

The Cranes are Flying

Act 2 of the *Russet Hippalector* series

by

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*Fosses and scamander-beds, and bleeding targes flashing,
With gryphon-eagles bronze embossed, and crags, and riders reeling,
Anon, anon, I see the russet hippalector.*

Aeschylus - fragment.

*This unreality does not exist
That reality never ceases to be...*

Bhagavad Gita 2.16

The Russet Hippalector is an offstage mythical beast which crows whenever there is a hint of sexual impropriety.

CAST:

ROD: A male, mid thirties in a business suit.

AMY: A fashionably dressed female. Mid thirties.

BRAD: A male dressed in a gorilla suit (or some other animal or fabulous beast) with casual clothing underneath.

DAPHNE: A female dressed as a Greek goddess (or in some other extravagant way) with housewife's clothing underneath.

SET: You have a white card for designing the set.

COSTUME: The only stipulation is that Rod and Amy are conventionally dressed and that Brad and Daphne are fantastically dressed.

NOTE: If done as a one act in the festival they will still take their bows at the end as this is part of the play.

(The Cranes Are Flying)

(They are sitting possibly in an airport bar. The set is possibly surrealist.)

ROD: The cranes are flying.

AMY: What did you say?

ROD: I said the cranes are flying.

AMY: Where?

ROD: Over the steppes of Siberia. They fly across the face of the gelid moon which rises calm and serene above the frozen lake.

AMY: Very poetic. But what do you mean when you say the cranes are flying?

ROD: Something deep and significant.

AMY: I know that, but what particular deep and significant thing are you thinking of?

ROD: It cannot be expressed in words.

AMY: But you just did express it in words, you said 'the cranes are flying'.

ROD: But what I really meant was something quite different from what those words expressed.

AMY: Such as?

ROD: Well for example, "I really love you deeply, from the depths of my heart, but cannot tell you because you have a violent husband who is insanely jealous."

AMY: Is my husband violent?

ROD: It was just an example. I think he is jealous.

AMY: We don't know anything about my husband.

ROD: We can think of things, as the play goes on.

AMY: Perhaps. Do you really love me?

ROD: All I said was that the cranes are flying.

AMY: And there are a multitude of meanings behind that simple phrase?

ROD: There may be.

AMY: This is all very enigmatic.

ROD: It's meant to be. You see we are unable to express our true feelings and intentions, hence we are required utter mundane phrases which mask what we really think.

AMY: Most esoteric.

ROD: Yes.

AMY: What we do know is that I am Amy and you are Rod and that both of us are married to other people.

ROD: Yes, I'm sure I am married.

AMY: And we are having an affair.

ROD: Or are about to have one.

AMY: Or have had one in the past.

ROD: Something like that.

AMY: Shall we have another cocktail?

ROD: I have to drive.

AMY: Do you?

ROD: I think so.

AMY: What are we waiting here for anyway.

ROD: We are waiting for your husband to arrive.

AMY: What husband?

ROD: We know you have a husband. We just discussed it.

AMY: I forget things. I have to change all the time. Like an amoeba.

ROD: I think we should try to stick with what we are now. You and I have to have an extra-marital affair. Remember?

AMY: Oh yes.

ROD: Your husband's name is Brad and he's an airline pilot.

AMY: An airline pilot?

ROD: It allows you a high standard of living.

AMY: Oh. Yes. I get it now. His name is Brad and he's an airline pilot. Let me make a note of it. *(Takes a small diary from her handbag and makes a note.)* There, that's settled. He is the jealous type you say?

ROD: No, not particularly.

AMY: He's changed then. That's good. Why are we waiting for him?

ROD: Let me see. *(Pause)* Because he's bringing in flight 456 and that's the end of his shift.

AMY: I don't understand why it's necessary for us to be here.

ROD: He needs a lift home.

AMY: Can't he drive?

ROD: He's had his licence suspended, for drunk driving.

AMY: Drunk driving? And he can still fly a plane?

ROD: Apparently.

AMY: It still doesn't explain why we're both here.

ROD: I'm his best friend and you can't drive.

AMY: Why did I come at all then?

ROD: So we can establish the eternal triangle.

AMY: You have all the answers. Now let's go over this again. I am married to Brad. Who are you married to?

ROD: She hasn't quite floated in yet.

AMY: But we will see her?

ROD: I'm sure we will learn about her as time goes on.

AMY: Between the lines.

ROD: In the sub-text.

AMY: Under the surface.

ROD: In the world of dreams.

AMY: In the world of reality.

ROD: Naturally.

(The rooster crows. Brad enters. He is in a gorilla suit but is carrying an airline bag. He takes off his head and gives Amy a domestic kiss. It could be some other animal or fabulous beast, in which case change the lines accordingly.)

BRAD: Hello darling.

AMY: Brad. Are you going to a fancy dress ball?
BRAD: Problems in the wardrobe.
ROD: Good flight?
BRAD: A bit bumpy over the ranges.
ROD: It often is.
AMY: What?
ROD: Bumpy over the ranges.
AMY: Of course.
BRAD: But the Cranes were flying.
AMY: The cranes?
BRAD: No, the Cranes. The Cranes with a capital 'C'.
ROD: Oh, those Cranes.
AMY: We've just had an intricate discussion concerning flying cranes.
ROD: Yes, it meandered along and didn't get anywhere.
BRAD: What Cranes were you referring to?
ROD: The ones over the steppes of Siberia. They fly across the face of the gelid moon which rises calm and serene above the frozen lake.
BRAD: Oh those cranes?
ROD: Yes.
AMY: What cranes were you referring to?
BRAD: Stephen Crane and his wife. They were passengers on the flight.
AMY: I see. They were flying.
BRAD: Across the face of the gelid moon.
ROD: I've heard of that name. Didn't he write a book?
BRAD: Yes. "The Red Badge of Courage".
ROD: But that was set in the time of the American civil war?
BRAD: Yes, I believe it was.
ROD: They didn't have airplanes then.
BRAD: That is a paradox.
AMY: We've finished with Cranes then?
BRAD: For the time being. Can I buy you a cocktail?
AMY: Shouldn't we be going?
BRAD: Of course not.
AMY: Why?
BRAD: This room is the only place where we have existence.
AMY: Of course.
ROD: I'd better get the cocktails then. *(He goes.)*
AMY: I missed you dear.
BRAD: Did you?
AMY: I always miss you when you go away.
BRAD: I only left you this morning.
AMY: I didn't remember.
BRAD: Just after breakfast you know.
AMY: I can't remember breakfast. In fact I can't remember much about you at all.
BRAD: Nobody can. I think it's still because I'm still in the world of reality.

AMY: You mean unreality.

BRAD: Do I?

AMY: Well you are my husband, we can be sure of that. *(Pause)* Did you have a good flight?

BRAD: A bit bumpy over the ranges.

AMY: It often is.

BRAD: I had that conversation with Rod.

AMY: So you did. How long have we been married?

BRAD: Quite a long time I think.

AMY: Ten years?

BRAD: Yes, that seems a fair time.

AMY: There must be conflict in our relationship then.

BRAD: Why do you say that?

AMY: All stories of romance start with conflict and end in reconciliation and marriage. After that there is nothing of interest, not unless there is conflict in the current relationship.

BRAD: That seems to make sense.

AMY: Let's have an argument then.

BRAD: I can't be bothered.

AMY: That's the trouble with you, you just can't be bothered. Whenever I ask you to take me to the movies, or a ball, you just slouch back on the couch with a can of beer and a jar of pretzels and make some lame excuse.

BRAD: Can of beer and jar of pretzels? Is that in character?

AMY: Possibly.

BRAD: Anyway it's impossible for me to take you to the movies or a ball.

AMY: Why?

BRAD: Because you can't drive and I've had my licence cancelled.

AMY: I hadn't thought of that.

BRAD: Characters have to be consistent.

AMY: Only in normal plays. *(Pause)* We could go in a taxi.

BRAD: I hadn't thought of that.

AMY: You see, we do have something to argue about.

BRAD: You mean the taxi?

AMY: Yes.

BRAD: Well it is something I suppose.

AMY: Well let's get angry then.

BRAD: I can't be bothered.

AMY: What do you mean you can't be bothered?

BRAD: I just want to slouch back on the couch with a bottle of Scotch and a bag of coconut rough and make some lame excuse. Why don't we say that our relationship has reached a level of apathy, that I have become bored with your company and that we are hardly aware of each other's existence any more and that we wish to seek excitement in other fields that are greener, and hence more pleasant, because they are in the distance.

AMY: That's the first long speech for a while.

BRAD: Do you like it?

AMY: Well it's a mediocre speech, but it's a relief from these short lines.

BRAD: Doesn't lose the rhythm?

AMY: I don't know. I liked the bit about the Scotch and the coconut rough, it shows a nice bit of development. Why don't you do it again?

BRAD: I just want to slouch back on the couch with a bottle of Scotch and a bag of coconut rough and make some lame excuse. Why don't we say that our relationship has reached a level of apathy, that I have become bored with your company and that we are hardly aware of each other's existence any more and that we wish to seek excitement in other fields that are greener, and hence more pleasant, because they are in the distance.

AMY: No, I don't think it loses the rhythm.

BRAD: One way of spinning it out.

AMY: Yes. *(Pause)* Well we've established that we are married and that our marriage is in tatters.

BRAD: Yes, we've established that.

(Enter Rod with two virtual cocktails.)

AMY: What are these?

ROD: Cocktails.

AMY: Do we have to imagine them?

ROD: It's minimalist.

BRAD: Aren't you having one old chap

ROD: I have to drive.

BRAD: It shouldn't matter if it's minimalist.

ROD: That's a point. *(Exit)*

BRAD: *(Sipping through a (virtual) straw)* Nice cocktail.

AMY: Could do with a little more bitters.

BRAD: You're never satisfied.

AMY: I have standards.

BRAD: Yes. Standards.

AMY: We're back to those short lines again.

BRAD: Yes. Short.

(Enter Rod with a virtual cocktail. He sips cocktail) . (The rooster crows)

ROD: Could do with a little more bitters.

AMY: That's what I said.

ROD: Yes, you have standards.

BRAD: Yes. Standards.

AMY: You said that before.

BRAD: Another way to spin it out.

AMY: Well I have to go to the toilet.

BRAD: Why?

AMY: So you two can have a tete a tete.

ROD: But we're not married.

AMY: It doesn't seem to matter now-a-days. *(Exit)*

ROD: The cranes are flying.

BRAD: What did you say?

ROD: I said the cranes are flying.

BRAD: Where?

ROD: Over the steppes of Siberia. They fly across the face of the gelid moon which rises calm and serene above the frozen lake.

BRAD: Very poetic. But what do you mean when you say the cranes are flying?

ROD: Something deep and significant.

BRAD: I know that, but what particular deep and significant thing are you thinking of?

ROD: It cannot be expressed in words.

BRAD: But you just did express it in words, you said 'the cranes are flying'.

ROD: But what I really meant was something quite different from what those words expressed.

BRAD: Such as?

ROD: Well for example, "I really love you deeply, from the depths of my heart, but cannot tell you because you have a violent wife who is insanely jealous."

BRAD: Is my wife violent?

ROD: Not at all.

BRAD: Why did you say that then?

ROD: I was just repeating a line from before.

BRAD: What do you know about my wife?

ROD: I know everything. But I don't know anything about you.

BRAD: Why is that?

ROD: Because I don't know whether you're a man or a gorilla.

BRAD: I might have come from one.

ROD: Via the missing link?

BRAD: Perhaps. Anyway I cannot love you.

ROD: Why not

BRAD: I don't go in for that sort of thing.

ROD: But it would solve problems with the plot.

BRAD: One cannot fall in love with a person of the same sex if one is not inclined to do so. If God wants to do such things in order to resolve problems with the plot then He should have some consideration for the thoughts and feelings of the poor ants that He invents and leaves to crawl over the face of this benighted ball of mud that spins in a celestial dance about the bright and incandescent orb of the sun.

ROD: You've come up with a long speech again.

BRAD: Do you like it?

ROD: I don't know. It's less mundane than the other one.

BRAD: It doesn't spoil the rhythm.

ROD: No. Don't repeat it though.

BRAD: Once is enough.

ROD: More than enough.

(The rooster crows. Amy and Daphne enter. Daphne is in an ancient Greek robe or some other outlandish costume.)

AMY: I've brought your wife Rod.

ROD: Oh who?

AMY: Your wife.

ROD: I thought I had one. What's your name deary?

DAPHNE: Daphne.

ROD: Daphne. I must make a note. *(Takes out his diary and makes a note.)* Why are you dressed in that outlandish costume?

DAPHNE: Because I am still in the world of reality.

ROD: Oh well, if you are my wife I should give you a kiss. *(Gives her a domestic kiss.)* Where did you come from?

DAPHNE: I was in the toilet when Amy came in.

ROD: What were you doing there?

DAPHNE: Waiting for my entrance and stroking the Russet Hippalector.

ROD: The Russet Hippalector? Whatever is that?

DAPHNE: It's what everyone is thinking of when they say "the cranes are flying."

ROD: I see. What does it look like?

DAPHNE: Whatever your mind makes it appear to be. One day it might be a white swan, the next it might be a green serpent. It all depends on how you are feeling at the time.

ROD: What was it doing?

DAPHNE: Sitting in the corner chewing on a piece of critic.

ROD: I suppose we have to have them. *(Pause)* Your entrance has been a bit delayed.

DAPHNE: I was just coming into unreality.

ROD: Out of the dawn mist.

DAPHNE: Now I want to make exactly sure. I am married to you?

ROD: All I know is I'm married to someone. It could quite possibly be you.

DAPHNE: Don't you know?

ROD: Well I'm pretty sure, but I don't think you've exactly matched up with it yet.

DAPHNE: I'll have to develop.

ROD: With your figure?

DAPHNE: The problem I have is that the author can't think up another gag about cranes for me.

AMY: Is he still around.

DAPHNE: Maybe, and maybe not.

AMY: What about the cranes they use on construction sites?

DAPHNE: Flying around? I would hardly think they would fly.

AMY: It's the only other type of crane.

BRAD: You could have a model crane and have it hanging up there in the flies.

DAPHNE: They don't have flies in a small theatre like this, you're thinking of the Opera House.

ROD: They could be anthropomorphic cranes having a flight of fancy.

BRAD: I rather think that's an extravagant thought.

ROD: What?

BRAD: About anthropomorphic Cranes.

ROD: Why?

BRAD: I'm sure nobody here knows what anthropomorphic means.

AMY: What does it mean then?

BRAD: In the shape of a human being.

AMY: All right... the shape... When are we going to do our cranes are flying bit then?

ROD: We've just done it.

AMY: We've just done it? That wasn't very enigmatic. I didn't get a whiff of any sub-text.

BRAD: It was indecisive.

AMY: Very.

(Pause. Change of mood.)

DAPHNE: Have you been to the Chelsea Flower Show?

ROD: Why would I want to go to the Chelsea Flower Show?

DAPHNE: To see the flowers.

ROD: I hadn't thought of that.

BRAD: I hear the artichokes are very good this year.

DAPHNE: What?

BRAD: The artichokes.

AMY: Are those globe artichokes or Jerusalem artichokes?

BRAD: Jerusalem artichokes.

DAPHNE: You would hardly expect artichokes in a flower show.

AMY: I believe they have yellow flowers.

ROD: Like sunflowers...

AMY: ... but smaller.

DAPHNE: This is very enlightening. I would have thought that artichokes would be more appropriate for the Chelsea Vegetable Show.

AMY: There isn't a Chelsea Vegetable Show.

ROD: They choke out your garden anyway.

BRAD: Artichokes?

ROD: Yes.

BRAD: That joke's been done before.

AMY: Why are we discussing these trivial things.

DAPHNE: It helps to pass the time.

AMY: I seem to have heard that before.

DAPHNE: It's a repetition.

ROD: You mean a plagiarism.

DAPHNE: There's nothing new under the sun.

BRAD: I'm certain I've heard that somewhere before.

(Pause)

ROD: Well Brad and I have to go to the toilet.

AMY: Why?

ROD: So you two can have a tete a tete. *(Exit Rod and Brad)*

AMY: The cranes are flying.

DAPHNE: Oh good, we're going to do this again.

AMY: How did you know we'd done it before? You weren't here.

DAPHNE: That strange old fellow, the one who sits in his study with books floating in the air, he told me.

AMY: I thought we'd got rid of him.

DAPHNE: He just keeps on coming back.

AMY: Let's get on with it then. *(Pause)* The cranes are flying.

DAPHNE: What did you say?

AMY: I said the cranes are flying.

DAPHNE: Where?

AMY: Over the steppes of Siberia. They fly across the face of the gelid moon which rises calm and serene above the frozen lake.

DAPHNE: Very poetic. But what do you mean when you say the cranes are flying?

AMY: Something deep and significant.

DAPHNE: I know that, but what particular deep and significant thing are you thinking of?

AMY: It cannot be expressed in words.

DAPHNE: But you just did express it in words, you said 'the cranes are flying'.

AMY: But what I really meant was something quite different from what those words expressed.

DAPHNE: Such as?

AMY: Well for example, "I really love you deeply, from the depths of my heart, but cannot tell you because you have a violent husband who is insanely jealous."

DAPHNE: But we know my husband isn't violent.

AMY: Yes, that is known.

DAPHNE: Why did you say it then?

AMY: Just testing, to see how you were developing.

DAPHNE: Quite well thank you.

AMY: Yes, you seem to be coming more real as time goes on.

DAPHNE: Perhaps. Anyway I cannot love you.

AMY: Why not

DAPHNE: I don't think I go in for that sort of thing.

AMY: But it would solve problems with the plot.

DAPHNE: One cannot fall in love with a person of the same sex if one is not inclined to do so. If God wants to do such things in order to resolve problems with the plot then He should have some consideration for the thoughts and feelings of the poor ants that He invents and leaves to crawl over the face of this benighted ball of mud that spins in a celestial dance about the bright and incandescent orb of the sun.

AMY: You've come up with a long speech again.

DAPHNE: Do you like it?

AMY: I don't know. It's less mundane than the other one.

DAPHNE: It doesn't spoil the rhythm?

AMY: No. Don't repeat it though.

DAPHNE: Once is enough.

AMY: More than enough. *(Brad enters.)*

DAPHNE: Where's Rod?

BRAD: He got flushed down the toilet.

AMY: How did that happen?

BRAD: *(The rooster crows.)* The Russet Hippalector chased him. He ran into the cubicle and dived down the bowl.

AMY: Why would it chase him?

BRAD: I think the piece of critic was too crusty for it's liking.

DAPHNE: I find that strange, it is a theatrical beast is it not?

BRAD: It's all a theatrical beast.

DAPHNE: It should make more sense.

BRAD: I don't think that anything about this makes any sense at all.

DAPHNE: But it's got to make sense, otherwise nobody will understand it.

BRAD: That's a point. I'll tell the author next time I see him.

DAPHNE: He wouldn't take any notice of what you say.

BRAD: Possibly.

AMY: Anyway I'd better go and fish Rod out. *(Exit)*

DAPHNE: How does she do that?

BRAD: She uses a boat hook.

DAPHNE: Yes. *(Pause)* We're together at last. *(The rooster crows.)*

BRAD: Yes. At last.

DAPHNE: It's what it's all been building up to.

BRAD: You mean... a logical conclusion?

DAPHNE: A resolution.

BRAD: A final consolation.

DAPHNE: A satisfactory ending.

BRAD: It's strange that it should.

DAPHNE: Why?

BRAD: It hasn't made much sense until now.

DAPHNE: But life's like that.

BRAD: Yes. Let's walk around the room.

DAPHNE: Why?

BRAD: You get points for good blocking.

(They walk about the stage.)

DAPHNE: We should get rid of these costumes.

BRAD: Is that a proposal?

DAPHNE: Don't be silly.

(They remove their costumes and are now more conventionally dressed.)

BRAD: That's better.

DAPHNE: It never would have worked.

BRAD: How could a goddess make love to a gorilla?

DAPHNE: Indeed.

BRAD: Those costumes were a symbol of the apparency of reality.

DAPHNE: Come again.

BRAD: Those costumes were a symbol of the apparency of reality.

DAPHNE: That's what I thought you said.

BRAD: Why did you ask me to say it again then?

DAPHNE: He wanted to spin it out. Anyway I don't understand it.

BRAD: But nobody does, that's why they're squirming in their seats. They come here to see people in business suits or football jerseys doing mundane things in a humorous way and what do they get? a man in a monkey suit and a woman out of a Greek tragedy.

DAPHNE: It's funny though.

BRAD: In it's own quirky way.

DAPHNE: What's the truth in a monkey suit then?

BRAD: We all wear clothes, we wear them to tell people who we are.

DAPHNE: I know, but I remember when I was a maid of the dawn mist and I didn't wear any clothes.

BRAD: You were nothing then.

DAPHNE: Nothing, yet something.

BRAD: Out of nothing something comes.

DAPHNE: And out of something nothing comes.

BRAD: Or vice versa. *(Pause)* But we don't become real people until we know what clothes to wear.

DAPHNE: So the monkey suit does not exist then?

BRAD: Of course not. Who would expect an airline pilot to be dressed in one?

DAPHNE: Yes, but are you an airline pilot?

BRAD: Well that's a good question. I don't think I am.

DAPHNE: What are you then?

BRAD: I'm a poet.

DAPHNE: Isn't that a great step, from a pilot to a poet?

BRAD: Only a couple of letters, and poets are involved in flights of fancy.

DAPHNE: Especially where cranes are involved.

BRAD: And I think my name is Bradley. More out of the common mould.

DAPHNE: Yes, I like Bradley. I think I like poets more than I like aeroplane pilots.

BRAD: More class and less money. What about you? Not really a Greek Goddess.

DAPHNE: No, I haven't got the figure. Anyway she got turned into a tree. I think I'll just be an ordinary housewife.

BRAD: And be turned into a piece of furniture.

DAPHNE: Why not if you like it?

BRAD: What's your new name then?

DAPHNE: Dianne. She was a huntress, and a virgin.

BRAD: But you're not either of those.

DAPHNE: Oh yes I am. I hunt men and I never let them own me.

BRAD: I see.

DAPHNE: So it's a new sort of play, where people come out of imagination into existence.

BRAD: No, it's all been done before, it was all predicted when the universe was conceived.

DAPHNE: Do you love me?

BRAD: I think it is what the plot demands.

DAPHNE: Answer my question.

BRAD: I think I love you.

DAPHNE: You'd better.

BRAD: I'm sure I have some affection for you. I mean we have just had an affair, or are having an affair or are about to have an affair.

DAPHNE: While our respective spouses are doing the same?

BRAD: Or are about to.

DAPHNE: Or have done. *(Pause)* So now that we have found ourselves it is time to start the play.

BRAD: But we are at the end of it.

DAPHNE: Why.

BRAD: Because it's about that time.

DAPHNE: Then I think we should kiss and swear eternal devotion and make that the ending?

BRAD: But it will not be the true ending.

DAPHNE: What is the true ending?

BRAD: The true ending is... inconclusive.

DAPHNE: Inconclusive?

BRAD: The true ending is always the start of the next play.

DAPHNE: Why is that?

BRAD: Because life goes on.

DAPHNE: I see. Now that we've got to the start we'll take our bows then.

BRAD: Yes. Take our bows.

(The other characters enter and all take their bows.)

CURTAIN