

This Unreality Does Not Exist

Act 3 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: Mid thirties in a business suit.

DIANNE: Married to Rod. She is wearing an expensive frock but is not comfortable in it.

BRADLEY: Mid thirties, casually dressed. Wears a humorous T-shirt.

AMY: Married to Bradley. Dressed as a businesswoman.

WALDO: A theatre ghost. Dressed in quite a bizarre fashion. (Sitting on a ladder?)

SET: The affluent lounge of Rod and Dianne. Settee, chairs and coffee table. Finger things on the coffee table. It has just been tidied up.

NOTE: Each act can be presented separately as a one act play. (Also act 1, scene 1 by itself.) Although each act is a different 'plot' and has different, though related, characters the whole project has been conceived an organic whole, not as three separate pieces.

(Rodney alone in the lounge with a cell-phone.)

ROD: Yes CJ... Yes CJ... I understand... I'm to call the minister's secretary and make an appointment to discuss an easement... sorry I've been buying a house... it's one of the terms they use... Yes CJ, I'm to call the minister's secretary and make an appointment to discuss an easing of the conditions concerning our mining operation on the Coromandel... Yes, I've got that... put it in my diary?... yes CJ. *(Takes out a small diary and makes an entry.)* I've done it... Tonight...? I've got Amy Griffiths over, and her husband, cocktails and supper... she's close to the Minister of Agriculture, the one I've been talking to about our hippalector farm... Yes of course we've got a hippalector, it's in the library now. Seems to love The Encyclopaedia Britannica, it's started on the As... No it doesn't read it CJ, it eats it... Colour? Russet... You think green is better? I'll get it exchanged tomorrow.

(Hangs up. The rooster crows.)

DIANNE: *(Enters)* Are you going to tuck the children in?

ROD: Do we have children?

DIANNE: Of course we do.

ROD: I'll make a note. Now you mention it all budding executives should have a wife and children.

DIANNE: Of course they should dear.

ROD: Children shouldn't be cosseted too much. They need to learn independence, like I had to when I was a child.

DIANNE: Of course they do, but they like their father to tell them a story.

ROD: A story?

DIANNE: A bedtime story.

ROD: Oh, a bedtime story. Our guests will be here any minute.

DIANNE: I'll see to them. Tell them one of your stories, they like that.

ROD: Yes. I'll tell them about Steve the Share broker.

DIANNE: Craig said he wanted a story about dragons and knights in shining armour.

ROD: Craig, yes I remember. Good business head that boy. Knows the importance of hippalectors to the economy.

DIANNE: Ah yes, hippalectors, in the other world, the world of imagination, the business world.

ROD: Imagination? Hardly important in the business world.

DIANNE: What about creative accounting then?

ROD: That's different. That's just cooking the books. You don't need imagination to do that.

DIANNE: Just tell him a story.

ROD: All right I'll tell him about Dannie the Dragon sitting on his hoard of gold, and how he took it to the bank and got a good rate of interest.

DIANNE: That is very imaginative dear.

(Rod goes. Dianne fusses around the room for a moment. The doorbell rings. She admits Amy and Bradley).

AMY: We're not late? *(Giving Dianne a peck)*

DIANNE: Not at all.

AMY: I had the devil's own job getting him into his tuxedo.

BRADLEY: Like it? *(Opens his wind jacket to reveal t shirt)*

DIANNE: Very nice. *(Gives him a peck - this is all very a la mode.)* Rod is just saying goodnight to the children.

BRADLEY: Children? Children? I seem to have heard that word before.

AMY: We have some of our own dear.

BRADLEY: Of course we do.

DIANNE: Let me take your coats. *(She takes their coats and goes off.)*

BRADLEY: *(Looking at a modern work of 'art' on the wall.)* Very nice, yes very nice. Picture of a piece of stilton cheese. So realistic I can almost smell it.

AMY: It's modern art.

BRADLEY: Oh yes, modern art. Art of the moderns. We are all a bit modern aren't we, all a little avant garde. Trouble is we drink tea.

AMY: Quiet, they'll hear you.

BRADLEY: Do you want some rabbit food? *(There is raw cauliflower, broccoli, carrots, celery for dipping in the dip.)*

AMY: Not just now thank you.

(Bradley puts carrots in his nostrils.)

You'll have to eat them.

(Bradley eats the good end of the carrot, throws the snotty bits in the rubbish).

You just behave yourself tonight.

BRADLEY: *(Pinching her bum)* Don't I always?

AMY: That's the problem.

(Dianne comes back.)

DIANNE: A bit chilly out?

BRADLEY: Slight hint of a southerly buster coming up from the north. Due to a prominence of icicles, I mean to say isobars, on the weather map, the weather is likely to be inclement with persisting showers, not to mention snow storms, hail storms, thunder storms, fire storms and other grotesque sports of nature.

AMY: He's in a new phase.

DIANNE: A new phase? What is it this time?

AMY: Post Modernistic Impressionism.

DIANNE: I thought that only applied to painting.

BRADLEY: Who knows what it might apply to? What's in a name? A nose by any other name would smell as foul. A Post Modernistic Impressional poem by any other rhyme would scan as neat.

AMY: He'll get over it.

DIANNE: Is your new book selling well Bradley?

BRADLEY: Passing fair.

AMY: You know they never sell. He makes as much out of a book of poetry as I earn in half an hour at my job.

BRADLEY: (*In a less frivolous vein.*) There's a good chance I'll get a grant. The critics raved over it.

DIANNE: How did you manage that?

BRADLEY: I wrote something in the acceptable style. You know, sewing machine stuff. Pretty boring, but that's what they want to see.

AMY: I tell him not to worry about the Establishment. I can earn enough to keep us.

BRADLEY: It's not money my dear, it's Art.

AMY: Art? Art is a fart.

DIANNE: But all those poems you've got in your trunk, aren't you going to publish them.

AMY: How do you know he's got a trunk full of poems?

(*The rooster crows.*)

DIANNE: You told me. At the gala.

AMY: Did I.

DIANNE: You must have forgotten.

AMY: Or I didn't remember in the first place.

BRADLEY: Quiet. If they knew I had a thousand unpublished poems I'd be dead. A great poet can only produce one slim volume every five years. Anything more prolific is absolutely obscene.

DIANNE: Such a pity. Shall we have a cocktail?

AMY: Where's Rod?

DIANNE: Putting the children to bed.

AMY: Nice to see he's domesticated.

DIANNE: Yes. Once I reminded him.

AMY: Nice to see.

DIANNE: Yes. (*They freeze. Enter Waldo*)

WALDO: She might have as well said; 'the cranes are flying' don't you think? There's a multitude of meaning in a simple 'yes'.

DIANNE: (*Unfreeze*) Yes. (*Freeze*)

WALDO: You see what I mean? Well we've met them all haven't we? Happy families. First of all there's Rod. Very much high finance, walking round the house with a cell phone taking orders from his boss, CJ. Rod didn't seem to know he had children. Maybe an indication he didn't care much for them. This play is full of patches - holes in the fabric of reality - lets you see through to the plot which lies beneath. CJ has Rod on a string hasn't he?

ROD: *(Appears from behind a flat and goes back after his line.)* Yes CJ. Certainly CJ. On the dot CJ. Stupendous CJ.

WALDO: Well we are all pulled on strings. You could say the playwright and the director have us on one... and if you get into real life there's someone else pulling them... Then we have Dianne. Say 'yes' dear.

DIANNE: *(Unfreeze)* Yes. *(Freeze)*

WALDO: Perfectly predictable. Stays home and cares for children all day. Gossips with the other child carers, and when her ambitious husband decides on a small soiree in the hope of advancement she struggles into that new frock, selected by him, which she secretly loathes. Come on parrot. Pretty Polly. Pretty Polly.

DIANNE: *(Unfreeze)* Yes. *(Freeze)*

AMY: *(Unfreeze)* Pretty Polly. Pretty Polly. *(Freeze)*

WALDO: Not you.

AMY: *(Unfreeze)* Polly wants a cracker. *(Freeze)*

WALDO: *(Picks up a piece of celery and stuffs it in her mouth.)* You'll have to make do with celery. A businesswoman, and dressed accordingly. You can see she has worn the same clothes all day, they have that unchanged look. Well not in business actually, some politician's press secretary I would think. Full of glib phrases designed to impress the hoi polloi and bolster power by putting her leader in the right. A tired old power game, but politics is power. *(Takes the celery from her mouth and throws it in the rubbish.)*

AMY: *(Unfreeze)* Pretty Polly. Pretty Polly. *(Freeze)*

WALDO: Look at Bradley here, he tries to give the impression he doesn't give a stuff but don't you believe it. You might think he's a bit of a clown but clowns are our most serious people. In fact we have to become like clowns if we wish to enter the Kingdom of... of?... of something or other. Or is it children....? Give us your line. Iambic pentameter.

BRADLEY: "To be or not to be that is the quest."

(Waldo goes to a quiet corner of the stage where he sits quietly watching the action, unnoticed by the others, who now unfreeze. He has opera glasses. NB in the original production Waldo was on a step-ladder.)

AMY: I do like your frock dear.

DIANNE: Do you? I feel such a slouch all day...

AMY: Imagine what it's like having to get up at six every morning and spending an hour preparing... [oneself for a day at the office.]

BRADLEY: ...baby food, nappy san, mashed vegetables, wheat meal, scrubbing floors, making beds, tidy towels, dirty linen, rubbish bags, toilet cleaner...

AMY: Writing poems.

BRADLEY: In between...

DIANNE: I do like your frock Amy.

AMY: Do you?

DIANNE: Very much.

AMY: It's just something I wear to work.

BRADLEY: The office uniform. If you don't wear it, you're not in, and you don't make the right impression, and you don't get employed. I could do it just as well if I was dressed like this.

AMY: Don't be cynical dear.

BRADLEY: A pose by any other rose would smell as sweet.

AMY: You see, his new phase is like this play, it doesn't have to make sense.

BRADLEY: But it does rhyme.

DIANNE: Are you wearing a new ring?

AMY: Just something I picked up from Harrods.

DIANNE: I like it, it suits your hair.

AMY: How can a ring suit hair?

DIANNE: It's the stone, it's so large and brown. You see it matches the colour of your hair exactly.

(Dianne takes Amy's hand quite gently - even sensually - and holds it to her hair. Amy does not actually wear a ring, it is all imagined.)

AMY: Piece of coloured glass I think. They call it agate or something and charge you the earth.

DIANNE: It's very nice.

BRADLEY: Almost the income for a book of poems.

AMY: You know all about it.

ROD: *(Enters)* Fast asleep. Hello Brad, hello Amelia.

AMY: Amy to you.

ROD: One likes to be informal.

BRADLEY: It helps the intercourse.

ROD: What?

BRADLEY: The social intercourse.

(The rooster crows.)

ROD: You had me for a minute.

DIANNE: I'll make the cocktails.

AMY: Let me help you.

DIANNE: If you let me wear your ring.

AMY: Of course. *(They go)*

ROD: Well, how's things?

BRADLEY: Not to bad. *(Confidentially)* Can they hear us?

ROD: The walls have ears. *(Aloud)* How's the new book going?

BRADLEY: Not bad.

ROD: Selling a few copies?

BRADLEY: I believe so.

ROD: Would have come to the launch. Matter of fact I was on my way there when CJ called me. Had to rush off and put out a forest fire.

BRADLEY: Forest fire?

ROD: When there's trouble with one of the heavy metal subsidiaries.

BRADLEY: I'm sorry old chap, I'm not with you.

ROD: In what way?

BRADLEY: Heavy metal.

ROD: Oh, just a phrase I use. Came off the top of my head one day and CJ thought it was humorous. I mean that's what Conglomerate Joiners are all about, running a whole raft of subsidiary companies. CJ has a habit of picking up what we call junk, companies are doing poorly but have a good facility for development, or stripping of assets.

BRADLEY: Heavy metal?

ROD: Precisely.

BRADLEY: I prefer Iron Butterfly.

ROD: What's that?

BRADLEY: Light metal.

ROD: I like that. I'll tell CJ. Shall I say you mentioned it?

BRADLEY: Say it came from a cog in the nog.

ROD: 'Cog in the nog,' that's good.

BRADLEY: It rhymes.

ROD: So it does.

BRADLEY: You could also say 'the head of the head'.

ROD: You never know, if this play becomes popular office terminology will never be the same.

BRADLEY: I hardly think this sort of nonsense would ever become popular.

ROD: Stranger things have happened.

(The women return with four cocktails which are mimed.)

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

AMY: They're my special.

BRADLEY: Oh, has it got a name?

AMY: I call it standard number one.

BRADLEY: We'll have to think up something better than that.

ROD: What about Calendar Girl? Just off the tip of the lid.

BRADLEY: Good one, I'll make a note of it.

DIANNE: Why Calendar Girl?

ROD: After you my dear.

DIANNE: Hardly a calendar girl with my figure. Anyway it's Amy's recipe.

BRADLEY: She's my calendar girl. I say, did you put alcohol in mine? I'm driving you know.

AMY: You didn't say. One won't hurt you.

BRADLEY: Remember next time.

DIANNE: We've got four people speaking.

ROD: One way to spin it out.

(They freeze. Waldo comes down.)

WALDO: Do we have to listen to this tedious small talk?
Isn't something enlightening going to happen?
I mean it's supposed to be a play isn't it, not 'Waiting for Godot Part 2.'
What did you say?
'Waiting for Godot' is a play?
Well we're all entitled to our opinion.
Perhaps if I did a juggling act it might help pass the time in a pleasant way, after all that's what we are here for isn't it?
You madam? You're not here for a pleasant time?
You just want to be seen with the best people?
That must be pleasant.
Oh you sir. You're providing entertainment for your secretary? Isn't that noble? What? Your wife always finds out? Oh dear. Well it is a way of passing the time.
But the truth is that we are all sleep-walkers, and while the dream is pleasant we do not wish to wake into that true reality, even if, by remaining asleep, we have to put up with small talk.

(Waldo goes back. They unfreeze.)

DIANNE: *(Shivers)* A ghost walked over my grave.
BRADLEY: Something strange... a shadow... Will O' the wisp...
ROD: There have been power surges all day.
AMY: Problems on the network. It can all be explained very easily. Dew on the power lines.
ROD: There definitely is a rational explanation.
BRADLEY: What to?
ROD: Ghost's walking over graves.
AMY: A spontaneous body reaction.
BRADLEY: But what if there is something deeper.
ROD: Deeper? Deeper than what old chap?
BRADLEY: This unreality.
ROD: Oh that.
BRADLEY: No this.
DIANNE: I definitely felt something strange. As though another being had entered the room. A theatre ghost with opera glasses. *(Waldo puts down his glasses.)* It made me shiver.
ROD: There aren't any theatre patrons here.
BRADLEY: *(Looking into the audience.)* Nobody comes to see it.
DIANNE: I remember once we sat around talking about ghosts and suddenly I become aware of an eerie feeling in the room. As though our talk had been heard by unseen presences and they gathered around.
AMY: There wouldn't have been any actual unseen presences. Talking about it had stimulated your imagination.
DIANNE: No, they were there, I know they were there.

BRADLEY: When Shackleton travelled over the ice he and his men were all aware of an unseen companion guiding them in the uncharted wilderness. They arrived at base without mishap.

ROD: Yes, I heard the story. Could have been a polar bear eh? Lost in the white-out.

AMY: I heard a theory that it was the sun.

BRADLEY: The sun? How come?

AMY: A pattern of light diffused through the clouds...

DIANNE: They are here with us now. Spirits from the other world crowding around.

AMY: You imagine it.

DIANNE: But they know. The people out there can feel it too, can't you dears?

ROD: That's enough now. All this talk about spirits is giving me the shivers.

DIANNE: There, you feel it.

AMY: There's a rational explanation for everything. You talk about ghosts and spirits and ethereal beings but the only thing you can be sure about is the solidity of the things in this world. There is no other reality.

BRADLEY: This unreality...?

AMY: This reality...

BRADLEY: Which has no existence.

AMY: I don't know what you're talking about.

BRADLEY: Nobody does. It's not real.

AMY: Then let's get on to something sensible.

(They freeze. Waldo comes down.)

WALDO: They're on to me don't you think. That Dianne, she's a smart girl. Thought I saw her look at me when I came in. All right you sprites up there, off you go. Well it's an improvement isn't it after all that small talk, a bit of philosophy. I don't know where it's going to lead us. Best not to think about it isn't it. Just wait for the laughs and the evolving of the plot. Plot? Plot? Yes I think there is a plot. I've got it in my pocket. *(Pulls out Fred's lighting plot from act 1.)* That's a lighting plot. *(Pulls out another piece of paper.)* What's this? "Boy meets girl." That sounds like a good one.

Madam, please move to the side of the stage. *(He escorts Amy who moves robot like.)*

AMY: Polly wants a cracker.

WALDO: You too please sir. *(Escorts Rod)*

ROD: Yes CJ. Certainly CJ. On the dot CJ. Stupendous CJ.

WALDO: Roll back time. Scene 1. The laundromat.

(Bradley and Dianne in the laundromat sitting side by side watching the washing. In the original production they had a revolving flat with a washing machine on one side and the beehive on the other covered by a curtain which Waldo pulled back.)

BRADLEY: I like the way it goes round and round.

DIANNE: What?

BRADLEY: The washing.

DIANNE: It would be funny if it didn't.

BRADLEY: It didn't use to you know. Washing going round and round is only an invention of the last fifty years. Before that it was scrub, scrub, scrub or jump in the water with your clothes on.

DIANNE: Do I know you?

BRADLEY: You're Rod's wife.

DIANNE: Am I?

BRADLEY: You hadn't forgotten?

DIANNE: Have I met you?

BRADLEY: We met in the pub.

DIANNE: Briefly?

BRADLEY: Very.

DIANNE: It wasn't a cocktail party?

BRADLEY: It might have been a dance.

DIANNE: First meetings are...

BRADLEY: What?

DIANNE: I don't know.

BRADLEY: Ephemeral?

DIANNE: That's a nice word.

BRADLEY: I'm a poet.

DIANNE: Doing the laundry?

BRADLEY: It gives me inspiration.

DIANNE: You can't be like Shakespeare then?

BRADLEY: Why?

DIANNE: Writing poems about the laundry.

BRADLEY: I'm sure he dirtied his linen just like anybody else.

DIANNE: Don't you work?

BRADLEY: My wife does. I stay home and look after the kids. That way I get time to write poetry.

DIANNE: I do the same.

BRADLEY: What? Write poetry?

DIANNE: No. Stay home and look after the kids.

(They freeze. Waldo stands up.)

WALDO: Fast forward two weeks. Same laundromat.

(They exchange places. Watching the washing.)

BRADLEY: It's still going around.

DIANNE: Yes it is.

BRADLEY: Fourteen times in fact.

DIANNE: What? Fourteen?

BRADLEY: The world has rolled over fourteen times since we last met.

DIANNE: We met in between time, at the gala. Your wife bought me a cocktail.

BRADLEY: And your husband bought me a beer.

DIANNE: Yes.

BRADLEY: But that wasn't at the laundromat.

DIANNE: No.

BRADLEY: You weren't here last week.

DIANNE: I came on Tuesday.

BRADLEY: I always come on Wednesday.

DIANNE: I come on Wednesday or Tuesday. It depends on how I feel.

BRADLEY: How you feel?

DIANNE: If I want to get out of the house.

BRADLEY: Oh.

DIANNE: I don't need the laundromat. We've got washing machines and dryers, everything you would need.

BRADLEY: So have we.

DIANNE: You need to get out of the house too?

BRADLEY: I need the inspiration. For my poetry.

DIANNE: In the laundromat?

BRADLEY: I wrote a poem about it.

DIANNE: About the laundromat?

BRADLEY: Yes. (*Recites*)

"The round world goes round,
the world whirled in ellipse
round the central sun."

DIANNE: What does that mean?

BRADLEY: I don't know.

DIANNE: But you wrote it.

BRADLEY: The author is the last person to understand his work. But in due course of time the critics will tell him or her what it's all about. That's why all this won't make any sense until we've had a review.

DIANNE: I'm sure they'll say it's absurd.

BRADLEY: I know. It's like our life in this universe. It doesn't make sense because God is a playwright who wrote a play He didn't understand.

DIANNE: You're a philosopher.

BRADLEY: No, just mad.

DIANNE: Did you write that poem for me?

BRADLEY: For the laundromat. I'll write one for you. You have nice eyes.

DIANNE: Thank you.

BRADLEY: I'm an eye man.

DIANNE: You're the first eye man I've ever met.

BRADLEY: Windows to the... something-or-other.

DIANNE: Have I got one?

BRADLEY: What?

DIANNE: Something or other?

BRADLEY: Quite possibly.

DIANNE: (*Pause*) I've got a lot of washing today.

BRADLEY: Yes.

DIANNE: Will you help me carry it into the house?

BRADLEY: That could be dangerous.

DIANNE: Very.

(The rooster crows. They freeze. Waldo comes down.)

WALDO: That rooster crowing, it's the hippalector in the library feasting on the Encyclopaedia Britannica. A hippalector? It's a mythical beast with the body of a horse, the head of a rooster and the legs of a chiwawa. But you already knew that. And why is it crowing? If this were a French farce you'd understand.

But what's happening here? They engage in banal conversation in the laundromat and before you know it he's carrying her washing into the house.

Something going on, between the lines, under the surface. They call it sub-text. Well all this is fighting to obtain a text, let alone a sub-text

You see, beneath the solid world of our play there is another existence, one that is not spoken of, and yet is more real than the apparency of reality, but all we have is baby talk. Fast forward three weeks. Still in the laundromat.

(They exchange places. Waldo goes back.)

BRADLEY: We'll have to stop meeting like this.

DIANNE: Hold my hand.

BRADLEY: Why?

DIANNE: I like it.

BRADLEY: But people might notice.

DIANNE: That's all right, we are married aren't we?

BRADLEY: Yes, but to different people.

DIANNE: That is a complication.

(They hold hands.)

BRADLEY: It's still going round.

DIANNE: What?

BRADLEY: Everything. *(Pause)* You didn't come last Wednesday.

DIANNE: No. I felt depressed on Tuesday.

BRADLEY: I missed you.

DIANNE: I missed you too, but I had to come on Tuesday.

BRADLEY: If you have to come on Tuesday ring me.

DIANNE: I haven't got your phone.

BRADLEY: I'll give it to you.

DIANNE: No. Rod might see it.

BRADLEY: Hide it then.

DIANNE: No. I always lose things. I could put it anywhere. Anyway I don't want your phone, you're my Wednesday man.

BRADLEY: Wednesday man? Does that mean you've got a Tuesday man?

DIANNE: Only on Tuesdays.

BRADLEY: What about Fridays?

DIANNE: Fridays are fish and chips. Rodney is always late home.

BRADLEY: What does Rod do on Fridays?

DIANNE: CJ invites him into the board room for a whisky and soda. They have to finish the decanter of whisky and then get carried home in taxis. Rodney always gives me a cigar.

BRADLEY: Why a cigar?

DIANNE: CJ always puts one in his top pocket. It's part of the ritual. I always smoke it. I love cigars. Rodney hates them. He says they're no longer appropriate for modern business practice.

BRADLEY: Your lines are getting longer.

DIANNE: Too bad. If lines start getting longer that means it's developing a different rhythm, and if it's developing a different rhythm that means its evolving.

BRADLEY: I thought it was meant to go in the direction of kitchen sink realism.

DIANNE: But kitchen sink realism has no existence...

BRADLEY: And we seek the true reality?

DIANNE: Exactly. *(Pause)* Rod wants you and Amy to come for cocktails next Wednesday.

BRADLEY: I know. It's all for business and politics.

DIANNE: I'm sure to get depressed on Wednesday.

BRADLEY: You've got a small load this week.

DIANNE: But I'll still need help to carry it into the house, seeing you didn't do it last week.

BRADLEY: I'm glad.

DIANNE: I knew you would be.

BRADLEY: What do I have to do to carry it in on Tuesdays?

DIANNE: Write me a poem, about my legs.

BRADLEY: I'm an eye man.

DIANNE: Then you can't come on Tuesdays.

BRADLEY: Oh well, an eye for an eye, and a leg for a... something or other.

(They freeze. Waldo comes down.)

WALDO: Doesn't look like she'll need help with her washing for too much longer. Already the seeds of discontent appear to be sewn. Soon they will extend little tendrils into the earth of disharmony, and before you know it these two will be going to different laundromats. Or doing their washing at home. But now of course it's a week later, time to get on with the party. Come on you two, back into the action.

(He escorts Amy who moves robot like.)

AMY: Polly wants a cracker.

WALDO: You too please sir. *(Escorts Rod)*

ROD: Yes CJ. Certainly CJ. On the dot CJ. Stupendous CJ.

WALDO: Now that you know what these two have been up to today the trivial conversation obtains a meaning beyond words.

(Waldo goes back to his seat. The others unfreeze.)

ROD: I was saying to CJ just the other day...

DIANNE: Really?

ROD: Yes it was... something... important... I work hard for all these possessions...

DIANNE: What were you saying to CJ dear?

ROD: Something... important.

DIANNE: I'm sure it was dear.

AMY: When I have a tete a tete with the minister it's always... important.

BRADLEY: The future of the world could depend on it.

AMY: What would you know about it, you're only a poet.

BRADLEY: The cost of everything... the value of nothing.

DIANNE: What did you say Bradley?

BRADLEY: The economics of art. I suppose you'd have that worked out Rod?

ROD: Oh yes, we've been doing a project for Creative New Zealand.

DIANNE: What was that dear?

ROD: Organising their annual conference for them.

BRADLEY: I never got invited to that.

ROD: Oh it's only for management and staff. We managed to save them a heap of money by suggesting they buy their caviar from an alternative source.

BRADLEY: Alternative...

ROD: Didn't have the same name, but just as good. Lots of other savings. We've managed to increase the percentage of their allocation that goes to artist's grants from four percent to five percent.

BRADLEY: Where does the rest go?

ROD: Management expenses.

BRADLEY: They seem to have their priorities right.

ROD: I always said that the only money in the arts in [New Zealand] was in administration.

BRADLEY: And the author of all this won't be getting any that's for sure.

AMY: You two are getting too serious.

DIANNE: Yes, it's becoming realistic.

BRADLEY: I'm sorry.

DIANNE: You don't have to be sorry.

BRADLEY: Just airing my dirty washing.

DIANNE: You air your washing when it's clean.

BRADLEY: Of course.

(The rooster crows.)

ROD: What's that Bradley?

BRADLEY: Getting into the B's I would say. *(Pause)* All right you people, we'll cut your marionette strings, I want to talk to Waldo.

DIANNE: Yes dear.

AMY: Polly wants a cracker.

ROD: Yes CJ. Certainly CJ. On the dot CJ. Stupendous CJ.

(Waldo comes down. The other three go up and freeze.) (flopped their heads down like dolls in the original production.)

WALDO: You knew I was here?

BRADLEY: I wrote you.

WALDO: Oh? The author in guise of a character. Weren't you in the other play? The one I stage managed?

BRADLEY: That is correct.

WALDO: How can I help you then?

BRADLEY: I want to know what this is all about.

WALDO: Well that's for you to know and me to find out.

BRADLEY: Most amusing.

WALDO: I thought you'd think so.

BRADLEY: We've got this far and I still don't know. I mean I've told Ann what I've done so far and that it had a lot of sexual shenanigans and she immediately wanted to do it. She was fascinated by a trick ending, but I don't like it now, I'll have to do it differently.

WALDO: An absurd play can't have a neat ending. I mean to say, Godot never came.

BRADLEY: He might still. They'll be waiting the next day. Anyway if I find something suitably enigmatic that might do it.

WALDO: I see. We have a problem.

BRADLEY: Yes.

WALDO: What is the play about anyway?

BRADLEY: Reality.

WALDO: Reality?

BRADLEY: Yes.

WALDO: Explain.

BRADLEY: It says that this world of nut and bolts that we live in and are so familiar with is not the true reality. In time it all crumbles away and dissolves into nothing.

WALDO: I see.

BRADLEY: It has no permanence - 'the gorgeous cloud capped towers' - that sort of thing. But everyone relies on them, these blocks of stone, which can be touched and felt. People would think I was strange if I said they were ephemeral.

WALDO: They would. What you say is that if matter has no permanence, then there is nothing. Our whole lives are nothing. Just like Becket said.

BRADLEY: No. Underneath I believe there is a deeper reality.

WALDO: Ah, a deeper reality. Are people going to come and see a play about that?

BRADLEY: They might. They might become interested if I put in sexual shenanigans.

WALDO: And drugs?

BRADLEY: And rock and roll.

WALDO: That too.

BRADLEY: But this, other world, how can I express it?

WALDO: Just baby talk.

BRADLEY: No other way?

WALDO: No. Keep the sex in though, that'll keep their attention. If you want to talk about everlasting arseholes trailing clouds of glory then you have to sweeten it with a teaspoon of sugar.

BRADLEY: Good thinking. Let's get on with it then.

WALDO: Yes. Good idea. Thanks for the talk though, I enjoyed it; I thought this part was going to be all soliloquies.

BRADLEY: Glad to be of assistance.

WALDO: All right. Get back to being a character.

BRADLEY: *(Moves robot like to sit beside Dianne.)* To be or not to be, that is the quest.

WALDO: *(Pulls out the piece of paper with the plot.)* What have we got now? "Boy meets girl." Again. Oh well it's tried and true. Roll back time. Scene 1. Bellamy's restaurant. *(NB Bellamy's is the restaurant in NZ parliament in a building called 'the beehive'.)* Come on you two.

AMY: Polly wants a cracker.

WALDO: You too please sir. *(Escorts Rod)*

ROD: Yes CJ. Certainly CJ. On the dot CJ. Stupendous CJ. *(They are sitting at table - mime it)* Cocktails?

AMY: Not during working hours.

ROD: Precisely.

AMY: How can I help you Mr...?

ROD: Rod.

AMY: Mr Rod. That's an unusual surname.

ROD: It's my Christian name.

AMY: Oh. I see. How can I help you then?

ROD: You're not selling ladies lingerie are you?

AMY: No, of course I'm not selling ladies lingerie. Whatever put a thought like that in your head?

ROD: It must have been another life.

AMY: There never has been another life.

ROD: Another person, another play.

AMY: It's always been the same play. Get back to the topic in question.

ROD: The topic... Oh yes, hippalectors. My company wishes to start up a series of hippalector ranches. We wanted to investigate the possible implications this might have with the Minister of Agriculture.

AMY: Yes, well hippalectors are a tricky subject. When they were first introduced they were welcomed by the Society for Community Standards.

ROD: Because they crowed whenever there was a hint of sexual impropriety?

AMY: Indeed. But only if it were a French farce. Initially we thought we might have a battle with the Minister for the Environment but it turns out we have a fight with the Minister of Education.

ROD: Oh, why is that?

AMY: It's their food. The only thing they eat is educational books. And then there's the problem of disposing of their dung. It's slightly radioactive you know.

ROD: Only slightly. Not above acceptable levels.

AMY: There only has to be a whiff of radioactivity and there's a protest. What does your company want from us anyway?

ROD: We don't want to go to the expense of starting up these farms and then having them closed down.

AMY: I'll talk to the Minister. Shall we meet, next Wednesday?

ROD: I'll look forward to it.

(They freeze. Waldo stands up.)

WALDO: Fast forward two weeks. Bellamy's again.

(They exchange places.)

ROD: It's still going around.

AMY: What is?

ROD: The old sun. Fourteen times in fact.

AMY: What? Fourteen?

ROD: The sun has whirled around the sky fourteen times since we last met.

AMY: We met in between time, at the gala. I bought your wife a cocktail.

ROD: And I bought your husband a beer.

AMY: Yes.

ROD: But that wasn't at Bellamy's.

AMY: No.

ROD: You weren't here last week.

AMY: I came on Tuesday.

ROD: I thought we were to meet on Wednesday.

AMY: Wednesday or Tuesday. It depends on how I feel.

ROD: How you feel?

AMY: Whether I want a restaurant meal or not. I got depressed on Tuesday so I came here then.

ROD: Oh. I thought we had an appointment.

AMY: Only about hippalectors. I don't need Bellamy's. We've got microwaves and frozen foods at home, everything you would need.

ROD: So have we.

AMY: But we should have a meal today. Later.

ROD: Of course. Later. There's nothing worse than having a meal in a play, especially if it's minimalist. *(Pause)* That conversation we just had...

AMY: Yes?

ROD: I seem to think that it has been going on somewhere else.

(The rooster crows.)

AMY: What would make you think that?

ROD: Intuition.

AMY: Don't be silly, we're not intuitive people.

ROD: Right brain thought?

AMY: We're left brain thinkers.

ROD: Logical.

AMY: Rational.

ROD: Calculating.

AMY: Pragmatic.

ROD: Syllogistic.

AMY: Dialectical.

ROD: A priori.

AMY: A posteri.

ROD: A fortiori.

AMY: Deductive.

ROD: Inductive.

AMY: Epagogic.

ROD: Soritical.

AMY: Emthymematic.

ROD: Analytic.

AMY: Intellectual. *(Ends)*

ROD: You're right, I can't have intuitive thoughts like that.

AMY: I'll forgive you this time.

ROD: A flight of the imagination.

AMY: Something to be avoided.

ROD: I will in future.

AMY: You must take the a priori assumption, apply the syllogism and obtain the a posteri conclusion utilising the parameters of multi-valued logic in your analysis.

ROD: That sounds clear enough.

AMY: Only in that way will you reach the right conclusion.

ROD: I stand corrected.

AMY: You feel the solidity of this table?

ROD: I feel it. *(Actually there is no table.)*

AMY: The esoteric philosophers would say it was made of the stuff of moonbeams.

ROD: I feel it.

AMY: They are deluded.

ROD: Absolutely.

AMY: You are saved. *(Pause)* I don't feel like a restaurant meal today.

ROD: Neither do I.

AMY: Come to my flat. I'll put a sausage in the microwave.

ROD: That could be dangerous.

AMY: Very.

(The rooster crows. They freeze. Waldo comes down.)

WALDO: That rooster crowing again.
The story has repeated itself hasn't it?
One would think the playwright copied bits down and changed a few words here and there.
They engage in banal conversation in Bellamy's and before you know it they're eating at home.
The plot thickens. I mean it is pretty thin, it would have to thicken wouldn't it?
These two are very logical, quite ensnared in the safe certainty of the solidity of their universe. But is that table really real?
Modern physics says that it's structure is just a mess of probabilities, and modern physics is a pretty mathematical subject.
Maybe the creator is trying to tell us something.
You there in the back row. Wake up, we'll get to the naughty bits in a minute.
Fast forward three weeks. Still in Bellamy's.

(They exchange places. Waldo goes back.)

ROD: Do you think we should meet somewhere else.
AMY: Why?
ROD: People might notice.
AMY: But we are involved in these important concerning your hippalector farms. It could be a subject of national importance.
ROD: But the fact that we don't lunch with our colleagues...
AMY: Don't be silly, this sort of thing happens all the time.
ROD: What sort of thing?

(The rooster crows.)

AMY: That sort of thing.
ROD: Yes, I see. *(Pause)* It's still going round.
AMY: What is?
ROD: Everything. *(Pause)* You didn't come last Wednesday.
AMY: No. I felt like a restaurant meal on Tuesday.
ROD: But you never have a restaurant meal when we meet, we always go to your place and put a sausage in the microwave.
AMY: That's because when I see you I feel that I would prefer a sausage in the microwave.
ROD: There's no point in me coming if you're not here.
AMY: Give me your cell phone number and I'll call you.
ROD: It's on my card. *(He hands her his card)* I could come on Tuesdays.
AMY: No, you're my Wednesday man.
ROD: Wednesday man? Does that mean you have a Tuesday man?
AMY: Only on Tuesdays.
ROD: What about Fridays?
AMY: I go home early on Friday and give the children Fish and chips.

ROD: What does Bradley do on Fridays?

AMY: It's his night off. He goes down to the pub with his fisherman friends and drinks gallons of beer. He gets so drunk he has to be brought home in a taxi. All poets are drunks, it's part of their nature. Bradley always gives me a cigar.

ROD: Why a cigar?

AMY: A peace offering. He knows I love cigars.

ROD: *(Pause)* I want you and Bradley to come to our house for cocktails next Wednesday.

AMY: Why?

ROD: I want to make sure CJ knows about it. So he knows you are one of my contacts.

AMY: Business. Business and politics.

ROD: I know. It's all for business and politics.

AMY: I'm sure to feel like a restaurant meal next Wednesday.

ROD: Do you think you'll change your mind when you see me?

AMY: I'm sure I will.

ROD: I'm glad.

AMY: I knew you would be.

ROD: What do I have to do to change your mind on Tuesdays?

AMY: You can't come on Tuesdays.

ROD: Not ever?

AMY: No never.

ROD: It all seems pointless somehow.

AMY: Don't say things like that. It's not 'Waiting for Godot', we are pragmatic people.

ROD: Yes. Pragmatic.

(They freeze. Waldo comes down.)

WALDO: Where do we go from here?

That is the question, the very important question.

The playwright has no idea himself, so he's asked me to stand here and fill in a gap.

(In the original production he stood in a gap between two flats.) (Takes out his cell phone) I'm in direct communication.

(PUTS PHONE TO HIS EAR) He says it doesn't matter if it doesn't make sense as long as they get a few laughs. A few laughs? Shall I tell you the one about the horse and the dog and the rooster? *(The rooster crows)* It's been done to death?

I suppose it has.

He says that he's got the structure right but he doesn't know what to put in it at this point.

That could be a bit of a problem.

A cup of tea?

He says that everyone has to have a cup of tea.

ROD: Orange Pekoe.

AMY: China black.

BRADLEY: Prince of Wales.

DIANNE: English breakfast.

ROD: China Green.

AMY: Lapsang Sousing.

BRADLEY: Assam.

DIANNE: Ceylon.

ROD: Indian.

AMY: French.

WALDO: What do you mean, French?

AMY: Sorry, German.

WALDO: That's better.

BRADLEY: Earl Grey.

ROD: Russian Caravan.

AMY: Chamomile.

BRADLEY: Rhubarb.

WALDO: What did you say.

BRADLEY: It's all rhubarb.

WALDO: It certainly is.

DIANNE: Dandelion.

ROD: Mint and rosemary.

AMY: A lemon zinger.

BRADLEY: A purple stinger.

DIANNE: Gumboot.

ROD: Irish breakfast.

AMY: Darjeeling.

BRADLEY: Jasmine.

DIANNE: Mother Grady's herbal infusion.

ROD: Afternoon tea.

AMY: Morning tea.

BRADLEY: Model T.

DIANNE: Orange pekoe.

WALDO: You already said that.

DIANNE: No, Rod did.

ROD: We'll all have a cup of tea. *(Ends)*

DIANNE: I'll make you all a nice strong cup of coffee with whipped cream and cinnamon sprinkled on it.

BRADLEY: And crystallized brown sugar?

DIANNE: Of course.

BRADLEY: Get back in your place.

(Waldo goes back.)

AMY: I'll help you with the coffee.

DIANNE: In the upstairs kitchen.

AMY: Why upstairs?

DIANNE: That's where the coffee is.

(They go)

ROD: Slightly inclement.

BRADLEY: What old man?

ROD: The weather.

BRADLEY: Absolutely. *(Pause)* The walls have ears.

ROD: Absolutely.

BRADLEY: They said they were going to the kitchen upstairs.

ROD: There is no kitchen upstairs.

BRADLEY: What are they doing then?

ROD: *(Indicates)* They'll be waiting in the wings listening for their cue.

BRADLEY: I mean as far as the play is concerned.

ROD: Right at this moment they don't exist.

BRADLEY: Figments in the mind of the audience?

ROD: Absolutely.

BRADLEY: But can they hear us?

ROD: Of course not, they're in the kitchen upstairs.

BRADLEY: Then we can talk openly?

ROD: Absolutely.

BRADLEY: Absolutely.

ROD: That is enough.

BRADLEY: Abso... enough.

(Pause. A move.)

ROD: What is the truth?

BRADLEY: That is the quest...

ROD: What is reality?

BRADLEY: The quest... *(Pause)* You all right for Friday?

ROD: Don't talk about it now.

BRADLEY: But I want to.

ROD: We have an agreement. We always meet on Fridays.

BRADLEY: I don't want to get drunk any more.

ROD: We have to. It's our cover. All poets are alcoholics and all executives drink on Fridays.

BRADLEY: There are exceptions.

ROD: A very small percentage.

BRADLEY: And I've just had a thought.

ROD: What?

BRADLEY: We give them both the same brand of cigar. They might compare notes.

ROD: Never. They don't get on. They would never compare notes on that sort of thing.

BRADLEY: I meet her at the laundromat.

ROD: Who?

BRADLEY: Your wife. Dianne.

ROD: Oh?

BRADLEY: I find her a bit wet.

ROD: Yes, I've noticed that. I meet her at Bellamy's.

BRADLEY: Who?

ROD: Your wife. Amelia.

BRADLEY: Oh?

ROD: I find her a bit dry.

BRADLEY: Yes, I've noticed that. Neither of our wives are much good.

ROD: One's too wet and one's too dry.

BRADLEY: We should give them up and live together.

ROD: I'd lose my job.

BRADLEY: Lose your job? Why?

ROD: CJ is very conservative.

BRADLEY: Oh damn convention, let's stop living a lie.

ROD: What about the children?

BRADLEY: I thought you'd forgotten about them.

ROD: No. They just came to mind.

BRADLEY: Upstairs are they?

ROD: Where we can't hear them.

BRADLEY: A figment...

ROD: Yes.

BRADLEY: But what is the true reality? Is it that we wish to live with our wives and children, or is it that we wish to live together? Do we want to live a lie, or do we wish to live the truth?

(The rooster crows).

ROD: There is your answer.

BRADLEY: Ah, I looked in moonbeams for the answer, I looked at strange affairs, the Himalayan smile, the twanging of the sitar and the jangling of bells, the mind changing drugs, the shaman with his top hat and consecrated cigar and here it was before me, in the crowing of a rooster.

ROD: All here before you.

BRADLEY: In the smile of a lover.

ROD: In the esteem of a friend.

BRADLEY: I love you, friend.

ROD: And I love you.

(They embrace. Amy and Dianne enter holding hands).

AMY: So we have found our loves at last.

DIANNE: Yes, we have found our loves at last.

(Waldo comes down.)

WALDO: But things are not as they might seem. The Creator waves His magic wand and pronounces the Word and the pageant appears before us, the glorious carnival, with

dazzling sideshows, ensnares us with its brilliance. We walk up to the bright facade and pay the barker a dollar to see Marvello, the Great Magician, in his world of illusion and then remain in the maze until the tent is struck and the caravan arrives at another fairground.

ROD: But we are in love.

AMY: It is all resolved.

BRADLEY: Nothing is resolved.

DIANNE: Nothing is ever resolved.

WALDO: It is an enigmatic ending.

CURTAIN.