

(DRAFT: 19 Mar 2020)

# Brute Farce

A play in two acts

By Craig Houk



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#### CHARACTERS

<b>Alistair McHugh</b>	Theater Critic
<b>Killian Black</b>	Actor
<b>Deirdre Shepherd</b>	Stage Manager
<b>Reggie Brimble</b>	Stagehand
<b>Fiona Bainbridge</b>	Actress
<b>Vivian Pruitt</b>	Actress
<b>Quinn Ponsonby</b>	Actor

CASTING NOTE: The actors playing Alistair and Quinn should if possible be similar in stature and appearance. The actor playing Reggie may be either male or female.

#### SETTING

An old theater. A dusty, unkempt basement/storage area perhaps, which has been transformed into a crude dressing room.

#### LOCATION

London

#### TIME

2019

PRODUCTION NOTE: This is technically a play within a play. However, since the audience will never see the play within, I leave it to the artistic team to make the decision as to what the genre and period of that play within might be. That decision will obviously impact costume design. Have fun with this.

**ACT 1****Scene 1**

*(At rise we see Alistair, who is unconscious on the floor. A moment passes before we hear him moan. He rouses, tries to take in the space, and then carefully and slowly rises to his feet in grave pain. He moves a few steps before realizing he's been restrained by chains, which are anchored to the floor. He has difficulty focusing as he tries to inspect the restraints. Killian enters carrying a horseman's pick. He is in costume, ready for the impending performance. He strikes Alistair over the head with the knob of the pick. Alistair collapses.)*

KILLIAN

We're not ready for you.

*(Deirdre enters.)*

DEIRDRE

House opens in thirty minutes, Killian. And bring that with you. We'll need it for fight call, won't we love?

*(She is referring to the horseman's pick.)*

KILLIAN

Is Vivian here?

DEIRDRE

She's in hair and makeup. Do you know she's gone through three stylists since we've started the run? And Quinn phoned to say he'll be late. Again. Fiona just got here. She's in the loo.

KILLIAN

Is she baked?

DEIRDRE

Not this time, no...

KILLIAN

...Good to hear...

DEIRDRE

...She's coked up.

KILLIAN

What!?

DEIRDRE

Well, I can only assume it's cocaine. I mean, I'm no expert. Perhaps I'll take an occasional nip or two from the bottle of Teeling that I keep in the booth, but otherwise I most assuredly wouldn't know the difference between nose *candy* and nose *drops*.

KILLIAN

Bloody hell...

DEIRDRE

...Relax. I went through her things and got rid of anything that looked remotely suspicious, including some prescription pills.

KILLIAN

Well, she may need those.

DEIRDRE

Oh, I don't know. Might be interesting to see how it affects her performance without them.

KILLIAN

I expect it could only be an improvement.

*(Alistair stirs. Deirdre kicks him.)*

DEIRDRE

*(Referring to Alistair.)*

This guy. Am I right?

*(Beat. She checks the time.)*

Okay. Make that twenty-eight minutes before we open the house. Fight call at a quarter past.

*(She exits. A beat. Reggie enters. He carries a wooden panel on which are mounted a line of colored light bulbs, and below that a line of clear light*

*bulbs, and next to the collection of bulbs, a small buzzer. Loose wires hang from the back of it.)*

REGGIE

*(Referring to Alistair.)*

He's still here?

KILLIAN

Well, of course he's still here. Why wouldn't he be?

REGGIE

I was thinking maybe you'd come to your senses by now.

KILLIAN

What have you got there?

REGGIE

Deirdre asked me to install it.

KILLIAN

What is it?

REGGIE

Well, since we're holding this bloke hostage such a long distance from the stage, I needed to find another way to let the actors know when they're due their entrances. I mean look, I can't be running back and forth between here and there as well as managing the props and moving the furniture, now can I?

KILLIAN

So...?

REGGIE

So, after I get this panel wired and mounted, we'll test the system.

KILLIAN

Which is...?

REGGIE

Right. Well, about one minute before any of you are due to be onstage, you'll hear a buzzing sound followed by one of these bulbs lighting up. Each color represents a different actor. The line of clear bulbs below the colored ones will remind you what scene you're in.

KILLIAN

All right, quick question...

REGGIE

Mm hm?

KILLIAN

...Wouldn't it be a whole lot simpler if you just shot us a text on our mobiles?

REGGIE

It would be, yes.

KILLIAN

So, then why are we not doing that?

REGGIE

There's no service down here.

KILLIAN

Oh, for fucksake. All right then. And which colors have you assigned to whom?

REGGIE

I haven't. I thought maybe you could sort that out amongst yourselves.

KILLIAN

More than half of us are incapable of sorting our own knickers. Just assign the colors. All right?

REGGIE

Certainly. Okay... You...

KILLIAN

...Killian...

REGGIE

...Right. Mr. Black. You will be blue.

KILLIAN

Fine. Mr. Black is blue.

REGGIE

Miss Pruitt will be red. Miss Bainsbridge will be green. And Mr. Ponsonby will be yellow. Have I missed anyone?

KILLIAN

No, Reggie. You haven't missed anyone. There are four actors in this production. There have always been four actors in this production. And that's been the case since when we started rehearsals three months ago. And even on opening night last weekend. And it's all due to the simple fact that there are four characters identified in the script.

REGGIE

I never understood why they didn't bother to hire understudies.

KILLIAN

Any proposed budget for understudies was immediately sucked up by Vivian's demands for a higher salary.

*(Beat.)*

All right. Just so I have this all in order. I'm blue. Vivian's red. Fiona is green. And Quinn is yellow.

REGGIE

I'm more familiar with your surnames.

KILLIAN

Oh, for fucksake. Black - blue. Pruitt - red. Bainbridge - green. Ponsonby - yellow.

REGGIE

I should write that down. I'll grab a pen and paper after I've put this up.

*(Reggie will install the panel during the following. Fiona enters carrying a garment bag, a makeup case and a handbag. She is not yet in costume.)*

FIONA

Good evening everyone.

*(She settles herself somewhere and begins to unpack things.)*

REGGIE

Hallo, Miss Bainbridge.

KILLIAN

*(Lackluster.)*

Fiona.

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FIONA

I've had better days, thank you both for asking..

REGGIE

Is she all right?

KILLIAN

Not likely.

FIONA

...This morning I awoke to the smell of smoke, only to discover that my bed had been set on fire.

KILLIAN

Oh my God.

FIONA

Well, I wasn't in it at the time..

REGGIE

...That's lucky..

FIONA

...The man I brought home last night was.

KILLIAN

What!?

FIONA

Oh, he's fine. Just a little first-degree burn on his backside. We'd lit some candles late in the evening for some ambiance and then fell asleep after a massive shag. I must've gotten up at some point, perhaps to get a glass of wine, who knows really. Except then I woke up on the floor several feet from the bed in a cloud of smoke and to the smell of burning flesh.

*(Beat.)*

Has someone been going through my things?

KILLIAN

Why do you ask?

FIONA

There are some items that have gone missing.

KILLIAN

Like what?

FIONA

I'm not sure that's any of your business, Killian.

KILLIAN

Well then, I supposed I'm in no position to assist.

FIONA

I suppose not.

*(She notices Alistair.)*

And who do we have here?

REGGIE

That's Mr. McHugh.

FIONA

Who?

KILLIAN

Oh, for fucksake, Fiona. Alistair McHugh.

FIONA

The theater critic?

REGGIE

From the Daily Telegraph.

FIONA

Well, what's he doing here? And why is he chained to the floor?

KILLIAN

Are you...? Have you gone completely...? I mean honestly, just the other day, we spent hours discussing... Never mind. I will go over it again...

*(At some point during the following, Fiona will begin to powder her face, and then happily discover that she had replaced the face powder with cocaine. She will then, to some extent, discreetly set up several lines to snort.)*

You see, this mustachioed Billy no-mates right here is, without equal, the single largest threat to the continued existence of

the whole Actors' Guild of Great Britain. He has been relentless in his efforts to undermine and, at times, completely shut down any production that doesn't suit his impossible standards. And he's been particularly vicious as it relates to various actors in those productions, repeatedly castigating them in his reviews, and thereby ultimately putting an end to their stage careers. And because of that, we all agreed - I know you agreed, Fiona, because you were in the room when it was all decided - we all agreed that this fucking bastard right here is finally going to get his comeuppance!

*(Deirdre enters.)*

DEIRDRE

Five minutes to fight call.

ALL

Thank you, five to fight call!

*(Deirdre starts off.)*

KILLIAN

Wait. Where's Quinn?

DEIRDRE

I've already told you. He's phoned to say he'll be late.

KILLIAN

Well, we can't have fight call without Quinn, now can we.

DEIRDRE

Oh, I don't know. I wouldn't mind watching you thump *yourself* for a change.

*(She grabs the horseman's pick from Killian and exits. A beat. Vivian enters. She is fresh from hair and makeup and is in full costume. She carries a bag or purse.)*

VIVIAN

This place is filthy.

*(She sees Alistair.)*

Oh God. So, we're actually going through with it, are we?

KILLIAN

Yeeeeeeesssssss!!!

VIVIAN

You seem on the fence, darling.

REGGIE

I promise you, he's not.

VIVIAN

You know, it took me forever to figure out how to get here. I'm not certain I'll be able to find my way back.

KILLIAN

We need to be as far away from the stage as possible. We can't risk having the audience catching sight of him if he escapes or hearing him if he cries out. I mean honestly, were any of you listening when we decided *all* this just a few days ago?

VIVIAN

I get paid to *talk*, darling, not to *listen*. And I'll have you know that my being compelled to wait my time out in this bedraggled den of ineptitude is in direct violation of my contract, which clearly states that I am to have my own dressing room with swift and unobstructed access to the stage.

REGGIE

Not to mention your own bathroom to include toilet paper that matches your complexion.

*(Fiona guffaws blowing coke powder into the air.)*

VIVIAN

And speaking of complexions... Fiona, darling, you should really be using a darker shade of powder. Whatever that is, it's far too pale for your skin.

*(Fiona's head falls to her makeshift dressing table.)*

KILLIAN

Oh, for fucksake.

*(He moves to Fiona.)*

Fiona? Fiona...

*(He checks for a pulse and lifts her head. He lowers her head.)*

VIVIAN

Is she...?

*(Deirdre enters.)*

DEIRDRE

Quinn's arrived.

ALL

Thank you, Quinn!

DEIRDRE

What's happened with Fiona?

VIVIAN

She's expired.

DEIRDRE

What!?

REGGIE

She's pegged out.

KILLIAN

No. No. No, no, no. She is not dead.

REGGIE

Well, she's not moving, now is she?

KILLIAN

She's breathing.

VIVIAN

Then what's the matter with her?

KILLIAN

*(Killian moves in closer to Fiona.)*

She's... Well, it looks like she's...

DEIRDRE

She's what, Killian?

KILLIAN

She's asleep.

DEIRDRE

Asleep?

KILLIAN

Yes.

REGGIE

Hardly seems possible considering the amount of blow she's done.

KILLIAN

*(He slowly turns to Deirdre,  
accusingly.)*

Deirdre...?

DEIRDRE

What? What have I done?

KILLIAN

Fiona's prescription pills...

DEIRDRE

What about them?

KILLIAN

Where are they?

DEIRDRE

I've thrown them out.

KILLIAN

Can you get them?

DEIRDRE

Perhaps I misspoke. What I meant to say was that I flushed them.

KILLIAN

You flushed...? Do you really think that was...? I mean, are you intentionally trying to...? Never mind. Listen, do you at least remember what they were for?

DEIRDRE

No. No wait, yes. Yes, I do remember. Er um... one of them was for anxiety and the other for psychosis; I know this because most actors are on *those*. There was a third one, though. Sodium something. Sodium... Ox bite... or maybe Ox bait.

REGGIE

Sodium Oxybate.

DEIRDRE

Isn't that what I just said?

REGGIE

It's nearly what you just said.

DEIRDRE

Well, I said "Ox bait", didn't I, love?

REGGIE

Correct. But that's incorrect. Because the word is ox-y-bate. Three syllables, not two. One word, not two. And it's got nothing to do with an ox.

VIVIAN

Sounds a bit like a tomato/tomato [to-may-to/to-maw-to] thing to me.

REGGIE

Actually, no, it's nothing like that at all.

KILLIAN

I couldn't care less how it's spelled or how it's pronounced or whether it's got two syllables or three. I just want to know what the fuck it means.

REGGIE

She's got narcolepsy.

KILLIAN

*(Quietly, troubled.)*

Oh, no.

VIVIAN

That's revolting.

*(They all take this in. A moment.)*

DEIRDRE

You're thinking of necrophilia, love. That's a very different thing.

VIVIAN

Ah.

*(Fiona's head pops up.)*

FIONA

...Except then I woke up on the floor several feet from the bed in a cloud of smoke and to the smell of burning flesh.

*(Quinn enters carrying the horseman's pick. He is already in costume. He does not see/notice Alistair.)*

QUINN

Can anyone here perchance explain to me why I've been standing all alone on an empty stage holding on to this for the past five minutes?

VIVIAN

*(To Quinn.)*

Have you been drinking?

DEIRDRE

*(After checking the time.)*

Fight call.

ALL

Thank you, fight call!

KILLIAN

What about Fiona?

FIONA

What about me?

DEIRDRE

*(She pulls Killian aside a bit.)*

I'll deal with her presently. In the meantime, I need you and Quinn onstage for fight call...

KILLIAN

...Well, we can't just...

DEIRDRE

...I'll deal with it. Okay? And I need Reggie -

*(She turns to Reggie.)*

Reggie?

REGGIE

Yes?

DEIRDRE

Have you finished with that, love?

*(She is referring to the panel.)*

REGGIE

Just.

DEIRDRE

Good. Now I need you to go and set up for act one, scene one.

REGGIE

Certainly.

*(Reggie exits.)*

DEIRDRE

Right.

*(She checks the time.)*

Okay everyone. Ten minutes 'til house open.

ALL

Thank you, ten to house open!

DEIRDRE

Quinn and Killian follow me. Fiona and Vivian, make yourselves comfortable. And keep a close eye on him.

*(Deirdre, Killian and Quinn exit. A moment of silence. Fiona begins to clean herself up a bit, maybe fixes her makeup, and eventually gets into costume. Vivian tries to settle in, but the place is filthy, so it'll be a challenge. Alistair regained consciousness sometime during the previous but has remained silent until now.)*

ALISTAIR

I'm a theater critic who lives for bad theater. What can I say? It's my one weakness...

VIVIAN

Is he allowed to speak? Are you allowed to speak?

ALISTAIR

...I exist because there are actors out there who are profoundly self-aware and who are grateful to hear the truth. And I persist because there are actors out there - like you lot for example - who take me too seriously when you shouldn't.

VIVIAN

Oh, is that a fact? Do you know, mental institutions are full to the gills with actors who have taken critics too seriously?

ALISTAIR

On behalf of reviewers all over the globe, I'm honored. But you exaggerate. And so, what? So, a trifling few of my criticisms have been a smidge unflattering at times...

VIVIAN

A smidge!? A smidge!? Do you have any idea the damage you've done?

ALISTAIR

Damage?

VIVIAN

Yes. I mean, take poor, daft Fiona here for example -

*(To Fiona.)*

Fiona, darling, what vice is it this week?

FIONA

I've no idea what you mean?

*(Her head drops to the table.)*

VIVIAN

*(To Alistair.)*

You see? She's been reduced to a hopeless, hackneyed, slavering nitwit.

FIONA

*(Her head pops up again.)*

That's a bit hurtful, isn't it?

ALISTAIR

*(To Fiona.)*

Only a smidge.

VIVIAN

*(To Fiona.)*

Well, it's not your fault, darling. It's not your fault.

FIONA

I suppose not, but whose fault is it then?

ALISTAIR

I expect I'm the culprit.

VIVIAN

Indeed, you are, Mr. McHugh. Indeed, you are. You're like the living, breathing, looming Brexit of the theater world. And none of us are likely to survive the next decade intact.

ALISTAIR

And what are your plans for me, if I may so inquire?

FIONA

That's a terrific question. I'd like to know as well.

VIVIAN

Well, If I'm to be honest, I have no idea as to our plans for you. Admittedly, I got a bit weary nearly five minutes into the conversation. I mean, Killian is quite famous for droning on and on without ever really coming to the point. Or perhaps he does come to the point and it's just that by the time he gets there, everyone's lost interest.

FIONA

And he's generally like that offstage as well, isn't he?

VIVIAN

Well, what difference does it make anyway? We've come this far now, haven't we? We can hardly turn back. And I'm sure whatever Killian has planned for you will be appropriate.

ALISTAIR

Appropriate to what?

VIVIAN

To your aggressions, Mr. McHugh. Your reviews are unreasonably harsh. And I'll accept that though it is the responsibility of theater critic to be critical, it doesn't mean that the critic should take pleasure in being cruel.

ALISTAIR

I don't take pleasure in being cruel. It's simply a by-product of years and years of exposure to dreadful scripts, second-rate productions, and vomit-inducing performances.

FIONA

*(To Vivian.)*

He's been particularly harsh with you, hasn't he?

VIVIAN

He has indeed.

FIONA

I'm honestly surprised you're still able to find work. And in fact, I was shocked to see your name on the casting announcement.

VIVIAN

What an awful thing to say.

FIONA

Well, it wasn't meant to be awful.

VIVIAN

I'll have you know, there isn't a single director or producer in the whole of London who wouldn't kill for the chance to work with me. And at least I'm not compelled to go *horizontal* for the privilege.

*(She stares hard at Fiona. A beat. Vivian then pulls a piece of decomposing paper from her bag or purse. She unfolds it and hands it to Alistair, who does his best to take it in his chained hands.)*

Read that.

ALISTAIR

*(He squints at the paper.)*

I would, except I can hardly make it out.

FIONA

I've a pair of reading glasses you can borrow.

*(Fiona retrieves a pair of bejeweled glasses, takes them and places them on Alistair's face.)*

Better?

ALISTAIR

I suppose. Except the words are all smudged. Almost as if someone had been crying into them.

VIVIAN

*(She pulls the paper from Alistair's hands.)*

It's the review you wrote about my performance as Rosalind in *As You Like It*.

ALISTAIR

Well, I can't read it; not in that condition.

FIONA

Not to worry. I've got a copy of it here.

*(Fiona pulls a nicely framed copy of the review out of her bag.)*

VIVIAN

You've framed it!?

FIONA

Well, it's practically a work of art, isn't it?

VIVIAN

Hand it over.

*(Fiona does. Vivian seizes it and looks at it in disgust.)*

Unbelievable.

*(She passes it on to Alistair. He looks at it, possibly admiringly.)*

Well, go on. Read it.

FIONA

I've highlighted in yellow the bits about Vivian.

VIVIAN

*(To Fiona.)*

I'll deal with you later, darling.

*(To Alistair.)*

Go on.

ALISTAIR

*(He squints a bit more, perhaps a little hesitant to read. He clears his throat.)*

Vivian Pruitt, as heroine and protagonist, Rosalind, appeared rather long in the tooth as she grappled with a role typically reserved for an actress whose face hasn't yet been narrowed beyond recognition. Miss Pruitt's advanced years only became more apparent when she endeavored to disguise herself as the meant to be young and handsome, Ganymede. Was it her decision to go minimalistic with the foundation and blush or was it simply the aftermath of an embittered makeup designer out for revenge? To her credit, nonetheless, Miss Pruitt successfully tapped into her inherent masculine qualities in a manner that will most assuredly win her the coveted role of Brutus in the National Theatre's upcoming winter production of Julius Caesar. "But what of her actual performance?" one might ask. It was, in a word, noticeable. As noticeable as a ring bearer toddler, shuffling down the church nave and pinching his willy determined to get to the altar without wetting himself.

*(Quinn enters carrying a burlap sack and a length of rope. He is followed by Killian who carries the horseman's pick.)*

QUINN

You nearly put an end to me this time 'round, do you know that? I mean, you can't just go changing things. We've been blocking this fight for weeks and just when we've mastered it, suddenly I've got you coming at me from the wrong angle. You nearly took my head off. And I can hardly see a thing as it is with this sack over my head.

KILLIAN

I'm sorry, Quinn. I was trying something different.

QUINN

You were trying something different? Like what? Decapitating one of your castmates? That *would* be different, wouldn't it?

KILLIAN

You're overreacting.

QUINN

Am I?

KILLIAN

Well, it's certainly nothing to lose your head over.

QUINN

Oh, I see. This is funny to you, is it?

KILLIAN

It's becoming less so the more you go on about it.

QUINN

You know, you should count yourself fortunate you haven't yet been excommunicated from the actors' union.

KILLIAN

Oh, is that right?

QUINN

Yes. I mean, are you really that out of touch? Are you so full of yourself that you actually have no notion of the magnitude of your insidious misconduct...?

FIONA

...Listen, perhaps maybe we should...

VIVIAN

*(To Fiona.)*

...Hush. It's about to get good.

*(Deirdre enters.)*

DEIRDRE

House is open!

ALL

Thank you, house open!

FIONA

Haven't we already had 'house open'?

DEIRDRE

That was the ten-minute warning, love.

FIONA

Was it?

DEIRDRE

I ought to know, oughtn't I?

*(Fiona's head falls to the table.)*

KILLIAN

Oh, for...!

*(To Deirdre.)*

Did you or did you not say that you were going to take care of that?

DEIRDRE

I did.

KILLIAN

And...?

DEIRDRE

I did not.

*(To everyone.)*

Oh, and by the way... my bottle of Teeling has gone missing. I don't suppose any of you lot has taken it.

*(All are silent, except Quinn who lets out a belch.)*

No? All right then.

*(Deirdre exits. Reggie enters and spots the horseman's pick, still in Killian's hand.)*

REGGIE

There it is. I've been looking all over for that.

*(Reggie takes the horseman's pick from Killian.)*

And I'll need those as well.

*(He takes the burlap sack and length of rope from Quinn. He exits.)*

QUINN

Where was I?

VIVIAN

You were just about to share with us the titillating details of Killian's declining career.

KILLIAN

Oh, yes. Full steam ahead, Quinn. We're *all* waiting with bated breath.

QUINN

Your reputation precedes you, Killian. Countless claims of unprincipled behavior, mostly concerning considerable transgressions as it relates to the fairer sex...

VIVIAN

...What you mean to say is, he's molested nearly every woman he's been on stage with.

QUINN

That's precisely what I mean to say.

VIVIAN

Well, the role does call for a sadistic, predatorial, paranoid narcissist, so I might agree with you that Killian was the only suitable choice... except that he's an actual *danger* to women!

KILLIAN

Not to worry, Vivian. Both you and Fiona are quite safe.

*(Vivian braces. Fiona's head pops up.)*

FIONA

And what do you mean by that?

KILLIAN

Not. My. Type.

*(Fiona rises, crosses to Killian and slaps him hard across the face. Killian scarcely balks.)*

Is that all you can muster?

*(Beat. Fiona punches Killian between the eyes. Killian yelps and stumbles back in grave pain. A beat before Alistair begins to laugh. They all turn to Alistair, Killian grasping his nose,*

*perhaps with a handkerchief that he's pulled from his pocket. He's bleeding.)*

QUINN

*(Just now seeing Alistair.)*

Alistair McHugh? What's he doing here?

*(Beat.)*

KILLIAN

You can't be serious! Is there not one person in this room who's at all listened to a word I've said!? Is there no one here who remembers what we agreed upon!?

ALISTAIR

Well, I know I wasn't privy to those conversations.

*(Beat. Killian moves pointedly towards Alistair, still holding his nose.)*

KILLIAN

No. No you weren't, were you?

*(Reggie enters.)*

REGGIE

Well, from what I can recall of the plan, Mr. McHugh will have gone belly up by the end of act one.

*(A beat.)*

ALISTAIR

Beg pardon.

REGGIE

You'll have carked it. Taken a dirt nap. Assumed room temperature...

ALISTAIR

...Yes, all right! I get it.

REGGIE

I'll be off then.

*(Reggie exits.)*

ALISTAIR

*(To Killian.)*

You mean to have me killed!? Is that your plan then? That seems a bit drastic, doesn't it?

FIONA

It does, doesn't it...?

VIVIAN

*(Overlapping Fiona.)*

I did not agree to *that*, darling...

QUINN

*(Overlapping Vivian.)*

I need a drink...

*(Quinn pulls a bottle of Teeling from his coat jacket. He will open it and drink from it. Going forward, he will pull the bottle out at moments of stress.)*

KILLIAN

Enough! Not another word! From anyone! Now listen to me. Very carefully.

*(Beat.)*

We need to face facts. We are all of us nearing the end of our theatrical careers. And indeed, some of us have already surpassed our expiration date. And surely none of you - and let's be honest with ourselves here - not *one* of you could possibly be ignorant to that indisputable truth. I mean, we can all certainly *pretend* that there *might be* - hidden somewhere in the splintered cracks of the deeply worn floorboards upon which we have tread many times over - a tinder of hope for a reignited career; for a final chance to shine; for an opportunity to go out on top. But it's only just that... *pretend*. Otherwise, we're just putting off the inevitable, aren't we? So, this is it, folks. This is our time. As a collective. This is how we're all going out. We will make our way to the stage and we will put in the best performances of our lives. And by the end of act one, this bloated twat right here will have met his untimely demise...

*(The buzzer on the wooden panel goes off. Vivian bellows. Quinn belches. Fiona's head falls to the table. Alistair and Killian look to the panel. The colored bulbs light up slowly and*

*in sequence followed by the clear bulbs.)*

QUINN

What in hell is that?

KILLIAN

*(To himself.)*

Oh, dear God.

*(Dreading the explanation.)*

That apparatus there will serve as an electronic cue caller.

QUINN

Sorry, what?

KILLIAN

Yes. Since Reggie is sadly unable to be in two locations simultaneously, and since Deirdre is compelled to work without an ASM due to budgetary restrictions, the pair of them decided to find another way to give the actors their entrance cues.

VIVIAN

And this is what they're collective brains have come up with, darling?

KILLIAN

Yes.

VIVIAN

How does it work?

KILLIAN

Well, if memory serves, each of the *colored* bulbs represents one of the four *actors*. The *clear* bulbs below those will tell us which *scene* we're in.

QUINN

And how do we know which *act* we're in?

*(Beat.)*

KILLIAN

Say again?

QUINN

How do we know which act we're in? We've got bulbs for actors, bulbs for scenes, but no bulbs for acts.

KILLIAN

How many acts are in this play, Quinn?

QUINN

Two.

KILLIAN

Yes. Correct. There are *two* acts. *Just* two.

QUINN

I don't think you're getting my question.

*(Beat.)*

KILLIAN

Quinn. Dearest Quinn. Are you trying to say that you're incapable of differentiating between act one and act two... without being prompted by a *filament!*?

*(Beat.)*

QUINN

I get your point.

KILLIAN

Excellent. So, then with all due respect, shut the fuck up.

*(Fiona's head pops up.)*

FIONA

What in hell is that?

*(She points to the wooden panel.)*

VIVIAN

I'll explain later, darling.

*(To Killian.)*

And Killian?

KILLIAN

Yes, Vivian?

VIVIAN

May I ask...? Which color is assigned to whom?

*(Reggie enters.)*

REGGIE

Very good question... Mr. Black is blue. Miss Pruitt is red. Miss Bainsbridge is green. Mr. Ponsonby is yellow. And it looks like the system is working brilliantly.

*(Reggie gives a thumbs up and then exits.)*

KILLIAN

Everyone got it?

*(Murmurs of confusion.)*

Oh for... I'm blue. Vivian's red. Fiona's green. And Quinn is yellow.

*(He points to himself and then to the others as he lists the colors.)*

Blue. Red. Green. Yellow.

FIONA

*(Repeating and pointing to make sure.)*

Blue. Red. Green. Yellow.

KILLIAN

Very good, Fiona.

VIVIAN

Red is not a good color for me, darling.

*(Beat.)*

KILLIAN

Isn't it?

VIVIAN

No. Not at all right for my skin tone.

KILLIAN

Oh. Well, I wasn't aware you were planning on wearing it...

*(He gestures to the bulb.)*

...or perhaps that you were considering carrying it around as an accessory.

VIVIAN

Don't be ridiculous, darling.

QUINN

I'd be happy to switch with you.

FIONA

Oh, good idea! Let's all switch.

KILLIAN

No! No one is switching. It's all been settled. Vivian will just have to make do. You will *all* have to make do.

*(Deirdre enters. She carries a costume bag.)*

DEIRDRE

Twenty minutes to places.

ALL

Thank you, twenty to places!

DEIRDRE

*(She hands Killian the costume bag.)*

Here it is.

KILLIAN

And not a moment too soon.

DEIRDRE

Well, you can't expect the costumer to immediately pull together another outfit on such short notice, now can you, love? I mean, I get that we're down to the wire here, but at this point, there's no sense in debating the timing of its arrival?

KILLIAN

I wasn't debating it.

DEIRDRE

As well you shouldn't. I mean, there you have it, in hand, and with twenty minutes to spare.

*(Long beat.)*

KILLIAN

Thank you?

DEIRDRE

Just doing my job, love.

*(Deirdre exits.)*

VIVIAN

And what do we have here?

KILLIAN

*(He unzips the garment bag and pulls out a costume.)*

This, my dear addlepatented artistes, is a replica of Quinn's costume...

FIONA

...Oh, very nice...

QUINN

...Well, isn't that thoughtful.

*(Pulling at the costume he's wearing.)*

This one's a bit threadbare already...

*(He reaches for the costume.)*

KILLIAN

*(He pulls the costume back.)*

No. No. No, no, no. This is not meant for you.

QUINN

Well, if not for me, then for whom?

KILLIAN

For Mr. McHugh, that's whom.

ALISTAIR

Me?

KILLIAN

Yes.

ALISTAIR

Why?

KILLIAN

Well, didn't you hear? Didn't any of you hear? The celebrated critic of the Daily Telegraph, Mr. Alistair McHugh, will be

making his acting debut this evening in the West End of London.  
And here, onstage, at this very theater.

VIVIAN

Over my dead body.

*(Fiona's head falls to the table.)*

KILLIAN

On the contrary, my dear Vivian. Over *his* dead body.

QUINN

Hold on a damn minute!

*(Beat.)*

KILLIAN

What is it, Quinn?

QUINN

You mean to tell me that this... this... this plug-ugly tosser will  
be going on in my place tonight?

KILLIAN

Yes.

ALISTAIR

I hardly see how that's possible...

QUINN

*(To Alistair.)*

...You shut up.

*(To Killian.)*

And how do you plan to pull *that* off?

KILLIAN

He *will* be going on for you tonight. But *only* for the fight  
scene.

VIVIAN

Have you lost your mind, Killian?

KILLIAN

Well, I'm certainly on the verge of it.

*(Beat.)*

Now, look, I need everyone's undivided attention, please. And that includes you, *Fiona*!

*(Fiona's head pops up.)*

FIONA

Do I smell smoke?

VIVIAN

Yes. And it's presently coming out of Killian's ears.

KILLIAN

For those of you who aren't the least bit interested in what's taking place *onstage* when you're not in fact *standing on it*... At the end of act one, *my* character and *Quinn's* character have a bit of a tussle, during which Quinn, who has been fitted with a burlap sack over his head and strapped to a wooden chair with a length of rope, manages to free himself by throwing his body to the floor. At which point, I come after him brandishing a horseman's pick. And, after a carefully choreographed series of head slams, hair pulling, punches, kicks, slaps, grappling, and falls, both Quinn and I crash through a breakaway door.

*(Beat.)*

Any of this sound vaguely familiar to any of you?

*(Quinn reluctantly raises his hand.)*

Quinn, yes, I would hope so. And the rest of you?

*(Heads shaking, looks of puzzlement, murmurs of confusion.)*

Seems about right. Anyway, after a count of five, I return to the stage and reach for the horseman's pick, which had been cast-off during the fight. I then pick it up and turn back to the door at the same moment Quinn reappears, still wearing the sack over his head. I then lunge at him, thrusting the pick through his midsection. Quinn falls backwards out the door again and expires offstage.

*(A moment. Eyes blinking, vague looks.)*

*Except... Except tonight... When Quinn reappears in the doorway with the sack still over his head, it won't be Quinn. It'll be Alistair dressed as Quinn. Or, more precisely, dressed as Quinn's character.*

ALISTAIR

Oh my God...

*(Reggie enters carrying the horseman's pick.)*

REGGIE

...All right, here you go.

*(He hands the pick to Killian.)*

KILLIAN

*(He examines the pick.)*

Oh, yes. Looks good. Looks very good.

REGGIE

Well, I did what you asked. I cleaned and polished it. And then I sharpened the edges. And this pointy bit at the top is no longer retractable. So, it should go through Mr. McHugh like a hot knife through butter.

ALISTAIR

You can't be serious.

REGGIE

Well, it was quite simple really. I just replaced the spring mechanism with a small metal rod..

ALISTAIR

...No! What I mean is, you can't be serious about killing me.

REGGIE

Oh. Right. Well, I know nothin' about that, so I guess I'll be on my way then.

*(Reggie exits.)*

ALISTAIR

*(To whomever will listen.)*

All right now listen to me. Please. This is ridiculous. You clearly haven't thought this through. I mean, do you honestly believe you'll actually get away with it? Even if you're successful in your endeavor to... exterminate me, it's all sure to unravel in due course..

*(Deirdre enters. She carries three garment bags.)*

DEIRDRE

...Fifteen minutes to places.

ALL

Thank you, fifteen to places!

DEIRDRE

All right. Which of you lovelies wants to take these off my hands?

VIVIAN

More costumes?

DEIRDRE

That's right. Two of them to be exact.

FIONA

Well, now they're just spoiling us, aren't they?

DEIRDRE

Okay, now before you get too excited, these are *also* replicas of *Quinn's* costume.

KILLIAN

Oh, for fucksake. Whyyyy?

DEIRDRE

There was a bit of a mix-up with the request, love. I thought *you* wanted *me* to speak to the costumer. And when I mentioned it to Reggie in passing, he thought I wanted *him* to speak to the costumer. And *neither of us* was aware that *you* had planned to speak to the costumer yourself from the start.

*(Fiona's head falls to the table.)*

KILLIAN

And who's paying for this?

DEIRDRE

I've no idea, love.

VIVIAN

Well, it's certainly not coming out of my salary, darling.

QUINN

Well, I for one think it should come out of Killian's *fucking* salary. I mean, all of this was his big *fucking* idea. So, he should *fucking* pay for it.

*(Beat.)*

DEIRDRE

Are you drunk, Quinn?

QUINN

No.

DEIRDRE

Are you sure, love? I only ask because I've yet to find my bottle of Teeling.

QUINN

*(He's drunk.)*

I'm not drunk. And I am offended by your assertion that I am...

*(A gas bubble pops up in his throat.)*

...drunk.

DEIRDRE

All right then. I'll take your word for it. And I'll just leave these here.

*(She dumps the garment bags and exits.  
A beat.)*

ALISTAIR

Listen, everyone. I think I have an idea...

*(Killian moves pointedly to Alistair.)*

KILLIAN

...I'm sorry, what? You have an idea? No, I don't think so, Alistair. As you can certainly tell, this group is not interested in ideas. In fact, I don't think anyone here has any room left in their pea-sized brains for another idea. And besides, it's all been settled. You die tonight.

QUINN

I'd like to hear what he has to say.

KILLIAN

Absolutely not, Quinn. There's nothing left to consider. And we won't negotiate.

VIVIAN

*(To Killian.)*

Honestly, darling. Don't you think this is all a bit much? I mean, I suppose I get it. We're all actors. We love drama. And we all have a shared hatred for this mound of tainted cabbage over here. But it all seems problematic and perhaps even a bit convoluted, don't you think...?

ALISTAIR

...Oh, thank God someone has come to their senses...

VIVIAN

...I mean, couldn't you just kill him now and get it over with...?

ALISTAIR

...What? No...

VIVIAN

...Frankly, I'm just bored to tears with the whole situation. I'd be content to step away for a few minutes while you do whatever it is you need to do. I could freshen up in the loo, do some vocal warmups... Just let me know how much time you need, darling. In any case, I don't want to be here when you put this old dog down.

KILLIAN

We will not deviate from the plan, Vivian.

VIVIAN

All right, darling. You're in charge. But if this show gets shut down for any reason - and especially if that reason happens to be that this colossal sack of fetid lard over here has been skewered to death in front of an audience on stage - I can assure you, you will not hear the end of it from me.

KILLIAN

Well, I don't like the sound of that. Not hearing the end of it from you is surely a fate worse than death...

ALISTAIR

...I beg to differ...

KILLIAN

...What is it you want, Vivian?

VIVIAN

Perhaps we could speak privately, darling? Hm? Over here?

*(Killian rolls his eyes and reluctantly follows Vivian. Wherever they land, Fiona will be nearby.)*

Listen. Killian. Darling. I've been thinking about what you said earlier. That all of us here need to accept that our careers are coming to an end. And that any notion that we might be able to - in some way - extend our shelf life is really just an illusion...

KILLIAN

Mm hm. I also said that at least one of us has *already exceeded* their expiration date.

VIVIAN

Yes, but I'm not interested in talking about Quinn, darling.

KILLIAN

Ah.

VIVIAN

Anyway, if this show closes, there's a good chance I won't get paid. Or that any of us will get paid for that matter. But mostly I'm thinking about me.

KILLIAN

Of course, you are. And...?

VIVIAN

And if I don't get paid.. Well, there are a few very important things that I simply won't be able to afford, darling. Things that I need right now. Things that might help me to stay.. fresh.. and relevant.

KILLIAN

I see. And would these be 'from the neck up' things or would they include your tits as well?

VIVIAN

Don't be crass, Killian. It won't be anything drastic. Just some minor alterations. A nip here, a tuck there. A bit of a revamp if you will.

KILLIAN

So, you're getting a facelift.

*(Fiona's head pops up.)*

FIONA

Thank you, places!

QUINN

Places!? Already!?

KILLIAN

No. No. No, no, no. We are not at places. I said 'facelift'.

FIONA

Oh. Well, I highly recommend it, Vivian. And while you're at it, you ought to get your tits done as well.

*(Vivian shoots Fiona a look.)*

VIVIAN

Killian...

KILLIAN

Yes, Vivian?

VIVIAN

Perhaps I could see you over here?

*(They really have nowhere further to move, but they give it a go. Elevated whispers.)*

Listen, darling... I don't take any pleasure in doing this... Nevertheless, show or no show, I'm going to have to rely on your generosity right now.

KILLIAN

My generosity?

VIVIAN

Yes, well the procedures I need aren't cheap.

*(Beat.)*

KILLIAN

Hold on. Are you suggesting that I...? Do you mean to tell me that you...? No fucking way, Vivian.

VIVIAN

I hardly think you have any choice in the matter, darling.

KILLIAN

I won't do it.

VIVIAN

You most certainly will. Because if not, I can't promise I'll be able to keep my mouth shut about what's been going on here.

KILLIAN

Oh, I see. So, extortion is your game now, is it? I appreciate your determination, Vivian. I really do. Except there's one teensy weensy flaw in your little scheme. You're an accomplice.

VIVIAN

An accomplice to what, darling? Until just a few moments ago, I had absolutely no inkling that you had planned from the start to slaughter that pugnacious pig over there. So, I'd hardly consider myself an accomplice to any of it.

*(A beat. Killian stews.)*

So, do we have a deal?

KILLIAN

I need some air.

*(As he starts off, Reggie enters.)*

REGGIE

Mr. Black...

KILLIAN

*(Overlapping Reggie, calling out.)*

..Reggie! Oh, there you are. Do you have the keys?

*(Reggie produces the keys.)*

Good. Now, as soon as the curtain goes up, I need you to come back here immediately and get this knob head into costume. Do you understand?

REGGIE

Well, English is my native language, so yes.

KILLIAN

Piss off.

*(Killian pushes Reggie out and follows him off.)*

\*\*\*INCOMPLETE - MORE TO COME\*\*\*