

LOST GATES AND RAILINGS

A play in 3 scenes (scenes change by rear projection)

Setting - present day.

Costumes – historical costumes, wimples, white leotards/overalls, tennis visors.

Props – a mobile phone, 2 tennis rackets, an old tin can, a baked potato, a cigarette

Also require 1 or slide projectors, or perhaps PC projectors.

Tape (or male actor) for loudspeaker voice.

Tape for songs *Every Picture has its Shadows* (Joni Mitchell) and *Tomorrow Belongs to Me* (Cabaret).

Cast:

Myrtle

Albert

Woody

Louise

Strap line –

Why do we so desire to remember things that never were?

Snobbery, the evanescence of things, the efluxion of time.

Playtype – Tragicomedy

Plottype – A fool and his money.

Robert Joyce@Blueyonder.co.uk

01392 664713

Woodward, Streatham Rise, Exeter

SCENE 1

Slide projection at rear – outdoors in a verdant park. It is a fine summer's day, with birdsong from the trees. A historical recreation of the Canterbury Tales is about to take place.

Myrtle enters eating a baked potato with a plastic fork. Louise follows with a cigarette in hand. Each is wearing an item indicative of Chaucerian times (perhaps a wimple), as well as a white boiler suit.

Louise wears a long skirt over her boiler suit.

Louise

But baked potato can't be authentic can it, Myrtle? Not in Chaucer. That was Raleigh.

Myrtle

Aye what a man – he invented the potato *and* the bicycle. Anyway, I can't see this crowd fussing. They were happy enough with Hamlet played by a woman on a unicycle, as long as they could see down her top. What was that artist chap's name? You know. You said he could start with a garden shed and by the time he'd finished he'd have you believing it was Blenheim Palace.

Louise

The one who came knocking on mam's door in Swansea? Woody. Woody Woodbine. And the fag, Myrtle. The fag's a knacker...

[ie anachr-]

Myrtle

Can I have his mobile number? I know he's a rum 'un but he won't be taking me in, Myrt.
No chance

Louise

Anachronistic. Yeah it's here somewhere under my bustle. But he's bad news Myrt – very bad news, so hang on to your purse.

Louise heaves up her skirts, searching for her mobile phone.. A loudspeaker booms from offstage

Loudspeaker voice

Laydeez n genmen, The Canterbury Tales tableaux experience is about to kick off on the hardstanding to the North Gates – next to the mini-bowling arena. And Chatam Ladies Linedancing ensemble will be signing autographs to the lee of the organic sausage concession by the main entrance.

Myrtle

I don't chuck it around, Louise. Nor do I put it about, whatever Albert might say.

Loudspeaker voice (*fading out...*)

So if you want to Chatam up now's your chance. But don't show any naval reserve. The sandwich ladies are getting their baps out...

Myrtle

I just want a permanent record for the family.

Louise

Rum un alright! You only have to clap eyes on him to see he's a tosser. Mind you I doubt he'd recognise me. He prefers the sight of his own face.

SCENE 2

Myrtle and Albert face the audience, standing. Centred between them is Woody, standing, his back to the audience. All are dressed in white overalls and tennis visors, and carry tennis rackets. Coarsely drawn monochrome images of railings and windows are projected onto them.

Myrtle

Over there there used to be servants' quarters, they always had staff you see. Stands to reason doesn't it? A few stories to tell there, Woody. They say one of them ran off with the cook.

Woody

Pudding club. Here we are – see these markings – that's where the foundations must have been. Quite a substantial structure, too. Plenty to get our teeth into, Myrtle. And it's based on scientific principles – that's the beauty of it.

Albert

For goodness – What we've got is what we've got. Why're you always harkening back? You should be proud of who we are. The trouble with all this is ...

Woody

Of course we can, Albert. But England made us, eh? That's what's going on here eh? Myrtle? Think of England. We're working together to catch something before it disappears for ever. And it could so easily be lost. It's evanescent as the morning mist. This ... This ... *delicate* treasure. People – your people – will be grateful, very grateful, Albert. You needn't doubt that.

It's a win win situation. But be assured there's no pressure to...

Myrtle

No! I'm so pleased we can do this now. Can't you see it's a way of investing in your children's future, Albert? Bertie? There'll be more respect... It's a lovely feeling isn't it – all 'my lady fol-de-rol'. Makes you feel all *ancestral*. And we get a scroll done in colour, and the print?

Woody

The full colour archive quality heritage offset lithograph conservation print with annotations package.

Albert

I really can't see the need, Myrtle. I shan't waste any more breath. Mind you, Woody seems to know his stuff, bet he never misses Time Team.

Myrtle

Really!

Woody

No, fair enough point Albert. It's not bad company to be in though is it? Now will you look at that, chisel marks. All the signs are converging. You know what that means? When that happens it's something very special. This house – your *ancestral* house, Myrtle, would have had carved stone window frames either side of the door, looking out down a grand, really rather a grand carriage drive, which would have been ...

Woody moves over to the left, in front of Myrtle, as if to rub himself against her. He points with his racket.

just about here, eh? Probably certainly on the site of the old manor house or the Barton. Didn't know you'd married into the gentry eh Albert? Oh yes this does deserve the larger sized historically accurate print with the gold blocked lettering and deckle edges.

Myrtle

How glorious! Oh, this is how it should be isn't it Albert? We found a good school for Troy (first things first Woody). And the ship, boat – the *Cockleshell Mudlark* oh we do love that. And now this. Things we didn't have when we were young. Younger.

Albert

Cockleshell Mudlark two, Myrtle. The first Mrs Rubenstein had... Anyway, I don't know why you.. spending nonsense... Why this time shunt? Here and now's fine. The same with your historical recreation group. William Shakespeare, Geoffrey Bloody Chaucer, the *Tres Riches Heures of the Duc de* bloody doodle doo da. History isn't a sort of Sunny Chums Sunshine Charabanc day trip. What about some grit in your oyster?

Woody

I can't see what you're *driving* at old chap.

He swings his tennis racket like a golf club.

Albert

What about doing real history - Auschwitz, Arbeit Macht Frei, the gates of hell itself, the suffering masses? Conjure that up from rust and blood.

Projection of images of the gates of Auschwitz, Rodin's Gates of Hell. Sound fx? Joni Mitchell "Every picture has its shadows and it has its source of light – blindness blindness and sight"

Woody

Mmm. A bit of a downer, Albert. I mean we didn't actually, personally...

Woody turns to Myrtle

No, really, it's about things *you* deserve, Myrtle. Things which lighten the spirit. Things you both deserve. See these iron stains here here and here can you see? Indicates railings right round and across. You know it really was quite a pile. All this must have been part of the grounds. Oh they knew how to live! I'd go for the antique distressed framed three foot pure cotton duck double gesso primed stretched canvas. Like a Gainsborough but in acrylic paint, applied by computer. Best of both worlds. You'd be there you see by the pond.

Albert

It's a water stain. Rusty tin can. Cigarette ends.

Woody

There would have been a pond there.

Woody bends to pick up the can.

Myrtle

It would be more than we'd thought of spending.

Albert

May as well do the job properly Myrtle. You can put the dog in here, near the front.

Myrtle

We don't have a dog.

Albert

We'll get one.

Albert paces the stage, tapping the floor with his racket as he makes his points.

Albert

We'll be a good old-fashioned modern family, spending together until the money runs out. Man, wife, child, dog, car, boat, and seemingly ancestral bloody home of fond benighted memory known only to Photoshop and an Apple Mac of this Parish.

Albert walks off stage right.

Woody

No worries, Myrtle. I can do you a dog. A nice Gewurtzreimer? Or a Spumante?

Myrtle walks off stage left. Woody sings reflectively

Woody

Tomorrow belongs
Tomorrow belongs
Tomorrow belongs to me...

Lights go down

SCENE 3

Historical Re-enactment Society Event in the park. Outdoor stall. Birdsong. All by back projection. A woman dressed as Chaucerian wench enters stage left. She hovers at the edge of the stage, doing something busy with her costume, bends down, ties a lace etc. A voice can be heard off-stage, left

Woody

Thing was, I heard 'civil service memoirs' as 'silver surface mirrors'. Anyway, Tom, believe me her life was nothing special. No harm in it is there?

Woody enters stage left (startling resemblance to Dick van Dyke circa 1968) dressed as Victorian chimney sweep. He has a toothbrush in his breast pocket. He is talking on a mobile phone. He turns away from the audience, without noticing Louise.

Woody

Her main thing was, she liked to hark back to the "grand leisured existence" of her forebears. She was fascinated by this house that somehow she had worked out or imagined her ancestors had lived in. Wasn't there of course. Likely enough never was. So that gave me the idea of offering a service. Don't bother with the research bit. They'll only settle for being related to Lady Muck. Just make it up – pull the wool.

Woody laughs

Woody

Got it in one. Pull the wool.

He is running a finger up and down something at the back of the stage. A blank white canvas on an easel?

Woody

Take the money and move on.

Swansea was easy pickings. The Welsh, you see... I don't mean no harm. I saw it on a poster – Lost Magic Kingdoms. That got me thinking. Five grand, Tom! Anyroads up, Three Tuns, later. Buy you a half.

Woody laughs and puts his phone away. He notices Louise.

Louise (*dreamily*)

My father had a house once – more a cottage by the sea. No running water.

A Ringing noise. Woody extracts the mobile phone from his dark capacious pocket.

Woody

Excuse. Yes hello. I'm on the stall! Yes. I think that should be possible about 6-ish. I'll ring you later.

Woody replaces his phone

Woody

Hi, Woody.

Woody holds out his hand to shake. Louise shakes it gingerly

Woody

Oh and that's another thing. Always travel with a toothbrush. You must be The Wife of Bath...

Louise

Yes the wimple's a giveaway isn't it. A cliché but it's what the public want. Louise by the way. I always thought when I was younger, that I was a Princess of the Blood Royal, stolen by fairies and abandoned among common folk.

Woody

Well it's the only explanation that stacks up from where I'm standing. Thing to do, to be certain, is to put a pea under your mattress. Worked before DNA, and it'll work after DNA. Seriously, I get the impression you're from an old Colonial family. Something about the way you carry yourself – m'lady.

Louise

Wow! That's impressive. My father was born in Suez. I was born in Carshalton Beeches, but my older brother was born out in Malaya. Sent home to school. I went to Malaya once.

Woody

Yes, I can imagine the heat. Seen it on Tenko. Do you have any photos of it? You know, the old place, in the the olden times?

Louise

I do somewhere. Some snaps of my brother with the servants. I don't mean it to sound grand. It was what one did. And one of me with mummy – she did look like me. I can scarcely remember her now. They were all treated well you know - people came and asked to be servants.

Woody

Yeah yeah yeah. You look like her, more like.

Louise

Yes, I meant.. And one of that lovely old house. I always wondered what it would have been like to live there.

Woody

The house, eh? I'd like to see that. Had an uncle in the RAF you know – he served out East. Malaya hand. He died in ...

Woody looks pensive.

Louise

In the war? In Malaya?

Woody

No. In Hastings. In poverty. Maybe you and me could meet up before the next re-enactment?

Louise

You must think I'm silly, with all these ideas above my station and the play-acting.

Woody

Of course I don't, Louise. You're a creative. Like me. You know, Bish bosh, dab here, dab there. Bit of the old Al Fresco theatricals for the Lord Mayor's Parade. Count me in. What's next, anyway?

Louise

The Bosworth Field thingy. I'm down for the plague pits.

Woody

You might want a bit of TCP on those, then. I thought we might have a bite down at the Blue Penguin – they do muppets of turkey soused in drizzle, with a glass of the old house Chardonnay – chalky but fundamentally persuasive. We can talk about the glory days.

Louise (*somewhat ironically*)

Great days, eh?

Woody

You never know – you enjoy the old historical reconstruction business as much as I do, I reckon. I might be able to find out about the old place for you.

Louise

Well I'm not sure about that.

Woody

Tell you the truth it's a hobby of mine. I can have a look-see, then do a reconstructional fine-art-based painting in authentic Malay-style pigments. In a betel-nut frame with a lime juice finish. I'd only charge for the materials. Let's do lunch, talk it over, yeah? Do, do, let's...

Louise

No, not. Let's not, shall we? Let's lose touch with each other. You see I'm like my mother – no more a nob than you are. She's no more related to Lady Llewelyn Owen Jones as was, of Lampeter House than I am Lady Di's secret love child by King Farouk. You see my mother lives in Swansea, Woody. And since you did her that paint-by-numbers picture of that what-was-it, the family abode of by-gone yore, she's a laughing stock all the way up and down Cockle-Candy Park Parade.

Woody

Oh, tara then. Must dash. I've got to sort my bodkin out.

Woody rushes off stage right.

ENDS

The slides to be front-projected in scene 2 are made from slices of the picture on the next page.

