

OLD VIC

Written by
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OLD VIC
A play by Vian Andrews
October 1, 2018

A struggling repertory company pulls a retired actor out of the old age home where he is languishing to play all the roles that made him a one time superstar of stage and screen. Surely, Victor will put bums in seats and save their theatre from going dark.

Within moments of his arrival, Vic uses his larger-than-life personae - and superior acting skills - to establish his pre-eminence among the other players. During their year long season, as he becomes increasingly demented, Vic will play Uncle Vanya, King Lear, Henry Higgins in Pygmalion and Garry Lejeune in Noises Off.

Jealousies among the actors and the sexual politics of the MeToo! movement erupt and propel the Company through its season, from comedy to farce, to drama and finally to tragedy, all against the always-contrasting background of the plays they have undertaken to perform.

As Vic devolves into madness he becomes disconnected from reality, but it is a disconnectedness that holds a mirror up to the shape-shifting superficialities of our times, where diversions and distractions, and an inability to focus on any one thing for long. We take on an ever-changing series of roles, investing our entire being in what we are in the moment, while stuffing all that we were into the vagaries of our unreliable and self-serving memory.

"Old Vic" is about acting, but in the light and shadow of real life, not just the theatre. It is about the immense power of words and how they can be deployed to create and elucidate imaginary realities that can not be resisted by the human mind, which in our eagerness for certainty and truth, will often snare us in uncertainty and falsity.

Old Vic
The Players

- Victor - An aged and increasingly demented actor.
- Frimaire - The Company's frazzled but determined artistic director, a lesbian.
- Ventose - The combustible and temperamental leading man displaced by Victor.
- Nivose - A leading lady and one time lover of Ventose's just returned from maternity leave.
- Thermidor - A short, somewhat zany character much in love with Frimaire.
- Floreal - The beautiful, feminist ingenue, whose affections Vic and Ventose compete for despite her rejections.

ACT ONE: UNCLE VANYA**INT. THEATRE - STAGE - SUMMER**

Under a not too dim light, the stage is set with a card table at which there are two folding chairs. Two other chairs are set about. There is a potted tree about 10 feet high, with a few red apples hanging on threads from its boughs, a couple of potted shrubs and a pot of flowers. A grandfather clock, with pendulum swinging, sits off to one side.

Enter **VENTOSE**, swaggering, handsome leading man in his mid thirties, followed by **NIVOSE**, just returned from matAs she gets closer to Ventose, he moves away.

The clock chimes one o'clock.

VENTOSE
(looking at the clock)
It can't be. What time is it really?

NIVOSE
I'm not sure exactly. Ventose stop!

VENTOSE
We are to meet here in the dimness? You're sure?

NIVOSE
Thermidor said so, yes. Frimaire has a surprise. So, said he.

VENTOSE
Turn the lights up will you.

NIVOSE
Me?

VENTOSE
I'll tell you when. Go.

Nivose exits to the lighting console. Ventose strolls around the set looking at it with skeptical disgust.

NIVOSE (O.S.)
It's programmed...

VENTOSE
Say again.

Nivose sticks her head in.

NIVOSE

The lighting console has been pre-programmed. For the season.

VENTOSE

(irritated)

Nivose, just hit a button. Pull a switch. Figure it out.

Nivose exits. Momentarily the lights turn up a few notches.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

Got it!

Nivose returns. He moves further from her.

NIVOSE

Why are you avoiding me?

She attempts to move closer to him. He turns on his heels and points at the clock.

VENTOSE

Why is there a grandfather clock in the Uncle Vanya's rather hideous garden? Is this more of Frimaire's, you know, toying with convention? A clock's tick must exceed its tock or what's a metaphor? Clock as guillotine? Metronomic monotony in the Russian countryside? She should have us play it straight.

Nivose walks up behind him and throws her arms round his waste. He struggles to free himself.

NIVOSE

You're always ill-tempered before opening night. Stay still! All will be well when the curtain rises.

He extracts himself and moves away again.

NIVOSE (CONT'D)

Ventose! Look at me.

He turns toward her reluctantly but with no eye contact.

NIVOSE (CONT'D)

What is going on? Ever since I returned, you have been cold to me.

VENTOSE

You're a mother now. Things have changed. And, I am a new man.

The strains of a woman singing Habanera from Bizet's Carmen badly is heard off stage. A young woman's voice. As soon as he hears it, Ventose turns in its direction.

NIVOSE

The ingenue?

She suddenly understands. As the singer reaches a crescendo her voice shreds around the music. **THERMIDOR**, a short but occasionally zany character, appears on the side of the stage, eavesdropping.

NIVOSE (CONT'D)

The ingenue!?

VENTOSE

Nothing has happened between us.

Thermidor walks in.

THERMIDOR

As yet, he means. Not from want of trying though. Floreal is a small town girl who has mistaken Ventose friendliness for, well, for friendliness.

He kisses Nivose's hand while Ventose shoots daggers at him.

THERMIDOR (CONT'D)

M'Lady.
(to Ventose)
Sir.

VENTOSE

Give it up Thermidor. Short men should never attempt gallantry any more than a tall man should stoop to conquer.

THERMIDOR

What an awful set. Uncle Vanya's garden. Hardly.

NIVOSE

You have thrown me over to stalk her. Just as you did me once upon a time.

THERMIDOR

No more than the hummingbird stalks
the honeysuckle. And look at you
Nivose, all aglow. Haven't quite
shed the extra... Well, you know.
And, oh my...

(he pretends to hoist his
own breasts)

Still nursing?

FLOREAL, a very pretty ingenue in her twenties floats on stage, prancing giddily and still tra-la-lalling the aria as she capers around the stage.

VENTOSE

(bowing deeply)

You adorn our set, Floreal.

FLOREAL

It strikes me as a bit flimsy and
flamsy. Truth be told. Is this
truly it?

THERMIDOR

It is what we are reduced to. It
is Frimaire's commitment to extreme
poverty at the expense of the
merely threadbare. She's been
cursed with a survivalist's
instincts.

NIVOSE

(to Floreal)

You're late.

VENTOSE

And where is our esteemed director?
She called the meeting after all.

FLOREAL

So, if Frimaire is not here, how
could I possibly be late? Or were
you being ironic?

The clock chimes 2 o'clock.

THERMIDOR

Reinforcements, probably. We can't
take on the repertory she's laid on
as we are, even with Frimaire
herself taking on a few roles.
Somebody to play the bit parts she
always assigns to me. Better be.

VENTOSE
Who could do the tiny bits better
than you, Thermidor?

FLOREAL
Sarcasm. Interesting.

Noises off...mutterings and grunts.

FRIMAIRE (O.S.)
Careful where you step. Backstage
is a death trap. Just hold my
arm...almost there.

VENTOSE
It's about time.

Enter **FRIMAIRE**, the Company's Director, a serious, frazzled heliotropic woman in her late thirties. Hanging on to one arm and using a cane with the other, **VIC**, a slightly stooped old man, shaky on his legs. She holds a clipboard with papers in her other hand.

NIVOSE
Who have we here?

As Vic steps out onto the stage, he looks up, then stops when he sees the others. He casts an amazed look at the penurious set.

VIC
This is it?

FRIMAIRE
Where you will reprise your very
famous turn as Uncle Vanya. Yes,
this is it.

VENTOSE
(quick to anger)
Uncle Vanya, but I am Uncle Vanya!

Ventose storms off upstage, bangs the table and kicks a chair, which unnerves Floreal. Nivose goes to him to calm him while the others ignore him.

NIVOSE
(whispering to Ventose)
Breathe... Breathe...

Ventose smoulders and turns his back on the others.

FRIMAIRE

Victor, meet the Company and vice versa. Ventose...

Ventose is petulantly looking the other way.

FRIMAIRE (CONT'D)

Ventose! Votre attention, s'il vous plait.

Ventose sucks it up and turns toward them.

FRIMAIRE (CONT'D)

Leading man, been with me for years and years and years.

VENTOSE

And years. Paid my dues, old man.

Vic extends his hand, which Ventose shakes but with a barely suppressed snarl on his face.

VIC

A journeyman's solid grip. A good and manly shake. But easy on the arthritis friend. It's not what it's cracked up to be.

FRIMAIRE

Nivose - leading actress *nonpareil*. She's married and recently delivered a baby which accounts for the...erm...

(indicating Nivose's plump cleavage)

- so hands off this one, Victor.

VIC

I am content to nibble the back of her hand.

He takes Nivose's right hand and kisses it gallantly.

VIC (CONT'D)

A voluptuous Yelena, no doubt?

FRIMAIRE

Erm...not sure.

NIVOSE

Not bloody sure?!

FRIMAIRE

Thermidor. Not to be underestimated.

Thermidor tugs his forelock and shakes Vic's hand.

THERMIDOR

Wait. I think I know you.
You're... You're...

He steps back and takes a longer look.

FRIMAIRE

He is indeed. Last but not least,
may I present our rising star...

Floreal steps toward Vic and puts her hand out to be kissed.

FLOREAL

(gushing)

Floreal. No one's ever kissed my
hand before.

Delighted to oblige, Vic bows, takes her hand and gives it a lingering smack with his lips.

FRIMAIRE

Victor, of course, is *that* Vic.
Victor! Star of stage and screen.
London's National Theatre.
Stratford. Broadway. Hollywood.
I think you even did Bollywood when
they first got going.

Vic does a little shoe shuffle.

VIC

Song and dance man to the rescue.

THERMIDOR

Yes...yes. Victor!

NIVOSE

But, you're dead...

VIC

Just acting.

VENTOSE

Youngest ever Hamlet? The Scottish
Play....

VIC

In truth, I merely played Banquo's ghost. Never got a chance to play Macbeth himself.

FRIMAIRE

I found him in an old age home.

VIC

Senior's residence, I think we call it these days.

FRIMAIRE

The local paper reported that a retired actor was going to stage Henry IV at the home. It was a "who cares" story until I saw that the play was to be directed by....

NIVOSE

...Victor.

FRIMAIRE

None other...and that he would also take on the...

VENTOSE

...lead role. We have arrived at last at the theatre of the absurd.

VIC

Not Henry. Falstaff! Helluva show it was. You'd be surprised at the enthusiasm one finds in a community of the nearly dead... Last hurrah and all that. It went over fairly well, despite the inconveniences of creeping dementia in some of the players and the massive incontinence of several others. But we got it done.

FRIMAIRE

Victor! Here in our city. Imagine that. Well, I thought to myself. Vic is the answer to our problems-monetary and is absolutely the right man to take on...

VENTOSE

Uncle Vanya...

VIC

All the grand roles of your
brilliantly re-plotted repertory
season as a matter of fact.

THERMIDOR

An amazing coup, Frimaire.
Congratulations.

FLOREAL

(to Vic)
So, you really are famous?

NIVOSE

You've changed the line-up?

FRIMAIRE

All but Uncle Vanya, of course,
which we open tomorrow. But, as
Vic has the role stored in
memory...

VIC

Compressed to its essentials way
down in the very deep, cold
waters...

Ventose charges toward Frimaire and grabs the clipboard.

VENTOSE

Let me see that.

He reads.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

Good god!

FRIMAIRE

We must bring bums to seats and
regain lost glory. Here's our
chance!

FLOREAL

(to Vic)
Can we find you on YouTube?
Facebook? Do you tweet?

Vic trills a bird call while Ventose hands Nivose the
clipboard. She reads.

NIVOSE

But, I am our leading lady!

FRIMAIRE

You are still nursing, Nivose. We don't want to chance a leak of the maternal variety.

Thermidor takes the clipboard and reads.

VENTOSE

I am left with secondary parts!

THERMIDOR

(moaning loudly)
And I have the crumbs. Again!

VIC

That's the sound of a dogsbody, boy. Have you no shame. No small parts, is the dictum of the theatrically devoted.

He hands the clipboard to Floreal who scans the document quickly.

FLOREAL

I hope these aren't ingenue roles. I am trying so hard not to be one.

Ventose, Nivose, Floreal and Thermidor circle around the clipboard and collectively fume. Vic takes Frimaire aside.

VIC

(to Frimaire)
You do not seem to be universally popular at the moment, Frimaire. May I offer you some advice based on my experience in theatre over several decades?

FRIMAIRE

Of course.

VIC

This is your Company, yes?

FRIMAIRE

I founded it.

VIC

On a rock in the river of time, yes? Built it up?

FRIMAIRE

Work like a bugger and still do...

VIC

But, democracy runs rampant, eh?
 (beat)
 Theatre is not a democracy,
 Frimaire. It is the exclusive
 domain of potentates, dictators,
 despots and tyrants.

FRIMAIRE

What do you suggest I do? I pay
 them almost nothing. I'm rather at
 their mercy.

The other actors realize he is talking about them and circle
 back to Frimaire and Vic.

VIC

(to all)
 Beat them like the dogs they are.
 Make them whimper. Make them beg.

Ventose and Thermidor fake large laughs. Nivose titters.
 Floreal is star struck.

FRIMAIRE

(tentatively)
 He has a point.

Vic steps forward and, as he draws himself up to full flight,
 more or less pushes Frimaire aside.

VIC

Look here you minions of the stage.
 I would not feign to usurp this
 doughty woman's authority, but I
 have been dredged up from the
 bottom waters and speak I must.
 Frimaire came to me with but one
 goal in mind - to save this Company
 from utter collapse and ruination.
 Your future as thespians in other
 words. So, let's be clear: my
 name, once dusted-off and buffed to
 a glow, can still draw people into
 this sacred place. I know it can
 and soon enough you shall see for
 yourselves! But, from the outset I
 knew instinctively it would do no
 one any good at all if I did not
 insist on certain conditions. So,
 I negotiated. Didn't I, my dear?

FRIMAIRE

Resolutely.

VIC

You see, children, I am happy to spoon creamed corn, gum mushy potatoes and clamp my dentures on the boiled meat they serve at my latest and last abode. Oh yes, I am. Just happy as a clam over there, taking my lucid days as they come, where my companions are an earthy mix of those who have retreated into the opaque silence of the very, very old, and others who are given to sudden, risible declamations of their crotchety grievances. We all live there microcosmically in a crisis of managed disconnectedness. Me? I stay in the no-mans land between we demented and forlorn inmates and our weary attendants, some of whom are patronizingly helpful, and some of whom are refreshingly and genuinely disinterested in our well-being. There is not much to do, I grant you. But, what for some is unrelieved idleness, the chaos of meal time excepted - for that is when the wheel-chaired, the caned and be-crutched, and the otherwise shuffling lame emerge from our rooms and race viciously to the commissary. God's waiting room it is for most, but for actor's it is a backstage paradise where we are given time to rehearse the words that one, such as yours truly, will utter at the Pearly Gates to gain an entry that, truth be told, isn't assured. I was happy enough to await my fate. So, why do I tell you all this? Because, I reckoned, if our heliotropic director, Frimaire really wanted me, as she seemed most earnestly to do, then, my thinking went, she should have the young and fearless me, not the dentureless, faded star she thought she saw before her. If I were to come out of retirement it would be to do good work. Did I say "good"? No children. Powerful work! It therefore falls to me to play the part of Uncle Vanya.

(MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)

And when we move on to Shakespeare, who better than I to play Lear. Again! And then, post Christmas, I shall once more play Henry Higgins in Pygmalion to immense acclaim - just as in my halcyon days, let us pray! And, finally, to close-out our triumphant season, it will fall to me - me! not some youth who hasn't yet got the chops - to trod the boards as Garry Lejeune in that wild farce, Noises Off. That's the deal we made, Frimaire and I. So, whatever parts are left to you lot - well, I don't give a damn who among you gets them. That's up to our esteemed director.

Vic raises his cane and points at each actor.

VIC (CONT'D)

But, know this, you will acquit yourselves like professionals, or make an exit now! If you don't, I shall.

Everyone except Floreal are dumbfounded, but Floreal goes dancing about in a state of inspired awe, and then comes back to him and beams up into his face.

FLOREAL

Oh, wow!

NIVOSE

Impressive.

VENTOSE

He didn't even sound rehearsed.
Are you done, Sir Vic?

All the actors collect around Vic, suddenly exhausted, and Frimaire. There is an awkward silence. Suddenly, Vic pushes through them and wanders momentarily with a mystified look on his face.

VIC

Lines. Sorry. Lines?

FRIMAIRE

This way, Vic. There's a couch in my office where you can lay down.
(to the others)
It's nap time.

Sullen and shaking his head, Ventose starts to walk off the opposite side of the stage. Nivose sees him.

NIVOSE

Wait up!

Hearing her voice, Ventose picks up his pace and disappears with Nivose chasing behind.

THERMIDOR

(waving the clipboard)

I've got her... I should...

FLOREAL

Methinks you are sweet on Frimaire, Thermidor.

THERMIDOR

I have deep respect for her.

FLOREAL

You know she's gay. Right?

THERMIDOR

Rumour has it.

FLOREAL

You're not convinced?

THERMIDOR

I am convincing. And, I think if she sees that I have a feminine side... Well, perhaps we can meet in the middle.

Thermidor exits with the clipboard held high.

FLOREAL

Prop and proposition. Love is love, after all.

Ventose steps in from wings carrying a flower.

VENTOSE

(offering the flower)

Exactly. Love is...

The clock chimes two o'clock.

FLOREAL

(alarmed at the sight of Ventose)

Make up and wardrobe...

She flees. Ventose gives chase.

Momentarily, Frimaire enters, clipboard in hand. She adjusts the chairs at the table, then the other two chairs. She tries to buff the hanging apples with her sleeve then goes behind the grandfather clock tilts it back and "walks" it to a slightly different position.

Enter Nivose quietly weeping not aware of Frimaire who is looking out at her from behind the clock. Frimaire steps out.

FRIMAIRE

He's just a bastard. Remember that, Nivose. He always was and always will be.

She draws herself up and comes down front and center. As she speaks, Frimaire will walk gently up behind her, not wanting to interfere, but wanting to help.

FRIMAIRE (CONT'D)

Word to the wise, Nivose. There is almost no problem a good soliloquy can't resolve. Let yourself rant a little to the pitiless gods.

Frimaire steps away from Nivose and continues to tidy the set as she listens. Her face will register concern, compassion, and finally surprise, shock, horniness, and relief when Nivose concludes her speech.

NIVOSE

Serve yourself, Nivose. Wean your baby. Get more sleep. Lose a few pounds. Buy a new bra.

(pushing her breasts up)

You are a mother now, not just an actress - a mother and a wife, lest we forget.

(beat)

Post lactation, you will consent to your husband having his tedious way with you. It may not be the ravaging that Ventose, that bastard! laid upon your once beautiful, and oh my god yes!, your once lithe and luxurious body, when you rose to the summits of glory as you bounced and frolicked and rocked and rolled on his tuck-away bed.

(MORE)

NIVOSE (CONT'D)

Ever the swordsman that Ventose,
 ever a man to impose his lusty will
 by making you turn this way and
 that in the tumble and rumble. Oh!
 the somersaults and the pole
 vaulting, and the relays down the
 track of his randy imagination,
 past the finishing line with baton
 in hand, around again and again,
 until his starter pistol emptied of
 its ammunition and you both just
 flopped down into that billowing
 green duvet, sweating, wasted and
 spent, while all your juices dried
 exactly where they were spit and
 drooled and shot and flung.

(beat)

But your husband, good man that he
 is, tremendous father, good
 provider, yes, yes, all of that, he
 has made it clear that he is
 pleased with this...

(looking down horrified at
 her post-baby body)

Oh my god, this! He is a kind man,
 you must remember, the sort of man
 who likes a..a...

(wailing suddenly)

...matron and a wet nurse!

Frimaire, now sympathetic, walks quietly to Nivose and taps
 her on the shoulder.

FRIMAIRE

Sorry to disturb....

Nivose starts and let's out a minor scream. She wheels
 around

NIVOSE

Frimaire! Oh. Oh. Sorry. Ooo,
 that's embarrassing.

FRIMAIRE

Are you alright?

NIVOSE

Yes. I'm fine. Fine.

FRIMAIRE

Really?

Nivose walks to front and center and faces the audience.

NIVOSE

How many actors have I fallen for?
Right over the cliff of good sense.
It is like I am incapable of giving
myself to anyone who can't inhabit
a character. That I can only
really connect when I'm in
character. What's wrong with me?!

FRIMAIRE

C'est la vie, c'est la vie, I say,
for anyone who steps in these
doors.

NIVOSE

Yes, and it's your fault Frimaire.

FRIMAIRE

As usual.

NIVOSE

No wonder Ventose finds me hideous.
You have me playing the old nurse
and the grandmother.

FRIMAIRE

And the workman, lest we forget.

NIVOSE

Why don't you let me play Astrov's
horse while you're at it.

Nivose begins to thunder off stage effecting a gallop.

FRIMAIRE

But, you are the consummate
actress, the only one who can pull
off such a variety of roles...

Nivose spins around and shoots daggers at Frimaire.

NIVOSE

I am being replaced by that, that
scheming little bitch Floreal!

When she turns around to walk off stage she bumps into
Thermidor as he enters. She pushes past him.

THERMIDOR

A little peeved or a full on
tantrum?

NIVOSE

Hormones have got the best of her, I'm afraid. I suppose you're here to yell at me too? I know you don't like the parts I assigned...

THERMIDOR

Oh no. I am resigned to my fate. Well, temporarily I am. I understand completely. We need to do better box office, isn't that it? Vic's an answer to a prayer. Isn't that so?

She bends over to give him a hug. He responds by hugging her back but he does not let go.

FRIMAIRE

(patronizingly)
Thank you, Thermidor.
(beat)
Thermidor.

She pulls his arms off her and steps back.

FRIMAIRE (CONT'D)

Whatever has gotten into you?

THERMIDOR

Erm.... Well... I am feeling a bit... My brainwires have short circuited.

FRIMAIRE

Opening night jitters. It's our lot in life... A good sign really.

THERMIDOR

I am in love, Frimaire. There. Said it.

FRIMAIRE

Oh, Thermidor! That's wonderful. Who's the lucky girl?
(beat)
Oh no! Don't tell me Floreal? Not you too?!

THERMIDOR

Oh, God no! Not with a girl. With a woman. A very sexy, smart woman.
(beat)
I'm in love with you, Frimaire. With you.

Frimaire is shocked.

THERMIDOR (CONT'D)

Now, I know your a... that you're a
 (whispering)
 ...lesbian. But, Frimaire, for
 you, I can be less of a man. I can
 be more of a...

FRIMAIRE

(secretly pleased to be
 loved)
 Oh, don't be so damn silly, silly.
 (beat)
 Thermidor.

THERMIDOR

Yes.

FRIMAIRE

Have you heard that eating is the
 new sex? I'm starved. Let's go
 eat out.

She walks away from him, not completely unhappy with his
 confession of love. She takes his arm and they exit.

The clock chimes three. But as soon as it rings the last the
 pendulum stops swinging.

Floreal enters in costume for the role of Yelena pulling Vic
 behind her by the hand in costume for the role of Uncle
 Vanya.

FLOREAL

Any last minute tips, suggestions,
 advice?

Floreal walks downstage. Vic stands and follows, then walks
 past her to the front of the stage, where he looks out. She
 is looking back at the set.

VIC

Oh, I do so love looking out into a
 dark auditorium full of empty
 seats. It is so full of
 expectation. The place where the
 fearful dream of nakedness in a
 crowd is shared before we wake
 again into our separate and
 costumed lives.

FLOREAL

It's an awful set, Vic. Really, it's supposed to be a garden. A country estate.

VIC

But, it is Floreal. It is. A luxurious one. Come. Come here.

She walks to him. He goes to one of the chairs and brings it back. During Vic's speech he will walk around the table. Floreal will rise and join him, the table always between them.

VIC (CONT'D)

Sit. Now, pretend you are in the audience. Good.

(professorially)

We can evoke here a strangely coherent image spun out of nothing, but it will register in each of us like an undeniable memory even though none of us have lived any part of it. It is a kind of magic.

FLOREAL

Magic never is, for me, anything but a trick.

VIC

A trick?

FLOREAL

I always see one hand go into some deep pocket while the other snaps.

Vic raises both hands to the heavens and snaps his fingers.

Vic

The stage is set. The lights come up. It's a sunny, summer day. Hot. Very hot. The first of the actors enter and take their places. One sits there at that table, joining the long forgotten ancestors whose ghosts chew on their fates. The oaken planks of the table top have been much abused under the cycling seasons. It has stalwart iron legs whose feet curl under to form the rusty feet of aging lions.

(MORE)

Vic (CONT'D)

The table has sat in one place under sunlight, rain and snow for succeeding generations of noisy people who have their grandfather's nose, and their great aunt's mouth, and their uncle's receding hairline and their grandmother's hurricane temper. Their *al fresco* dining has made the table groan under the weight of the family's most precious heirlooms, their polished silver, their crystal goblets, their bone china plates and most especially the proud myths that bear them up. Here they have spooned their soup and forked their well-butchered meat, partaken of the fruits of the earth, potatoes, parsnips and greens unending. The family has made merry here. They have broken bread with friends and neighbours. They have gossiped, railed at their government and the finger-wagging church, ridiculed their petulant servants and passed imaginary sentences of execution upon the peasants they employ, who, they are rightly convinced, steal from them at every turn. Gains have been celebrated, losses have been suffered, the dead grieved. All before the final course was served: the lemon sorbet, already melting. Can you taste it?

FLOREAL

And surely there must have been lovers who quarreled within these precincts?

VIC

Too many to remember. Bitter arguments that in due course resolved themselves. Making-up. Table top sex, hot and fervid. Oh yes, imagine that!

(beat)

Now, look - another actor takes a seat over there in that fusty old chair whose horsehide upholstery is cracked and split.

(MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)

There are cushions that have taken the shape of time itself, all warped by the gravity of human life coming and going, rising and falling in the river of time.

FLOREAL

The garden has a view?

VIC

No, no. Those high laurels make a wall my dear, to keep the cows out.

Floreal feigns deep disappointment.

VIC (CONT'D)

Well it could have a view. Of that long flat stretch of ground upon which sits a cherry orchard by a river. There is a bridge that lets the road continue through a forest on the other side. Dr. Astrov lashes his horse as they gallop to the cottage of some broken soul, where the good doctor will perform his doctor-magic.

Floreal points to the tree in the garden.

FLOREAL

There, that is very specific. An apple tree.

VIC

....whose roots tickle the underground channel of the sacred River, Alph. Ripe fruit hangs on the tree. Indeed one of the actors - let's say it's you Floreal - even if it's not in the stage directions, you might...

She rushes to the tree and playfully pulls an apple off.

FLOREAL

Pick one and sink my teeth into it...

VIC

You chomp!

FLOREAL

Yes, I chomp. Then I shall wipe my mouth as the juice dribbles down my chin, and the ardent serpent withdraws to his hideout in the limbic boughs, grinning with his small mouth because...

VIC

...because he's nailed pleasure to the cross of sin. But, here's the thing. No writer ever directs an actor to change the muscles on her face to this or that. That's all actor stuff. Stage business. Flesh on bones.

She rushes to Vic and throws her arms around his waist and pulls herself tight to his body. He is nonplussed. It's been forever since a beautiful woman embraced him. Finally, he strokes her hair.

VIC (CONT'D)

Whatever are you doing?

FLOREAL

Oh. I am so sorry, Victor. So, so sorry. Am I being too familiar?

She sees a hungry look on Vic's roused face.

FLOREAL (CONT'D)

I... I... Oh, look at the time. We have to join the others. We're late.

She exits hurriedly. Vic turns to the audience but speaks to himself.

VIC

And what else does the mind's eye see, but Eve naked in the garden? Naked and not so innocent. And also, indeed, judging from the shaking in the boughs, that the fruit has roused the serpent's appetite as well.

Ventose enters, carrying a piece of paper.

VENTOSE

You are dreaming of Floreal?

VIC

No need to dream. She was just here.

VENTOSE

Another girl in search of a father figure, no doubt.

VIC

You have business with her? A paper to sign, perhaps?

Vic grabs at Ventose's paper.

VIC (CONT'D)

Perhaps a pledge to love her unconditionally, at least 'til season's end?

Vic grabs the paper out of Ventose's hand. Ventose angrily tries to get it back. Vic dodges him, but Ventose finally forces Vic down on his knees. Vic clings to the paper.

VIC (CONT'D)

It's a poem? A love poem? How earnest. But, is it important?

Ventose finally forces the paper out of Vic's hand and hurts him until Vic crumples to his knees. Vic rubs his hurt knuckles and manages to get to his feet.

VIC (CONT'D)

With that girl, Ventose, my boy, poetry will not suffice. Trust me. Besides, I have reason to believe she wishes me to pursue her, and this I shall do. I ask you as a gentleman to clear the field.

VENTOSE

I don't even know what to say. No one can possibly imagine what that might look like. She may be Venus but, due respect, Vic, you're no Adonis.

VIC

And so the play begins, then. Two men competing for the love of a beautiful woman.

Ventose grabs Vic by his collar, but Vic remains unafraid.

VENTOSE

Compete?

Ventose suddenly softens and begins to laugh. He releases Vic and laughing uproariously, exits into the wings. Now, Vic, also smiling, begins to walk off stage but he stops and looks again at the audience.

VIC

A little while ago, the pendulum of that misplaced clock over yonder stopped swinging. Did you notice?

(beat)

What I think? With time stopped, I can give Ventose a run for his money.

As the lights go down he exits whistling.

Fade to black.

ACT TWO: KING LEAR**EXT. THE HEATH - AUTUMN**

The apple tree in Uncle Vanya's garden has morphed into a fruitless and leave-less tree, sticking up at a windblown angle from a low knoll set against a desolate landscape painted on a clumsily hung painted backdrop. We are on a heath where King Lear will later rail at the gods.

On one side of the stage there is a cliff where Gloucester will convert the sound of his despair to the noise of waves breaking on rocks far down below. A large boulder sits somewhere, as does a ruined sun dial.

Floreal, whose Cordelia costume is a bodice and long skirt, looks anxiously over her shoulder, as she dashes from one side of the stage to another where she exits effecting a panicked escape.

Presently, from the other direction, Thermidor enters wearing a Fool's motley, holding a sword aloft, gleefully out of breath. He stops and looks back from whence he came.

THERMIDOR

(loudly)

You have been un-sworded,
Gloucester. By a Fool.

He listens for footsteps but hears none.

THERMIDOR (CONT'D)

(again, loudly)

And by an old man, if I'm not
mistaken. On wardrobe day, no
less.

(beat)

(quietly)

Who's king of the Company now, eh?

Satisfied he is not about to be jumped, Thermidor practices sword play. But, far upstage, Ventose sneaks in, ready to pounce. Holding a quill pen in hand, he creeps up behind the boulder and moves close to the unsuspecting Thermidor.

VENTOSE

En garde, you swine!

Caught by surprise, Thermidor starts. He swings around and once he's regained his composure, parries Ventose's pen with the sword.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)
Enough, Thermidor. Hand over the hardware.

THERMIDOR
Not until you apologize.

VENTOSE
For what?

THERMIDOR
You called me short.

VENTOSE
You are short.

THERMIDOR
I do not go around calling you tall.

VENTOSE
I would not be offended.

To their amazement, Nivose enters in a costume split between one side (facing the audience) dressed as Edgar, the other as Goneril. They stop their roughhousing in midstream. Thermidor hands the sword to Ventose.

THERMIDOR
You may need this, my friend.

Ventose takes the sword and deftly puts it in his scabbard. Then he watches Thermidor nervously peeling-off to the wings. He turns to see Nivose closing-in.

NIVOSE
There you are.

VENTOSE
Unavoidably. Yes.

She moves closer to him. He pulls the sword and holds it point down toward her, forcing her to keep a sword's length distance.

NIVOSE
I can't tell whether Frimaire's economies have rendered me sublime or ridiculous. Is it innovation or economy gone mad?

VENTOSE
Not sure. You have been cleaved but your cleavage has been lost.

She threatens to move closer so he subconsciously lifts the point to knee level. She moves even closer, the point of the sword rises near to waist height.

Vic enters at pace in stocking feet, red-faced, out of breath, his white hair a wild corona around his head, heavily made-up, wearing earrings. He carries a pair of high heels in one hand.

When Ventose and Nivose see him in costume they are astonished, looking at one another then at him, then at one another, then at him. Ventose reflexively tilts the blade so it is at a 45 degree angle from his crotch. Nivose daintily pushes the point down with her finger.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

Ye Gods!

NIVOSE

She has concocted a transgenderated Lear.

VENTOSE

He's a queen by any other name....

NIVOSE

No. Frimaire is not that clever. This is not about sexual identity. She has merely put the old man in a frock and will have him wobble on heels.

VENTOSE

Theatrics, not politics. Understood. I would not want us to trivialize such things.

Ventose sheaths the sword. Vic stops in his tracks and looks toward the tree on the knoll and scans then scans the horizon with a hand shading his forehead. When he sees Nivose and Ventose he turns to face them.

VIC

Ah! You there. Have you seen her? Did she come through here? Answer quickly, for we're caught in time's rapids. You want proof? Last night, at midnight, the autumnal equinox sprang upon us right between the tick and the tock. *Sic transit gloria mundi*. Another summer gone! At eighty, I have but few left, dammit. No time to lose! Answer if you can!

NIVOSE

Frimaire?

VIC

No, no, not Frimaire. You know.
What's her name? The pretty one.

Using the sword, Ventose points Vic in the opposite direction in which Floreal exited.

Vic climbs the knoll, grabs the tree with one hand, then wets a finger on the other and puts it up to catch the direction of the breeze. Then Vic sticks his head out and takes a whiff.

VIC (CONT'D)

Never mind, never mind. I have her scent. Oh yes! There's perfume in the wind coming from the other side...yes, yes... from the other side of the autumnal river. To the bridges!

He roars off in the same direction taken earlier by Floreal.

Ventose, flushed and angry, pulls his sword and is about to run after Vic, but Nivose grabs his trailing arm and yanks him back, spins him so their chests collide, then kisses him wetly on the mouth. He pushes her away in disgust and wipes his mouth.

VENTOSE

I have no time for this, Nivose! I must save Floreal. Cut him off at the pass.

Ventose exits in the opposite direction that Vic went, but runs into Thermidor as Thermidor enters on the run. They block one another's passage.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

What are you doing, Thermidor?

THERMIDOR

Laps. And you?

VENTOSE

Damsel in distress!

Thermidor takes a runner's starting stance again and then blasts off into the wings where he makes athletic noises that are heard on stage.

Ventose is about to run after Floreal in the other direction, but now Nivose blocks his way. He tries to side step her this way and that, but she blocks him every time. Ventose backs away until they are at a distance.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

OK. I give up. You win.

She opens her arms and gestures that he should come to her for an embrace. Ventose points over her left shoulder.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

Your husband and the newborn!

Nivose turns reflexively in the direction he points to. Ventose bolts past her on her other side and exits on the run. She dashes after him.

Vic now enters exhausted. Presently, Thermidor enters on the run and comes to a sudden halt at center stage. As he catches his breath, he walks in circles around Vic.

THERMIDOR

That's ten. Wings, backstage, corridors, lobby, round and round. First clockwise to wind me up; then counter-wise to wind me down.

VIC

I envy you my boy. Run like that unbridgeable river over yonder you do. Relentlessly.

THERMIDOR

River? Methinks you mistake that paint smear on the backdrop for water. I think Frimaire meant it as something else: perhaps a purple patch of palingenetic plantlife.

Vic grabs Thermidor by the collar with both hands and pulls his face close.

VIC

Perhaps a purple patch of palingenetic plantlife?

THERMIDOR

Calluna vulgaris is my guess, common heather, whose habitat is the hapless and hopeless heath of hell.

Thermidor tries to pull away but Vic tightens his grip.

VIC

The hapless and hopeless heath of hell!? You're a cunning linguist, my boy, but mark my words, you run like a river alright - down to the endless sea. And soon enough all you are and ever have been will be spit into the salt chuck where the ripping tides will chew you into atoms.

Thermidor manages to get loose. As they talk, Frimaire and Floreal enter and begin crossing the stage. Floreal is downstage of Frimaire, whose costume, like Nivose's is split. She is Regan on one side and Edmond on the other. The Edmond side faces the audience. Floreal, paying no particular attention to Frimaire, spots Vic and darts around to the other side of Frimaire to avoid being seen.

THERMIDOR

Yes, I'm sure that must be awful, Vic. But, I have a more immediate problem.

VIC

Speak!

THERMIDOR

You've played Lear before? Well, you have. We all know that. But, this is my first time as Lear's fool. But, if you're going to play Lear as a queen, I'd like to do the Fool as a gigolo.

Vic looks at Thermidor quizzically.

VIC

Ah! Interesting.

THERMIDOR

So, Vic, as a special favour... Vic, will you run lines with me because I want to achieve a certain...

VIC

...loucheness. Of course! When, boy? Full dress tomorrow if I'm not mistaken.

THERMIDOR

Tonight. I'll come by the home, after dinner.

VIC

Not allowed, my boy. Can't get you through the fire doors. Do that and alarums will sound. Bring on the calvary, that would.

(beat)

But, if I were to sneak out, you could meet me at the edge of Birnam Wood hard by the horseshoe pitch, bring me back here. But, great care must be taken for if we wake the house that hulking Nurse, Nurse Dunsinane, will give chase.

THERMIDOR

Great idea. We can use the set, mnemonically.

VIC

Demonically? Yes!

THERMIDOR

But, I beg you, not a word to anyone else.

Ventose enters at pace and crosses to the edge of the "cliff" being pursued by Nivose whose "Edgar" side faces the audience. Ventose leaps off, but Nivose is brought up short at the cliff's edge and almost teeters over.

NIVOSE

Damn you!

She runs around to the side of the cliff and runs into the wings.

VIC

The work we do will be our secret, buried in the purple deeps. My boy, the others may doubt your capacity for the stage now, but I will tutor you in our mystery so that on the morrow you will shock them. Your every line must ride the transcendent arc of craft becoming art.

(beat)

Work til dawn we will. Make no noise. Make no noise. Draw the curtains.

THERMIDOR

Metaphorically...

VIC
 (quoting from King Lear)
We'll go to supper in the morning.

THERMIDOR
 (quoting from King Lear)
I'll go to bed at noon.

VIC
 Famous last words.
 (beat)
 But, no one sleeps on the day of a
 full dress rehearsal, Thermidor.
 Too much lightening in the brain.
 But, look here, my boy, for my
 trouble, I might require a quid pro
 quo.

THERMIDOR
 Name it.

Frimaire enters in costume carrying a broom over her
 shoulder. Vic is taken aback.

VIC
 Woe betides. One of the witches!

FRIMAIRE
 Hello you two!

VIC
 One second, my dear.

He takes Thermidor aside while Frimaire sweeps the set in
 readiness for tomorrow's dress rehearsal.

VIC (CONT'D)
 (whispering to Thermidor)
 I need your help tripping up that
 dastard, Ventose. We must stop
 him, stop him before he...

THERMIDOR
 Yes...?

VIC
 Before he makes it to Floreal's
 bed chamber where, if we should
 fail, he will attempt...
 (whispering)
 (MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)

...to violate her, to put the bloody stain of ill-repute on the starched sheets upon which she floats in her dreams and thus - and this is the crux of the matter, m'boy - ruin her for other, better men. Now, you go that way, and I'll go this.

Thermidor salutes Vic, then bounds off stage, but quickly turns back and hides just off stage, looking in while eavesdropping.

FRIMAIRE

And where are you going, Victor?

VIC

To mount my white horse, Madame and Sir, so I may lead the one man army-of-the-virtuous into battle. Adieu.

Vic takes off his heels and holds them in his hands as he exits in a determined hurry.

FRIMAIRE

(calling after him)

Save a little energy for Lear.

When she is satisfied that he is gone she calls out to the wing on the opposite side.

FRIMAIRE (CONT'D)

(loud whisper)

They're gone. You can come out now.

Even though she's looking in the opposite direction, Thermidor thinks she must be talking to him. He steps out of the shadows but just then, Floreal, hair dishevelled, dressed in her Cordelia costume, enters from the other side.

FRIMAIRE (CONT'D)

Such a picture...

Thermidor quickly steps back into shadow where he strains unsuccessfully to hear what they are saying.

As they talk, Frimaire's "Regan" side is to the audience so it appears two women are talking. Floreal takes both Frimaire's hands.

FLOREAL

Oh, Frimaire, you are so good to me.

The two women enjoy a long embrace. Thermidor's eyes pop.

FLOREAL (CONT'D)

Thank you, thank you, thank you. I love you so much!

THERMIDOR

(to himself)

"Love" (*air quotes*) did she say?

FRIMAIRE

(a bit giddy)

Shall we make a show of your, you know, "coming out" (*air quotes*)?

THERMIDOR

(to himself)

"Coming out" (*air quotes*) did she say?

FLOREAL

Shouldn't we just let it become "obvious" (*air quotes*) if and when necessary?

To free her hands, Frimaire tucks the broom between her legs with the stick end protruding just a little from her crotch.

FRIMAIRE

You are such an attractive woman, Floreal. Beautiful figure, face, lips, hair...Beautiful hair.

Frimaire strokes Floreal's hair and becomes noticeably excited herself. Thermidor blanches.

FRIMAIRE (CONT'D)

(her Edmond side facing the audience)

Who can blame those men? Any man, really?

Floreal turns away and when she does, Frimaire ogles Floreal and fans herself with her free hand.

Floreal turns quickly back to Frimaire.

FRIMAIRE (CONT'D)
 (discombobulated)
 Ah, sorry. Dirt and dust. Lots of
 dirt and dust.

She sweeps frantically. Floreal catches sight of Thermidor who seeing that she may have seen him moves into deeper shadow. Floreal pretends not to have seen him, but clearly plays to him.

FLOREAL
 I really don't want the men not to
 want me. I just don't want them to
 have me.

THERMIDOR
 (to himself)
 One of us is confused!

FRIMAIRE
 We certainly do not want your
 Cordelia to be tainted by over-
 familiarity with the King your
 father or for that matter the queen
 your mother.

FLOREAL
 I've never been one for incest.
 But, as "to the love that dares not
 speak its name" (*air quotes*), could
 we, keep our little secret a
 secret?

FRIMAIRE
 (surprised and confused)
 Feign to be lovers but act as
 though we are not?

FLOREAL
 Exactly! Promise?
 (loudly so Thermidor can
 hear)
 Oh, Frimaire, I do love you so!

She kisses Frimaire whose "Edgar" side faces the audience, on the lips provocatively. Thermidor is aghast. Floreal moves to the sundial and tries to "read" the time.

FLOREAL (CONT'D)
 Oh dear, the time. Must go.
 Later!

Floreal exits while Frimaire gives her a lingering, affectionate look, then holds the brush end of the broom up to her face and dances with it.

When she is gone, Thermidor slips on stage. He coughs. Frimaire stops in her tracks and turns around.

THERMIDOR

J'accuse!

FRIMAIRE

Thermidor!

THERMIDOR

(hurt)

Had I known that you and Floreal...

FRIMAIRE

It's not what you think...

He walks up to Frimaire, whose "Edgar" side is to the audience gain, grabs the broom in one hand, then puts his arm around her waist to pull her toward him, then kisses her lips.

THERMIDOR

I saw you do this to her?

FRIMAIRE

She to me, in point of fact.

He strokes her hair.

THERMIDOR

And this!

FRIMAIRE

You are mistaken...what you saw was...

He grabs the broom and dances one circle.

THERMIDOR

So?

FRIMAIRE

It's not love. It is... Well, it's... Two women who have... Well, it's something I can't name. Floreal has a particular need that only I can satisfy. In the circumstances.

THERMIDOR

Sex then?

FRIMAIRE

I cannot say, Thermidor. I am bound to her by a secret.

THERMIDOR

(increasingly angry)

I think you owe me an explanation. I declared my love to you!

FRIMAIRE

Yes. You did. And thank you for that. But... You see... Well, you made me think. Made me wonder... I mean, never say never. But, for the time being, I cannot...

Nivose enters with her "Regan" side to the audience.

NIVOSE

Interrupting?

THERMIDOR

Not at all. She's in love.

NIVOSE

With you? A bit short for her aren't you? No offence.

THERMIDOR

With Floreal!

He stomps off.

NIVOSE

Really?

FRIMAIRE

He must not tell anyone.

NIVOSE

You're in love with Floreal?

FRIMAIRE

It's not love...dammit! Thermidor, wait up!

She dashes after Thermidor.

NIVOSE

Not love then. Something else. Sex. Primal sex.

(MORE)

NIVOSE (CONT'D)

Frimaire, the experienced, masculinized woman, shy, but driven by overweening ambition, and possessed of a great deal of unquestioned power over the members of her Company, sees that said ingenue is scared out of her wits by the men who are in hot, throbbing pursuit of her alleged virginity, and so she spins a sticky web of understanding kindness into which said unsuspecting ingenue will fly. The older woman lets down her hair, doffs her ancient reading glasses, sets the lights just so, cues a full album of mesmerizing music, lights a fire, and pours two goblets of *vin extraordinaire*. Post prandial, the older woman sits on the brocade divan, then pats the empty seat beside her by way of a mentoring invitation, and they cozy up for a long and sympathetic chat concerning the younger woman's deepest insecurities, during which the older woman speaks in tongues while stroking the weepy cheeks of the ingenue, first to calm and sedate her, but really, with matchless dexterity, to kindle a subliminal fire that will, the older woman is convinced, become a full on blaze. She already sees in her director's mind, the bodies of two naked women upon whose tender skin and tangled hair the firelight flickers like a thousand tongues! And so do I.

(beat)

This changes everything.

Ventose enters in a hurry dressed as Gloucester, sword at his side. Nivose's "Edgar" is turned toward him.

VENTOSE

Ah, Frimaire. Is that you? Are you in character? Don't want to disturb.

Nivose turns to face him with her "Goneril" side, causing Ventose to jump back a bit.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

Oh, dear.

NIVOSE

It's all right, Ventose. I am quite over you. Don't be afraid. We can be just friends now. Just friends.

VENTOSE

Uh... Are you sure?

NIVOSE

You were looking for Frimaire?

VENTOSE

I thought she might know the whereabouts of... well, of Floreal if you must know, now that we are friends.

He begins to stride into the wings.

NIVOSE

Ventose, you haven't noticed. Probably this costume conceals certain facts of which you should be apprised.

He turns to face her. She uses her hands to accentuate her figure on her "Goneril" side.

VENTOSE

You've lost weight...

She pats her now flat stomach. He nods with disarmed approval. She pulls his face into her breasts, arousing him somewhat.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

Push up bra?

NIVOSE

No bra at all, truth to tell. They've rebounded as if by magic.

She pulls a hanky from her cleavage and waves it under his nose then throws it on the floor.

NIVOSE (CONT'D)

What is that smell, I wonder?

He noses into her cleavage then sniffs following the trail down to her navel.

VENTOSE

Oooo...*L'air du temps*, cascading into, oh my god, *les cheveux en feu*. And is that *le trou du lapin* rising to my nostrils?

NIVOSE

Ah, what the nose knows...

She suddenly pushes him away, turns and steps away from him. He is very aroused now. He comes up behind her. She bends over to pick up the hanky, which causes her bottom to thrust into his crotch. He grabs her hips.

NIVOSE (CONT'D)

Woof woof.

Vic arrives in costume wearing the high heels this time, from upstage right and sees what looks like two men *in flagrante delicto* because Nivose's "Edgar" side faces him.

VIC

Bravo! A new twist on Lear. Gloucester deeply loves his sheepish son. Who am I to judge?

With her "Edmond" side still showing to Vic, Nivose begins to take her leave.

NIVOSE

(to Ventose)

Just friends, remember. Just friends.

She exits.

VIC

(calling out after her)

But, very good friends!

VENTOSE

It is not what you think!

VIC

Oh, it doesn't bother me, boy. I've been in the theatre trades too long for that. But...if love is war by other means, the advantage goes to Old Vic, wouldn't you say? I'm not sure young Floreal would understand.

Vic turns on his heels and runs away with Ventose in hot pursuit. Sounds of a chase ensue in the wings.

VIC (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye!

Enter Floreal still in costume, surprised to find an empty stage. She walks to the sun dial and inspects it. She paces muttering to herself, then stands facing the audience.

FLOREAL
 (quoting from King Lear)
*Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
 My heart into my mouth...*

She does not see Vic enter, out of breath and also still in costume. He walks on wobbly heels.

FLOREAL (CONT'D)
*I love your majesty
 According to my bond; nor more nor
 less.*

VIC
 Hah!

Floreal is startled. She backs away from him as he continues to approach. Ventose enters behind her, brandishing his sword, also out of breath.

VENTOSE
 Has he spoken?

Floreal is doubly surprised by Ventose's sudden appearance.

FLOREAL
 He said "Hah!" But nothing more.

VENTOSE
 "Hah"?

FLOREAL
 Just so. All said and done.

VIC
 She was in the midst of pledging
 her bond. To me!

VENTOSE
 If that is true, then the rumours
 are wrong...

FLOREAL
 What is truth, gentlemen? Consider
 the possibility of fake news
 trumping the truth.

VENTOSE
A wild accusation then?

Vic goes down on one knee before Floreal then pulls a drooping flower from his bodice and extends it to her.

VIC
Don't you long for old time
romance?

She is revolted by the supplication, turns and walks away. Ventose counters by coming around in front of her with some athletic sword play.

VENTOSE
If all the avenues of love are
open, then opt for youth and
vigour!

Just then, Frimaire, Thermidor and Nivose, all in costume, enter from different places around the stage and converge at center stage.

FRIMAIRE
(to Thermidor)
Get him up.

Thermidor assists Vic to his feet.

FRIMAIRE (CONT'D)
(to Ventose)
Sheath that sword.

FLOREAL
I can take no more of this
harassment!

Frimaire walks to Floreal and kisses her on the mouth. Vic and Ventose groan, but Floreal is not pleased, which Vic notices.

THERMIDOR
All is lost!

NIVOSE
My my.

VENTOSE
Well, I'll be bugged.

Nivose crosses to Ventose, whose anger rises, and stands closely at his side while stroking his back to calm him.

FRIMAIRE
 (to Vic and Ventose)
 Do you understand?

VIC
 Not sure I do.

FRIMAIRE
 Now to business. Sound and lighting
 check as discussed. Take your
 positions please.

Ventose kneels by the "cliff" with Nivose, her Edmond side
 turned to the audience, standing a few feet away looking at
 him. Thermidor takes Vic by the arm and escorts him to the
 knoll and helps him stand by the tree.

VIC
 An apple! My kingdom for an apple!

Thermidor crouches at the foot of the knoll while Floreal,
 very upset, once again walks to the sun dial where she stands
 facing the audience, but agitated and angry.

FRIMAIRE
 Good. Now, when I set the lights
 so they are on you in your scene,
 call out. Then, you're off for the
 night.

Frimaire walks into the wings.

A spot light comes up on Floreal.

FLOREAL
 I am going legal!

FRIMAIRE (O.S.)
 Thank you, Cordelia.

Floreal exits, still angry.

A flood light comes up on Ventose and Nivose.

VENTOSE
 (to Nivose)
 Dinner tonight, my dear.

NIVOSE
 (loudly)
 Not unless you're eating a humble
 pie made of crow.

FRIMAIRE (O.S.)
 Thank you Gloucester and Edgar!
 See you on the morrow.

There is a long pause. Vic seems lost in a reverie.
 Thermidor is perplexed.

Enter Frimaire at the side of the stage.

FRIMAIRE (CONT'D)
 Call from Floreal. Urgent she
 says. Can you finish this?

Thermidor salutes her, rises and exits behind her.

FRIMAIRE (CONT'D)
 Be right back.

Suddenly, an unexpected light show. Thermidor sticks his head
 in to take a look.

VIC
 (befuddled)
 What's this then?

THERMIDOR
 Oops...

He backs away again. The stage lights go black. But, the
 sound of thunder rises.

VIC
 Hello darkness my old friend...

The sound of thunder.

THERMIDOR (O.S.)
 Damn. Bit tricky this.

A crack of lightning. Lights come up a little. Small spot
 on Vic's face. Sound of hard rain and more thunder. Vic
 raises his arms to the heavens and looks up.

THERMIDOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Goddammit!

VIC
 (quoting from King Lear)
*Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks.
 Rage! Blow you cataracts and
 hurricanes; spout till you have
 drenched our steeples and drowned
 their weathercocks!*
 (MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)

You sulphurous and mind-blowing lightning flashes, heralds of oak-splitting thunderbolts! Singe my white head! And you, all shaking thunder: flatten the roundness of the world. Crack Nature's moulds, spill in an instant the seeds from which ungrateful woman grows!

Thermidor runs out on stage followed by the other actors who stand transfixed by Vic. Frimaire runs off and suddenly the stage is quiet with a harsh, oblique light coming across the set causing everyone and everything on set to cast a long shadow.

NIVOSE AND FLOREAL

Woman!?

FRIMAIRE

(referring to Vic's performance)

Let us pray for that in front of paying audiences.

Vic comes down from the knoll to the applause of his colleagues. Clearly he is lost in a fugue state. He walks past the other actors and makes his way to the sun dial.

Thermidor moves toward him on tip toes not wanting to frighten Vic.

VIC

(quoting from The Dream of Richard, King)

*It is the dusk or the dawn
And the shadows are infinitely long.*

THERMIDOR

Vic, are you OK?

Vic turns to face Thermidor. He is at a momentary loss but finally recognizes Thermidor.

VIC

Ah, m'boy. Going to run lines are we?

THERMIDOR

No need, Vic. I've learned my lesson. I'm just a fool. A damned fool.

VIC
Sleep then? Perchance to dream.
But, before I go, a question.

THERMIDOR
Yes.

Vic turns to face the audience. The other actors come quickly forward to hear the question and gather round Vic.

VIC
Why does a sundial stand in the
midst of the mad heath?

Fade to black.

ACT 3: PYGMALION**INT. STAGE - HENRY HIGGINS DRAWING ROOM - AFTERNOON - WINTER**

The stage is set as Henry Higgins drawing room. Just back from front and center, and a little to one side. Vic naps, faces the audience.

A coat/hat rack stands beside a closed door. A small framed mirror hangs on the wall on the other side of the door. Perhaps, an upright piano stands against another wall. A bowl of fruit containing several apples sits on a table. A clock on the mantle ticks the time.

Enter Ventose and Thermidor carrying a second, matching chair. They see Vic and put it down quietly next to Vic's chair. Thermidor tip toes away while Ventose rouses Vic.

VENTOSE

Wake up, Vic. Come on. That's it.

Vic stirs and snorts. Suddenly he breaks the surface. He lurches to his feet, still drugged by sleep.

VIC

(quoting from Pygmalion)
Take all her clothes off and burn them. Ring up Whiteley or somebody for new ones. Wrap her up in brown paper til they come.

VENTOSE

Easy, Vic. We're still dressing the set not the players. Hold your fire 'til opening night.

Enter Thermidor with a small table which he puts down in between the two chairs. He pulls an ashtray, a pipe and a pipe stand from his pockets and puts them on the table.

THERMIDOR

That is if there is an opening night. Snow's coming down in rifts and rafts and piling high by the front doors.

Vic, now almost fully awake.

VIC

Don't you worry about that, m'boy. People would plough frozen-over hell to see me reprise Henry Higgins.

THERMIDOR

There are two shovels Ventose...

Ventose walks to the mantle and rewinds the clock.

VENTOSE

Right. I'll be there *tout d'suite*.
Need a short word with Vic.

THERMIDOR

(skeptically)
Of course you will...

He exits. We hear the opening and of a fire door in the wings, and hear the sound of a blizzard before it closes.

VENTOSE

Sit down old boy. We need to put
our heads together on the subject
of...

VIC

...Floreal. Yes. Nasty bit of
business she's brought upon us.

Vic sits.

VENTOSE

What was a farce has become real
drama.

VIC

What do you have in mind? The
grand strategy. Spare me the
details.

VENTOSE

The truth.

VIC

The truth!?

VENTOSE

Did you assault Floreal?

VIC

Of course not.

VENTOSE

Intimidate her?

VIC

No!

VENTOSE
Coerce her in anyway?

VIC
At my age? Impossible!

Ventose stands.

VENTOSE
Nor I. We were competing for her
attention.

Vic stands.

VIC
Her affections.

VENTOSE
Answered her siren call.

VIC
What man wouldn't?

VENTOSE
I thought I loved her.

VIC
Me too!

VENTOSE
Was quite convinced I did.

VIC
Me too. I adore the girl.

VENTOSE
Me too.

VIC
Truth be told....

VENTOSE
Truth, yes...

VIC
Had she asked me to stand down, I
would have.

VENTOSE
Me too. In the spirit of workplace
comity.

VIC

Still, it could get rough.
Something about a zero tolerance
policy.

VENTOSE

All *ex post facto*. There were no
rules that I remember.

VIC

You would have been the one to
know. I'm a newcomer.

VENTOSE

Floreal could have left the
Company...

VIC

Why should she be allowed to impose
her man-hate on the company?

VENTOSE

I sacrificed my relationship with
Nivose for a mere chance with
Floreal. I am very sad about it.
Floreal has caused me much grief.

VIC

(very sincere)

Poor boy. But, you'll get over it.
I've been through worse.

VENTOSE

But, here is the question, Vic: How
can we play opposite Floreal now
that she's called in the law...?

The question catches Vic by surprise because he assumes
Ventose knows the answer.

VIC

Act. Just act, Ventose. The part
is all. Invest heart and soul.

VENTOSE

Act? Yes, of course. Damn, I'm
such a fool. I've been tied-up in
knots since she brought her case.

VIC

I played Julius Caesar you know.
So, I know a bit about betrayal.

VENTOSE

You were superb, so it's said.

VIC

Comes that scene where they butcher him. Caesar's ears are ringing with the soothsayer's warning, ides of March and all that. Irritating little homeless guy, smelling of Roman sewage no doubt, and yet something in his voice, like an ill-tuned violin sawing on Caesar's nerves. But, Caesar, he's king of the world. Fearless. Not going to let a little prophesying ruin his day. Up to the Senate chamber he goes, bounce in his step.

VENTOSE

I can see it all. Mind's eye.

VIC

It doesn't take them long. The conspirators swarm him. Start plunging daggers and swords into his body.

VENTOSE

Couldn't have been pleasant.

VIC

And I've never been stabbed. Not once. Bottle of stout over my head once. Jealous husband. But, never stabbed.

VENTOSE

It's a new situation. What do you do?

VIC

What we actors must always do, Ventose. We imagine what it's like. In comes the tip of the first blade. Oh dear, oh dear. Hurts like hell, but it's going to jack up the adrenalin, isn't it? I'm going to react, you know. I'm Caesar for chrissake, not some girly-man who's going to take it up the keester. Not when I don't want to I mean. I could be politically incorrect in putting it that way. Please forgive.

VENTOSE

All is forgiven.

VIC

I flail at my attackers. But by this time, some bugger's got me in the thigh. I'm doing a merry dance trying to get away, make excuses to go back to Calpernia. Didn't douse the coals in the brazier. Left a lamp burning. That sort of thing. Calpernia! Oh, I can hear her now. I told you not to go there today. I told you so. Natter natter natter. But, it's too late. Someone - that dog Servilius probably - gets me good, right in the back, left kidney. What's a man to do?

VENTOSE

What?

VIC

Down on my knees, of course, trying to keep my head up as I bob in a river of my own blood. Biological imperative again. But, fuck them I think to myself.... That's an actor's choice in the moment, you see. How's a real man going to act? Cassius is wiping his blade on someone else's robes. He took his shot. Fastidious to the last, that man. And there's Brutus, standing by, all googly-eyed with blood lust. My big line is coming. Got to set it up just right. It's what they pay me for. Damn right. Caesar knows its game over. How could he not? I rear back on my haunches, rip open my toga, expose my breast. I say, tauntingly, "E tu Brute?", before, not after, the fatal stab. But, I have maybe a second before the dagger is in my heart and another before its lights out. It's the Tercio de Muerte. And it's right then Ventose, in those two seconds I had to do the whole cycle: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

VENTOSE

Bargaining and depression too?

VIC

Not so much, but hinted at, of course, to preserve the immutability of the process.

VENTOSE

Applicability?

VIC

Ah. You see Ventose, I have to believe that Floreal is going to channel all her misguided anger into Eliza when Eliza balks at some of my insults. Higgins's not mine.

VENTOSE

How does that help us?

VIC

You and I both know that Higgins and Pickering each feel a palpable lust for the young woman. It's all buried in their gentleman's bet, swept under the carpet of good English manners and it's sublimated into the work Higgins agrees to do on the girl to see who wins their wager.

In the wings, the sound of the fire door opening and closing again. Momentarily, Thermidor enters wearing winter outerware, snow on boots.

THERMIDOR

Damn you, Ventose. Are you coming to help, or not?

Vic is suddenly startled by some inner voice. He walks to Thermidor.

VIC

Eventide?

THERMIDOR

Yes.

VIC

Bitter cold?

THERMIDOR

It is.

VIC
The river's frozen?

THERMIDOR
Imagine so.

VIC
Skaters fly where the water flowed,
then. Night falls.

THERMIDOR
Exactly why we need to clear the
walks now, Ventose.

VENTOSE
Right there. I promise.

Exasperated, Thermidor exits. The outside door opens and closes again. Vic has become strangely detached.

VIC
January! January is the cruellest
month!

VENTOSE
Not sure I get the drift.

VIC
(finding his lost train of
thought)
Yes, sorry, sorry. Where was I?
Floreal. Eliza. Acting. Yes. I
am going to act as though I have no
lust for her at all. Not a
scintilla. It's going to be all
intellectual on my part: game
theory, politics and socio-
economics. I suggest you do the
same. If we get it right, the
audience, including Floreal's
lawyers, will perceive an innocence
they will transpose immediately
onto real life thereby casting
doubt on all her accusations.

VENTOSE
It's in the acting, then?

VIC
Indeed! Now, my defence will be
abetted by my general decrepitude,
which I shall play up for maximum
effect.

(MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)

You, well, I recommend that when you walk into court you feign a limp. Be morose, aggrieved, put upon.

VENTOSE

The art of devious distraction.
Brilliant!

VIC

I've enjoyed the man-talk, Ventose. It does the heart good. I shall remember this time always.

Vic begins to march toward the wings.

VENTOSE

Where are you going?

VIC

(declaratively)
To walk on water!

He exits with a concerned Ventose following.

Moments later, Thermidor enters through the parlour door of the set still in winter gear, carrying his shovel. He calls into the wings.

THERMIDOR

Ventose! Damn you.

He stamps his feet on the floor to shake off the loose snow, unwraps his scarf and hangs it and his coat off and hangs it on the coat rack then rubs his hands together to warm them.

Frimaire enters.

FRIMAIRE

All done?

THERMDOR

It's still snowing, but I did what I could, no thanks to Ventose.

FRIMAIRE

If there's shirking to be done, he's your man.

She points to his coat, scarf and boots

FRIMAIRE (CONT'D)

Those yours?

She picks them up and carries them to Thermidor and hands them to him.

FRIMAIRE (CONT'D)

Not here please. Sacred ground.
Otherwise, everything looks ready.
Pygmalion avanti.

She begins to walk off.

THERMIDOR

Don't you owe me an explanation?

FRIMAIRE

(with her back to him)
I don't think so.

THERMIDOR

You do. You are chilly toward me.
Exceptionally cold, in fact.
(beat)
Your phony love affair with
Floreal...

FRIMAIRE

No love lost there.

THERMIDOR

Said with a tone of despair.

FRIMAIRE

She betrayed me.

THERMIDOR

But not really.

FRIMAIRE

She hardly has a case against Vic
and Ventose. Why sue me after I
tried to help?

THERMIDOR

A legal question. And while the
lawyers kick that one around, what
about my question?

She waves him off and is about the exit.

THERMIDOR (CONT'D)

Frimaire!

She turns and faces him, angrily.

FRIMAIRE

What!?

THERMIDOR

You told me you were open to an experiment. In boy-girl love.

FRIMAIRE

I thought about it.

(beat)

(softening)

Oh, Thermidor, I know I should offer some sort of long, Chekhovian dissertation to explain myself. And, if I could spin my feelings like that weebegone writer, I would. But my attempt would create a vortex that would pull me down into the bung hole. And you, well you would go round and round on the outer edges until you got flung off into the never-never, and we could not even make theatre here let alone make love.

(indicating the theatre)

Here, Thermidor. This is where we can put our pain to work.

THERMIDOR

Admit it. You're angry with Floreal because she has no appetite for women. Or, apparently, for men. Talk about being flung into the never-never.

FRIMAIRE

Jayzus, Thermidor. You don't get it do you? She's just not interested in Vic or Ventose. Taste not orientation supplemented by a fear of workplace complications.

THERMIDOR

So, you're angry because she sued you too?

FRIMAIRE

She has reduced this Company to its parts. The thing that was greater than the sum of all that, now lost. We are all down to working our contracts.

(MORE)

FRIMAIRE (CONT'D)

Every scene infused with a sour light. Lemon not lime. All craft, no art.

THERMIDOR

You can't blame her for that.

FRIMAIRE

Who should I blame, then? Men for being men. Women for being women? Shall I just blame the times, Thermidor? How do we avoid a dangerous trivialization when sharp-eared lawyers are seated willy-nilly in our audience?

(beat)

Work to do. Must go.

She exits. Thermidor dons his coat and scarf, then sits down on one of the wing-backs. Ventose enters with a limp as Thermidor pulls on his boots.

THERMIDOR

That for me?

VENTOSE

The limp you mean? No, it's just a bit of theatre. Legal variety. Rehearsal.

Nivose enters.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

(to Thermidor)

I'll join you in a bit. Save some for me.

THERMIDOR

I'm sure the gods of winter will provide.

Thermidor hands Ventose his shovel then exits through the parlour door.

NIVOSE

What do you want?

VENTOSE

Sorry, I didn't know he was here.

NIVOSE

He's gone.

VENTOSE
Yes. Well, I just wanted
to...erm...apologize.

NIVOSE
(coolly)
Thank you.

VENTOSE
You are owed an explanation.

NIVOSE
You have a shovel. How convenient.

He opens the parlour door and puts the shovel out.

VENTOSE
It's Vic's fault.

She's exasperated by the comment and begins walking out.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)
What I mean, Nivose... Wait,
please.

She turns back toward him.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)
He's the old lion, isn't he? He
came here from out of nowhere.
Took all the roles I have dreamed
of playing.

NIVOSE
And exceeded everyone's
expectations. Yours too. Admit
it.

VENTOSE
He's incredible. Amazing. But,
you see Nivose, you went away.
Months and months. I was in an
agony of loneliness. Missed your
company. I missed your body. Your
amazing body.

NIVOSE
This one you mean?

VENTOSE
I did not dare contact you because
your husband... I did not and do
not know where you live...out
there.

NIVOSE

Oh, I get that. In here is a tiny cosmos that by its enormity negates all others.

VENTOSE

Yes! Whenever anyone enters this place, whatever world they come from cannot enter with them. I remember when you first came here and all that happened in between plays and acts and scenes. But then, you left...

(beat)

You left and then Frimaire brought Floreal to the Company, a green girl from the Provinces, not long before she pulled Victor in. Floreal batted her eyes at me. She would walk by me with her hips swaying, cast her Monnalisa smiles my way, leave a trail of a new perfume in the air that led - I believed, wanted to believe - to her dressing room door. But, it was a door that was always locked. One day in the midst of my agony, Frimaire posted a note in the green room. Nivose gave birth it said. A girl. Both doing well. And suddenly I could hear the crying of a newborn, somewhere, out there, in the great beyond. Reality.

NIVOSE

Our baby.

VENTOSE

(not listening to her)

I was prepared to leave Floreal alone. I'd learned my lesson. Then Vic arrived. You were here. You saw for yourself.

NIVOSE

You thought Floreal was attracted to Vic?

VENTOSE

I thought it was preposterous that an old man could exert that kind of attraction. I'm embarrassed to say it. Nivose...

(MORE)

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

I couldn't let the old man win. He took my roles. The girl too? No! No!

NIVOSE

You turned your back on us.

VENTOSE

I convinced myself that I could make Floreal love me, not Vic. We were in competition. He and I were Astrov and Vanya, Higgins and Pickering. Deep feeling, not just words in the mouth.

(beat)

But, you're back. You broke the spell.

NIVOSE

That's just not true. You just finally got her message of disinterest. Now, here I was with my rosy cheeks and my tits and ass, back inside the universe of the selfish. My baby lived in a parallel universe in the arms of another man. But, guess what, Ventose? It's our baby.

VENTOSE

What!?

NIVOSE

(tearing up)

Your little girl.

While Ventose is recovering from the shock of the news, there is a knock on the parlour door.

VENTOSE

It's Thermidor wanting help. We need to...

The banging on the door grows louder. Ventose, angry at the interruption, walks to the door and yells before he opens it.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

Damn you!

When Ventose opens the door, Vic stands leaning against the jam, shivering and shaking, his arms wrapped around his chest, hair matted with snow.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

My god! Vic!

She exits, hiding her tears. Ventose can't run after her because Vic needs help.

Floreal enters, looking over her shoulder in the direction Nivose went.

FLOREAL

(sarcastically)

You two have a talent for drawing tears.

VENTOSE

Floreal, take care of Vic. Please.

Ventose exits at a trot in pursuit of Nivose.

FLOREAL

I'm sure he can look after himself.

Vic shuffles to one of the wing-back chairs and after a struggle manages to sit down. Floreal spots a small blanket on the back of the chair. She casually throws it on his Vic's lap. He still chatters from the cold.

Finally, she relents and perfunctorily pulls it up over his torso. He looks up and their eyes meet. She backs away and strolls around the room. He tries to follow her with his eyes. As she talks he utters various guttural responses that she accepts as meaningful.

FLOREAL (CONT'D)

This is awkward.

(beat)

I thought they had taken you back to the home for the night. So, we open the show tomorrow night. Might not be too many in the audience if the snow keeps up.

Suddenly she spins round and puts her hands on the armrests of his chair.

FLOREAL (CONT'D)

But, even if no one shows, I am going to damn well play my part, whatever you dish-out Victor.

She stands but still glaring.

FLOREAL (CONT'D)

I don't know how you plan to Higgins me, Vic, but if you try to dominate, I'll make the audience feel you are going to break all my pretty little bones in your calloused hands. I'll meet indifference with a dissonant beauty, offhandedness with unignorable pain, sarcasm with bewilderment, confront your contempt with a secret, healing love for you. If you withhold one ounce of the ache that is your life, I'll come in after you. You want acting, Victor, you shall have it.

He is over-taken by incomprehension. He sputters. She strolls the room again, regains her composure.

FLOREAL (CONT'D)

We did a little research, Vic. My lawyers and I. Seems you were married five times. Five! And you had countless lovers, so it seems.

VIC

(stirring)

Can that be true?

FLOREAL

Some men among them apparently. Imagine that.

VIC

Have I forgotten?

FLOREAL

Seven children. All adults now. Four girls, three boys. Maybe more eh, Victor? Bastards aplenty. Most don't know you. Those who do wish they didn't.

VIC

(waking out of a half stupor)

I see. Come to me here. Come. I will divulge...something...

Floreal hesitates but moves closer.

VIC (CONT'D)

Sometimes I get lost.
Hallucinations rise up in the
valley of the shadow of death...

FLOREAL

I'm not going to feel sorry for
you.

VIC

About my being lost. Don't. I
like it. I like my hallucinations
too, because they are truly vivid,
even if they are plotless and theme-
less and the acting of all the
beasts I encounter, including the
human beasts, is so...un-acted.

FLOREAL

Really? Doubt it.

Vic stands but struggles without her help.

FLOREAL (CONT'D)

Careful.

VIC

Here's a vision that this brain
recently cooked inside the pan
where it simmers. You tell me if it
doesn't get the heart racing.

FLOREAL

Don't you dare bore me.

VIC

Faces of babies. Cradles rocking
in their upstairs rooms. Nurse not
happy to see me. Shoos me away to
tumble down into the inevitable
party in the front room. Jazz on
the record player. A cloud of
cigarette smoke gathering on the
ceiling. Glasses clinking. As the
night goes on I can hear the throat
songs of those on the couches who
had gone into one another's arms,
the rasping of nylon stockings on
trouser legs. Some good friends
still dancing, slow and close in
the sonata of moonlight streaming
through the bay window. The
murmurs of seducers, the purring of
the seduced.

(MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)

I hear above the quiet din, the squalling children, but after everyone has departed, at last they fall into the river of their dreams. I am alone, another glass of scotch in hand, weeping by the now dead fire in the grate, because my wife has departed in the glittering coach of some other prince of stage and screen. No matter, there are always other women and I deserve whatever I get.

FLOREAL

None of the women have much good to say about you...

VIC

You know nothing! Just as you don't those women had a backstory they must account for. Besides, it's an ill wind that blows no good, sayeth the Bard. It blows the clouds away from the midnight sky. My friends and I, my wife too, we were stars in the firmament, a constellation of supernovas.

FLOREAL

Some of those women are coming forward, some of them with tales to tell. And what do they reveal? A certain pattern of behaviour to which my lawyer will draw the court's attention.

VIC

Judge not lest ye be judged.

FLOREAL

You were always the same. All the old courtesies, of course. The beautiful language you spoke. King's English. Charming. Fire your cigarette, my dear, as you pull a lighter from your pocket and flick it into a flame that illuminates your face just so. Firm jaw. Whimsy in your eyes. Touch her hair a bit. Compliments that flutter down on her like tiny kisses. You invite her to dance.

Floreal seizes Vic and makes him dance the beginning of a tango.

FLOREAL (CONT'D)

In one hand you envelope hers,
split her fingers with yours,
drawing her forearm against yours
for that first electric touch.
Your hand on her lower back to draw
her closer. But then, you'll swing
her 'round til she rises on her toe
tips.

VIC

We flew like birds...

She disengages and he almost falls.

FLOREAL

Oh yes, but you are like a raptor
on leather wings and you watch her
close with your preternatural eyes.

VIC

I don't remember. I forget.

FLOREAL

Oh yes, you remember. That dark
hallway where once upon a time, you
leveraged a permitted kiss into an
unpermitted grope. Where her no,
no, no was met with your slight
apology and a momentary
reconnoitering of the way forward.
Into your library for brandies and
forgiveness. You allude to your
star power. You tell her about all
the lovely women whose careers you
promoted. You asked nothing of
them, but coincidentally, they all
became your lovers of the moment.

VIC

Forgotten lovers. Beware!

FLOREAL

Lovers who moved on to big and
better when they'd had their fill
of you, you'd say with a self-
deprecating little laugh while you
add another inch of high-proof
brandy to her snifter.

VIC

This is all just someone's memory.
It's not a true history.

FLOREAL

The poor ingenues who rejected you
in moments just like those are now
retired counter girls, secretaries
or grandmothers in the grey suburbs
where you never could find the map
to.

VIC

You frame me while you paint a
picture.

Vic flops down into his chair.

FLOREAL

One of those woman now comes
forward and the picture comes into
focus. You pushed her back into
the corner of your couch. She was
half drunk it's true, but terrified
nonetheless. You slid your hand up
her thigh, put a knee between hers
to prevent her legs from closing,
then, the moment being propitious,
you mounted her. To this day she
feels - feels! - the bristle of
your whiskers on the rouge of her
cheeks, the starch in your white
collar points sticking in her neck,
the sound of your unstoppable
zipper, the ripping of her
garments, the penetration of your
ardent, obsessive, priapic self
into the telltale dryness of her
guts. Into her like a knife.

VIC

(hands clasped to his
head)

I don't remember. I don't
remember.

FLOREAL

That's the testimony that will be
heard when she takes the stage.
And do you know what I will say
when I testify Vic? I never let
you lay a hand on me. I never took
so much as a single kiss from you.
It's true.

VIC
Arghhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

FLOREAL
But, harassment is harassment, and
you will pay, you and Ventose too
and Frimaire for standing by.

Vic struggles to get out of the chair. He stands and tries to orient himself. As Floreal watches with an air of suspicion about his current mental state, Vic moves toward the bowl of fruit. He holds it above his head as though a votive offering to the gods, then carries it behind the chairs where, after tucking the bowl under his left arm, he uses his right hand to place apples into the "branches" of the coat rack.

Floreal exits in a halo of dismissive contempt. Vic puts the bowl down then walks to the mantle, where he turns the clock around and winds it until it starts ticking again. He shuffles to front and center and slaps the sides of his face hard with his hands to wake himself out of what feels to him to have been a nightmare. He casts his eyes around the set.

VIC
Right. Henry Higgins, coming up.

Fade to black.

ACT FOUR - NOISES OFF**INT. BACKSTAGE OF NOISES OFF - LAST NIGHT - SPRING**

The back of the set outlines a large house facing an unseen audience who laugh uproariously at the performance. Frimaire's and Thermidor's muffled voices are heard through the closed windows and doors facing the audience. One of the doors on the "second floor" is accessible from a small platform that can only be reached by a wooden ladder.

The only light illuminating the backstage area is the light seeping through from the imaginary stage on the other side of the set wall.

The grandfather clock, sundial, mantel clock and fire irons, used in previous productions are clustered together. In another cluster, the wing back chairs, coat rack, table and bowl of fruit used in Pygmalion.

Nivose, Ventose and Floreal, all in costume, are back stage during a performance of Michael Frayne's "Noises Off". Nivose reclines quietly on the corner of a long, low prop chest that sits beside the lighting console. "Props" is painted on the sides and ends in large letters.

Ventose lounges on a pile of ropes. Floreal paces, but frequently returns to a wardrobe trolley where she thumbs through the garments that hang on it.

Suddenly, Frimaire enters through one of the set doors, slamming it shut. Seconds later Thermidor enters through the upper door, which he slams shut. Rapturous applause breaks out on the other side of the wall. Thermidor slides down the ladder.

Frimaire nods at the other actors, who line up behind her. They walk through the two closed doors, step out where they are visible from the backstage area, and take bows. More applause.

The actors return backstage, lit up by the applause. They slam doors behind them as a finishing flourish. As the Noises Off audience shuffles out of the auditorium, the actor's faces immediately take on the sour look of people at serious odds with one another.

VENTOSE

That's a bloody awful way to finish
a run.

NIVOSE

End of run, end of season, and end
of this Company too. Who would
have guessed that a few months ago?

FLOREAL

But, it is spring. There's that.

NIVOSE

So?

FLOREAL

Time for new starts, new
beginnings.

VENTOSE

You don't end on a matinee.

NIVOSE

Especially a show like Noises Off.

VENTOSE

A matinee for God's sake! Old
people in every seat, hands
rattling cello packs, sucking
bonbons, grunting as they shift in
their seats.

FRIMAIRE

It was, for all of that, a special
show. Victor was in the audience.
He and a bus load of his friends
from the home.

FLOREAL

(angrily)
What!?

THERMIDOR

A gesture of gratitude. You might
try that on one day, Floreal.

FRIMAIRE

He deserved to be honoured for what
he brought us in our time of need.

NIVOSE

I didn't see him in the audience.

THERMIDOR

Last row. In his wheelchair. Not
quite up in the gods, but close
enough to talk with them if he had
a mind to, which I'm sure he did.

(MORE)

THERMIDOR (CONT'D)

Now, if you'll pardon me, I've got
a bladder to empty.

FLOREAL

(to Frimaire)

I can't believe you did that.

Thermidor exits at a trot.

NIVOSE

A nice gesture.

FLOREAL

Oh, for god's sake, he's got
Alzheimers.

FRIMAIRE

Lewy Body Dementia. A bit
different.

FLOREAL

But, he's still a bloody reminder
of what happened.

VENTOSE

So are you, but you're still here.
(to Frimaire)
You should have said he'd be here.
We would have cranked things up a
notch.

FLOREAL

She knew I wouldn't have stepped
foot on stage had I known he was
there.

FRIMAIRE

I wasn't going to take a chance on
that happening.

NIVOSE

You've already done enough damage.

VENTOSE

Actually destroyed the Company that
took you in.

FRIMAIRE

It's all behind us now. Life goes
on.

FLOREAL

Life goes on, Frimaire? Lucky man, your Victor, never having to account for himself. And lucky you, Ventose, for not having the wit to understand what you don't understand. About women.

Ventose's anger surges.

NIVOSE

She's not completely wrong.

FLOREAL

Then there are my sisters, not in arms. One is ready to give her newborn girl the clotted milk of love stirred into the pabulum of Frimaire's advice.

FRIMAIRE

No need to be unkind, Floreal.

FLOREAL

Says the princess of prevarication, she who will say and do anything to seem so pliantly nice. Seem. Seem. Seem.

Everyone freezes in place and glares at Floreal.

FLOREAL (CONT'D)

Well, my work here is done. I have a few things to pack up, so I'll leave you to it. Ta ta.

Floreal exits. A difficult silence follows.

VENTOSE

What's your plan, Frimaire? Start another Company in some other town?

FRIMAIRE

No. I'll just carry on. Right here in this theatre. My home and native land.

VENTOSE

Say again.

FRIMAIRE

Thermidor and I.

NIVOSE

What? Why didn't you say? I would have stayed on.

VENTOSE

In that case, so would I, but, Frimaire, you never left open any possibility.

NIVOSE

(rethinking)

No. I wouldn't have.

FRIMAIRE

Yes, well. I'm sad to see you both go, but, we'll manage. Somehow.

VENTOSE

You must have known well before we... Oh, wait, wait, wait, wait. She's engineered this. Don't you see, Nivose? Vic gone. Floreal gone. You and I, gone.

NIVOSE

Face it, Ventose. It's time for a change.

VENTOSE

(to Nivose)

Don't you see? She's the cunning bitch Floreal said she is.

NIVOSE

It's her baby. I get it.

FRIMAIRE

We'll do anything to protect our babies, won't we?

VENTOSE

(suspiciously, anger
bubbling)

What's going on?

Nivose nods. When Ventose turns to her as a comrade in arms she turns away from him.

Enter Thermidor pushing a wheelchair.

THERMIDOR

Did he come back here?

FRIMAIRE

Who?

THERMIDOR

Victor. The home just called. They just discovered he didn't get on the bus. I found his wheelchair at the back of the theatre, so sometime during the show he got up and went walkabout.

FRIMAIRE

He's wandering. He does that. He's here. We'll find him.

NIVOSE

Forgive me, Frimaire. Train to catch.

VENTOSE

Now?! I'm not packed. I'm not ready!

Frimaire nods and the two women hug.

FRIMAIRE

You're doing the right thing.

Frimaire and Thermidor exit, leaving the wheelchair.

VENTOSE

OK, OK. We'll stop by my place. I'll throw my things together. We can pick the baby up on the way to the train station. Nivose? Did you order up a taxi?

NIVOSE

For me. Not us.

Ventose shoots a quizzical look at her.

VENTOSE

You're not going back to... You told him the baby's not his, you said. The baby's mine, you said.

NIVOSE

You are the father, yes. But, I'm not yours and she's not yours.

VENTOSE

My god, Nivose. Are you still...?
Nothing ever happened with Floreal!

(beat)

I was filled with remorse. You
saw. You forgave.

NIVOSE

I did forgive you. But, I am not
going to forget it - unless my mind
becomes as shredded as Vic's. And
wouldn't I like that if that's what
it takes to put you behind me.

VENTOSE

OK, forget the idea of being
together romantically. But, we are
such a good act together. Our
audiences adore us. The critics
have blessed our union. You'd give
that up?

The sound of a taxi tooting its horn.

NIVOSE

Good bye, Ventose.

She tries to kiss him on the cheek, but he turns his face.
She puts a hand on his cheek to turn his head to face her.
He angrily swats her hand away.

Ventose puts his head in his hands and walks the stage
stammering and upset. He wanders near the pile of Pygmalion
props. Nivose tidies her hair and dabs on fresh lipstick.

Vic, appears in the shadows near the front of the stage
looking mad and dishevelled. He makes a noise that only
Nivose hears. She walks toward Vic, but is not able to see
him. Vic makes another noise. While Nivose moves toward Vic,
Ventose picks up a fire iron from among the props, then makes
his way toward Nivose, who is listening intently for more
noise.

NIVOSE (CONT'D)

(over her shoulder)

Did you hear that?

She turns towards Ventose who is now behind her. The taxi
horn sounds again.

NIVOSE (CONT'D)

See if you can find, Vic. I have
to go.

Suddenly, Ventose, in a state of rage, raises the fire iron over his head.

VENTOSE

I am nothing without you.

He brings the iron down on her head and strikes her hard. She falls dead in a heap.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

And you shall be nothing without me.

Vic steps out of the shadows clapping.

VIC

Bravo my boy!

Ventose starts and turns toward Vic, iron still in his hand, ready to strike.

VIC (CONT'D)

Authenticity. That's the thing. By god that was good. But, I don't know the work. Part for me? Give me a line. What's your name?

(beat)

C'mon. I'm a good actor. Prepared to audition.

VENTOSE

OK. Sure. Sure. We've got to move the body.

VIC

Make sense. What did she do to you? Betrayal? Ever thus, eh?

VENTOSE

Not just her. Floreal. Frimaire.

VIC

Reached the end of your rope, eh?

VENTOSE

I just lost it. I...

VIC

OK. Got it. That's why you hit her with the cliché. Now, where do we put the poor girl? She's not letting us off the hook. Still in character.

Vic tries lifting her head and shoulders but can't do it.

VIC (CONT'D)
Heavy lies the head...

He walks to the feet end of her body. Ventose looks around and spots the trunk.

VENTOSE
There.

VIC
Let's drag her. A beast with two
backs can make short work of her.

They do. Once they have her along side the prop chest, Ventose opens the lid, shuffles a few props out of the way and gives Vic the high sign to lift her feet while hoists the head end. They swing her into the box and Vic closes the lid.

VENTOSE
Thank you, Vic. Thank you.

VIC
Next scene?

VENTOSE
You make a getaway. I blame it on
you.

Ventose picks up the bloody fire iron.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)
Take this, Victor. That's it.
Your fingerprints everywhere. Now,
hide it in plain sight.

Vic tosses the iron behind the prop chest.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)
Now, hide, Vic. Hide. They're
coming for you. They want you to
go back to the home.

VIC
Back home? Is this not my home?

VENTOSE
No, no. This is backstage. You're
a front-of-stage man. Greatest of
his generation. Your home is on
the other side of that door.
(MORE)

VENTOSE (CONT'D)
 (indicating a door in the
 back of the Noises Off
 set)

VIC
 (quoting from Stoppard's
 Rosencrantz and
 Guildenstern are Dead)
*Every exit an entrance some place
 else.*

VENTOSE
 Go. That's right. Look for the
 porch light and the welcome mat.

VIC
 Through the door in the willow tree
 I must go. I have the key. Into
 the wood by the river wild, til I
 come to the edge of the mad heath
 for a romp. Dial into sunny days
 again.

VENTOSE
 That's right. Pretend you have the
 key. Walk through and keep on
 walking 'til you come to the end of
 your very long shadow.

VIC feigns reaching into his pocket and pulling out a key
 which he holds up to Ventose to see.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)
 Good man, Vic. Good man.

Before turning the lock, Vic puts his ear to the door and
 then backs off and turns back to Ventose who is urging him to
 go.

VIC
 I can hear the clock in the
 parlour, tick-tock, tick-tock. And
 the little ones. Do you hear them
 where they frolic within the walls
 of the apple-tree garden? Hear
 them when they answer the dinner
 gong. They stream like trout
 through the wavering stems of the
 lily pads and trip through the
 slamming doors calling Pappa!
 Pappa!?

VENTOSE
 Go to them.

Vic excitedly exits through the door.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

I hear my little one too. No wonder you've gone mad. The baby! Yes. What words will I use to explain what happened? What's my story? Mother gone AWOL. A total mystery. Selfish, selfish, selfish woman. She always was. An actress. A heinous crime, mother abandonment. So, as far as the police are concerned, it's me to the rescue.

(beat)

Serenity now. Be fatherly. The baby's innocent. And her father, innocent for all intents and purposes. I'll bring the child up myself, not anywhere near a theatre and its numberless traps and tricks.

He stands and straightens himself, then exits on the opposite side with a resolute demeanor. Off stage we hear a fire door to the outside open to the sound of traffic.

Enter Thermidor and Frimaire.

THERMIDOR

He's not here.

FRIMAIRE

Listen.

THERMIDOR

Door's open. Vic must have gone to the streets.

They run off.

Enter Vic. Not seeing anyone, he walks front and center and peers out over the audience.

VIC

Hello darkness my old friend.

Tears come to his eyes. He turns and walks back to center stage.

VIC (CONT'D)

Hey ho! Somebody?

He spots the wheelchair.

VIC (CONT'D)
Can this be hell?

He walks to it and sits, then spins it round a couple of times, coming to rest facing the audience.

VIC (CONT'D)
(quoting from
Shakespeare's *The
Tempest*)
*Sit still, and hear the last of our
sea-sorrow. Here in this island we
arrived...*

He regains his feet and wipes tears from his eyes.

VIC (CONT'D)
No. No. Not an island in the sea.
Not the sea itself this fine spring
day...
(quoting again from *The
Tempest*)
*Wipe thou thine eyes; have comfort.
The direful spectacle of the
wreck...*

(regaining his composure)
Not a wreck. I am an actor. *Homo
erectus*. But, no, no. My acting
days are done. I'll take the easy
way and write instead. Yes, fill
space and time with a new world,
not with lines and scenes that must
be remembered and performed. No
more hard work for me.

The sound of a police siren is heard through the fire door.

Floreal, wearing a winter coat and carrying a suitcase enters quietly and observes. Realizing that Vic is adrift in dementia, she is moved at last by what she witnesses.

VIC (CONT'D)
But what metaphor should I resort
to? How draw my play together?
(beat)
Nothing ambiguous. Clear dividing
lines to avoid confusion. Zero,
one. Light, dark. Good and evil.
Man and woman. No. Not that. Past
and future? Reality versus dream.
That's it. The atmosphere you are
designed to breathe, not the one
where you suffocate. Air versus
water. Good, good.
(MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)

The metaphor of the sea then. No!
I reject you, sea! No one will get
the aqueous humor of it. And what
is a play without at least one
laugh. So, not the sea or the
salt it splashes in my wounds.

(beat)

The river! The river upon which
not long ago I walked. It was so
cold. I drifted there just like
snow. Hair gone white. Bones all
white. But the thaw came and I
sank at last through the daylight
sparkle into the near and blessed
dark.

(throwing up his arms)

Here is the river's bottom with the
still surface high above.

FLOREAL

(soto voce)

You really are mad, aren't you old
man?

VIC

Down here in the river's deep, in
the power of its ecstatic run,
snagged by some old stump, hair
streaming into the fierce current
where the last bubbles of my life
slant ever upward toward the air
that is their mother.

Floreal steps forward.

FLOREAL

And what characters will you
conjure? What plots?

VIC

Ah! Are you an actress? You shall
be an eel or fish. With those lips
a fish I think.

FLOREAL

You really are mad, aren't you?
Very well.

(quoting Cordelia in King
Lear)

*We are not the first
Who, with best meaning, have
incurr'd the worst.
For thee, oppressed king, am I cast
down...*

(MORE)

FLOREAL (CONT'D)

(beat)

Who else is in your story, Vic?

VIC

The frogs who push through water
with beautiful legs. The water
bugs who dance upon the twinkle.
The skitters who skit the sideways
channels. The dragonflies, who in
the sunlight's buzz, beat the
rising vapour on translucent wings.
The snakes who slither shore to
shore. The ducks who float upon the
eddies too. The turtles basking on
the steaming stones.

More sirens sound outside.

FLOREAL

It seems a pretty place. Where's
the drama?

VIC

In the blue, blue sky as you
already know, my dear, for as you
waggle your tail fins and move from
shadow into light, out from under
the shade of willows clinging to
the bank into open water, down
comes the plunging fisher king with
his blade-like beak to snatch you
out. Or down comes the eagle whose
raptor claws will tear your flesh
as he pulls you up to drown in air.

FLOREAL

That's the plot?

VIC

Isn't it enough? Life and fucking
death!

(beat)

You've brought your case with you,
I see. I'd heard you'd laid it
down.

FLOREAL

My case? Oh, this. The case
against you has been laid to rest.
Here I have a few rags and a few
mementos I shall carry with me.

(beat)

Why aren't you at the home, Vic?

VIC

What mean you by that? This is my home. And you are my pretty wife.

FLOREAL

Not a wife, no.

VIC

Mistress?

She shakes her head. He walks to her and strokes her cheek with his hand.

VIC (CONT'D)

Daughter, then.

FLOREAL

(almost in tears)

Yes, I think I could pull that off.

VIC

I played the Duke of Buckingham once. In King Richard III. Not Shakespeare's. The other one. Came up out of the parking lot. Remember? Found his bones all bright and broken. Brought him up out of his dream.

She nods. We hear the roar of trucks and cars outside and the muffled sounds of Frimaire's and Thermidor's voices.

FLOREAL

Sit, Vic, please.

She helps him sit in the wheelchair and then begins walking away.

VIC

(desperately)

Don't leave me alone.

FLOREAL

I'll just close the door.

She exits in a hurry.

VIC

(quoting from The Dream of Richard, King)

*I rattle in my castle like a stone
in a tin cup,
Distracted and damned to prowl the
tight corridors*

(MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)

*Of my reason until I confront my
anger,
Which broods and stomps in
confinement like a Minotaur.*

The sound of voices off, then the slamming of the fire door which puts an end to the street noise.

Enter Floreal with Thermidor and Frimaire who stand behind and off to the side from Vic who is now lost to his thoughts.

FLOREAL

He's been here all the time.

FRIMAIRE

Is he OK?

FLOREAL

All that's left of him are the parts he played once upon a time.

THERMIDOR

Where are Ventose and Nivose?

Hearing Thermidor, Vic throws his words loudly over his shoulder.

VIC

(quoting Eliot's *The Wasteland*)

The nymphs have departed!

(beat)

*Sweet Thames sing softly til I end
my song.*

He struggles out of his chair and walks downstage. The others move toward him. Floreal stops them.

FLOREAL

Let him play it out.

FRIMAIRE

Yes.

Ventose enters, seen by Thermidor.

THERMIDOR

We thought you'd left.

VENTOSE

I can't find Nivose. She's disappeared.

FRIMAIRE

She left with her baby. Took a train remember?

VENTOSE

Right. Yes. Forgot.

FRIMAIRE

I'll take Vic back to the home.

She starts walking toward Vic, but as Vic starts speaking Floreal pulls her back again.

VIC

(to the audience, quoting from MUNDUS)

Look at you. You, The People, now sit in judgement.

THERMIDOR

He's just a man of parts. Now, he's Mundus.

VIC

When once your voices rose together, rose up out of the community of your broken dreams, rose up for Mundus, you now sit there in the dumb, dark quiet, some of you stunned, some of you hissing and seething behind your pursed lips, some of you, no doubt, saying a silent prayer - wishing to God that Mundus would leave the stage forever - some of you mulling your pity for this old man, like a candy. Hah! (beat) Oh, look at your faces now.

Vic winces with a sudden pain in his left shoulder, which, as he speaks, he kneads with his right hand.

FRIMAIRE

Something's wrong.

VIC

It is a shock, isn't it, when the force of a distant charisma, a figure on a stage or screen, a god or devil in a dream, comes down to the dirt you walk on every day and looks you in the eye, deigns to speak to you, dares you to spit your insults into his very face?

(MORE)

VIC (CONT'D)

You sir. You say I broke my promises. You. You there. You and you.

VENTOSE

By all accounts, it was by all accounts his greatest role.

FRIMAIRE

We must get him to hospital.

The actors begin walking quietly toward Vic believing him to have lost touch with reality. Floreal moves out in front of them and makes them stop.

FLOREAL

Let me.

She moves carefully toward Vic.

FLOREAL (CONT'D)

Victor.

He is lost in the moment and doesn't hear her.

FLOREAL (CONT'D)

Victor!

He turns toward her. She moves another step in his direction.

VIC

Daughter!

Suddenly he swings around and points at the wheelchair.

VIC (CONT'D)

(still quoting from
MUNDUS)

I won that chair! Me, little, stupid Mundus, made of dragon fire and drunk desire. But, I do not give a damn for that seat of little power. I would have more!

Again, suddenly, he arches backward and clutches at his chest and gasps for air. He collapses to his knees. Floreal drops to her knees beside him, trying to steady him.

FLOREAL

Something is going on. He's not acting. Get some light on us. I can't see what's going on.

Thermidor rushes to the lighting console and flicks a few switches so that the light now falls on Vic and Floreal with the others in a semi-circle behind them.

Vic drops further on his haunches, clutching his chest with one hand, holding on to Floreal before he lays down. Once he's down he yanks at her and she falls to her knees close to his body.

VIC

A kiss from my beloved before I die.

Floreal, now tearing-up at the reality of Vic's death, nods and kisses him on his brow.

VIC (CONT'D)

(loudly, angrily)

A fucking kiss!

Vic reaches up and grabs her hair and forces her lips to his. Breaking away from him, she stands, wipes her mouth and looks down with sudden loathing at Vic. The other actors gather round Floreal in sympathy.

FRIMAIRE

Call an ambulance! Thermidor.

VENTOSE

And the police.

Ventose kneels on one knee and holds up Vic's right hand.

VENTOSE (CONT'D)

He's got blood on his hands. Call the police too.

FLOREAL

Let him die. Let him die!

The actors begin to move away, each of them to a different part of the stage as Vic goes through his final death throws. Floreal moves to her suitcase picks it up.

FLOREAL (CONT'D)

(determinedly)

Good bye.

They all watch her exit then turn back to look at the heap of Vic at the front of the stage as they find places to sit, or stand and watch.

FRIMAIRE

It's not right. It's just not right.

Nivose raises the lid of the prop chest, gets out and also stands to watch.

Once they are all motionless again, Vic's body begins to stir. He rises and faces the audience.

Floreal enters and comes down behind Vic.

FLOREAL

So, what's the plot?

The other actors come downstage to listen to Vic's answer.

VIC

We're actors. It's not our concern.

Frimaire comes down stage and addresses the other actors.

FRIMAIRE

OK. Not bad. But, I want one more run through. From the top. I want every syllable the playwright wrote, and none of those he didn't. I only want to see magic until old Vic snaps. And dies.

Floreal emerges from the wings and drags the apple tree to the center of the stage. Thermidor and Ventose carry in the table, then bring the chairs. Floreal and Nivose drag the grandfather clock to where it was in Act 1. Everyone clears the stage.

Enter Ventose and Nivose. The clock chimes one o'clock. They both look at it and then, smiling, at one another.

VENTOSE

(looking at the clock)
It can't be. What time is it really?

The End

Fade to black