



HEIR APPARENT
by Paul Smith

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HEIR APPARENT

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Characters

GEORGE BUCKINGHAM – THE HEIR APPARENT - 21

CINDY RUTTOCK – GEORGE’S GUARDIAN - 50

GABRIEL RUTTOCK – GEORGE’S GUARDIAN - 50

SCURVY – A BUTLER – 40-60

TIBERIUS CHAMBERLAIN - SON OF FREDERICA & THE DUKE - 21

FREDERICA CHAMBERLAIN – WIFE OF THE DUKE – 50+

APHRODITE CHAMBERLAIN - DAUGHTER OF FREDERICA & THE DUKE - 19

VENUS CHAMBERLAIN – DAUGHTER OF FREDERICA & THE DUKE - 16

THE DUKE – HEAD OF THE CHAMBERLAIN FAMILY – 60+

BISHOP OF CHISWICK – UNCLE VESPASIAN - 60

EARL OF SWANAGE – BROTHER OF FREDERICA - 60

CUSTARD – VISCOUNT CLIFFORD - SON OF THE EARL OF SWANAGE - 18

MR GURDLE – THE FAMILY SOLICITOR – 50+

The action of the play moves between the farmhouse of the Ruttocks in Devon, England and 74 Cavendish Square, London and moves between locations within each in as fluid a fashion as possible.

Appropriate music should be used throughout whenever possible – 1920’s band and song music and some carefully chosen classical snippets.

Act One

Scene One

A light comes up on GEORGE BUCKINGHAM. Smartly dressed, 21 years old, attractive. He is well spoken but not overtly posh – for he isn't.

THE YEAR IS 1930. ENGLAND

GEORGE

When I was 9 years old, my Father was killed in an accident involving a trapeze and a 6-year old male elephant.

During the above we see a body fly through the air and hear an elephant trumpeting. A thud. Silhouette maybe.

I was in the audience of The Quarry Brothers Circus. The event, as I am sure you will understand, left an indelible mark on me.

During the following an upright piano appears with a woman in her 40s climbing on to it with a tankard of drink in her hand. A small boy is playing the piano.

In order to deal with the tragedy and her grief, my Mother took to drink.

At first her depression was assuaged, and she continued life with a joie de vivre undetected during her marriage. As the only child of the family, I took comfort from her change in demeanour, even if she was frequently comatose. But the cheer was short-lived. Within months, the flagons of Mother's Ruin took their toll and one night, whilst sitting astride a piano at the Fox and Goose in East London – a piano I was playing in the said pub – she toasted the assembled throng with a verse or two of 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary', drank a pint of gin down in one and passed out for the last time.

There. In front of me. I was 10.

This event also made an impression on me.

My name is George Buckingham and the tale I am about to tell is one which I promise you is fact. Not fiction. Complete fact.

I knew nothing of my family and despite looking, could find no evidence of any relatives. Following the death of my Mother, I was passed around from one well-meaning foster family to another for a number of years. My life became nomadic as I criss-crossed the length and breadth of these islands.

Schooling was equally unsettled, and my education was mainly developed through the reading of a child's encyclopaedia; one of my only possessions.

It was then on my 21st Birthday that I received a card postmarked London. At the time I was living with the Ruttock Family in a sleepy village in Devon. They had been my guardians for some years now and I loved them very much. I couldn't remember receiving a card from anyone beyond the Ruttocks before. It said 'Come to London. First of May. 11.33am. Number 74 Cavendish Square. Freddy.'

I had no idea who Freddy was. Nor did the Ruttocks.

SCENE TWO

DEVON.

The farmhouse kitchen belonging to the Ruttocks. It is rustic in every possible way.

CINDY No, we don't know any Freddy do's we Gabriel?

GABRIEL No, we don't know any Freddy at all.....oh no.... hang yourself for a moment. Who was that boy with the one eye and the one leg who used to empty the slurry pit with the bucket with the holes in it?

CINDY Oh yes, I'd forgotten about him. He was a Freddy, George. Do you think this is the Freddy you're looking for?

GEORGE No, I don't.

GABRIEL Yes, didn't he have a one-handed Mother who was deaf and had a gammy leg?

CINDY Gin.

GEORGE I'm sorry?

CINDY Gammy leg.

GABRIEL Gin. She drank a bottle a day.

GEORGE Bit like my Mother.

GABRIEL Yes. Yes, so you say. So maybe they's are related. Maybe it's your brother.

CINDY Well, wouldn't that be exciting?

GEORGE It would be curious for certain. But I think we are indulging in a little bit of fantasy here.

CINDY You never know what you might come across in your life.

GABRIEL Hang a bit, that wasn't a Freddy. That was a Jonathan. Weren't it?

CINDY That's right it were a Jonathan. Not a Freddy. It were a Jonathan George.

GEORGE Ah right.

GABRIEL Certainly strange. We knows alls about strange things in life don't we
Cindy m'love?

GEORGE **(to front)** There was an awkward silence as the two yokels turned
away from one another. Embarrassed? I couldn't tell.

GEORGE What's the matter?

GABRIEL It's alright young George. I hit the nerve as they say.

CINDY It's alright Gabriel, it's time that George knew.

GABRIEL Aye, maybe it is. Maybe it is.

GEORGE Know what?

CINDY Well, not to put too fine a point on it and without beating about the
bush and circumventing the full nature of the matter.....

GABRIEL We has us a son.

Silence

GEORGE A son?

GABRIEL Brought into the world we did, a complete little basket. Before we
was wedded.

CINDY Well, we was neither of us in the spring chicken mould.

GABRIEL Pushing it was we.

CINDY Near twenty years since.

GABRIEL We had been courting for years and then one night we had been
having a few jugs of pickled scrumpy at the Scraggs End pub in Lower
Slimesnake.....

CINDY And Gabriel got as fruity as a ferret in treacle.

GABRIEL A roll in the hay loft and Cindy was full of plum pudding.

CINDY Only we didn't know anythings about it until this poor little kiddie
popped out of me the day before we nuptialled.

GABRIEL So we had to be carefuls. Sadly we had no choice but to pass him on
to someone else.

CINDY Broke my poor heart it did.

GABRIEL There, there Cin.

CINDY But at least we has you now dearest George.

GEORGE This is some news indeed. But you have been like my parents since I first came here. And I have you, just as you have me.

GABRIEL Yes, we's 'ave you.

CINDY Yes, we 'ave you.

GEORGE *(to front)* And with that revelation, Cindy and Gabriel returned to cooking the frog meat stew. Their story had brought a lump to my throat and I realised how important I had become to them. They did, indeed, treat me as their son. So I looked back at the invitation and thought what would I have to lose. I had always sought adventure in my life, and this was about as adventurous as it had ever got. So, I decided to accept the invitation. Cindy and Gabriel had been just as inquisitive and urged me to go. I packed a small bag and took the train to London and in a few hours I had arrived at Number 74 Cavendish Square.

SCENE THREE

LONDON

A posh front door which will lead into the house itself. Which is well-appointed and eccentrically dressed.

GEORGE rings the doorbell. It is answered by a world-weary butler, SCURVY

SCURVY You rang Sir?

GEORGE Ah, hello. Yes. I have come to see Freddy.

SCURVY You have?

GEORGE Yes. I had an invitation. Today. 11.33.

SCURVY slowly looks at his pocket watch.

SCURVY But it is only 11.32

GEORGE Ah.

SCURVY You will have to wait.

GEORGE & SCURVY wait in silence

SCURVY Please enter now.

SCURVY shows GEORGE into the room.

I will inform Freddy of your presence.

SCURVY leaves the room

GEORGE ***(to front)*** It was a grand house – a little faded and lived-in, but impressive, nevertheless. I was, however, no nearer knowing why I was there!

SCURVY re-enters

SCURVY Freddy is not back from shooting currently.

GEORGE Shooting?

SCURVY In Regents' Park, Sir.

GEORGE Has an animal escaped from the Zoological Gardens?

SCURVY I couldn't possibly say, Sir.

SCURVY starts to leave

GEORGE Sorry, I am in a bit of a quandary. Could you tell me who Freddy is?

SCURVY No, Sir.

SCURVY leaves the room

GEORGE ***(to front)*** And with that, he was gone. I assumed that the manservant – for I guessed that was what he was – would be returning, but after 15 minutes, there was no sign of him.

TIBERIUS enters

(to front) However, someone else did appear; a slender young man with long blond hair and piercing blue eyes. He entered the room silently and gave me a start when I turned and saw him leaning casually against a pillar. Staring at me.

TIBERIUS Hello.

GEORGE Ah, hello. Are you Freddy?

TIBERIUS I am not.

TIBERIUS leaves the room

GEORGE ***(to front)*** And with that he left the room too. I will not tell an untruth, I was starting to get concerned. Looking around the room I thought I might get some clues as to whose company I was in. But no. A lack of photographs, paintings, papers, letters – anything which might offer some clues – were noticeable by their absence.

After what seemed like an hour – there were no timepieces either and I had neglected to wear my wristwatch today – I ventured to leave the room, only to find that it had been locked. I was immediately reminded of one of my favourite novels; Dracula. As with the young solicitor, Jonathan Harker, was I being incarcerated by a vampire? Here in the middle of London?

As I was contemplating my next move.....

The door flies open and a woman in her late 50's/early 60's enters brandishing a shotgun. She is dressed in full hunting gear. This is FREDERICA - FREDDY

FREDDY Wild boar – don't you just love 'em. Snuffling around the Inner Circle. Thought I had bagged one, but the blighter made a dash for it and thwarted me. I'll get the bugger next time I will!

GEORGE Gosh.

FREDDY And you are George Buckingham. Sorry to have kept you. I didn't want to miss you, so I had Scurvy keep you here.

GEORGE Scurvy?

FREDDY The lugubrious and, dare I say, rather insolent manservant who locked you in here. Not my idea. I asked him to occupy you while I tried to track down the beast. His idea it was to imprison you. Mea Culpa.

GEORGE Please....

FREDDY And I am your Aunt.

GEORGE You are?

FREDDY I am. Freddy. Your Aunt Frederica. From the Chamberlain arm of the family.

GEORGE But...

FREDDY Now, don't start on with the 'I don't have an aunt' and so on. You do and so let that be an end of it

She has been pulling at a bell pull for some time and now puts down her gun.

That bell is either bugged or I am being ignored.

FREDDY calls out of the door

Scurvy?

The man spends far too much of his time maundering around the place looking like the Grim Reaper.

APHRODITE enters – slim, beautiful, blonde and blue eyed.

FREDDY Aph my dearest, Meet cousin George. George, this is Aphrodite who you will marry.

GEORGE But....

FREDDY No 'ifs' and certainly no 'buts'. Is she not a delectable being? The Duke and I are delighted with the match. The date is set and we have sent out invitations. I trust you are free on October 1st?
Aph dear, maybe you will entertain your fiancé while I report the news to The Duke.

FREDDY leaves

APHRODITE sits next to GEORGE and puts her hand on his knee.

APH Mother loves surprises. Not all of them are pleasant. You are a nice surprise.

GEORGE ***(to front)*** I may have been a surprise to her – but everything, since I had arrived at 74 Cavendish Square, had been a surprise to me. Within an hour or so I had found I was to attend my own arranged marriage.

APH It's ok. Everything will be explained at some point. Just relax. Enjoy.

GEORGE But...

APH No if's and certainly no 'buts'.

(APHRODITE starts 'playing' with GEORGE)

GEORGE ***(to front)*** And that was that. I was in the clutches of a cousin I never knew I had called Aphrodite who, apparently, I would be taking down the aisle. Time to assert myself. As I was about to...

(TIBERIUS enters)

TIBERIUS I think I should introduce myself as you are betrothed to my sister.

GEORGE But, I am....

TIBERIUS No 'if's' and definitely no 'buts'. The date is set I believe. My congratulations. I think we will be great brothers. I am Tiberius. Welcome George.

TIBERIUS gives GEORGE a prolonged hug and kisses him on the cheek, slightly too long for comfort.

Another young woman enters. This is VENUS – younger than her siblings – very floaty. She dances around – flowers adorn her hair.

VENUS I am the goddess of love and good virtue.

APH Our sister, Venus.

GEORGE Hello.

TIBERIUS No point in talking to her. She can't hear you.

GEORGE She is deaf?

APH No, she just doesn't listen.

VENUS I am the bringer of love and felicitations. I am the daughter of Gaia.

TIBERIUS The Earth that is. Mad.

FREDDY enters pushing an elaborate wheelchair with an elderly man in it – this is THE DUKE.

FREDDY Here we all are. Top stuff I say. Well, here he is Silly.

SCURVY enters with Champagne and glasses which he pours and distributes.

FREDDY George, this is The Duke.

GEORGE How do you do Sir.

FREDDY It's alright, you won't get any answer out of him. The bugger never speaks. Right, well get these glasses filled Scurvy. Let's clink together and toast the happy couple. Aphrodite and George.

ALL ***(except GEORGE)*** Aphrodite & George

APHRODITE kisses GEORGE on the lips – a little too long for comfort.

FREDDY And to George another toast. To the heir apparent!

ALL ***(except GEORGE)*** The heir apparent.

BLACKOUT

SCENE FOUR

LONDON

A little later. Still at 74 Cavendish Square.

GEORGE ***(to front)*** I had been at the house an hour or so and had never met any of the inhabitants before and had no previous knowledge of them and yet, as I have mentioned, I was apparently engaged to be married. And now, I was toasted as the heir apparent. To say my mind was in a whirl and my world was in a spin would be the ultimate understatement.

FREDDY Mind in a whirl and world in a spin eh?

GEORGE Yes.

FREDDY Not surprised. That's how this family works. Always has done and always will.

GEORGE But I am so sorry, I can't possibly go through with this wedding.

FREDDY Give her time. She may be bonkers, but she's fertile and lush and rich. What's not to like?

GEORGE She is undoubtedly attractive, but I don't know anything about any of you.

FREDDY Ah piffle and tosh. Blood bonds are blood bonds.

GEORGE But that's what I don't understand. How are we related?

FREDDY I am your aunt you flannelled fool. As I told you.

FREDDY leaves

GEORGE ***(to front)*** I was none the wiser. She left the room muttering something about needing to feed the python. She obviously had little intention on enlarging on our family connection.

SCURVY enters

SCURVY Luncheon is served Sir.

GEORGE is escorted to a dining room by SCURVY

GEORGE **(to front)** So we foregathered in the dining room for a lunch which included fresh crab and scrambled ostrich egg. The Champagne continued to flow as did the toasts which continued unabated. This was one of the most singular groups of people I had ever met and much as I felt I should leave, the magnetic effect of the whole peculiar circumstance kept me rooted to the spot. Whilst we ate I could feel every pair of eyes studying me deeply. My ‘fiancé’ – I can hardly believe I am using the word – sat beside me, her left hand moving up and down my inner right thigh. Unnerving it certainly was.

FREDDY This afternoon George, we have a meeting with the Bishop who will be conducting your marriage ceremony. Always good to keep things in the family – Uncle Vespasian is a decent cove.

GEORGE Vespasian?

FREDDY Family tradition – male members often named after Roman Emperors. We have avoided Caligula and Nero for obvious reasons – though I have a soft spot for Caligula; always love a renegade.

APH He was rather naughty Mother.

FREDDY What’s wrong with a bit of naughty between family members, eh George?

GEORGE **(to front)** The thigh rubbing continued and intensified as I pondered a meeting with a bishop who had been engaged to marry cousins – if that was the case.

SCURVY The Bishop of Chiswick

Enter VESPASIAN in full bishop robes.

FREDDY Vessy.

VESP Freddy.

FREDDY How are you my dear old bugger?

VESP Filthy good thank you, my love.

FREDDY You’re in time for a spot of tucker? Ostrich?

VESP No, thank you. Mrs van der Merwe gave me a fair old stuffing this morning and I couldn’t take another morsel, though I will quaff some bubbles.

FREDDY Champers for the Bishop, Scurvy.

SCURVY has pre-empted the request and has a glass of champagne in hand to pass to VESPASIAN

VESP Aphrodite, my dearest girl. My congratulations.

APH Thank you Uncle, we are so happy.

VESP And is this the lucky young man?

APH Yes, this is George.

VESP A lithe young buck I see. Greetings to you George and the love that passeth all understanding be with you now and forever.

GEORGE Thank you, your Grace, that's kind of you to say, but..

VESP No 'if's' and certainly no 'buts'. I suppose we are a nephew of mine or something? Who knows? Matters little. Small world. We are all related somehow. Confirmed Christian are you?

GEORGE Errrr, I'm not sure.

VESP Well doesn't really matter. I will marry anyone anyway. We are all God's children.

FREDDY Exactly. Now why don't you go along with Vessy and have a chat with him. He will offer some good advice I'll be bound. Take your bubbles with you.

VESSY I don't mind if I do

VESPASIAN helps himself to an opened bottle of Champagne. As he leads GEORGE to another room.

GEORGE ***(to front)*** So, I was led away by the Bishop. Still utterly confused.

VESP You do realise of course that your family is quite mad.

GEORGE Well...

VESP Don't worry, it has been the same throughout time. Now, you are a firm bodied young man I see. You must attract attention from all sorts what with your smooth complexion, your high cheekbones and your

unashamedly taut posterior. You can't possibly be a virgin. See plenty of carnal action I'll be bound.

GEORGE

Errr....

VESP

Aphrodite has been at it continually since her mid-teens I am given to believe, but she still professes to be 'virginia intacto'.

GEORGE

Who?

VESP

And as for Venus.... Well, if she doesn't ingest certain illicit flora and fauna....she's probably the loopiest of the lot.

GEORGE

Bishop. Your Grace.

VESP

Call me Uncle Vespasian

GEORGE

But I don't know if you are my Uncle.

VESP

You're George aren't you?

GEORGE

Yes.

VESP

George Buckingham?

GEORGE

Yes.

VESP

Well, there you are then. You're part of the Chamberlain family.

GEORGE

I know nothing about that part of my history.

VESP

Well, it's not fair to keep you completely in the dark. Fun though it is. Let me fill in some of the blanks for you. All will become clear – or at least a little clearer in the fullness of time.

GEORGE

Thank you Sir.

VESP

Now, if you dredge back into your history lessons you will, I am sure, remember that rascal Charles II.

GEORGE

Of course. Not related to him am I?

VESP

No, no, no. Well, now, wait a minute, you never know! Hehe. But around that time, the Buckingham Family and the Chamberlain Family joined in marriage and began a history of war and peace of marriage and divorce of give and take and of this and that. There have been

exceptions, for instance, Freddy here of course just married into another branch of the Chamberlains.

GEORGE You mean The Duke?

VESP Yes, of course, they are something like second cousins thrice removed or something of that ilk. But the families have always been unorthodox. They shared members of their family and built up many traditions between them. Names, occupations....and so on.

GEORGE Such as?

VESP Well, circus for one – been in the Buckingham family for eons!

GEORGE I see.

VESP Now, let's talk fornication and procreation. Your duty as part of the family is to extend the line and ensure that you and Aphrodite have copious offspring within the first few years of marriage. The night of the wedding is the time you should copulate continually and ensure the fulfilment of your promises.

GEORGE I am sorry Sir, but I cannot indulge in any talk of this nature. You cannot ask me to take this matter further when too much is being kept from me.

VESP If I might offer a word of advice and comfort. Firstly, have no fear, you are in safe hands here – we are family. Secondly, you would do well to follow the path set out for you. It will be to your advantage.

GEORGE But, Your Grace...

VESP Uncle Vespasian will do.

GEORGE But Uncle...

VESP I realise it is a bit of a mouthful. As I mentioned just now, names are something of a tradition – Roman Emperors particularly. My brothers have slightly easier names; Galba and Titus. And don't forget the Duke – his name is even worse than mine. I was going to be the first Caligula in the family, pity, he was such a naughty boy. I would have loved to have been Bishop Caligula – I wonder how the Church would have reacted to that. The cassocks would certainly have got in a tangle. But it wasn't to be. Sadly.

GEORGE Sadly.

VESP You might have to be renamed of course – there is a precedent here – in the latter half of the last Century when a distant Uncle Arthur became Didius Julianus. I say, how does the name Pertinax appeal? Or maybe Trebonianus Gallus – that’s very regal. Anyway, back to copulation. Whatever your name, the process of impregnating Aphrodite will be the ultimate in ‘satianus orgasmus’ don’t you think?

GEORGE I have no idea what you are talking about Your...Gr...I mean....Unc...I mean Bishop. Please, I must think about getting home. I didn’t expect to be away all day.

VESP Very well, but before you are too hasty, allow me to clear up something. Your Father was a circus man wasn’t he?

GEORGE Yes.

VESP And his name was Max?

GEORGE Yes.

VESP Emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Valerins Maximianus Herculus Augustus, reigned 286-305 AD – 19 years and 1 month. Known as the Emperor Maximianus. Max. Max, your Father. You understand a little more of your connection now?

GEORGE **(to front)** And so that was that, suddenly a little more of the mystery of my parents was uncovered. **(to VESPASIAN)** But how is that connected to my being here?

VESP It’s all to do with Freddy.

GEORGE My Aunt.

VESP My sister. Your Aunt she said? Well, she may say that, but of course she isn’t your aunt.

GEORGE She isn’t?

VESP No, of course not. Freddy is your Mother?

GEORGE **(to front)** I was knocked sideways again!

VESP Knocked sideways are you?

GEORGE Yes. How is she my Mother? I just don’t understand the connection. I thought I had a Mother. Betty.

VESP As I said, all will be revealed. Let's just say that elephants have played quite a part in your life.

GEORGE My Father's death.

VESP Of course...but not all. My lips are sealed, however, it is not for me to disgorge family secrets. You will find out some time I am sure.

FREDDY enters

FREDDY Oh, it's all very hugger mugger in here. Come along you two, time for tiffin.

VESP We have been discussing the finer points of relieving your daughter of her virginity.

FREDDY Bit late for that Vessy.

VESP I was referring to the official deflowering.

FREDDY Of course, well, after tiffin we are off to the Heath for a spot more shooting. Game Vessy?

VESP Sadly I must decline and return to the palace. I have a meeting about an exorcism or some such like.

FREDDY Pity. We might be able to bag a grouse or two for Sunday lunch if you have managed to destroy Satan by then.

VESP Thank you. I will bear it in mind once communion is complete. I will be on my way and give tiffin a miss as I think Mrs Van Der Merwe is at a loose end and I said I would assist her with her extra-curriculars. **(sotto voce)** By the way, I have told the boy something of his heritage. I advise not to keep him in the dark for too long. Goodbye dear boy. And remember – no coitus interruptus – we need progeny and soon!

SCURVY appears

SCURVY Your car Sir.

VESP Did I send for it?

SCURVY No Sir. I did. It is my duty to be one step ahead.

VESP Remarkable.

VESPASIAN leaves with SCURVY

FREDDY So, you are all sorted? Got your head around where you are from?

GEORGE Well, not really I am afraid. The Bishop told me a little about my Father and then he told me that you are my Mother – I don't understand that at all.

FREDDY So, cards on the table time. Yes, I am your Mother – it was I who pushed you into the world through my velvet cushions. I may not have been married to your Father, but I was, in fact, his lover. You are the result of the love-making that Max and I enjoyed. Unfettered sex. I see you are speechless. Undoubtedly you are in a state of shock which will consume you for some time.
Max was a voracious lover with an enormous manhood – a feature which it appears to me you have inherited. We met when I organised the shipment of elephants for his circus. I was in Kenya, on leave from fighting in the Boer War. We had an instant connection and made love continually for 5 days and nights.

GEORGE You fought in The Boer War?

FREDDY One of many. I could launch an assegai with the best of the natives.

GEORGE You fought with the Boers?

FREDDY Of course. Your heritage is borne of the Netherlands, amongst other countries – right old mixture you are.

GEORGE But how did I come to be with Betty who I thought was my Mother.

FREDDY Well, it pains me to report George, that you are a bastard child. Yes, I know it is a shock, but there it is. Hence my determination to make amends. In the face of parental disapproval, I left you in Max's hands. Within months, he married the circus songstress and contortionist Betty La Belle.

GEORGE I see.

FREDDY Well, it is your right to know and you will learn more about us as we learn more about you.

But enough of that. George. My son. Welcome home!

Applause breaks out as during the preceding speeches, everyone has crept into the room.

GEORGE I am so sorry everyone, but I really must be getting back to my guardian family. They will be wondering where I am. I hate to cause them worry.

APH But aren't we going to make love?

GEORGE I am sorry, no.

APH But we are betrothed. Mother!

FREDDY Don't crowd the boy. We need to understand this is all a bit overwhelming for him. Now that he is an integral part of this family he needs some time for adjustment. That's right Duke isn't it?

DUKE grunts.

FREDDY Exactly. Now, let's bid our farewells for now and get on with tiffin. Goodbye George. We will see you soon. There is a wedding to plan. Expect communication.

VENUS In the lofty bowers, the maidenhead doth flourish and the rabbit breeds all night till the cock doth crow.

FREDDY Come along everyone. Into the snug.

General goodbyes to GEORGE as FREDDY leads everyone out. All leave except GEORGE and TIBERIUS.

TIBERIUS It occurs to me that you've had the wind knocked out of you.

GEORGE That's something of an understatement.

TIBERIUS We are, of course, all completely mad. But maybe I am slightly less mad than the rest of the family and I do perceive in you a vulnerability that I recognise in myself.

GEORGE You do?

TIBERIUS I do. Let's just say that I believe you to be one of my own kind.

GEORGE Family you mean?

TIBERIUS No. Not family. Though what Mother has just announced may be true, but I rather think that you are not attracted to Aphrodite.

GEORGE Well I only set eyes on her today.

TIBERIUS But there is no connection.

GEORGE Well, she seems very lovely, but no, no connection.

TIBERIUS As I thought. I think you are more of my persuasion.

GEORGE Errrr....

TIBERIUS Sssshhhh. You are far too beautiful to be heterosexual. Let us just keep silent.

TIBERIUS leans into GEORGE and gives him a long passionate kiss.

TIBERIUS May that be a statement of intent.

GEORGE But....

TIBERIUS No ifs and certainly no butts. They all want you to marry Aphrodite. It will never happen.

GEORGE No. I mean, no?

TIBERIUS No. Because you are going to marry me.

TIBERIUS leaves the room.

GEORGE ***(to front)*** Tiberius was, of course, correct. The fair sex had never interested me or made any impact on my loins, but to admit one's own deviation from the norm was just not the done thing. Despite enjoying the company of a number of handsome men over the years, experimentation of a sexual nature had never occurred to me. Tiberius was incredibly attractive and I had flushed with excitement such as I had never experienced before. That kiss.

SCURVY enters

SCURVY There is a taxi cab here for you Sir. It awaits you outside.

GEORGE Thank you Scurvy.

SCURVY You are welcome Sir. Oh, and a word to the wise. Discretion in all matters is an admirable trait. You will find that it goes a long way in this life. I, myself, have kept many matters unsaid. If I might be bold Sir. Do not discard this family, despite their peccadillos. Mr Tiberius is very much the best of the bunch. Enjoy him. It will be accepted. In time.

GEORGE Thank you Scurvy.

SCURVY You are welcome Sir. And now we say goodbye. Return Sir. It is your destiny.

SCURVY leaves

GEORGE ***(to front)*** Was it? I had no idea. What I did know was that the last four hours had been the most extraordinary in my life.

SCENE FIVE

DEVON

- GEORGE *(to front)* It was on my journey back to Devon that I considered what I had experienced. Was it all a dream? However, reality hit home when in the pocket of my jacket I found a note. It read; 'My passion will wait in anticipation of our bonding. Aphrodite.'
Mmmm I was thinking, when in my other pocket I found another note. This one read; 'Be true to yourself. Be true to me. Tiberius.'
It had not been a dream.
- I arrived at the Ruttocks and told them all about who Freddy really was.
- GABRIEL It's unnatural, that's what I think. A woman's place is in the home. Not gadding about throwing spears and killing folk.
- GEORGE I think there was rather more to it than that. She was fighting in a war!
- GABRIEL Good on 'er. You go for it girl.
- CINDY Language Gabriel.
- GABRIEL What's wrong with that?
- CINDY Referring to her as a girl. She's not one of your sheep!
- GABRIEL Term of affection. Anyways I don't even know her does I?
- CINDY Well, just you mind yourself in front of the boy. We don't want him picking up any of your language do we?
- GEORGE *(to front)* The Ruttocks were such simple folk. Lovely, but lived in a world of their own. I found myself between two families of eccentrics. I recounted most of what had occurred at 74 Cavendish Square, omitting the subjects of copulation, impregnation and homosexuality. I felt that these subject matters – while not out of their knowledge – were best kept to myself in the circumstances. To be honest, though, these were subject matters that even I had precious little experience of myself.
- GABRIEL Well it all sounds very odd and suspect if you ask me. I think you need to find out what's what as soon as youse can or tell the lot of

them to 'op it. Now, I'd better get moving. I've a few sheep to castrate and I'm the right man for the job.

GABRIEL leaves

CINDY I think your Dad is a bit worried. He doesn't want you to leave us, but knows you need spread your wings soon enough.

GEORGE I think I have to sort this mystery out. I can't have it hanging about in mid-air.

CINDY Yes, you will have to George. And remember, wherever you end up in life, you won't forget your old Cindy and Gabriel will you?

GEORGE Of course not. Never worry about that. You mean the world to me.

CINDY Bless you George. Now, do you want to help me gut a turkey?

GEORGE If it's all the same, I'd rather not.

CINDY Still squeamish?

GEORGE Still.

CINDY Bless you. See you for supper.

CINDY exits

GEORGE (to front) And at supper nothing was said about the situation. Gabriel chuntered on about testicles and Cindy about gizzards. A usual family meal really.

The next day a letter lay on the doormat. Was this the communication that Freddy had mentioned? Post of any kind was not a common occurrence. No one had picked it up, though Moses, the Ruttock's slightly bonkers whippet, had dropped some of his breakfast on it. The brown food, brown envelope and brown carpet rather blended altogether.

I opened it and read; 'George. Your presence is requested at a soiree at 74 Cavendish Square in celebration of the 60th birthday of your Uncle, the Earl of Swanage. Evening dress. Carriages at midnight. Gifts welcome.'

Gifts welcome? Should I go? What do you offer as a gift to a viscount? And I didn't own evening dress. Was I going to get myself into deeper issues by attending? Should I just ignore the envelope?

The answer to that came in the second post two hours later. A similarly brown envelope arrived on the doormat with a message enclosed which read; 'Please do not ignore the invitation. It will be to your advantage.'

Where had I heard those words before? What advantage did it mean? Was it really worth trying to get to the bottom of everything? I decided I had nothing to lose.

GEORGE What on earth do you buy an Earl?

CINDY What about one of my parsnip and bean curd cakes?

GEORGE Thank you Cindy – might be a bit rich for him. I'll pass on that.

GABRIEL You're quite right to do so George. It causes uncontrollable flatulence which creates a whiff which is a cross between chicken manure and the old slurry pit. It isn't good. What about presenting him with one of my prize gobblers?

GEORGE It might be tricky to take on the train. But thank you for the thought Gabriel.

CINDY I'd be happy to gut it first! And I could pop it in a box and tie it up with a bow and a ribbon.

GEORGE Er.....

GABRIEL Or I have some maturing cheese wine – he might like to try a taste of that.

CINDY Not if he values his stomach. It's like what you put in that tractor.

GEORGE It's very kind of the two of you, but I think I'll pick up something when I get to London – I am sure there must be some trifle I can find.

CINDY Trifle? I could knock you up an artichoke and plum one – that might suit. Won't take me a jiffy.

GEORGE No really, thank you so much you dear, sweet people. Your suggestions are so thoughtful and heartfelt. I think I will leave the gift. I don't want to make a social faux pas. Maybe a bunch of flowers will do just as well.

CINDY You can't take him a bunch of flowers. Not unless they are very special.

GABRIEL I tells you what, why not take his worship one my orchids. They looks pretty.

GABRIEL leaves

CINDY Oh, that's a great idea. The Lord will be very pleased. As you know Gabriel is an expert on these rare beauties. You wouldn't know it just to look at him, but he really does know his orchids.

GEORGE Well I knows knew he was really interested in them, but to be honest I hadn't taken much notice before. He certainly has a good collection.

CINDY He has but he is far too modest to boast about them.

GABRIEL returns with a plant in a basket.

GABRIEL Paphiopedilum Rothschildianum – the Rothschild Slipper Orchid – very pretty. Rare too I think.

GEORGE It is indeed very beautiful.

CINDY Better than a trifle I think.

GABRIEL Or my cheese wine.

CINDY There you are then.

GEORGE I am so grateful.

GABRIEL Just make sure you don't get taken advantage of by those knobs and nancies in London.

GEORGE Of course now. Thank you.

And so, off I went with my orchid and collected the evening dress I had ordered. Yet another step into the unknown.

SCENE SIX

LONDON

The Soiree – Cavendish Square

There is music and chattering. The whole family are in attendance. Amidst them all is FREDDY and EARL OF SWANAGE – laughing very loudly.

FREDDY ...and we were all naked and all covered in chocolate; it was quite some experience

Even more noise.

SWANAGE Sounds to me like the recipe for a rodgeringly top-hole titterfest.

FREDDY Undoubtedly.

SWANAGE Now where's this young stripling nephew of mine?

FREDDY Not arrived yet. But he will be here. I can assure you.

SWANAGE How come the certainty?

FREDDY I just know. My juices are running clear at the moment and that is a sure signal that my instincts are in the correct orbit.

SWANAGE You are certain he isn't some kind of grubby interloper?

FREDDY Not at all Florrie. The vibrations felt, not just by me, but from the produce of my womb would suggest the connection is umbilical in its tenure.

SWANAGE Well, I will need to check the youngster out from top to toe before I have any certainty in the matter.

FREDDY Aphrodite darling. Tell Uncle Florianus all about George..

APHRODITE approaches the two.

SWANAGE How's my luscious little vixen this evening? Gung-ho for some tete a tetting later?

APH Thank you Uncle I am quietly shivering with it all. You need have no worries about George – he is the one I have waited for – there is no mistaking his attachment to the family or that he has a fully

functioning and fundamentally oversized equipment which are causing me lustful flushes.

SWANAGE Really? Well I am sure such information will have already been gleaned by Vespasian – never one to ignore the power of the groin.

VESPASIAN is nearby and has overheard this exchange

VESP Did I hear my name taken in vain?

SWANAGE Not in vain – just the truth of your uncanny ability to unfetter the lustfuls in our midst.

VESP I have a gift borne of my heritage. I think we need to tread carefully with young George though – I don't think he is here to roll over an allow us all to sacrificially tickle his stomach. He is deeper, more tender and more vulnerable than you might at first think. Having said that I am gratified to see he has enough lead in his proverbial to sire many kinder. Where is the rampant young pony?

FREDDY Yet to arrive. But he will be here. My waters are running....

SWANAGE That's quite enough chat about your fluids Freddy. I want to meet the boy.

FREDDY Scurvy.

SCURVY ***(who has been lurking nearby)*** Madam.

FREDDY Any sign of George?

SCURVY Not as yet Madam. However, methinks he might be running a little shy. I will scout around the perimeter and see if I can flush him out.

SWANAGE Scurvy is the only butler I know who uses the word 'methinks'. And I know a good few butlers I can tell you.

TIBERIUS appears nearby

FREDDY I bet you do, you crafty old dog! Ah, Tiberius, you haven't clapped eyes on George have you? Your Uncle is rather anxious to grasp him by the hand.

TIBERIUS He isn't the only one. No, I haven't seen him, but he will be here.

SWANAGE Don't tell me, your waters are running clear.

TIBERIUS They always do Uncle. George will be here. I just know.

FREDDY There you are Florrie. We all know how wise Tiberius is.

SWANAGE Well, I suppose we will have to wait.

FREDDY Patience Florrie. Patience. Now we must go and see if Vespasian is behaving himself – I thought he seemed a little unsteady on his pins a moment ago. Come Florrie.

FREDDY leads SWANAGE away. TIBERIUS is left abandoned for a moment. He looks around. Suddenly, CUSTARD appears. He is the son of EARL OF SWANAGE and named VISCOUNT CLIFFORD – He is called CUSTARD on account of his large mop of yellow hair.

CUSTARD I say Tibby, I've just seen this utterly scrumptious cove outside; I tried to approach him, but he ran away.

TIBERIUS Isn't that the usual action taken by someone on first setting eyes on you?

CUSTARD Is it really?

TIBERIUS Probably.

CUSTARD Anyway, he is tall and languid and quite utterly delicious. Enough to eat. I promise you. Sadly he is dressed like some kind of street person and he probably smells of cabbage and stains his clothes. Anyway, I thought I would mention it. I know you like pretty things.

TIBERIUS Where did you see him?

CUSTARD I think he moved off in the direction of the drive gates. Are you going to chase him down like a rabbit or a stag?

TIBERIUS No.

CUSTARD What? Oh you are no fun anymore Tibby. We could get the guns out and see if we could pick him off.

TIBERIUS Not a good idea.

CUSTARD As I say, you are funless.

SCURVY approaches

SCURVY Excuse me Sir.

TIBERIUS Yes Scurvy?

SCURVY I have located young George, Sir.

TIBERIUS Good work Scurvy. Please make sure he is comfortable and bring him in to me would you?

SCURVY Very good Sir.

TIBERIUS Discreetly Scurvy.

SCURVY Always discreetly Sir.

SCURVY leaves

CUSTARD I say, is that the lollipop I was talking about?

TIBERIUS It may be Custard. You may find out if you behave yourself, though I realise that is a doubtful path for you. If you cannot do that, then at least leave me for a moment to greet him.

CUSTARD Of course. I shan't say a thing. But tell me this...

TIBERIUS Custard, leave me.

CUSTARD Yes. Yes I will. But you...

TIBERIUS Custard.

CUSTARD I dutifully oblige.

CUSTARD moves away. SCURVY enters with GEORGE; they make straight for TIBERIUS.

SCURVY Mr George Buckingham Sir.

TIBERIUS Thank you Scurvy. No word yet to anyone else if possible.

SCURVY Of course Sir.

TIBERIUS takes GEORGE by the arm and leads him to a quiet and un-overlooked part of the room. TIBERIUS kisses GEORGE, at length, fully on the lips.

TIBERIUS Despite telling everyone how confident I was that you would be here, I was beginning to have my doubts. I am more than pleased you are here.

GEORGE Thank you.

TIBERIUS What have you got there?

GEORGE A gift for the Earl.

TIBERIUS An orchid.

GEORGE Yes.

TIBERIUS He loves orchids. How did you know?

GEORGE I didn't.

TIBERIUS Educated guess then.

GEORGE Well not even my guess. I cannot take credit.

TIBERIUS Make sure you do. It will hold you in good stead. Come.

TIBERIUS leads GEORGE to where FREDDY, EARL SWANAGE and VESPASIAN are chatting.

TIBERIUS Uncle. Apologies for butting in. This is George. This is George Buckingham.

SWANAGE Well bugger me sideways. He is the spit Freddy. The absolute spit. Welcome George.

GEORGE Thank you your Grace. It is a great pleasure.

SWANAGE None of this 'Grace' stuff. Call me Florianus – that's the name I have been belted with since birth. Florianus or Florrie. Or Uncle really I suppose. We are blood after all. Blue at that.

GEORGE Thank you.

FREDDY Well, Florrie, what do you think? This is my boy George. Perfect for Aphrodite what?

SWANAGE Absolutely. All the appropriate attributes. Aphrodite is a lucky girl. Have you bedded her yet, or are you saving yourself?

FREDDY Florrie, they've only just met.

SWANAGE Time waits for no man and the line must be maintained. Heavens it's going to be hard enough with Custard!

VESP Maybe he would take to Venus?

SWANAGE You and I know, Vespasian, that though mad as the proverbial, that alliance is never going to take wing.

GEORGE Oh, Sir, I mean Uncle. I wanted to give you this. A birthday present.

SWANAGE Why my boy, you didn't need to do that. Breeding is good Freddy. What do we have here? An orchid? AN ORCHID??

GEORGE Oh, I am sorry if it's inappropriate.

SWANAGE Inappropriate? INAPPROPRIATE???

FREDDY Steady on Florrie.

SWANAGE This is a Rothschild Slipper Orchid - Paphiopedilum Rothschildianum – it's very rare George. I have never had one – George – this is the best present ever. Come here my boy!

SWANAGE hands the orchid to FREDDY and embraces GEORGE very tightly.

SWANAGE This party has now started. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You are a true member of the family. Such generosity and thought it beyond that of anyone else. The sheer pleasure of this is not only in its monetary value, but in its aesthetics and in the utter joy of ownership. Your pockets must be deep.

GEORGE Well, not really, but I am so very fortunate to have the acquaintanceship of one who is an avid orchid grower.

SWANAGE Well you must invite him around. I would like to mull over the fascinations of such flora with him over a bottle or two of the finest champagne.

GEORGE That's very kind of you.

SWANAGE Bring him.

APHRODITE approaches

APHRODITE George. Have you been avoiding me?

GEORGE Errr no. I have just arrived.

SWANAGE Indeed he has, and he has upped the stakes on the birthday present front.

APHRODITE Well done George. Now, isn't it about time you asked me to dance?

GEORGE Oh, well, I am sorry, I am not much of a dancer.

APHRODITE Phooey.

SWANAGE Time to practice for your wedding day. You won't be centre of attention today, but you will be soon, so get your heels kicking. Drag him off Aph!

APHRODITE Come on you sexual being you.

APHRODITE pulls GEORGE onto the dance floor in the background. VENUS sidles up to SWANAGE.

SWANAGE Well Venus my dear girl. What brings you to my side?

VENUS Love. Always love.

SWANAGE Is it in the air?

VENUS It is in the Earth and in the fire and in the water. Love is elemental. Love will flourish.

SWANAGE Between those two?

VENUS That will never be. Never.

SWANAGE Really?

VENUS But love is here. Rest on the zephyrs of air and you will see.

SWANAGE I will. Whatever that means.

VENUS You will see. You will see.....

VENUS drifts away. CUSTARD bounces around nearby.

SWANAGE Custard.

CUSTARD Pa?

SWANAGE Fancy getting married to Venus?

CUSTARD She's bonkers Pa.

SWANAGE That's true enough. But in principle?

CUSTARD Nice try Pa, but even I can see she is a girly.

SWANAGE In name only maybe...

CUSTARD As I say, Pa, nice try. But she's not my caviar on toast and never will be.

SWANAGE Oh, well, it cannot be said that I didn't try!

From elsewhere comes the voice of FREDDY

FREDDY Attention everyone. Please make sure your glasses are charged. It's time to toast the birthday boy. On this day of days my dear brother reaches a milestone. He is the best of brothers one could ever wish for. Not least cos he always has plenty of champagne available morning, noon and night. He is also the best hunting partner to take out in the parks of London. He can pick anything off without causing too much carnage all over the place. So, from your beloved family Florrie. Happy Birthday

Everyone else has gathered around.

SWANAGE Well from the bottom of my heart Freddy. Thank you. It may be my birthday – and I don't really count them – but I do love presents. This year is of special note. For we have in our midst, a long, we thought lost, member of the family. So, welcome to my nephew, George.

Cheers

SWANAGE I might also add that even though we have only just met, George gave offered us a present which is better than all the others put together. Yes, an orchid, but not just any orchid, a Rothschild Slipper Orchid - Paphiopedilum Rothschildianum! Rare as rare can be. So make sure you admire it during the evening. Now, back to the drinking and I hope that you all get royally sloshed.

More cheers. Music starts up again and there is more dancing. GEORGE is being led off the dance floor by APHRODITE.

APHRODITE We don't need to wait any longer. Let's go and do it now. I am feeling so wonderfully fertile.

GEORGE Please, Aphrodite... I can't.

APHRODITE It doesn't matter if you impregnate me, the family will be thrilled.

GEORGE No. I am sorry.

APHRODITE You are infertile?

GEORGE No, please, you don't understand.

APHRODITE Uncle, George won't sleep with me.

VESP Come along George. Put some spunk into this liaison and satisfy the nymph. Carnalous impregnator.

GEORGE Your Grace, I mean. No, I have to leave.

APHRODITE George...

VESP Freddy. Crisis over here.

GEORGE Please.

FREDDY What's the problem?

VESP George here wants to leave.

FREDDY We can't have that. Florrie! You need to enjoy. Relax and indulge in whatever your heart desires.

SWANAGE What's the problem?

VESP George wants to leave.

APHRODITE I offered him my body...

FREDDY George, you must stay. It wouldn't be cricket.

SWANAGE Have more champers that'll sort you out.

VESP There are plenty of bedrooms where you and Aphrodite won't be disturbed. In casa sexualis in primatorium.

SCURVY appears.

SCURVY Excuse me Ma'am, your Grace, your Grace. Cake-cutting is required and I have been asked to whisk Mr George elsewhere for a momentum.

SWANAGE Cake. That's the ticket.

FREDDY We leave George in your capable hands Scurvy. Don't let him leave.

SCURVY No Ma'am.

Everyone leaves except GEORGE and SCURVY.

SCURVY Mr George, one has become painfully aware that there is an awkwardness for you. I fear it will only get worse tonight, so a break in proceedings may be of use. I have been asked to occupy you while Mr Tiberius fends off some of his rather questionable friends. Ah, here he comes now.

TIBERIUS enters.

TIBERIUS Thank you Scurvy. I have told them all to eat cake. George, come with me.

TIBERIUS drags GEORGE into the gardens

GEORGE Look, I am going to have to go. I can't deal with this at all. I am so sorry. I have to go.

TIBERIUS And go you must. This family has a stifling effect. Not just on you. On all newcomers. I should know. I will explain all, but please, George, please, I beg of you, bide your time and don't make any rash decisions. There is much more to discover about your past, your present and your future and I think it would be to your disadvantage not to hold on to the reins for a little longer.

GEORGE But they are plotting in there. Plotting for a marriage I can't go through with.

TIBERIUS I have told you already. It will never happen. I promise you. But you will marry. I told you that. They will understand. George. You are so very handsome and I can see tears in your eyes. Drops of sorrow which should never fall from eyes of such fundamental beauty.

GEORGE I am sorry. I can't stay. You are so kind to me and I have grown very fond of you. But I cannot stay.

TIBERIUS I will make your excuses. Don't worry. But tell me where you will be going to.

GEORGE Back to my family in Devon.

TIBERIUS Ah yes. And where in Devon might that be?

GEORGE Ruttock Farm, Gurtmanchester.

TIBERIUS Take flight my beauty. We will see you again in happier circumstances.

TIBERIUS embraces GEORGE and kisses him. For the first time, GEORGE gives in to his urges and gives as good as he gets. TIBERIUS breaks away and leaves with a final glance over his shoulder.

GEORGE ***(to front)*** I knew then that I had fallen somewhat in love. Although everyone had been so very kind to me, the overwhelming nature of the few weeks that had passed had become just too much. Tiberius was the only one who seemed to understand the effect on me – I was curious to discover why he should have said he understood what being a newcomer to the family was like.

I knew I needed to return to the Ruttocks. I knew I needed to work out my true life. I knew I needed to be myself. I knew I needed to see Tiberius again. I knew I loved him.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

DEVON

THE RUTTOCKS – A FEW DAYS LATER

GABRIEL Is he still in his bed?

CINDY Can't get a sound out of him. I sent Moses in to see if it would help. I don't think it made any difference, but at least he seems to have stopped crying.

GABRIEL Breaks my heart it does. Breaks my heart to hear our boy in such distress. **(he wells up)**

CINDY Now, don't you start.

GABRIEL **(crying)** I can't 'elp it Cindy. Youse knows what I is like.

CINDY Well, I could always try and inveigle him down with some more of my toasted grub patties, but if you ask me, even those won't make any difference.

GABRIEL He never used to be like this. It's all the confusion since goin' up to Lunnon. It's why I's never wanted to go.

CINDY Well, I must say that he doesn't seem to have been himself since he first got that letter. We will have to just keep him safe for a while and see how things go.

GABRIEL I wonder if the gentleman liked the orchid. I hope so. It's quite a nice one.

A light comes up on GEORGE elsewhere in the house.

GEORGE **(to front)** Oh, bother. I had forgotten to tell Gabriel how delighted the Viscount was. I would make sure I did at the earliest opportunity. Cindy and Gabriel were correct, of course. I had been miserable and confused and since arriving back from the party. I had to get a grip, but I didn't know what to do next. I felt my life had suddenly been put into a vice. I needed to speak with my beloved Cindy and Gabriel.

GEORGE joins GABRIEL and CINDY

CINDY Ah here he is.

GABRIEL Oh George my boy. We've been that worried about you.

GEORGE I am so sorry. There is nothing I would ever want to do that would upset you. My best friends in the world. And Moses too, of course.

CINDY Well we are pleased you are up and about again. How about some of Gabriel's stoat wine; guaranteed to cheer you up.

GEORGE Just a cup of tea if it's alright with you.

CINDY Right you is.

GEORGE And Gabriel, it was terribly remiss of me to not mention how delighted the Earl was with his orchid. He said it was his best present.

GABRIEL Well I's totally delighted for you. This Earls has very good taste, I'll give him that.

GEORGE Honestly, he was overwhelmed.

GABRIEL Stop it, or you'll have me crying again. And we don't want that.

CINDY No, we's don't. He's been crying ever since you got back from London George. Now, what have you got to tell us.

GEORGE What makes you think I have something to tell you?

CINDY Cos you haven't said a word since you returned and your light and cheerful disposition ain't much been in evidence, 'as it Gabriel?

GABRIEL Youse been as miserable as sin.

GEORGE You are right. You are always right. I had to leave the party as there was too much talk of marriage which I can't conceive of going through with. Not with someone I don't know.

CINDY Well, that's sensible. Mind you, Gabriel and I had only known each other a day and half before we got married.

GABRIEL One roll in the hay with this lusty young lass was all I needed before I realised she was the one.

CINDY Oh that was some roll wasn't it?

GABRIEL Certainly was. Like rutting sheep we was. At it for hours on end. We had the energy in those days.

CINDY And the way you were able to....

GEORGE Yes, I am sure it brings back some vivid memories.

GABRIEL It sure does. Well I had better go and calm myself down and take Moses for a walk.

CINDY And I need to do the same – I'll make some offal fruit slices – that'll sort me out and take the edge off.

GEORGE *(to front)* And so the Ruttocks continued on their merry ways; the trauma I was feeling just didn't come into their universe and it was forever going to be tricky to fully explain what I felt. I was suddenly feeling very alone. I just didn't know what to do next. Somehow I had the feeling that back in London plans were still in the process of being made.

SCENE TWO

LONDON

BACK IN CAVENDISH SQUARE

FREDDY So, that's 500 in total for the banquet. I doubt we can fit any more in. Duke?

The DUKE grunts

FREDDY Exactly.

APH I suppose George may have some guests he might want to bring.

FREDDY Really? I mean, who might they be?

APH Well, he must have friends. Possibly. What about the people who he lives with?

FREDDY Ah yes. Clean forgot. Well I am sure we can squeeze them in. There are bound to be a few cry-offs before the day and I wouldn't put it past a few of them to peg out – in fact I am not sure we aren't inviting some who have already passed on. We had better check up. Scurvy.

SCURVY Ma'am?

FREDDY I think we need to get a list of guests George would like to invite to his wedding. I am not sure there would be many. Can you organise a letter to the boy?

SCURVY I will Ma'am. Right away.

APH We might only have room for two or three Scurvy so make sure he doesn't start writing a long list.

SCURVY I somehow think that might not be an issue Miss.

FREDDY And you need to get him back here for two weeks' time when we have the final planning meeting. However much this is our wedding, we do need to ensure he knows what he has to do, otherwise it will turn into a very one-sided affair.

SCURVY Indeed Ma'am.

SCURVY leaves

APH Mummy I hope that the white horses have been ordered. You did promise.

FREDDY All sorted. As have the okapis and the giraffes so you have nothing to worry about. Your dream wedding is only a matter of weeks away. Now I need to speak to M. Epicure about the banquet. I fear that he might not have considered the fact that one of our guests doesn't eat grouse eggs – and I really can't imagine what he will use instead. If you ask me we should uninvite them – such ridiculous life choices some people make.

FREDDY marches out. TIBERIUS appears.

APH Tibby, I don't think Mummy has ordered the white horses.

TIBERIUS She probably has, but it will be no good. You won't need them.

APH Why do you hate the idea of me getting married? All you do is send negative thoughts. It's unkind and unhelpful. I presume it's just that you hate George.

TIBERIUS On the contrary, I am trying to prevent him making a decision which he would regret for the rest of his life. He is not for you. I promise you. He isn't.

APH You are horrid and you are ruining my life.

TIBERIUS On both counts you will find your views of me wanting. George is utterly without flaw and I am fearful that we might have driven him away.

APH What? You think so? But it's our wedding in a few weeks.

TIBERIUS A wedding he wasn't prepared for even slightly.

APH Maybe he hates me too.

TIBERIUS He doesn't. I can't imagine George hating anyone. Things will have to happen to sort this muddle out. I think I might have to be the one to take some kind of action.

APH Well don't ruin my wedding day or I will never forgive you.

APHRODITE leaves. TIBERIUS stands alone for a moment. SCURVY returns with a letter in his hand.

SCURVY Excuse me Sir.

TIBERIUS Scurvy

SCURVY Your Mother asked me to prepare a letter for Mr George. I have done so. However, might I suggest that you read it over first and that you might find the time to hand deliver it yourself. I believe you know the address.

TIBERIUS Scurvy I don't know what I would do without you.

SCURVY You are too kind Sir, but might I suggest that time is of the essence. The Bentley is at the front of the house and full of fuel. It is a long drive so I have taken the liberty of loading a basket of food to sustain you and some liquor for you to enjoy with Mr George. It is your task to ensure that we don't lose him. I know you have a vested interest and you will handle to matter with the delicacy which is required. I would urge you to leave now. I have also packed a trunk with your clothing and toiletries. All is ready Sir.

TIBERIUS You think of everything. You also know everything.

SCURVY I do Sir.

TIBERIUS Thank you. I will leave immediately.

SCENE THREE

DEVON

GEORGE **(to front)** I decided that it was time that I put pen to paper and explained to Freddy my feelings and how I just couldn't go along with their madcap schemes.

I was completely without any control over my life – such as it was. I had no direction before meeting them all and now I was terrified at which direction things were going. It was as if I was in some kind of runaway train with no driver. Enough was enough and I would have to walk away from them all.

That all said, something was pulling me back. There was something incomplete. I wanted to know more. I needed to fill in some more of the blanks.

Sound of a knock at the door. GEORGE looks up as if he can't decide whether to answer it or not.

CINDY **(off)** I'll get it.

GEORGE **(to front)** I just didn't know where to start. I wanted to be kind, but I needed to be firm. I didn't want to leave.

Enter CINDY

CINDY George. There's someone to see you.

GEORGE Really? No one visits me. Who is it?

CINDY Well, I've never seen the like.

GEORGE What do you mean?

CINDY Well. Beautiful.

GEORGE Don't keep them waiting.

CINDY Of course.

CINDY leaves.

GEORGE No one visits me. Not ever. Never.

TIBERIUS enters. There is a silence. The two look at each other. There is a frisson.

TIBERIUS Hello George.

GEORGE Tiberius.

After a pause they embrace – that little bit too long.

GEORGE How did you find me?

TIBERIUS You told me your address. Don't you remember? I don't think you told me accidentally. You meant me to have it.

GEORGE It's a wonder I can remember anything..

TIBERIUS Mind in a whirl eh?

They laugh.

GEORGE It's good to see you.

TIBERIUS You too.

GEORGE Please do sit down.

Knock on the door

GEORGE Yes?

CINDY enters

CINDY I just wondered whether you wanted some refreshment. Maybe some acorn curd wine?

GEORGE Thank you Cindy. Maybe tea. Tiberius?

TIBERIUS Tea would be lovely. Thank you.

GEORGE Cindy. This is Tiberius.

TIBERIUS A pleasure.

CINDY Oh thank you Sir. Pleased to meet you.

GEORGE Tiberius has been very supportive to me whilst I have been dealing with all these strange circumstances.

CINDY Well he has needed help, poor boy. Gabriel and I have been so worried about him.

TIBERIUS I think he has had a lot to deal with and I am here to help if I can.

CINDY You are so kind. Our George needs a friendly hand to hold at the moment. Well, I will go and get your tea.

CINDY leaves.

TIBERIUS What a dear lady.

GEORGE She is. She means the world to me. They both do, Cindy and Gabriel.

TIBERIUS Not related?

GEORGE No. Well, not as far as I know, but you are never sure in this life are you? As I have found out myself.

TIBERIUS I have missed you.

GEORGE I am sorry. I just disappeared. I had to. I didn't know what was happening and it was all going so fast.

TIBERIUS Of course. Don't worry, I completely understand.

GEORGE Thank you. I think maybe you are the only one who does. Oh, I think Scurvy has a certain sympathy.

TIBERIUS Believe me, he does. He is on your side.

GEORGE It's not really about sides though is it? I just need to know more about my history; and the whole idea of this marriage scares the life out of me. But you know all of that.

TIBERIUS I do and you have nothing to worry about. However, I do think there is a way out of all of this without you losing any credibility or face. And, if I what I think is true, my family will love you for it.

GEORGE What do you mean?

TIBERIUS Trust me George.

GEORGE I do.

TIBERIUS Then just do as I say. Don't ask too many questions as this is a work in progress and I don't really know the exact pathway ahead, but I believe it will get us to a conclusion which will be good for everyone – well, nearly everyone. You most important of all.

CINDY returns

CINDY Here's your tea Sir. I have popped some of my locust brownie on a plate – lovely and crunchie.

TIBERIUS Sounds delicious.

CINDY I will go and get Gabriel; he's certain to want to meet you. If that's ok with you George.

GEORGE Of course Cindy. Thank you.

CINDY leaves.

TIBERIUS Sweet. Reminds me of someone.

GEORGE Really?

TIBERIUS No idea who though. It doesn't matter.

GEORGE So, what is your idea.

TIBERIUS It only properly came to me on the journey down. I am here on the premise of delivering a letter to you; requesting your return to Cavendish Square in two weeks and a request to let Mama know if you want anyone to come to your wedding.

GEORGE But I can't invite anyone to a wedding which isn't going to happen.

TIBERIUS Look, we can forget about that for a while. Just relax. Come here.

GEORGE moves to TIBERIUS

TIBERIUS Hold me.

GEORGE and TIBERIUS embrace and gradually they kiss. As they do so CINDY and GABRIEL enter unseen. They stand and stare for a moment and then withdraw without being seen.

TIBERIUS George, I am not going to let you get away. I promise you everything will be alright.

GEORGE Thank you Tiberius.

TIBERIUS This is what will happen. Two weeks today you will come to London. It will appear that there is going to be a final planning meeting, just go along with it as far as you can – just don't sign anything – the solicitor will doubtless be there. Mr Gurdle. He looks after the family affairs and likes everything signed and sealed.

GEORGE Oh goodness I am so nervous. Wouldn't it be best if I just walked away from everything?

TIBERIUS And leave me? Leave your Cindy and Gabriel? I don't think so. The benefits of my plan will soon become clear.

GEORGE But you said we would marry. We can't. It's not legal. It's not possible.

TIBERIUS Anything is possible in this family. Let's make it work.

GEORGE Do you know more about my history? I don't seem to have been given any straight answers.

TIBERIUS I don't know the details but I think your meeting with Mr Gurdle could well put your mind at rest. I have spoken to him at length. He knows quite a lot that you do not. I know this all seems like a fantasy, but Mama would never have set this train in motion if she didn't know she was on terra firma, so take it from me, there is a lot of truth in all that has been suggested so far.

GEORGE But....

TIBERIUS No ifs and certainly no buts. Kiss me my darling before I leave.

They kiss. Slowly and sweetly.

GEORGE Before you go, you must meet Gabriel. Gabriel!

GABRIEL and CINDY enter rather too quickly.

GABRIEL Was that youse calling George?

GEORGE Yes, I want you to meet my friend Tiberius. Tiberius this is my beloved Gabriel.

TIBERIUS Charmed.

GABRIEL Awwww that's a kind of posh sorta name in't it? Tiber..what?

TIBERIUS Tiberius. The name of a Roman Emperor. Just like you are named after an angel.

GABRIEL Awwww I ain't be no angel me. You here that Cind? Me an angel?

GEORGE Well you have always been to me.

CINDY Well I think you have a few angels in your life George.

GABRIEL We's very pleased to make of your acquaintance Tiboria.

GEORGE Tiberius.

GABRIEL Yes, that as well.

TIBERIUS And might I also thank you for the suggestion of the spectacular orchid which you allowed George to present my Uncle with for his birthday. He was utterly delighted.

GABRIEL Awwww that weren't no troubles Sir.

TIBERIUS It was a delightful and generous gift.

CINDY Thank you Sir.

TIBERIUS Well it is my honour to meet two amazing people who have looked after this most beautiful human for so long. He is very well blessed all because of you.

CINDY Aww you'll make us blush.

TIBERIUS Well, it's been very jolly to meet you and my profound apologies, but I have a long drive back to London.

GABRIEL Awwww I was 'opin you might want to join us for a glass or two of pigs trotter syrup wine.

TIBERIUS Delicious though I am sure that is, I had best be on my way.

CINDY I do hope we will see you again young Sir.

GABRIEL Youse be welcome here any time.

TIBERIUS I think you can count on my returning. Good by Mr and Mrs Ruttock.

GAB/CIN Goodbyes.

TIBERIUS Goodbye my blessed George. Say nothing. Remember all I said. Keep with me.

TIBERIUS kisses an index finger and holds it to GEORGE's lips and leaves. GEORGE hurries after him.

GABRIEL Well, what a lovely fellow is he.

CINDY He is. I think he is special. Very special.

GABRIEL He was very polite. But I just got a thought in my old head which I can't get rid of.

CINDY What kind of a thought is that?

GABRIEL I's not sure. But when I sees our George and him anuggling and aflutter'in I just get me this funny feelin in these ere old bones.

CINDY Well I feels all warm and cosy insides me. But we must be careful what we say to George. He might be unsure. He might be confused. Don't wanna embarrass the poor boy. I mean I don't mind if he likes the flora as well as the fauna.

GEORGE enters – he has been crying.

CINDY Oh George. Don't cry. Has he upset you?

GEORGE No, no its alright. I just. I just don't know what's happening anymore, but he is being so kind and couldn't be sweeter if he tried.

GABRIEL Seems like a well turned out young man. We's liked him didn't us Cin?

CINDY Oh we did. We really did. And we are so glad to know we will see him again.

GEORGE Maybe. I'm not sure.

CINDY Now why not? You listen here George Buckingham, youse not got many friends and you could do far worse than Tiberustic ...

GEORGE Tiberius.

CINDY Exactly. So, wipe those tears and go and feed the piglets and we'll fix supper.

GEORGE Thank you. Both of you.

GEORGE hugs CINDY and GABRIEL and exits.

CINDY Bless him.

GABRIEL Bless him.

GEORGE is feeding the piglets

GEORGE ***(to front)*** Was I any further forward with things? I didn't think so. What did I think about entering the madness of Cavendish Square again? I was pretty terrified and I didn't want to face them all. I didn't want to be bludgeoned into a life I didn't want; but then I wasn't sure what I wanted and I certainly didn't want to be feeding piglets for the rest of my life. What about Tiberius? There was no ways about it, an attraction of the kind I had never felt before enveloped me on every glimpse of his beautiful face and the stirrings I felt when we touched was akin to the biggest electric shock imaginable. Cindy and Gabriel were also acting slightly more strangely than usual. Giving me winks and smiling a lot – well, they always did that, but there was something different. Did they know things? They seemed to like Tiberius a lot. In fact, following his visit, they talked about little else. So, I resolved I would follow Tiberius's requests and go and visit the family and see what they had in store; and, more important, to see what Tiberius was planning. Back to London I was going.

SCENE FOUR

LONDON

TIBERIUS'S ROOMS

SCURVY is with TIBERIUS

TIBERIUS So when George arrives, send him to my rooms first; I can't have him being spooked into oblivion by everyone else. He is a tender fellow.

SCURVY Indeed, that he is Sir.

TIBERIUS Oh and you might wish to discreetly let Mr Gurdle know that George is here so he can explain the family situation. Gurdle is fully aware of what has been going on and is keen to be a part of my plan.

SCURVY That is fine Sir, I will see to all of that. Would you require anything else? I have placed a bottle of champagne on ice in your rooms as I believe a little courage will be required today.

TIBERIUS As ever Scurvy, you think of everything.

SCURVY I do my best Sir.

Knock on front door

TIBERIUS That'll be him.

SCURVY I will return shortly Sir.

SCURVY leaves. TIBERIUS moves into his rooms and opens the bottle of champagne and pours two glasses. Soon after he has done this SCURVY arrives with GEORGE who is dressed very formally.

SCURVY Mr George Buckingham Sir.

TIBERIUS Thank you Scurvy.

SCURVY leaves and TIBERIUS embraces and kisses GEORGE.

TIBERIUS Before you say anything drink this.

TIBERIUS passes a glass of champagne to GEORGE

TIBERIUS This is a big day and we need some energy to get through it.

GEORGE Isn't it a bit early?

TIBERIUS Tosh. Never too early for bubbles. Now get that inside you. Look, Gurdle is going to join us shortly. I have engaged him to do some research and answer some of the questions which no one else has answered for you. Be prepared. He is a decent cove, if a little odd. I don't know what he is going to say, but I thought you should hear it here rather than in the cauldron. He knows the overall situation about you and me, so he is on our side.

PAUSE

George, I love you. I know we haven't known each other for long, but I fell in love with you at first sight. Yes, that does exist. George, I know you are sensitive and things have been a turmoil and I am a bit of a brash over-confident sort of fellow; but please, do you have feelings for me?

GEORGE breaks down in tears and throws his arms around TIBERIUS who embraces him.

GEORGE Sorry Tiberius. I don't know why I'm crying. Maybe it's because, yes, I can now really say I am totally in love with you. I didn't realise what love really was until now. I know. I know I love you. I can't stop thinking of being with you.

TIBERIUS Then we have the same aim. I promise you, if we can get through the next few days, the future will be ours! Now prepare yourself as Gurdle will be here imminently.

Knock on the door.

TIBERIUS Come in.

CUSTARD enters.

CUSTARD Oh, wow.

TIBERIUS What do you want Custard?

CUSTARD Just wanted to see if George had arrived and I see he has and you have secreted him already. Hello George.

CUSTARD throws his arms around GEORGE and kisses him full on the lips.

TIBERIUS Get out of here Custard. Leave George alone.

CUSTARD Can't I nibble at a corner of him?

TIBERIUS Get out.

GEORGE It's alright Tiberius. Hello Custard. Good to see you again.

CUSTARD You too George. You too. I thought I should let you know that they are all waiting for you. I think Daddy might have a present for you George. It's parked outside the front. But don't let him know I told you.

Knock at the door.

TIBERIUS Come in.

SCURVY and MR GURDLE enter

SCURVY Mr Gurdle Sir.

TIBERIUS Thank you Scurvy.

SCURVY leaves

CUSTARD Hi Mr Gurdle. What you doing up here?

TIBERIUS Custard, scram.

CUSTARD I only asked. Anyway Aphrodite wants you down with her asap.

TIBERIUS We will be there shortly, but don't mention that George is already here or else they'll all come piling up here.

CUSTARD Ok, I'll keep Mum and go and entertain Venus. She's quite mad you know.

TIBERIUS Don't state the obvious.

CUSTARD leaves.

TIBERIUS I do apologise Mr Gurdle.

GURDLE That's quite alright Sir. Custard is a Mercurial soul.

TIBERIUS That's one way of putting it. May I introduce you to George Buckingham.

GURDLE What a pleasure Sir.

GEORGE Thank you Mr Gurdle, likewise.

TIBERIUS Now, I have told George something of what you have been looking into, but nothing in detail. Please sit down.

They all sit.

GURDLE Well, Mr Buckingham, I have to say this is one of the more unusual quests that I have been on and it has not been without challenge. One of the joys of solicitorship is that you can become a real little Sherlock Holmes when trying to track people down. Dealing with the Chamberlain Family, as I have done for many years, is not without a level of intrigue and, dare I say it, entertainment.

The question of your heritage is mired in the mists of time, but, and it is a big but, documentation has been uncovered which I believe may remove the veils of mystery which you may have feared have cloaked this whole matter.

You will be aware, I have no doubt of the very long relationship between the Buckingham Family and the Chamberlain Family. You were too young to appreciate any of this when your parents passed and they may never have uttered a word on the subject to you. The Buckingham side of the family has had a very rich and fascinating history, but in recent times it has suffered from a lack of progeny. You would have realised you were without aunts and uncles, cousins etcetera.

GEORGE Yes, I had no relations as far as I was aware.

GURDLE Quite so. Exactly that. Because the inter-relationships between the families goes back eons, certain traditions have always built up. Sometimes they have been adopted by the new generation and sometimes they have not. For instance, the use of the Imperial names offered by the male members. Your Father Maximilian for instance, Bishop Vespasian and, indeed, young Tiberius here. You, of course, are George. Whilst there were several Emperors called Gordian – which is not dissimilar, there was no George. Your Father, being something of a maverick, decided not to follow tradition when naming you.

GEORGE I never knew about any of this and if there were any records of anything about my history they were all disposed of when Mother died.

GURDLE Mmmm evidently.

GEORGE But I still don't fully understand how I come to be here.

TIBERIUS Patience George, I think Mr Gurdle is getting there.

GURDLE Indeed I am. As I said, your Father was something of a rebel; hence he ran away from his family to join the Circus. It was pure coincidence that Max met Freddy in Kenya – they didn't realise at the time that they were connected; but soon this came to their attention. By that time, Freddy was with child; I believe you were created on their first time of copulation. Freddy told her parents of your birth and of your Father and they demanded that she leave you with your Father; they wouldn't harbour the idea of her being involved with this unpredictable Buckingham individual.

Your Father, as you know, went on to marry the circus singer Betty La Belle – who you knew as your Mother. She loved you as her son, but knew you were not. Max had made a promise to Freddy when they split asunder that if you were left as an orphan that she would find you and marry you into the family.

It has taken nearly ten years to track you down, but track you down we did and the rest is known to you.

GEORGE But...

GURDLE No ifs and certainly no buts. We have the full story and all the evidence one could muster. This portfolio contains all the information you would ever need to know.

GEORGE Well...

TIBERIUS Extraordinary.

GURDLE It is. Your presence here is quite legitimate and Freddy's desire to marry you is just to fulfil her obligation to your Father.

GEORGE I understand that, and it is most kind, but no thought has been given to my own feelings in all of this.

GURDLE I think your feelings are being taken into account by Mr Tiberius here....yes, I have been appraised of the situation and I am here to ensure that we find a happy course ahead. There are some legal obstacles to be considered, but for now, you must go along with Freddy's plans..

GEORGE But...

TIBERIUS No buts.

GURDLE I will not sanction the wrong course. Have no fear. You have my word and my word is my bond.

GEORGE Thank you Mr Gurdle. I am most grateful to you. And to Tiberius of course. I am more than happy to go ahead with what you are planning. I don't think I have anything to lose.

GURDLE You certainly don't and if, at the end of today, you change your mind you can.

TIBERIUS But you won't.

GEORGE No, I don't think I will.

GURDLE Now we had all better gird our loins for what is to come. I will go and join them first. They will be wondering what has been going on.

TIBERIUS Thank you Mr Gurdle.

GEORGE Yes, thank you. Thank you so much.

GURDLE You are more than welcome. I will see you in the board room shortly. I will show myself out.

MR GURDLE leaves

TIBERIUS Well, there you are.

GEORGE He seems a nice man.

TIBERIUS Well he is sane which is one hell of an advantage when dealing with this family.

GEORGE I think I know what you mean. Even sane people struggle though.

TIBERIUS Like you, you mean? Your problem is that, not only are you sane, but you are also the most handsome man in the world who I want to make love to madly. But that will have to wait. George you need to take a big breath. We are going to enter the lion's den!

TIBERIUS kisses GEORGE and they leave the room.

SCENE FIVE

LONDON

ELSEWHERE IN THE HOUSE

FREDDY, APHRODITE, VENUS, VESPASIAN, SWANAGE, CUSTARD MR GURDLE and THE DUKE are present – All sit around a table.

FREDDY Now, whatever happens we mustn't lose him. So tread carefully, but we must have this signed and sealed today.

VESPASIAN But surely you could wait on it a while longer.

FREDDY Once you have your prey in your net, you do not set it loose again; you will never get it back!

VESPASIAN Point taken.

SWANAGE We might need to look at some compromise of course.

FREDDY Compromise what?

SWANAGE Well, I mean, the poor boy hasn't had a great deal of input.

APHRODITE This is my wedding. I have the say so.

VENUS When the planets align all will be well. They are refusing to so do.

FREDDY Not helpful Venus.

VESPASIAN Well I am sure an agreement can be made. Don't you think so Duke?

THE DUKE murmurs

VESPASIAN Indeed. For me as long as there is impregnator ultimatum then that is all we need to achieve.

SWANAGE It's all sex to you isn't it Vespasian?

VESPASIAN Just as I am not permitted to indulge in carnalamous mogismus, I cannot deny it to others. It is the circle of life you know.

SWANAGE You do talk some rubbish sometimes.

FREDDY Gurdle, do you think we have the makings of the agreement.

GURDLE I am sure we will get there eventually. Discussion is needed.

SCURVY enters

FREDDY Ah, Scurvy, please hurry Tiberius; I hear he has already greeted George; please hurry them along.

SCURVY I just saw them making their way here Ma'am.

FREDDY Good. Serve sandwiches Scurvy please.

SCURVY Asparagus and mashed anchovy.

FREDDY Interesting as ever.

SCURVY Mr George Buckingham Ma'am.

GEORGE enters with TIBERIUS

FREDDY Ah, excellent. Come pull up a seat George we have a lot to get through today as I am sure you understand. Wedding planning is never straightforward but when it is the society event of the year it is even more complex. Nothing can go wrong. That was the attitude of us Sopwith Camel fighters in the Great War.

GEORGE I didn't know you were a fighter pilot.

VESPASIAN There will be plenty of time to talk about your war exploits; we need to get on I promised to help Mrs van der Merwe with some stuffing.

FREDDY Whatever that might be. Now then George, as you will see Mr Gurdle is here to do all the official bit, including your name change which we will come to in a short while.

Now the date is set for 4 weeks this Saturday. The 19th.

We have a list or two for you to look at. Numbers are a little shy of 500. Take a glance. I am guessing most won't mean too much to you, but by all means put your eyes over it. We have a handful of places for your family and friends. We have the palace for the reception and the Royal National Orchestra will be providing the music.

As I think we noted before Monsieur Epicure is dealing with the food. Peacock, pheasant, boar and the rest. Wines are on order from the Argentine and should just about make it here on time.

Any questions thus far?

SCURVY arrives with sandwiches and places them on the table

GEORGE Errrrr..

FREDDY Never say 'errrr' George. Now let's get the name settled shall we?

GEORGE ERRRR.

FREDDY Mr Gurdle.

GURDLE Well, the family have chosen Geta.

GEORGE Geta?

GURDLE Yes, Geta. Emperor for a few months in 211. Died aged 22 on the orders of his brother.

GEORGE Oh. I am 22 next birthday.

FREDDY Yes, but his life is unimportant isn't it Silly?

THE DUKE grunts

FREDDY The Duke here is named is named after Silbannacus. Apparently Emperor at some point in 253, but no one knows a jot about him. Isn't that right Silly?

THE DUKE grunts

FREDDY A sad day when his voice left him. Amazing what shock can do to you.

TIBERIUS My fault; my advent into the world rendered him speechless didn't it Daddy?

THE DUKE grunts

VESPASIAN Lovely though this all is, can we please get on?

FREDDY Pray continue Mr Gurdle.

GURDLE So George, although you may still use George for those who know you as George, to all intents and purposes you shall on the inst of the 19th in the said year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and thirty-three, be known henceforward and thereafter even unto God as Geta Chamberlain-Buckingham. This the nomenclature of the familial Chamberlain in perpetuity and forever after. Amen.

FREDDY Make sense George?

GEORGE Not entirely.

VESPASIAN Good, well can we get to the hymns? Choices?

APHRODITE I will go through them with George.

VESPASIAN Good, let me know as soon as you can. Now, saving your presence I will get back to stuff Mrs van de Merwe. And don't forget George. Coitus non interruptus!

VESPASIAN leaves

SWANAGE By the way George. Present for you outside. Pick it up when we leave. Here are the keys.

CUSTARD Green Rolls Royce!

SWANAGE Custard you lunatic. It was a surprise.

CUSTARD Sorry Daddy. But it's a cracking gift. George. Will you take me for a spin?

GEORGE Errrr, thank you. Yes, maybe.

FREDDY Now, Aphrodite, George, you are both being quiet and coy. Is there something you want to say?

GEORGE We have to stop this.

TIBERIUS George....

GEORGE Sorry, Tiberius, I cannot and will not go through with this. Please do not waste any further time or money on something which will not take place.

SWANAGE Geta.

GEORGE Sorry, your Grace, but my name is and always will be George.

CUSTARD Can I have the car?

FREDDY But George, the wedding must take place. We need you firmly as part of the family. We need you to extend the line.

APHRODITE It's me isn't it?

GEORGE It's not you. You are lovely and sweet. I am just so out of my depth here. I am not part of your sphere. You have all been so terribly kind

and I like you all. But you must see my situation. A few months ago you were not known to me and things have gone too fast.

FREDDY You know you are part of the family and we want to continue to make you welcome. You cannot turn your back on us; it is your destiny.

GEORGE Is it?

FREDDY Aphrodite. I think I need you to take over. We will leave you two together for a short while. George, treat her kindly.

SWANAGE, CUSTARD, VENUS, FREDDY & THE DUKE leave.

GURDLE I am here if you need me.

TIBERIUS ***(quietly)*** Be strong George

GURDLE and TIBERIUS leave and SCURVY enters with Champagne.

APHRODITE Thank you Scurvy.

SCURVY You're welcome Miss.

APHRODITE George. Drink!

GEORGE No thank you.

APHRODITE That wasn't a question. Drink. It seems to me that you have taken against me.

GEORGE I haven't.

APHRODITE You have shown little response to my overtures and have lacked any demonstration of affection – you have been a solid wall. Am I not pliant enough? Sexual enough? Am I not pleasing in any way?

GEORGE You are very pretty and very kind. I just said so.

APHRODITE Then kiss me George. Show me the love I need and deserve. Marrying me wouldn't be so bad would it? You do realise the fortune that will be coming your way as the heir apparent.

GEORGE It's nothing to do with the money.

APHRODITE £20 million is of no interest? Yes, that's what we are talking about. If that isn't enough to persuade you, I don't know what will.

GEORGE The money is very attractive of course, I cannot lie. But there are deeper issues at hand here.

APHRODITE It's the sex isn't it? You're a virgin. I have been telling everyone for years that I am one too; not sure they believe me though. I have a lot of experience in these matters. Don't worry, you will be safe with me. I can teach you all you need to know to pleasure me and ensure we bring fruitful produce to the family. Uncle Vespasian will be so proud of you. Come on, let's do it here and now. **(she starts to undress)**. Take me now George. Unload into me with your famously gigantic manhood.

APHRODITE is almost completely naked on the table when SCURVY enters – he doesn't bat an eyelid.

SCURVY More Champagne?

APHRODITE Not just at the moment Scurvy. A bit busy.

SCURVY Very good Miss. Sir.

VENUS enters. SCURVY leaves with a nod to GEORGE

VENUS The newt will always find its way into your pond as the glands of the toad become more protuberant in the Springtime.

APHRODITE It's her isn't it?

GEORGE What?

APHRODITE Venus.

GEORGE What?

VENUS In her nakedness, she shone like the harvest moon with her meadow all golden and tangled in its undergrowth.

APHRODITE starts dressing again.

APHRODITE Oh shut up Venus. You harpy. You are a fraud George Buckingham. You have tempted me to disrobe and heightened my desires, awaiting for you to pour your masculinity on me and all the time you have had Venus in your head. Creating your own erotic desires. I am ashamed of you.

GEORGE Ok, just stop this. Stop it now. You are so wrong. I have no desires for Venus.

VENUS Oh.

GEORGE Please

SCURVY enters followed by everyone else.

FREDDY Well?

GEORGE The time has come for some truths.

FREDDY You have been telling untruths?

They all start talking on top of each other.

GEORGE No, I haven't.

APHRODITE Yes, you have.

TIBERIUS He hasn't.

SWANAGE Hold on a moment.

CUSTARD What have you been lying about George?

GEORGE I haven't.

VENUS When the sun rises....

GURDLE Hold on a moment.

FREDDY What on earth is happening?

APHRODITE He is a fraud

Suddenly and totally unexpectedly, THE DUKE erupts and stands up out of his chair.

THE DUKE SHUT UP!

Everyone freezes and stares at THE DUKE.

THE DUKE Enough. Enough is enough.

FREDDY ***(eventually)*** Silly!

THE DUKE Oh, that is odd. Not spoken for over 20 years. Must be the shock.

SWANAGE What shock?

THE DUKE The shock of the new. The shock of what I am about to relate.

FREDDY Scurvy. Get a brandy for The Duke.

THE DUKE I don't need one Frederica. I am fine. I am well. Never been better.

APHRODITE Daddy, I have never heard you speak.

VENUS Nor I.

TIBERIUS Nor I.

THE DUKE Ah, but that is just where you are wrong Tiberius, because, you have, but I doubt you will be able to remember.

TIBERIUS I certainly don't.

THE DUKE No reason you should. And George. George my dear fellow; what a crazy time you have had. I suspect your head has been in a spin and your mind in a whirl.

GEORGE Somewhat Sir.

THE DUKE I have no doubt. Scurvy, you will know what you have to do shortly.

SCURVY I do Sir.

FREDDY Silly, what is going on?

THE DUKE You will find out soon enough, this is very much to do with you and I hope it will explain many things; not least my inability to speak for so long.

FREDDY And stand and move about.

THE DUKE Indeed; that as well.

VESPASIAN enters suddenly

VESPASIAN What's happened? I was apprehended. I was stopped on my way home. Duke!!

THE DUKE Be seated Vespasian. Now, no one interrupt me or I will lose my trail of thought. This has been brewing for 20 years. Freddy, my dearest

love and the rock who has kept me going for all this time and longer. You will recall when our dearest Tiberius was born.

- FREDDY Of course; I was sick with fever and pox and all manner of infection down below. Inside and out.
- THE DUKE Indeed so and you were unable to see your little boy for nearly two weeks in case you spread the infection to him. You were also so full of drugs that your delirium made it difficult to communicate any of this to you.
- VESPASIAN Didn't think you would pull through.
- THE DUKE But pull through you did. Sadly the little boy didn't.
- ALL What?
- THE DUKE Listen. No, sadly he didn't survive your infections and passed on soon after you produced him. It broke my heart, but I wasn't going to let it break yours. So, I laid the little chap to rest and went in search of a child to stand in for our son. There are many in the world who, for one reason or another are unable to cope with bringing a child into the world; not their fault, just a fact of life. After a few enquiries I came upon someone who took in new-borns and finds them a new home.
So, on that day of days when you were well enough, I was able to bring to you a little blond-haired boy who we called Tiberius. A blond, beautiful boy.
- Tiberius, I hope this won't come as too much of a shock to you. I think you always knew you were different; maybe in more ways than one.
- TIBERIUS Thank you Daddy. Yes, maybe I did. And no, it's not a shock.
- THE DUKE Freddy my dearest love, I hope it's not a shock to you either.
- FREDDY Don't be silly, Silly. This is the sweetest story I have ever heard.
- VESPASIAN Well, I have never been so jiggered as I have with this news.
- SWANAGE Well you certainly kept all that under your hat Duke.
- THE DUKE It was the shock of losing the little one and the stress of my subterfuge which had a detrimental effect on my health and then when it all got too much I was suddenly affected by a paralysis. Until....well, until a few days ago.

FREDDY A few days ago?

THE DUKE Scurvy discovered me walking about in the night. He was the only one to know. I asked him to keep his lips sealed as I needed a revelatory moment, for I received further news of something which I fear will also put the cat among the pigeons.

APHRODITE This is all very well and good and it's wonderful to be able to talk to you Daddy, but we really should be talking about the wedding shouldn't we?

THE DUKE I think we will be doing that some time very soon.

VENUS When the mists are lifted and the body of Adam stares up into the stars.

FREDDY Venus darling, give it a rest.

VENUS Mummy you can be such a spoilsport.

THE DUKE George. You have heard from Gurdle about how you became known to us and how your Father insisted that Freddy took you into our family if she found you.

GEORGE Yes of course, Mr Gurdle was more than clear about what had happened.

THE DUKE It's a day of surprises.

TIBERIUS Daddy, I think I must be the luckiest of all, for you and Mother brought me up in such a loving, if slightly eccentric, family.

VESPASIAN Eccentric?

TIBERIUS But you won't be surprised that I have some questions.

APHRODITE Still not sure how this has anything to do with my wedding.

FREDDY I think it might be best to listen lovely.

THE DUKE Go on Tiberius.

TIBERIUS Well, you probably know what I am going to ask. Do you know who my real parents are?

THE DUKE Yes, I knew you would ask that. It has not been an easy one to discover, but it was something I felt I had to do before I passed on. I

have here to thank Scurvy who has been my eyes, ears, voice and determination throughout. Without him, I would have got nowhere at all. Thank you Scurvy.

SCURVY My pleasure Sir.

THE DUKE I realise all these matters are Dickensian in their convolutions, but such is the richness of our family.
Now, our investigations took us around the country, but eventually, and only in the last day. We have moved fast. Tiberius, your real parents are waiting just outside this door. Before I invite them in I wish to tell you that they are the most humble and kindly people I have ever met. They are simple folk, but true to themselves. They warm the hearts of all whom they meet, and they provide love without any side or qualification. They are quite simply wonderful, and I wish you to all embrace them and welcome them to our family. I have the full evidence of all this; documentation which is watertight. Scurvy will you do the honours?

SCURVY Of course Sir.

SCURVY opens the door.

SCURVY Would you kindly step this way?

GABRIEL and CINDY enter. Everyone is struck dumb.

GEORGE Cindy, Gabriel.

GABRIEL Well here's a thing ain't it Cind?

CINDY Oh our George.

GEORGE hugs GABRIEL and CINDY

THE DUKE Mr and Mrs Ruttock; you are so very welcome here to our family. We know how wonderfully you have cared for George and we also know that unbeknown to each of you that you have already met your son before. Tiberius, your Mummy and Daddy.

TIBERIUS Gabriel. Cindy.

CINDY Our boy.

GABRIEL Our son.

**TIBERIUS hugs CINDY and GABRIEL. There is a round of applause.
SCURVY is pouring Champagne.**

CINDY I knew it. The moment we set eyes on you.

GABRIEL We said as much we did. I looked oh so familiar to us. You see he 'as our Cindy's eyes.

CINDY And your nose!

DUKE And do you know what they called you?

GABRIEL You were our little Augustus.

DUKE How appropriate!

Much laughter.

GEORGE ***(to front)*** Well this was something I certainly wasn't expecting and I told them so.
(to the assembled) Well this is something I certainly wasn't expecting.

FREDDY I don't think any of us were.

CINDY ***(indicating SCURVY)*** You could have blown me down with a feather when this gentleman here came knocking.

GABRIEL And it was only a few days gone. We haven't 'ad time to get presents for everyone. So we bought a few bottles of rancid gherkin sparkling wine.

SWANAGE Sounds rather inviting.

CUSTARD Daddy!

GEORGE How do you feel Tiberius?

TIBERIUS Do you know I actually feel rather warm inside. Of course Freddy and The Duke will always mean the same to me as they have always done, but I knew the moment I met Cindy and Gabriel that I would be seeing them again. It's rather wonderful isn't it George?

GEORGE It's wonderful and amazing.

VENUS The rook emerges from the nest and sets its mark on the field with those others who comprise the parliament.

THE DUKE Of course Venus.

APHRODITE This may all be well and good and very lovely. Congratulations and all that. But what about my wedding?

THE DUKE Of course my dear girl. Well, I think maybe there has been enough talking about the marriage and it may not be for me to say anything, but from everything I have seen and heard I don't think the wedding can possibly go ahead in its present form.

APHRODITE What?

THE DUKE I don't want to speak out of turn, but George, I think the time has come to be fully honest with everyone. I think it would make things much easier for all concerned.

GEORGE Oh, I errrr, I hadn't expected this.

FREDDY This is the day for the unexpected.

GEORGE It is, but I don't want to upset those who are so close to me.

TIBERIUS Be strong George.

CINDY I thinks we knows what's troubling you.

GEORGE You do?

GABRIEL We saws you when our son came to see us.

GEORGE Your son? Oh, Tiberius. You saw us..... ah.

TIBERIUS Need it be a secret anymore?

GEORGE Well, I think maybe you are right. I should speak to Aphrodite about this. The thing is, I like you very much and think you are extremely pretty. But you see. I don't love you. I don't love you in the marrying sense. You see, I only love other men in the marrying sense.

VESPASIAN Are you a queer George?

GEORGE I'm sorry?

VESPASIAN Homosexualist. Homos in flagrante delictum sexualis amorantum.

GEORGE Yes, I suppose that is right.

VESPASIAN How absolutely splendid!

APHRODITE Well, you silly thing. Why didn't you tell me that before?

GEORGE I was just too nervous. It's a difficult matter to deal with.

FREDDY Well I think it's a bit of a relief all round.

CUSTARD Join the Club George.

GEORGE Thank you Custard.

CUSTARD Maybe you could be my boyfriend.

THE DUKE I think he is already spoken for Custard.

CUSTARD Oh?

TIBERIUS Daddy. Mummy. Mummy. Daddy. George and I are in love.

FREDDY Thank heavens for that.

SWANAGE What about the wedding plans then, junk the lot of them?

THE DUKE I rather think that we could organise another wedding in its place.
What do you say Vespasian?

VESPASIAN What?

THE DUKE What do you think George, Tiberius; like a big society wedding?

GEORGE Goodness. But it isn't legal is it?

TIBERIUS Should that stop us? Should such a trifling thing get in the way of
love?

THE DUKE What do you say Florrie? Think something can be done? Vespasian?

SWANAGE I don't see why not. Vessie?

VESPASIAN I think between the two of us we can sort something. Being high up in
the Church it won't be a problem for me to sort and as Florrie is the
Lord Chancellor, he can deal with the judiciary and politicians. Yes
Florrie?

SWANAGE Of course.

VESPASIAN I mean, for heaven's sake most of the Church and a huge number of top judges are buggers of the first order. They'll love all this.

SWANAGE We will go and draw something up. Mr Gurdle, you can cross the t's and dot the i's. Please join us. Come on Vespasian.

SWANAGE and VESPASIAN leave.

FREDDY I think we should all withdraw for a while. Scurvy, find some more bubbles and lay them out in the drawing room. Oh and don't forget some of Mr Ruttock's fine wine.

SCURVY I have taken the liberty of carrying this out already and have brought a new bottle and two of the best crystal glasses in here.

FREDDY I don't know how you read my mind Scurvy.

SCURVY It is my job Ma'am.

FREDDY Come on girls, Custard. May I call you Cindy and Gabriel.

GABRIEL That's our names.

FREDDY And you must call me Freddy. Come my friends.

FREDDY leads APHRODITE, CUSTARD, GABRIEL and CINDY out of the room. SCURVY remains pouring two large glasses of Champagne.

VENUS I knew you two were one. I knew it the moment I met you George. I knew you two would be together. People don't listen to me, but I am always right.

VENUS kisses TIBERIUS on the cheek and then GEORGE and leaves.

TIBERIUS Maybe she isn't as mad as we thought.

GEORGE Maybe.

SCURVY A glass of the best Champagne in our best glasses for the lovely couple.

TIBERIUS Thank you Scurvy you are a brick.

GEORGE Scurvy, what happened when you visited the Ruttocks?

SCURVY Well, not a lot to tell really Sir. I called on them with all the paperwork which had been gathered. I explained the situation and they were

most agreeable. Having already met you Mr Tiberius, they were more that delighted to find out the truth. Enjoy your celebrations both of you.

***SCURVY passes TIBERIUS a small box which he puts in his pocket.
SCURVY exits***

TIBERIUS Well.

GEORGE Well.

TIBERIUS Here's a bit of a thing eh?

GEORGE Certainly is.

TIBERIUS All a bit fast?

GEORGE A little.

TIBERIUS Head in a spin and mind in a whirl eh?

They laugh.

GEORGE Something like that. But I think I'll cope

TIBERIUS Somehow I think we both will.

GEORGE Yes. I think we will.

TIBERIUS I love you George.

GEORGE I love you Tiberius.

TIBERIUS ***(getting down on one knee and pulling a small box from his pocket)***
Will you marry me?

GEORGE Wow, well, what can I say.

TIBERIUS What do you want to say?

GEORGE Yes, Tiberius. Yes, I will. I will marry you.

TIBERIUS puts a ring on GEORGE's finger. GEORGE rises and they kiss deeply. The set moves apart to reveal the rest of the family in full wedding attire. They all applaud. We are in the grand ballroom. TIBERIUS and GEORGE exit quickly. A dance starts with the guests taking it in turn to partner each other – a grand waltz possibly. As

the dance ends, VESPASIAN in full bishop regalia takes centre stage. SCURVY stands by the doors which he opens and in come GEORGE and TIBERIUS in their wedding outfits. Everyone applauds.

VESPASIAN Dearly beloved we are gathered here together to witness the wedding of Tiberius Arcadius Gratian Ruttock-Chamberlain and George, Geta, Valentinian Buckingham-Chamberlain. If anyone has cause or just impediment why these persons might not be married they should now speak or henceforth forever hold their peace.

Of course no one is going to say anything.

Do you Tiberius take George as your lawfully wedded husband to love and to cherish until death do you part?

TIBERIUS I do.

VESPASIAN Do you George take Tiberius as your lawfully wedded husband to love and to cherish until death do you part?

GEORGE I do.

VESPASIAN Please exchange rings.

CUSTARD steps forward with the rings.

VESPASIAN Place the rings on the fourth finger of the left hand.

GEORGE/TIBERIUS With this ring. I thee wed. From this day forward. Henceforth to have and to hold.

VESPASIAN Therefore by the powers invested in me I pronounce you husband and husband together in prima Gloria ad astrum per omnibus in patre in spiritus sancte.

ALL AMEN

VESPASIAN Oh do kiss!

GEORGE and TIBERIUS kiss.

THE DUKE Three cheers for the Heir Apparent!

ALL Hip Hip Hooray

FREDDY Let the party commence.

Everyone dances. After a short while GEORGE breaks away. Maybe during the following, those mentioned join GEORGE in a spotlight.

GEORGE

And so that was that. From the day I got that letter requesting my presence at Cavendish Square to my wedding day. In a few short months, my life had completely changed. A lot of lives had been changed. And despite the forthcoming conflict, we all lived to fight another day.

Cindy and Gabriel still kept their farm in Devon; Cindy becoming a best-selling writer of cookery books. Gabriel and the Earl of Swanage became world renown experts on orchids and set up a lucrative wine-making business.

Aphrodite gave up on men and took her vows, becoming a nun and travelling to world doing good.

Venus entered the world of academia; ending up as a world-famous philosopher; often talked about in the same breath as Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer.

Custard went to America becoming the foremost matinee idol in the movies of the time.

I felt so loved on that day and thereafter. I had by my side the most beautiful, kind and wonderful man. I didn't even stop to think about not being with him, it was just the most natural thing in the world. Love conquered everything for us.

We never quite worked out what strings Uncle Vespasian and the Earl of Swanage had pulled. We didn't ask.

Oh, and who, might you ask, extended the family line?
Well, Tiberius and I did, with our adopted little son. Caligula.

So that was my adventure – what will yours be? Look out for that envelope on your doormat.

TIBERIUS

We had better have our dance!

GEORGE winks or waves at the audience and he and TIBERIUS perform a wonderfully eccentric and funny dance routine as the others look on and then join in.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACKOUT

END OF ACT TWO

