

SERINGAPATAM

A PLAY FOR THE STAGE

by

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(Performed at The Old Red Lion, Islington, 1994)

THE SET

A LIVING-ROOM with CENTRE, a large, bird-cage.

This should be at least six-feet in height. Various properties are hung around the cage. These are: a flower-pot, a telephone, a watering-can, a hot-water bottle and a large carton of cigarettes. Two chairs are positioned DOWNSTAGE in front of the cage. A very large and ugly parrot is perched on top of the cage. A small dining-table is positioned SR of the cage)

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CAST

LEWIS - LATE 40'S

ALICE - EARLY 40'S

JILLY or THE POLICE WOMAN, MELISANDE - 20'S

COOP or THE POLICE INSPECTOR - 20'S

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SCENE 1 *(Mimed only)*

(An empty street at night. ENTER a young woman pushing a pram for twins. She wears a voluminous coat with the collar turned up. She wheels the pram under a large sign reading: SUPERMARKET CAR PARK.

A MAN rushes in wearing a hat with the brim pulled down. He is carrying two holdalls. The YOUNG WOMAN grips the MAN by the shoulders, stares intensely at him then pushes him away. The MAN places the two holdalls on either side of the pram and EXITS. The WOMAN puts on a large, flowery hat, lights up a cigarette and looks about nervously.

A YOUNG COUPLE saunter by and the WOMAN spills her packet of cigarettes in their path. They pick them up for her and look at the two babies in the pram. The WOMAN is anxious for the couple to leave. The COUPLE almost fall over the holdalls. The WOMAN behaves very distraughtly. The YOUNG COUPLE EXIT looking over their shoulders as if they cannot understand what is going on.

The WOMAN takes off her coat and puts it in the pram then with her back towards the audience takes each baby out and puts them into the holdalls. She signals to someone OFF and the MAN rushes in again and picks up the holdalls and EXITS other side from the couple.

The WOMAN stands CENTRE and screams. The YOUNG COUPLE run in and the WOMAN points to the empty pram. The WOMAN collapses)

BLACKOUT

SCENE 2

(Scene opens in **BLACKOUT**. Sound of birdsong. Gradually fade up light as **ALICE** and **LEWIS** enter with newspapers and sit in their chairs and start reading the papers)

LEWIS: Dog! (***Pause***) Dog... dog... dog, dog, dog... (***He barks***) Dog...

ALICE: Mm? Did you say dog?

LEWIS: It was interesting about the dog.

ALICE: Sorry? What page is it on?

LEWIS: (***Lowering the newspaper***) No, Alice! I *bought* a dog.

ALICE: (***Sighing***) Oh... What sort?

LEWIS: A soggy one, I'm afraid.

ALICE: (***Getting up***) Soggy? Is it raining? (***Looks out of the window***)
Thought it would pour down today. A bit disturbing when it doesn't. I
can't see your dog... Not in the house already, is it? Dogs have to be
house-trained, you know.

(**ALICE sits in chair again**)

LEWIS: Something I know a bit about, Alice.

(**Softly, ALICE begins to sing: 'Singing in the Rain'**)

LEWIS: Airedale's would be our sort of dog. Do you think a dog would fit in with us? Mind you, any animal is a complication and I would have to start

growing lettuces. **(LEWIS joins ALICE in singing)** When you're happy, I'm happy. **(Stands)** I thought tonight... we could try our new plastic rainwear.

ALICE: Oh! Wet the baby's whistle. Raincoats sooner or later have to get wet.

LEWIS: Equally, there's no law against wearing raincoats inside.

ALICE: No dear, not if they're stylish.

LEWIS: **(Looking up at the bird-cage)** Did you feed her? And there's no need to keep her covered up all the time. **(He lifts the cloth)** Ah, she's having forty-winks. Did I tell you about the new office hierarchy?

ALICE: Yes.

LEWIS: Sure?

ALICE: Yes, pet.

LEWIS: And you've no comment to make?

ALICE: I think it's about time I watered my babies.

LEWIS: You would have formed some opinion, then?

ALICE: **(Getting up)** My opinion is very formed, Lewis.

LEWIS: In that case a little something is called for.

(LEWIS pours out some drinks. ALICE wanders distractedly around the room)

ALICE: Have you seen my watering-can?

LEWIS: *(Holding up a bottle)* Squash?

ALICE: *(Finds the watering-can)* Vodka.

LEWIS: Together?

ALICE: Like two peas in a pod.

LEWIS: That reminds me... *(Hands her a drink)* I thought Jilly and Coop might drop in tonight.

ALICE: They won't come this late, will they?

LEWIS: No... morning, I expect.

ALICE: You'll be at work.

LEWIS: Then you can pass on the news.

ALICE: You missed them last time.

LEWIS: Well, I received your detailed report. About the spot of bother they got into. *(Pause)* They're good kids, though.

ALICE: The law of England wouldn't think so.

LEWIS: *Minor* transgressions. *(Pompously)* When all is said and done...they're good...

ALICE: **(Interrupting)** I think I'll turn in now. Do your usual, dearest.

(ALICE exits)

(Calling back) I'm glad you didn't bring that animal home with you. Such a nuisance when they're wet. And we don't really need a dog.

(LEWIS refills the glasses. ALICE comes back into the room)

(Nervously) Lewis?

LEWIS: Squash and voddie, dear.

(LEWIS and ALICE sip their drinks. There is a noise outside)

ALICE: Lewis... there's been a matter on my mind...

LEWIS: **(Not listening)** Give it some thought. About the dog. Shall I bring the new rainwear *up*?

ALICE: If you like. **(Pause)** Why do you feel the need for a dog, Lewis?

LEWIS: I don't.

(Noise off, again)

ALICE: There's that funny noise again. From out front.

(ALICE goes to the hallway)

LEWIS: **(Calling out)** Perhaps, it's your Mr Jackson.

ALICE: **(Calling back)** He's got a dog.

LEWIS: **(Calling out)** Princie! If it's got large, floppy ears - it's Princie!

ALICE: **(Coming into the room)** Why is the dog hanging about?

LEWIS: Conceivably, he's fond of our doorstep, Alice. Must be the polish you use.

(LEWIS goes to the front-door. ALICE sits in her chair)

Did old Jackson go? He's a man who finds waiting with or without a dog difficult.

ALICE: Poor man's lonely. After his wife died.

(LEWIS comes back and leans over ALICE)

LEWIS: He likes you. Probably dreams of you at night.

ALICE: Suddenly, I feel very tired. Say goodnight to the parrot for me.

(ALICE EXITS)

LEWIS: **(Calling out)** Parrot! The bird does have a name. **(LEWIS moves over to the cage and whistles to the parrot)** Time for Uncle Lewis to say goodnight. **(Using a sing-song voice)** Ugly Ursula... Ugly Ursula... How are we tonight? **(He strokes the parrot)** There, isn't that nice. **(Using a harsh, pretty-polly voice)** Ugly Ursula! Ugly Ursula!

ALICE: **(Calling down)** What's that, dear?

LEWIS: **(Calling up)** I was saying goodnight to Ursula.

ALICE: **(Calling down)** What?

LEWIS: **(Calling up)** I was saying what a good girl she is.

ALICE: **(Calling down)** Bring her up, dear.

LEWIS: She's a good listener. That's all one can ask for in a parrot.

ALICE: **(Calling down)** I said, bring her up, dear.

LEWIS: **(Sentimentally)** Birds... what would we do without them. **(He tucks the parrot under his arm. Then nastily:)** Time for the bloody water-bottles.

(LEWIS shuffles into the kitchen. Nothing of the kitchen can be seen apart from the entrance. Sound of running water as the kettle is filled)

ALICE: **(Nearer)** Lewis? the blue bottle tonight. Make it the blue bottle, Lewis.

LEWIS: **(From kitchen)** You sure? It's not as shiny as the old, magenta one.

ALICE: **(Nearer and scolding)** The blue bottle, Lewis! The blue bottle!

LEWIS: **(Still in the kitchen)** Ursula, I know this is as trying for you as it is for me. **(Suddenly yells)** Ouch!

(ALICE has crept back down the stairs and is standing by the kitchen entrance)

LEWIS: I ask you. The blue bottle. Worn down by years of ageing, scratchy

toenails. Ageing, scratchy toenails.

(LEWIS backs out of the kitchen still with the parrot under one arm and trying to tighten the bottle stopper with the other hand)

ALICE: Lewis. Are you making one of your fusses?

LEWIS: Don't creep up on me, Alice. You'll frighten poor Ursula. I can feel her poor little heart beating.

ALICE: Have you filled that bottle yet?

LEWIS: **(Muttering)** Bottle, bottle. I'm not a slippery bottle man myself but...

ALICE: **(Interrupting)** Oh! Slippery, bottom man.

LEWIS: I said: A slippery...

ALICE: **(Interrupting)** Then why didn't you say so?

LEWIS: Say?

ALICE: Well, I am your wife, after all.

LEWIS: **(On his dignity)** I have always believed that to be the case.

ALICE: So, I understand.

LEWIS: What do you understand?

(LEWIS loses the stopper on the bottle and gets down to look for it on the floor)

ALICE: Strange needs. Personally, I think going on that 'Package Tour' down the Amazon last year, changed you.

(LEWIS yells in outrage)

ALICE: It's the pigmies, isn't it? **(LEWIS yells again)** What did you get up to with them pigmies?

LEWIS: **(With great patience)** Pigmies is African, Alice.

ALICE: **(Carefully)** Did you do anything... difficult... with the pigmies, Lewis? Sometimes, I think you got no further than Torquay.

(LEWIS goes back into the kitchen)

(Shouting) I expect that Panama hat you gave me also came from Torquay.

(LEWIS comes back humming)

Sure you wouldn't rather play 'Hunt the Thimble'? No, I don't expect you would. Too much effort. Oh, silly boy!!! You can't carry the parrot and the bottle. I'll take the parrot, if you like. **(Kindly)** It's not that I don't appreciate your Panama...Don't forget to lock the windows, dearest. **(On EXIT)** And fresh bird's seed's in the Himalayan tea-caddie...

(ALICE exits)

(BLACKOUT)

