

Mustangs Theatre Company Presents . . .

Educating Rita

written by

Willy Russell

This script belongs to . . .

Address
Phone
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LIGHTS - BLACKOUT

SOUND - OPEN TRACK

VIDEO - CREDITS

LIGHTS - UP

SOUND - FADE OUT OPEN TRACK

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

A book-lined tutorial room on the first floor of a Victorian-built university in the north of England. There is a large bay window with an executive desk placed next to it. There is also another desk or table covered with various books and papers. On the wall above the exec desk there hangs a good and striking print of a nude, religious scene. Frank, who is in his early fifties, sits in an office chair, feet up on the executive desk. He holds an empty mug whilst pondering his shelves across the room.

FRANK

Now where did I put that? ... Eliot,
Eliot ...?

① — He crosses to the book shelf and follows the top shelf, looking at titles. He crawls on top of the desk and fingers through the titles. He removes a book. He is puzzled.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Eliot? Emerson? E, E, E, Euripides

(With sudden enlightenment)

Ah! Eureka, D, D, D, D, Dickens!

One can always rely on Dickens.

(He lifts out the books to

reveal the bottle of

scotch which has no more

than about three or four

fingers left in it; this

he pours into his mug

which he then raises in

salute)

To my dear Charlie Dickens, genius

and keeper of the scotch.

(He raises the mug to

drink.)

SOUND - PHONE RINGS

② —

The PHONE RINGS, startling him slightly. Hurriedly he replaces the now empty bottle and the books before taking a gulp of the scotch and crossing back to the desk and answering the phone.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Julia, Juliaa! ... Well yes, obviously I'm still here ... Because I've got this Open University woman coming this evening, haven't I? ... Tch ... Darling, I did tell you, of course I did ... Well, then you shouldn't have prepared supper, should you? Because I said, darling, I distinctly recall saying that I would be late ... Yes, yes, I probably shall go to the bar afterwards - I shall no doubt need to go to the bar afterwards if only to mercifully wash away some silly woman's attempts to get into the mind of Henry James or Thomas Hardy or whoever the hell it is we're supposed to study on this course ... Why did I take this on? ... Yes, darling, yes, I suppose I did take it on to pay for the drink ... Oh, for Heaven's sake, just leave it in the oven ... Julia, if you're trying to induce feelings of guilt at the prospect of a charred dinner you'd have been better cooking something other than lamb and ratatouille ... Because, my dear, I like my lamb cooked to the point of abuse and even a culinary ignoramus such as I knows that ratatouille is a dish that is impossible to overcook ... Darling, you could incinerate ratatouille, radiate it, cook it in the ovens of hell, napalm the bloody stuff and still it wouldn't be overcooked! ... Determined to go to the bar? When did I need determination to get me into a bar ...?

There is a KNOCKING at the door.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Look, I have to go ... there's someone at the door ... Yes, yes ... I ... all right, I promise ... just a couple of drinks ...

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)
 (Sotto voce.)
 four ...!

Further, more insistent knocking at the door.

FRANK (CONT'D)
 (Calling in the direction
 of the door.)
 Come in! (He continues into
 the phone.)
 Yes, I prom-all right ... yes, yes!

More knocking from the door.

FRANK (CONT'D)
 Come in!
 (Into the phone.)
 Absolutely, darling, absolutely ...
 yes ... bye-bye ...
 (He replaces the receiver,
 hard.)
 Come in! COME IN!

The door swings open, revealing RITA.

RITA
 I am comin' in, aren't I? It's that
 stupid handle on the door. You
 wanna get it fixed!

FRANK
 Erm, yes. I erm ... I er ... I suppose
 I always meant to.

RITA
 Well, that's no good, always
 meaning to, is it? You should get
 on with it. Because one of these
 days you'll be shouting 'come in'
 and it'll go on for ever and ever
 because the poor bugger on the
 other side of the door won't be
 able to come in. And you won't be
 able to get out!

FRANK
 Now, you are?

RITA
 What am I?

FRANK
 Pardon?

RITA

What?

FRANK

(prompting her now)

You are?

RITA

I'm a what?

① — Frank busies himself with the papers on his desk and falls into the chair by the window.

② — Rita is looking at the nude print. She becomes aware that Frank is watching her.

RITA (CONT'D)

It's nice, isn't it? The picture, it's nice.

FRANK

Erm, yes, yes ... I suppose it is, erm 'nice'.

RITA

It's very erotic.

FRANK

Erm, well, I ... you know, I don't think I've actually really looked at it for the past ten years or so but ... yes, I suppose it is.

RITA

There's no suppose about it - look at her. What do you suppose she's doing with that swan?

Frank smiles to himself and busies himself with the papers on his desk.

RITA (CONT'D)

Is it supposed to be erotic?

She's being quite genuine here - truly believing that those she regards as 'educated people' can and do converse in such a way.

RITA (CONT'D)

Like, when he painted it, do you think he like, like meant it to be a turn on, you know, stimulating?

FRANK
(fascinated as much as he
is fazed by her)
Erm ... probably ...

RITA
I think he did. You don't paint
pictures like that just so that
people can admire the technique, do
you?

FRANK
(amused)
No. No, you're probably right.

RITA
Because this was like, you know,
before they had the videos; but
back then they had to pretend there
was nothing erotic about it at all
so that's why they made it
religious, didn't they? Do you
think it's erotic?

FRANK
I think it's very beautiful.

RITA
I didn't ask you if it was
beautiful.

FRANK
No. I know. But the term
'beautiful' covers the many
feelings I have about the picture;
including the feeling that yes, it
is really rather erotic.

RITA
(Shifting the conversation)
Do you get a lot like me?

FRANK
I beg your pardon?

RITA
Do you get a lot of students like
me?

FRANK
Not exactly, no.

RITA

I was dead surprised when they accepted me. But I don't suppose they would have done if it had been a proper university, would they? It's different though, isn't it, the Open University? I suppose anyone can get in, can't they? Do you think they must be desperate?

FRANK

I ... really couldn't say. I've not had much more experience of it than you have. In fact this is the first Open University work I've done.

RITA

Oh, great! I end up with a beginner!

FRANK

No no, you misunderstand me; I work here at the university - I was just making the point that I haven't done this kind of extracurricular Open University work before.

RITA

It was a joke!

FRANK

I am a bona fide lecturer but with ...

RITA

A joke!

① A beat.

FRANK

Oh, I'm sorry. Yes, of course, 'a beginner', yes ...
(He laughs now.))

RITA

So what are you doing this for? Do you need the money?

FRANK

Actually I do as a matter of fact.

RITA

Oh.

FRANK

Erm ... would you like to sit down?

RITA

No. Can I smoke?

FRANK

Tobacco?

RITA

What?

FRANK

(almost bashful)

A joke.

RITA

(not quite sure for a second)

Oh. You mean was I gonna whip out marijuana? I hate drugs. They just cover everything up. I hate them.

She produces a packet of cigarettes and offers one to Frank. Frank raises hands aloft as if trying to physically ward off the temptation)

FRANK

Ah ah ... I'd love one.

RITA

Well, have one!

FRANK

No, no really, I've given up.

RITA

Everyone has. They're all afraid of gettin' cancer. But they're all cowards.

(throws pack to Frank)

You've got to challenge death an' disease. I read this great poem about fightin' death ...

FRANK

Ah, Dylan Thomas.

RITA

No, Roger McGoo! It was all about this old man who runs away from hospital and goes and gets drunk and stands in the street shoutin' an' challengin' death to come out an' fight. It's brilliant.

FRANK

Mm. I don't think I'm familiar with the actual piece you mean.

RITA

I'll bring you the book; it's fantastic.

FRANK

Good, good. That's very kind of you.

RITA

Mind you, you probably won't think it's any good at all.

FRANK

Why not?

RITA

Because it's the sort of poetry you can understand.

FRANK

(not quite sure)
Ah. Yes. I see. So you think it's important then, that poetry should be understood?

RITA

(shrugging)
Yeh. That's part of the reason I came here. Because there's a lot that I don't understand.

FRANK

You mean poetry? A lot of poetry you don't understand?

Rita begins to move around and scan the books on the shelves)

RITA

Yeh. All kinds of things.

FRANK
 (watching her for a second
 or two. Stands)
 Look, can I offer you a drink?

RITA
 What of?

FRANK
 Scotch?

RITA
 You should be careful with that
 stuff; it kills your brain cells,
 y' know.

① —————
 FRANK
 (Stops)
 But you'll have one?

RITA
 Yeh. All right. It'll probably be
 hard to even find my brain ...

② —————
 FRANK
 (scratching his head as he
 ponders the bookshelves,
 thinking out loud))
 Now now now ... think, think ... F, F,
 F, Faulkner, Fielding ... ah, Forster
 ... Forster!

As he pulls away a couple of volumes of Forster, leaving them
 on the table desk, he reaches in and takes out another bottle
 of scotch which he then takes across to the executive desk.
 He reaches into a drawer and pulls out another mug to pour a
 drink. Rita is silently gobsmacked for a second.

③ —————
 RITA
 My aunty's got a drinks cabinet
 like that!

FRANK
 Water?

RITA
 No, I'll have the whisky.
 (She picks up one of the
 Forster volumes.)
 What's this like?

FRANK
(bringing the drinks across
and looking at the book))
Howards End?

RITA
Yeh. Sounds filthy, doesn't it?
E.M. Foster.

FRANK
Forster!

RITA
Forced her to do what?

FRANK
(watching her for a second
before breaking into real
and appreciative laughter)
Forster, E.M. Forster; and it's
doubtful that he would have forced
'her' to do anything. Forster was a
committed homosexual.

RITA
Was he? Oh? So is that what his
book's about, being gay?

FRANK
No, not at all. Actually it's about
- but look, here ...
(He hands her the book.)
Borrow it. Read it for yourself.

RITA
OK. Thanks. I'll look after it. If
I pack the course in I'll give it
back to you.

FRANK
Pack it in? You've not even started
yet. Why should you pack it in?

RITA
I don't know. I just might. Might
decide it was a stupid idea.

FRANK
If you're already contemplating the
possibility of 'packing it in',
then why did you enroll in the
first place?

RITA

Because I want to know.

FRANK

What? What do you want to know?

RITA

Everything.

FRANK

Everything? That's rather a lot, isn't it? Where were you thinking of beginning?

RITA

Well ... I'm a student now, aren't I? I'll have exams to do, won't I?

FRANK

Well, yes, eventually.

RITA

So I'll have to learn about it all, won't I? It's like, you sit there, don't you - watchin' something like the ballet or the opera on the television - and you just, you know, call it garbage because that's what it looks like, because you don't understand - you don't know how to see it - so you just switch over or switch off and say, 'that's garbage'.

FRANK

You do?

RITA

Yeh. But I don't want to. Because I want to be able to see it. And understand.

(Shifting conversation)

Do you mind me cursing?

FRANK

No, not at all.

RITA

Do you swear?

FRANK

When I need to, yes, of course.
I've never subscribed to the idea
that there's such a thing as bad
language - only bad use of
language.

RITA

See, the properly educated, they
know it's only words, don't they?
It's only the masses who don't
understand. But that's because
they're ignorant; it's not their
fault, I know that, but sometimes
they drive me mental. I do it to
shock them sometimes; you know if
I'm in the hairdresser's - that's
where I work - I'll say somethin'
so awful and some of the customers,
they'll have a big face on them
just 'cos I come out with something
like that.

FRANK

Yes, but in the circumstances
that's hardly ...

RITA

But it doesn't cause any kind of
fuss with educated people though,
does it? Because they know it's
only words and they don't worry.
But these stuck-up ones I meet,
they think they're royalty just
because they don't swear. And
anyway, I wouldn't mind but it's
the aristocracy who swear more than
anyone, isn't it,

(She sighs.)

But you can't tell them that round
our way. It's not their fault; they
can't help it. But sometimes I hate
them.

(Beat. Shifting
conversation)

God ... what's it like to be free?

FRANK

Ah, now there's a question. Another
drink?

RITA
(shaking her head)
You know, if I'd got some other
tutor I wouldn't have stayed.

FRANK
(pouring himself another)
What do you mean, another tutor?

RITA
You know, someone who objects to
swearin'.

FRANK
How did you know that I wouldn't
object?

RITA
I didn't. I was just testin' you.

FRANK
Yes! You're doing rather a lot of
that, aren't you?

RITA
I can't help it. That's what I do -
you know when I'm nervous.

FRANK
And how am I doing so far?

RITA
(with a noncommittal shrug;
looking to the window)
I love this room ... this window. Do
you like it?

FRANK
What, the window?

RITA
Yeh.

FRANK
It's not really something I
consider, apart from those
occasions when I feel an
overwhelming urge to throw
something through it.

RITA
Like what?

FRANK

Oh, a student usually!

RITA

(amused)

You're crazy, aren't you?

FRANK

Quite possibly.

Beat.

RITA

Aren't you supposed to be interviewing me?

FRANK

Do I need to?

RITA

I know! I talk too much, don't I? I don't when I'm at home; I hardly ever talk at all when I'm there. But I don't often get the chance to talk to someone like you. Just tell me to shut up if I go on too much.

FRANK

I wouldn't dream of telling you to 'shut up'.

Frank begins to drink.

RITA

What does 'assonance' mean?

FRANK

(laughing and spluttering his drink)

What the ...

RITA

Don't laugh at me.

Frank hears the tone and knows he's touched a nerve. He quickly recovers.

FRANK

No. No. Erm ... I didn't mean ... 'Assonance'.

(MORE)

①

FRANK (CONT'D)

Well, it's, erm, it's a form of rhyme in which the corresponding vowels have the same sound but not the consonants that precede or follow the vowels. Now this can be slightly confusing because assonance can also be the use of identical consonants but with different vowels: erm, 'killed/cold' ... 'draft/drift', 'pin/pan', 'gloom/gleam', 'drink/drank' ...

RITA

(involuntarily)
'Wink/wank'.

She clasps a hand to her offending mouth. Frank is delighted she's grasped it.

FRANK

(Sits)
Yes, yes ... that's right, that's right. Look, do you know Yeats?

RITA

The wine lodge?

FRANK

(up to book shelf, taking down a book from his shelves)
The poet! W.B. Yeats, Irish poet. Look, you see, here ...
(Takes time to find the poem in the book. He shows her the relevant poem.)
'The Wild Swans at Coole' and here, you see, see how he's using really subtle assonance, rhyming the word 'swan' with the word 'stone'.

RITA

So ... so 'assonance' means gettin' the rhyme wrong?

Frank laughs in appreciation.

FRANK

Well, yes ... yes, in a way, yes it does, it bloody well does, it means, 'getting the rhyme wrong', but deliberately, purposefully in order to achieve a certain lyrical, almost musical effect.

RITA

Oh.

(She sighs. Slams book shut)

There's loads I don't know.

FRANK

Well, erm ... It's Mrs White, is it?

She nods.

FRANK (CONT'D)

But would you mind if I called you by your name, your first name?

RITA

No.

FRANK

So what is it?

RITA

My name? Oh, Rita.

FRANK

Rita?

RITA

Yeh.

FRANK

(alluding to the papers on his desk)

But it says here Mrs 'S.' White.

RITA

Oh that! Yeh, that's just 'S' for 'Susan'. That's my real name. I've changed it to Rita. I'm not a Susan any more. I've called myself Rita - y' know, after Rita Mae Brown.

FRANK

(blankly)

Who?

RITA

You know, Rita Mae Brown -
Rubyfruit Jungle.

(With serious reverence.)

Rita Mae Brown, she wrote Rubyfruit
Jungle.

FRANK

Ah.

RITA

Have you not read it? It's
fantastic. Do you want me to give
it to you?

FRANK

Erm, well, perhaps one day I might,
erm ...

But it's too late because she is already pulling her well-
thumbed copy from her bag and showing it to him.

RITA

And that's who I named myself
after. 'Cos I just love that book.
Do you want it?

FRANK

Oh ... um ... well ah ...

It's no good trying to avoid it. She presses it upon him.

RITA

So what about you - what are you
called?

FRANK

(pretends to be stern)
Sir.

(relaxes)
But you can call me Frank.

RITA

Oh, and were you named after
someone?

FRANK

Well, not as far as I'm aware.

RITA

Maybe your parents named you after
the quality; you know, 'Frank',
'frankness' - Eliot's brother -

FRANK

What?

RITA

You know - Frank Ness. Eliot's brother. Eliot Ness.

FRANK

Oh! Eliot Ness. When you said Eliot I assumed you were referring to Tom - T.S. Eliot.

RITA

T.S. Eliot? Have you read his stuff?

FRANK

Indeed I have, every last syllable.

RITA

(impressed)

Honest? I couldn't even get to the end of just one poem; I tried to read this thing called 'J. Arthur Prufrock' but I couldn't make any sense of it. I just gave up.

A beat.

RITA (CONT'D)

I've got a lot to learn, haven't I?

FRANK

Did I hear you say you were a ladies' hairdresser?

RITA

Yeh.

FRANK

Are you good at it?

RITA

(shrugging)

I am when I wanna be. Most of the time I don't wanna be, though. They get on my nerves.

FRANK

Who?

RITA

The women, the customers. They never tell you things that matter.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

Like, doing a perm; well, you can't use a strong perm lotion on a head if it's been bleached with certain sorts of, y' know, cheap bleach. Because it makes all the hair break off, you see. But at least once a month I'll get a customer comin' in for a perm and she'll swear that she has never done it; but I can tell! I can see it. But she swears to God; so you go ahead and do the perm and she comes out the drier half bald.

FRANK

And are you able to do anything about that?

RITA

Yeh. Sell her a wig!

FRANK

Good God!

RITA

The pensioners are the worst - they're dead vain, you know - it doesn't matter how old they are; so they'll never admit if they're wearin' somethin' like a hearin' aid. So you get your scissors and start trimmin' away, next thing is, snip! Another granny gone deaf for a week.

FRANK

You sound like something of a liability.

RITA

I am. But they expect too much. They walk into the hairdresser's and expect to walk out an hour later as a different person. I tell them, I'm just a hairdresser, not a plastic surgeon. See, most of them, that's why they come to the hairdresser's - because they want to be changed. But if you wanna change you have to do it from the inside, don't you? You know like I'm doin' ... tryin' to do. Do you think I will? Think I'll be able to do it.

FRANK

Well, that really depends upon you, on how committed you are. Are you sure that you're absolutely serious about this?

RITA

I'm dead serious. Look, I know I joke but I'm dead serious really. I am. I just tease because I'm not, you know, confident. But I want to be. I want to know.

FRANK

Everything!

She nods. He looks at her.

RITA

What you lookin' at me like that for?

FRANK

Because I think you're really rather marvellous.

RITA

For God's sake! Now who's joking?

FRANK

Don't you recognise a compliment?

RITA

Oh, get lost!

FRANK

It's so long since I paid a compliment to anyone, I barely recognise it myself.

(He forces himself to change gear.))

So! Come on; what I want to know is why - what is it that's suddenly led you to doing this? Comin' here?

RITA

Oh, it's not sudden. I've been realisin' for ages that I was ... slightly out of step. I'm twenty-six. I should have had a baby by now; everyone expects it - I'm sure my husband thinks I'm infertile. He's always goin' on about havin' babies.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

He's been tryin' for two years now to get me pregnant. See, I don't want a baby yet. I wanna find myself first, discover myself. Do you understand that?

He nods.

RITA (CONT'D)

Yeh. They wouldn't round our way. I've tried to explain it to my husband but between you an' me I think he's just thick! No, not thick; blind, that's what he is. He can't see, because he doesn't want to see. If I try an' do anything different he gets upset; even if I'm just reading or watchin' somethin' different on the television he gets really mad. I just used to tell him to get lost but then I realised it was no good just doin' that an' what I should do is try an' explain to him. An' I tried; I tried explaining to him how I wanted a better way of livin' my life. For once he listened. An' I even believed he understood because he said he felt the same as me - but all he meant was he was fed up livin' in our apartment so we should start saving and try and move out to somewhere like Formby. Formby! Even if it was a new house I wanted I wouldn't move out to Formby. I hate that place.

FRANK

Can I offer you another drink?

She shakes her head.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You don't mind if I do?

RITA

It's your brain cells.

FRANK

All dead long ago, I'm afraid.

But now any mirth/playfulness has evaporated from him. He drinks with a kind of grimness that has only previously been hinted at. A SHIFT - SELF LOATHING.

RITA

When do you actually, you know,
start teaching me?

FRANK

What can I possibly teach you?

RITA

Everythin'.

FRANK

Everything.

(A beat.)

I'll make a bargain with you, yes?
I'll teach you everything I know ...
but if I do that then you must
promise never to come back here ...
because there's nothing here for
you! You see I never ... I didn't
want to teach this course in the
first place; I allowed myself to be
talked into it. But I knew it was
wrong and seeing you only confirms
my suspicion. My dear, it's not
your fault, just the luck of the
draw that you got assigned to me;
but get me you did. And the thing
is, between you, me and the walls,
I'm really rather an appalling
teacher. Most of the time that
doesn't really matter - appalling
teaching is quite in order when
most of my students are themselves
fairly appalling. And the others
manage to get by despite me. But
you, young woman, you are quite,
quite different, you are seeking a
very great deal indeed; and I'm
afraid I cannot provide it.
Everything I know - and you must
listen to this - is that I know
absolutely nothing. Added to which
I don't like the hours of this Open
University malarkey, intolerably
bloody unsocial - when the sun's
gone down, my dear, I really should
be in the bar! I can be really a
rather good teacher when I'm in the
bar. Four glasses of weak Guinness
and I can be as witty as Wilde, as
pithy as Swift, as illuminating as
... well! I'm sorry.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

There are other tutors - I'll make all the necessary arrangements and no doubt the college will be in touch.

① Frank sits and turns away from her, doing business.

Rita slowly turns, collects her things and goes to the door. She goes out, closing the door behind her. Suddenly though, the inner door handle is being furiously turned as Rita tries to get back in. However, it being that door it won't open again. We hear frantic and repeated knocking.

RITA

(off)

Let me in ... open this door ... let me back in ... open the door.

FRANK

(calling)

Go away!

RITA

(off))

Wait a minute ... open this door ... listen ...

FRANK

Leave me alone. There are other tutors, I've told you I -

RITA

(off))

You're my tutor! I don't want another tutor ...

FRANK

For Heaven's sake, woman! I've told you ...

RITA

(off))

You are my tutor!

FRANK

I've told you, I don't want to teach you. Why come to me?

And the door finally gives. Rita enters.

RITA

Because you're a crazy professor who wants to throw his students through the window. An' I like you.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

Don't you recognise a compliment?
And when I come back next week I'm
gonna bring my scissors an' give
you a haircut.

FRANK

You are not coming back next week.

RITA

I am! An' you're gettin' your hair
cut.

FRANK

Oh, I don't think so.

RITA

I suppose you wanna walk 'round
like that, do y'?

FRANK

Like what?

RITA

(turning back just before
she exits)

Like a homeless hippy!

Rita exits.

① Blackout.

② SCENE TWO

③ Frank is standing by the window, looking out. He glances at
his watch and then peers out of the window again. He goes
④ across to the bookcase, removes a few volumes and stares in
at the bottle of scotch. For a moment he is tempted. But he
resists and replaces the books. Walking away from the
bookcase he goes to the window and looks out again. He
glances at his watch once more. And then, changing his mind
⑤ again: He heads for the bookcase, pulling out books as he
looks for the bottle. Only, as he does so he becomes aware of
a noise. He turns and realises that the door handle is being
turned. Quickly replacing the books he moves towards the
door, hesitating and then suddenly pulling it open to reveal
⑥ Rita, oil can in hand.

RITA

I was just oilin' it for y'. Well,
I knew you'd never get around to
it.

⑦

Handing him the can as she brushes past him and enters the room.

RITA (CONT'D)

You can have that.

Frank watches as she wanders around the room. She finally notices he is looking at her.

RITA (CONT'D)

What you lookin' at?

FRANK

Do you never just walk into a room and sit down?

RITA

No. Not when it's a room like this. I love it.

(A beat. She sits on the desk)

How do you make a room like this?

FRANK

I don't do anything.

RITA

Ah! That's the secret.

FRANK

There is no secret. I just moved in. And the rest just sort of ... happened.

RITA

Yeh, that's 'cos you've got taste. (A beat.)

I'm gonna have a room like this one day; there's nothin' phoney about it; everything's in its right place. It's like wherever you've put something down ... it's grown to fit there.

FRANK

You mean it's a mess!

RITA

Well, yeh. But ... but it's like ... it's like it's a lovely mess.

FRANK

Well ... I suppose that over the years it might have acquired a certain patina.

Rita takes a beat.

RITA

You haven't been drinkin', have you?

FRANK

Erm ... well, since you ask, no ... as a matter of fact.

RITA

Is that because of me? Because of what I said to you last week?

FRANK

What? You think where so many others have failed, you have reformed me!

RITA

(moving to the window)

I don't wanna reform you. You can do what you like.

① — (Deliberately changing gear.)

I love that lawn. It looks the way I always imagined somewhere like Yale or Princeton or one of those private schools to look. When I was a kid I always wanted to go to a boarding school.

FRANK

God forbid! Whatever for?

RITA

I always thought they sounded great, schools like that. I always loved that.

FRANK

What sort of a school did you go to?

RITA

Just normal; like all the other schools. Boring, ripped-up books, glass everywhere, knives and fights.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

But studyin' was just for the geeks and the wimps, wasn't it? See, if I'd started takin' school seriously then I would have had to become different from my friends; an' that's not allowed.

FRANK

Not allowed by whom?

RITA

By your friends, your family, by everyone. So you never admit that school could be anything other than useless and irrelevant. And what you've really got to be into are things like music and clothes and gettin' drunk and all that kind of stuff. Not that I didn't go along with it because I did. But at the same time, there was always something tappin' away in my head, trying to tell me I might have got it all wrong. But I'd just put the music back on or buy another dress and stop worrying. Till one day, you just stop and be honest with yourself. You say, 'Is this it? And that's the really big moment that is. Because that is when you've got to decide whether it's gonna be another change of dress or a change in yourself. And it's really tempting to go out and get that other dress. Because that way it's easy; y' know that you won't be upsetting anyone or hurting anyone - apart from yourself!

FRANK

But ... you ... did it ... You managed to resist another new dress.

RITA

(looking down at her clothes)

You mean you can't tell? Would you look at the state of this? I haven't bought myself a new dress for the past twelve months. And I'm not gonna get one either; not till I pass my first exam.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

And then I'll get a proper dress, the sort of dress you'd only see on a educated woman, on the sort of woman who knows the difference between Jane Austin and ... erm ... and Ethel Austen!

(A beat.)

OK. Can we start?

FRANK

Good idea. Yes, yes.

① —————
He locates a couple of sheets of A4 paper on his desk.

FRANK (CONT'D)

All right; now look, this piece you wrote for me on, what was it called ...?

RITA

Rubyfruit Jungle by Rita Mae Brown.

FRANK

Yes, well, the thing is, erm, it was, how can I say it ...

RITA

Crap? Garbage?

FRANK

No no ... the thing is, it was an appreciation and erm, a reasonably structured outline of the plot. But you've made no attempt to explore whatever themes there are or how character is portrayed and developed or what kind of narrative is being employed. In short, you haven't really brought any criticism to bear.

RITA

But I don't want to criticise Rubyfruit Jungle! Because I think it's brilliant!

FRANK

No no, I'm not talking about criticising, being critical in a censorious way; I'm talking about analytical criticism.

RITA

What's the difference?

FRANK

Well, as far as possible you should approach criticism as being purely objective. You see, you might consider ... erm ... what's it called ...

RITA

Rubyfruit Jungle.

FRANK

Yes, now you might consider ... Rubyfruit Jungle ...

RITA

By Rita Mae Brown

FRANK

By Rita Mae Brown, to be, what did you say, brilliant. But Rita, that is not criticism; it is mere opinion. You see, it's subjective. And in criticism there is no place for the subjective, for the sentimental, for the partial or partisan. Literary criticism should be detached and thoroughly supported by reference to established literary critique. Now bearing all of that in mind I'd like you to give me a considered response to your reading of Howard's End.

Frank hands paper to Rita.

RITA

① What, now?

FRANK

Yes. You have read it?

RITA

Yes. I've read it.

FRANK

So?

(beat)

Howard's End?

RITA

(taking a professional posture, trying to speak like an academic)
(MORE)

②

RITA (CONT'D)

Howard's End by Mr. E.M. Forster is
one really crap book!

FRANK

What?!

RITA

In fact it's even crappier than
crap!

FRANK

Oh really? And who are you citing
in support of that particular
thesis?

RITA

Who? Me.

FRANK

What have I just said? Me is
subjective

RITA

Well it's what I think.

FRANK

You think one of the most
considered novels of the twentieth
century is "crap". Well, perhaps
you'll do me the courtesy of
explaining why you think it's,
quote, crap, unquote.

RITA

All right, yeah. I will tell you.
It's crap because the man who wrote
it was a louse. Because halfway
through the book I could hardly go
on reading because he, Mr.
Fancypants E.M. Forster says,
quote, "we are not concerned with
the poor," unquote. That's why it's
crap. That's why I could barely
keep on reading it, that's why!

FRANK

(intrigued)

Because he said "we are not
concerned with the poor"?

RITA

That's right.

FRANK

But he wasn't writing about the poor.

① RITA

When he wrote that book the conditions of the poor in this country were appalling and he's saying he couldn't care less, Mr. E.M. Stupid Foster.

FRANK

Forster!

RITA

I don't really care what he was called. Sitting up there in his ivory tower and saying he couldn't care less.

Frank begins to laugh.

RITA (CONT'D)

Don't laugh at me!

② FRANK

But this is madness. You cannot interpret E.M. Forster from a Marxist perspective.

RITA

Why not?

FRANK

Look, before discussing any of this I said no subjectivity, no sentimentality.

RITA

I wasn't being sentimental.

FRANK

Of course you were. You wanted Forster to concern himself with the poor. Literature can ignore the poor.

RITA

Well I think that's immoral.

FRANK

(correcting)
Amoral.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

Have you any idea what kind of mark you'd get if you approached Forster in this way during an examination?

RITA

No. And I don't care.

FRANK

Well, in that case we're going to have to make you car, aren't we? Because if I'm going to teach you and you're going to learn then I'm afraid you'll ...

RITA

All right! All right! But I hated that book. Can't we do something else? Can't we do a book that I like?

FRANK

But books you like and books that will form the basis of your examination are extremely unlikely to be one and the same. The examiners, God help them, may never have heard of Rubyfruit Jungle or Rita Mae Brown.

(turns away from her)

And that is why you are going to have to learn how to discipline that mind of yours, learn how to focus and concentrate and ...

Rita drops into the chair by the window.

RITA

Are you married?

FRANK

Oh, Rita, please!

RITA

But are you though? What's your wife's name?

FRANK

Is my wife of the remotest relevance here?

RITA

Well, you should know that - you married her.

FRANK

All right! No, she's not relevant.
We parted a long time ago. OK?

RITA

I'm sorry.

FRANK

Sorry for what?

RITA

For asking. For being nosy.

FRANK

OK. But look, the thing about
Forster and a book like Howard's
End is that ...

RITA

Why did you split up?

FRANK

(beat)

Perhaps you'd like to take notes?
Then when you have to answer a
question on Forster, you can treat
the examiners to a dissertation on
Frank's marriage.

RITA

Oh, go away! It's only because I'm
interested.

FRANK

We split up, Rita, because of
poetry.

RITA

Stop! That's not true.

FRANK

It is. One day, my then wife
pointed out to me that for the
preceding fifteen years my output
as a poet had dealt exclusively
with that brief period in which we
had,

(beat)

discovered each other.

RITA

Are you a poet?

FRANK

Was. An extremely minor one. And so, to give me something fresh to fire the muse, she left me. A very selfless and noble woman, my ex wife, she sacrificed her marriage for the sake of literature.

RITA

And what happened?

FRANK

Oh, it did the trick. My loss was literature's great gain.

RITA

You started writing a whole load of good new stuff?

FRANK

I stopped writing all together.

RITA

(unsure if he is joking)
Are you teasing?

FRANK

No.

RITA

People don't split up because of things like that, because of poetry and literature.

FRANK

No?

RITA

Did you never write any famous poems?

FRANK

(laughing)
No. I published a couple of small collections. Sold a few here and there.

RITA

Can you still get them? I'll buy one of your books.

FRANK

I'm afraid they're all long out of print.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

And anyway I don't think it's the kind of stuff that you would have enjoyed.

RITA

Why?

FRANK

Because, Rita, It's the sort of poetry that you can't understand. Unless, that is, you happen to have a detailed knowledge of literary allusion.

RITA

So do you live on your own now?

FRANK

No. I live with someone, an ex student, she's now a tutor here. She's very caring, very tolerant, admires me enormously and spends a good deal of time with her head in the oven.

RITA

Trying to kill herself?!

FRANK

No, she just likes to watch the ratatouille cook or, as Julia's recently renamed it, the stepping out stew.

RITA

Is that you? Who steps out.

FRANK

I do occasionally.

RITA

For how long?

FRANK

Two, three days. Only now and then.

RITA

Why?

FRANK

Now come on, look, that's enough of that. Let's ...

RITA

If you were mine and you stepped out for days, you wouldn't get back in.

FRANK

Ah, but Rita, if I was yours would I even consider stepping out for days?

RITA

Don't you like her?

FRANK

I like her enormously. It's myself that I'm not too fond of.

RITA

But you're great.

FRANK

A vote of confidence. Thank you. Only, I'm afraid, Rita, that eventually you'll find there's less to me than meets the eye.

RITA

See. You can say clever things like that. I wish I could just talk like that, It's brilliant.

FRANK

Yes, all right. Now, come on, Howard's End.

RITA

Oh, leave that. I like just talking to you. It's great. That's what they do wrong in schools. They get you going and then you're all having a great time talking about something that's so interesting but the next thing is they wanna turn it into a lesson. Like we were out with this teacher once, you know, outside school on some project and I'm right at the back with these other kids and we saw this fantastic looking bird. It was all feathered and coloured and out of place around our way.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

So I was just about to tell Miss Hernandez about it but this kid next to me said "keep your mouth shut or she'll make us write an essay about it."

FRANK

Yes. It's what we do, Rita. We pluck birds from the sky and nail them down to learn how they fly.

RITA

You would think there was something wrong with education to hear you talk.

FRANK

Yes and perhaps there is.

RITA

So why are you giving me an education?

FRANK

Because it's what you wanted. If it was up to me, what I'd like to do is take you by the hand and run out of this room for ever.

RITA

Oh, be serious!

FRANK

I am, Rita. I am! Right now there are a thousand things I'd rather do than teach.

RITA

Oh, go away! You just like saying things like that!

FRANK

Do I?

RITA

You know you do.

FRANK

Oh Rita. Why didn't you walk in here twenty years ago?

RITA

Because I don't think they would have accepted me at the age of six.

FRANK

You know what I mean.

RITA

I know. But it's not twenty years ago, Frank. It's now - you're there and I'm here.

FRANK

Yes and you're here for an education. Now come on. Forster.

RITA

Oh, forget him!

FRANK

Now listen to me. You want to learn, you want me to teach you. Well, that, I'm afraid, means a lot of work, for you as well as me. You've barely had a basic schooling, you've never even sat a formal examination let alone passed one. Possessing a hungry mind is not in itself a guarantee of any kind of success.

RITA

All right, but I just don't like Howard's crappy End.

Frank stands.

FRANK

(sharp response)
Then go back to what you do like and stop wasting my time. You go off and buy yourself a new dress and I'll go to the bar!

RITA

Is that you putting your foot down?

FRANK

Yes!

RITA

You're impressive when you're angry.

FRANK

Forster!

Rita picks up pen and paper.

RITA

All right, all right - Forster,
Forster stupid Forster.

(pretending to read from
the paper)

Does the repeated use of the phrase
"only connect" suggest that in
reality E.M. Forster was a
frustrated electrician?

Frank reacts.

Blackout.

SCENE THREE

① Frank sits at his desk, reading a single sheet of paper and shaking his head.

② Rita barges in through the door. Out of breath. She tries to straighten herself out once she is in the door. She moves to the student table and organizes her purse, not looking at Frank.

RITA

Am I late? Sorry I'm late. I thought I'd easily be out of the shop by five but half past four one of my regulars shows up. Could I do her a quick wash and blow dry because she's met this new guy who's got a Chinese takeout place. He's not Chinese so it's not really a Chinese takeout, it's sort of - must be fusion, I guess. Well, he phoned her up this afternoon because he'd just got a couple of tickets for an exhibition of state of the art refrigeration units and walk in freezers. She said she doesn't even like him really. But she's always wanted a walk in freezer.

Rita looks over to Frank and sees he is staring at her.

RITA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, sorry. It's being in that shop every day - I think it must be catching, that's what I have to listen to, all day every day. Anyway, I'm sorry I'm late.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

I hate being late when I'm coming here.

FRANK

Let's forget about that. I want to talk about this that you sent me.

RITA

Oh, that.

FRANK

Yes. In response to the question, "suggest how you might resolve the staging difficulties inherent in a production of Ibsen's Peer Gynt" you have written, quote, "Do it on the radio," unquote.

RITA

Precisely!

FRANK

Precisely what?

RITA

Precisely, do it on the radio.

Frank holds up the single piece of paper.

FRANK

And that is the entire essay?

RITA

Well ... we were ... we were just dead busy in the shop this week.

FRANK

You write your essays at work? Why?

RITA

Denny gets real upset if I work at home. He doesn't like me doing this course. I can't be bothered arguing with him.

FRANK

But you can't produce work that's as thin as this.

RITA

Is it wrong?

FRANK

It's not a question of whether it's wrong. It's a fact of ...

RITA

See, I know it's on the short side. But, but I thought it was the right answer.

FRANK

Well, it's the basis for an argument, Rita, but *one line* is hardly an essay.

RITA

I know but I just didn't have much time this week so I sort of - sort of *encapsulated* all my ideas in one line.

FRANK

But it's not good enough.

RITA

Why not?

FRANK

It just isn't.

RITA

But that's stupid because you say that one line of exquisite poetry says infinitely more than a thousand pages of second rate prose.

FRANK

Yes. But you're not writing poetry. You are supposed to be writing an essay and what I'm trying to make you understand is that whoever was marking this would want more than "do it on the radio."

(shifting gears; trying to reach her)

Look, there's a way of answering examination questions that is - expected. It's a sort of accepted ritual. It's a game, with rules. And you have to observe those rules. Poets can ignore those rules, poets can break every rule in the book. Poets are not trying to pass examinations.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

But Rita, you are. When I was at university there was a student taking his final theology examination. He sat down in the hall, opened the exam paper, took out his pen and wrote "God knows all the answers." Whereupon he handed in his paper, and left.

RITA

(impressed)

Did he?

FRANK

Yes, he did. And when it was time to collect his results he received a piece of paper on which were the words "And God also gives out the marks."

RITA

Did he fail?

FRANK

Of course he failed. And rightly in my view because a clever answer is not necessarily the best answer.

RITA

I wasn't trying to be clever. I was just run off my feet all this week so I never had time ...

FRANK

All right, yes, I know. But you have got some time now. And I want you to give it just a quarter of an hour or so adding some considered argument to this. "In attempting to resolve the staging difficulties in *Peer Gynt* I would present it on the radio because ..." and then outline your reasons, supporting them wherever possible with quotes from accepted authorities.

(holding out the paper)

All right?

Rita considers it for a moment, then crosses to take the paper and return back to her table.

RITA

Yeah. All right.

She sits for a moment, thinking about what to write as Frank gets to his own work, marking papers.

RITA (CONT'D)

You know *Peer Gynt*? He was searching for the meaning of life, wasn't he?

FRANK

Put at its absolute briefest, yes.

Rita goes back to work but stops quickly, thinking to herself. Just as Frank is back into his work ...

RITA

I was doing this woman's hair on Wednesday ...

FRANK

Rita!

RITA

I'm gonna do this, don't worry. I'll do it. But I just want to tell you, I was doing her hair and I was bored stiff with what the others were talking about in the shop so I said to my customer, "Do you know about *Peer Gynt*?" She just thought it was a new conditioner. SO I told her all about it, the play. And you know something? She was so interested.

FRANK

(uninterested, still marking)

Was she?

RITA

She said to me, this woman, after I'd told her all about it, she said "I wish I could go off searching for the meaning of life." There's loads of us who feel like that. Because there is no meaning.

Rita thinks a little more, has another idea, she turns to face Frank this time.

RITA (CONT'D)

Frank, you know culture, the word culture.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

It doesn't just mean going to the opera and the ballet and all that, does it?

FRANK

No.

RITA

It means a way of living, doesn't it?

(pauses)

Well, we've got no culture.

Frank gives up, throws the pen down and looks up at Rita.

FRANK

Who hasn't.

RITA

Me and the people I come from. People I work with, live with, grew up with. Us. We've got no culture.

FRANK

Of course you have.

RITA

What? You mean that "Working Class Culture" thing?

FRANK

Well, yes

RITA

Yeah. I've read about that. I've never seen it though.

FRANK

Then look around you.

RITA

I do. But I don't see any culture. I just see everyone drunk or stoned and trying to find their way from one empty day to the next. There's more culture in a tub of yogurt. But you can't say something like that in my world because they're proud. And they'll tell you we have got culture. Doing the pub quiz, going to the club, singing karaoke.

FRANK

But if they're content with that,
if that's what people want then
surely they've got the right ...

RITA

But they *don't* want that! They're
not content. Because there's no
meaning left. All the meaning is
gone, so there's nothing to believe
in. It's like there's this sort of
disease but no one mentions it.
Everyone behaves like it's normal,
you know, like it's inevitable,
that there's vandalism and houses
are burnt out and wrecked by people
they were built for. Everyone's
caught up in the Got to Have game,
all running around like headless
chickens chasing the latest
haircuts and phones and all the
other got to have garbage that
leaves you wondering why you've
still got nothing even when you've
got it.

FRANK

Did you ever consider taking a
course in politics?

RITA

Politics? Go away, I hate politics.
I'm just telling you about how
things are. You know what I learn
from you about art and literature,
it feeds me, inside. I can get
through the rest of the week if I
know I've got coming here to look
forward to.

(beat)

Denny tried to stop me coming
tonight. He tried to get me to go
to the pub with him and his
friends. He hates me coming here.
It's like a drug addict. They hate
it when one of them tries to break
away. It makes me stronger coming
here. That's what Denny's afraid
of.

FRANK

"Only connect"

RITA

Oh no! Not Forster again!

FRANK

"Only connect." You see what you've been doing?

RITA

Just telling you about home.

FRANK

Yes, and connecting. Your dresses/society at large/consumerism/drugs and addiction/you and your husband. Connecting.

RITA

Oh.

FRANK

You see?

RITA

And - and in that book - no one connects.

FRANK

Yes! Irony.

RITA

Is that it? Is that all it means?

FRANK

Not *all* of it but yes, that's the hub of it.

RITA

Why didn't you just explain it to me right from the start?

FRANK

I could have, but you'll have a much better understanding of something if you discover it in your own terms.

RITA

Aren't you clever.

FRANK

Brilliant in fact. Now, *Peer Gynt*.

Rita returns ~~back to her desk, sits and looks back~~ to her paper. Frank goes back to her marking. Rita takes her work seriously and writes. When she is done she gets up and presents her work, putting it in front of Frank's writing. He looks up at her.

RITA
I've done it.

FRANK
You've done it?

Rita steps back. Frank sits up and reads.

FRANK (CONT'D)
In attempting to resolve the staging difficulties in a production of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, I would present it as a radio play because, as Ibsen himself said, he wrote the play as a play for voices, never intending it to go on in a theatre. So if they had the radio in his day that's where he would have done it.

Frank looks to Rita. She is bursting proud. Frank looks at her. He has much more work to do with her.

Blackout.

SCENE FOUR

Rita stands at the window with her outdoor coat, gazing out the window.

Frank stands at the student table.

FRANK
What's wrong? You know this is getting a bit wearisome. When you come to this room you'll do anything except start work immediately. Couldn't you just come in prepared to work?

Rita does not respond. Frank waits. Still no response.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Where's your essay?

RITA
I haven't got it.

FRANK
You haven't done it.

RITA
I said I haven't got it.

FRANK
You've lost it?

RITA
No.

FRANK
Don't tell me. Last night, while you were asleep, a couple of Princeton Phd candidates broke into your apartment and appropriated your essay for their own dubious ends.

Still not getting a reaction from Rita.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Rita.

RITA
It's burnt.

FRANK
Burnt?

Rita turns to face him.

RITA
So are all the Chekhov books you lent me. Denny burnt all my books. All my papers.

FRANK
Oh no Rita.

RITA
I'm sorry. I'll buy you some more.

FRANK
I wasn't referring to the books. Forget the books.

Rita takes off coat on chair to beg

①① — RITA
Why can't he just let me get on with my learning? You'd think I was having an affair the way he behaves.

FRANK

And you aren't?

RITA

No! What time have I got for an affair? I'm busy enough finding myself, let alone finding someone else. I don't want anyone else. I've begun to find me. And it's great, you know. It is Frank. It might sound selfish but all I want for right now is what I'm finding inside me.

FRANK

Perhaps your husband thinks you're having an affair with me.

RITA

You're just my teacher. I've told him.

FRANK

You've told him about me? What have you told him?

RITA

I've - I've tried to explain to him how you give me room to breathe. You just, like feed me without expecting anything in return.

FRANK

And what did he say to that?

RITA

He didn't. I was out for a while. When I came back he'd burnt my books and papers, most of them. I said to him, you idiot, even if I was having an affair there's no point burning my books, is there. I'm not sleeping with Anton Chekhov! He said he wouldn't put it past me to shack up with a foreigner.

FRANK

What are you going to do?

RITA

I'll order some new copies for you and I'll do the essay again.

FRANK

I mean about your husband.

RITA

I've told him, I said, there's no point crying over spilt milk, most of the books are gone, but if you touch my *Peer Gynt* I'll kill you.

FRANK

You're not serious.

RITA

I did. You know, I see him looking at me sometimes, and I know what he's thinking. He's wondering where the girl he married has gone. He even brings me presents sometimes, hoping that the presents will make her come back. But she can't, because she's gone, and I've taken her place.

FRANK

Look, if you want to pack it in ...

Rita stares daggers at him.

FRANK (CONT'D)

When art and literature begin to take the place of life itself, perhaps it's time ...

RITA

But it's not taking the place of life. It's giving me life. Coming here, doing this, it's given me more life than I've had in years, and he should be able to see that. And I don't want to come here and talk about him.

(trying to change the subject)

Why has Chekhov a comic genius?

FRANK

Rita. Don't you think that for tonight we could give the class a miss?

RITA

No, I want to know. I've got to do this.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

He can burn my books and papers but
if it's all in my head than he
can't touch it.

FRANK

Let's leave it for tonight. Let's
go to the pub and drink beer and
talk.

RITA

I've got to do this, Frank. I've
got to. I want to talk about
Chekhov.

Frank recognizes her determination. He goes to the bookshelf.

FRANK

Ok. Chekhov. C for Chekhov. We'll
talk about Chekhov and pretend this
is the pub.

RITA

(looking past all the
books)

Why do you keep your bottles hidden
behind there?

FRANK

A little arrangement I have with my
employer. It's called discretion.
They didn't tell me to stop
drinking, they told me to stop
displaying the signs.

RITA

Did you drink when you were a poet?

FRANK

Some. Not as much as now.

RITA

Why did you stop being a poet?

FRANK

That is a pub question.

RITA

Well. I thought we were pretending
this was the pub.

FRANK

In which we would discuss Chekhov

RITA

Well, Chekhov is next. Go on, why did you stop?

FRANK

(sighing)

I didn't stop, Rita, so much as realize I never was. I'd simply got it wrong. Instead of creating poetry I spent - oh - years trying to create literature.

RITA

But - but I thought that's what poets did, you know, create literature.

FRANK

No, no. Poets should confine themselves to creating poetry. Poets should do their damndest not to believe in literature.

RITA

I don't understand that.

FRANK

One day, Rita, you will.

RITA

① Sometimes I wonder if I'll ever understand any of it. It's like starting over again, you know, with a different language. Like I read that Chekhov play and I thought it was so sad, so tragic. People committing suicide and the Constantin kids trying to produce his masterpiece while they're all laughing at him? It is tragic. But then I read that blurb about it and everyone's going on about Chekhov being this "comic genius."

Frank leave bottle on table

FRANK

② Yes, but they don't mean comedy like - erm - well, it's not jokes, gags. It's not stand up comedy. Have you ever seen Chekhov in the theatre?

RITA

No. Does he go?

FRANK
Have you ever been to the theatre?

RITA
No.

FRANK
You should, you should go.

RITA
Hey, why don't we go tonight?

FRANK
Me go to the theatre? Heavens no, I
detest the theatre.

RITA
Well, why are you sending me?

FRANK
Because you want to know.

RITA
Come on, come to the theatre with
me. We'll have a laugh. Come on,
we'll call Julia.

Rita picks up the receiver.

RITA (CONT'D)
Come on, what's your number?

Taking the receiver out of Rita's hand and putting it back.

FRANK
We will not ring Julia. Anyway,
Julia's out tonight.

RITA
So what will you do, spend the
entire night in some bar?

FRANK
Yes.

RITA
① Come with me Frank, you'll have a
better time than you will at a bar.

Frank thinks about it for a time.

FRANK
What is it you want to see?

RITA

The Importance of Being ... what's his name.

FRANK

The Importance? It's not on at the moment.

RITA

It is. I passed the church hall on the bus and there was a poster ...

FRANK

An amateur production!?

RITA

What?

FRANK

Are you suggesting I miss a night drinking alone to watch The Importance of Being Earnest played by a bunch of bloody amateurs in a church hall?

RITA

It doesn't matter who's doing it! It's the same play, isn't it?

FRANK

I wouldn't be so sure of that, Rita ...

RITA

Oh come on. Hurry up. I'm so excited. I've never seen a live play before.

They both grab their things to leave the room.

FRANK

And there's no guarantee you'll see a "live" play tonight.

RITA

Why? Just because they're amateurs? You've got to give them a chance, Frank. They have to learn somewhere. And anyway, they might be good.

Frank just stares at her in silence. Rita opens the door.

RITA (CONT'D)

Oh, you're an awful snob, aren't you? Have you seen it before?

FRANK

Of course I have.

RITA

Well don't go spoiling it for me.

① Rita exits. Frank follows.

② Blackout.

SCENE FIVE

③ Frank enters with a bag lunch. He sits at his table, takes out a sandwich and opens a book - Rubyfruit Jungle. He has marked a spot, halfway through, and continues to read.

④ Rita bursts into the room, out of breath from running.

Frank drops his sandwich and in a panic, hides the book.

⑤ FRANK

What are you doing here? It's Thursday in the middle of the day ...

RITA

I know I shouldn't be here, it's my lunch hour. But listen. I've got to tell someone, have you got a few minutes, can you spare ...

FRANK

Certainly Rita, what is it?

RITA

I had to come and tell you Frank. Last night, I went to the theatre! A proper one, a professional theatre!

FRANK

Oh, goodness! You had me worried. I thought it was something serious.

RITA

It was, it was Shakespeare. I thought it was going to be dead boring but it wasn't.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

It was brilliant. I'm gonna do an essay on it.

FRANK

Which one was it?

RITA

Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a
poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon
the stage
And then is heard no more. It is
tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and
fury.
Signifying nothing.

FRANK

Ah, *Romeo and Juliet*.

RITA

Frank, be serious. I learnt that today from the book. Look, I went out and bought the book. Isn't it great? What I couldn't get over is how exciting it was. Wasn't his wife a cow, eh? And that fantastic bit where he meets Macduff and he thinks he's all invincible. I was the edge of my seat at that bit. I wanted to shout out and tell Macbeth, warn him.

FRANK

(grimacing)
You didn't, did you?

RITA

Nah. You can't do that in a theatre, can you. It was brilliant though. It was like a thriller.

FRANK

Well, you'll have to go and see more Shakespeare.

RITA

I'm going to. Macbeth's a tragedy, isn't it?

FRANK

Yes, it is.

RITA

Right.

(a long pause. Awkward
moment with nothing more
to say)

Well, I just had tell someone who'd
understand.

FRANK

I am honoured you chose me.

RITA

opens door
I better get back. I've left a
customer in the shop. If I don't
get a move on there'll be another
tragedy.

FRANK

No. There won't be a tragedy.

RITA

Oh yes there will. I know this
woman, she's super fussy. If her
low lights don't come out right
there'll be blood and guts
everywhere.

FRANK

Which might be quite tragic but it
won't be a tragedy.

RITA

What?

FRANK

Well, look. The tragedy of the
drama has nothing to do with the
sort of tragic event you're talking
about. Macbeth is flawed by his
ambition, yes?

RITA

Shuts door
Yeah. Go on.

FRANK

Well, you see, it's a flaw which
forces him to take the inevitable
steps towards his doom. You see?
Whereas, Rita, a woman's hair being
ruined, or - you know, the sort of
thing you read in the paper that's
reported as being tragic - "Man
killed by falling tree," that is
not a tragedy.

RITA

It is for the poor fool under the tree.

FRANK

① Yes, it's tragic, absolutely tragic. But it's not a tragedy in the way that Macbeth is a tragedy. You see, in dramatic terms, tragedy is something that is absolutely inevitable, preordained almost. Now, look, even without ever having heard the story of Macbeth you wanted to shout out, to warn him and prevent him from going on, didn't you? But you wouldn't have been able to stop him, would you?

RITA

No.

FRANK

And why is that?

RITA

Cuz they would have thrown me out of the theatre.

FRANK

No, no. What I mean is that your warning would have been ignored. He's warned in the play, constantly warned. But he can't go back. He still treads the path to doom. But, you see, the poor old fellow under the tree hasn't arrived there by following any inevitable steps, has he.

RITA

No.

FRANK

There's no particular flaw in his character that has dictated his end. If he'd been warned of the consequences of standing beneath that particular tree, he wouldn't have done it, would he. Understand?

RITA

So - Macbeth brings it on himself.

②

FRANK

Yes! You see, he goes blindly on and on with every step, spinning one more piece of thread which will eventually make up the network of his own tragedy. You see that?

RITA

I think so. I'm not used to thinking like this.

FRANK

It's quite easy, Rita.

RITA

① It is for you. I just thought it was an exciting story. But the way you tell it you make me see all sorts of things in it. It's fun, tragedy. Isn't it.

(indicating out the window)
All them out there. They know all about that sort of thing, don't they?

FRANK

Look, what are you doing for lunch?

RITA

Lunch?

(panics)
Oh no! I forgot about my customer again! She only wanted low lights - now she'll come out looking like she's got laser lights!

FRANK

② OK, you go. But wait. What are you doing on Saturday?

RITA

I work.

FRANK

When you finish work?

RITA

I don't know.

FRANK

I want you to come over to the house. Julia's organized a few people to come around for dinner.

RITA
And you want me to come?

FRANK
Yes.

RITA
Why?

FRANK
Why do you think?

RITA
I don't know.

FRANK
Because you might enjoy it.

RITA
Oh.

A long pause.

FRANK
So you'll come then?

RITA
If you want.

FRANK
What do you want?

RITA
All right, I'll come.

FRANK
Will you bring Denny?

RITA
I don't know if he'll come.

FRANK
Well ask him.

RITA
All right.

Another long awkward silence.

FRANK
What's wrong?

RITA
What am I going to wear?

Blackout.

SCENE SIX

Frank sits on the student table. Rita sits in Frank's chair.

FRANK

Now I don't mind. Two empty seats at the dinner table means more wine for me. But Julia - Julia is the stage manager type. If we're having eight people to dinner she expects to see eight. She likes order - probably why she took me on - it gives her a lot of practice - and having to cope with six instead of eight was extremely hard work on Julia. I'm not saying that I needed any sort of apology. You don't turn up, that's up to you, but...

RITA

I did apologise.

FRANK

"Sorry couldn't come," scribbled on the back of your essay and thrust through the mail box? Rita, that's hardly an apology.

RITA

What does the word "sorry" mean if it's not an apology? When I told Denny we were going to your place he went nuts. We had a big fight about it.

FRANK

I'm sorry. I didn't realize. But look, couldn't you have explained? Couldn't you have said that was the reason?

RITA

No. Cuz that wasn't the reason. I told Denny if he wasn't gonna go I was gonna go on my own. And I tried to. All day Saturday, all day in the shop I was thinking what to wear. Got home, tried on all kinds of dresses. Everything looked awful.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

And all the time I'm trying to think of things I can say, what I can talk about. And I can't remember if it's Wilde who's witty and Shaw who was Shavian or who the heck wrote Howard's End.

FRANK

Rita, stop.

RITA

Then I got the wrong bus to your house. It took me ages to find it. Then I walked up your drive and I saw all of you through the window, sipping drinks and talking and laughing. And I couldn't come in.

FRANK

Of course you could.

RITA

I couldn't! I'd bought the wrong sort of wine. When I was in the off license I knew I was buying the wrong stuff. But I didn't know which was the right wine.

FRANK

Rita, I wanted you to come. You weren't expected to dress up or by wine.

RITA

If you go out to dinner, don't you dress up? Don't you take wine?

FRANK

Yes, but ...

RITA

Well?

FRANK

Well what?

RITA

Well, you wouldn't take sparkling wine, would you?

FRANK

Does it matter what I do? It wouldn't have mattered if you'd walked in with a bottle of Spanish plonk.

Frank freezes.

RITA

And it was Spanish.

FRANK

Why couldn't you relax? It wasn't a fancy dress party. You could have come as yourself. Don't you realize how people would have seen you if you'd just - just breezed in? They would have seen someone who is funny, delightful, charming ...

RITA

But I don't want to be charming and delightful. Funny. What's funny? I don't want to be funny. I want to talk seriously with the rest of you, I don't want to spend the night making jokes because that's the only way I can get into the conversation. I didn't want to come to your house just to play court jester.

FRANK

You weren't being asked to play that role. I just - wanted you to be yourself.

RITA

But I don't want to be myself. Me? What's me? Some stupid woman who gives us all a laugh because she thinks she can learn, because she thinks that one day she'll be like the rest of them, talking seriously, confidently, with knowledge, live a civilized life. Well, she can't be like that really but bring her in because she's good for a laugh.

FRANK *stands*

(erupting)

① If you believe that's why you were invited, to be laughed at, then you can get out of here right now. You were invited because I wished to have your company and if you can't believe that then I suggest you stop visiting me.

RITA

I'm all right with you, here in this room. But when I saw those people you were with I couldn't come in. I would have seized up. Because I'm a freak. I can't talk to the people I live with any more. And I can't talk to the like of them on Saturday, or them out there, because I can't learn the language. I'm an alien. I went back to the pub where Denny was, and my mother, and my sister and all our friends. I decided I wasn't coming here again. They were all singing some song they learnt from the juke box and I stood there and thought, what in the world am I trying to do? Why don't I just pack it in. Stay in this pub and join the singing?

FRANK

And why don't you?

RITA

② You think I can, don't you? Just because you pass by a pub and hear us singing you think we're all OK. My mom started crying and everyone just said she had too much to drink but on the way home I asked her why. "Why are you crying mom?" She said "because we could sing songs better than those. That's why I'm back. And that's why I'm staying."

Blackout.

SCENE SEVEN

③ Frank is marking papers at his desk.

① Rita enters, carrying a large garbage bag filled. Frank is focused on his paper and does not look up.

FRANK

One second.

(finishes writing a
comment, puts the paper
aside and looks up)

What's that?

RITA

It's my bag. My things.

FRANK

Where are you going?

RITA

My mother's.

FRANK

What's wrong? Rita?

RITA

② I got home from work, he'd packed my bag. He said either I stop coming here or I could get out altogether. It was an ultimatum. I explained to him. I didn't get angry or anything. I just explained to him how I had to do this. But he said it's warped me. He said I'd betrayed him. I suppose I have.

FRANK

How have you betrayed anyone?

RITA

I have. I know he's right. But I couldn't betray myself. He says there's a time for education. And it's not when you're twenty six and married.

FRANK

Where are you going to stay?

RITA

I phoned my mother. She said I could go there for a week. Then I'll get a place. I'm sorry, it's just ...

(She tries to hold it
together but is not doing
a good job)

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

It's all right. I'll be OK. Just,
just give me a minute.

① FRANK

Look, come on, sit down.

She moves away from him to compose herself. *sits on chair*

② RITA

No. What was my *Macbeth* essay like?

FRANK

Forget *Macbeth*.

RITA

Why?

FRANK

Rita!

RITA

No, come on, I want you to tell me
what you thought about it.

FRANK

Rita, given the circumstances I
really don't ...

RITA

It doesn't matter. It doesn't. In
the circumstances I need to go on,
to talk about it and do it. What
was it like? I told you it was no
good. Is it really useless?

FRANK

I - I really don't know what to
say.

RITA

Well, try and think of something.
Go on, I don't mind if you tell me
it was junk. I don't want pity,
Frank. Was it junk?

FRANK

No, no. Not junk.
(standing with the paper in
his hand)
It's a totally honest, passionate
account of your reaction to a play.
It's an unashamedly emotional
statement about a particular
experience.

RITA
Sentimental?

FRANK
No, not at all. It's far too honest
for that. It's almost, well,
moving. But in terms of what you're
asking me to teach you of passing
exams - well -

Frank sighs and stops.

RITA
Say it, go on. Say it!

FRANK
In those terms it's worthless. It
shouldn't be, but it is. In its own
terms it's - it's wonderful Rita.

RITA
It's worthless. You said. And if
it's worthless you've got to tell
me because I want to write essays
like those on there. I want to
know, and pass exams
(pointing out the window)
like they do.

FRANK
But if you're going to write this
sort of stuff you're going to have
to change.

RITA
All right. Tell me how to do it.

FRANK
But I don't know if I want to tell
you, Rita. I don't know that I want
to teach you. What you already have
is valuable.

RITA
Valuable? What's valuable? The only
thing I value is coming here,
coming here once a week.

FRANK

But, don't you see. If you're going to write this sort of thing - to pass examinations, you're going to have to suppress - perhaps even abandon your uniqueness. I'm going to have to change you.

RITA

But don't you realize, I want to change! Listen, is this your way of telling me that I can't do it? That I'm no good? If that's what you're telling me I'll go now. I'll leave.

stand

FRANK

No, no. No, of course you're good enough.

RITA

See I know it's difficult for you with someone like me. But you've got to keep telling me and then I'll start to take it in. You see, with me you've got to be dead firm. You won't hurt my feelings. If I do something that's crap,

(holds up her essay)

I don't want pity, you just tell me "that's crap" and here, it's crap. Right. So we toss it and we start again.

①
*Grab essay
 from Frank
 return ②*

Rita rips the essay in half and reaches out to Frank.

Frank hands her a pad and a pen. She takes it and seats herself at the student table and starts to write.

Blackout.

End of Act One

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

③

Frank is sitting at his desk typing. He pauses, take a sip from teh mug at his side, looks at his watch and then continues typing.

④

Rita bursts through the door. She is dressed in 'new' second hand clothes.

RITA

Frank!

She twirls to show off her new clothes.

FRANK

(smiling)

And what is this vision, returning from the city? Welcome back.

RITA

Frank, it was fantastic! Honest, it was - oh!

FRANK

What are you talking about, London or summer school?

RITA

Both. A crowd of us stuck together all week. We had a great time. Up late every night, we stayed up talking, we went all round London, went to theatres, bought all sorts of second hand stuff in the markets. Oh, Frank, it was - oh!

FRANK

So you won't have had time to do any actual work there?

RITA

Work? We never stopped. Lashing us with it they were. Another essay, lash, do it again, lash. Another lecture, smack. It was so good though. You know at first I was so scared. I didn't know anyone. I was going to come home. But the first afternoon I was standing in the library, you know, looking at the books, pretending I was so clever. Anyway, this tutor comes up to me. He looked at the book in my hand and he said, "Ah, are you fond of Ferlinghetti?" It was right on the tip of my tongue to say, "Only when it's served with Parmesan cheese." But Frank, I didn't. I held it back and I heard myself saying "Actually, I'm not too familiar with the American poets." Frank, you would have been so proud of me.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

He started talking to me about the Beat poets. We sat around for ages. And he wasn't even one of my official tutors, you know. We had to go to this big hall for a lecture, there must have been two thousand of us in there. After he'd finished his lecture this professor asked if anyone had a question. And Frank, I stood up. Honest to God, I stood up, and everyone was looking at me. I don't know what possessed me, I was going to sit down again, but two thousand people had seen me stand up, so I did it, I asked him the question.

stands

A long beat before Frank asks.

FRANK

Well?

RITA

Well what?

FRANK

What was your question?

RITA

Oh, I don't know. I forget now, because after that I was asking questions all week, you couldn't keep me down. I think that first question was about Chekhov. Because you know I'm an expert at Chekhov now.

sits

He smiles.

RITA (CONT'D)

Hey, what was France like? Go on, tell me all about it.

FRANK

There isn't a lot to tell.

RITA

Ah, go on, tell me about it. I've never been to France. Tell me what it was like.

FRANK

Well, it was rather hot. I've brought you back something.

Frank reaches under the desk and produces a duty free pack of 200 Gauloise cigarettes.

^{given to} RITA
I've ~~packed it in~~. Did you do much drinking over there?

Frank puts the pack down.

FRANK
Ah, a little.

RITA
Did you write?

FRANK
A little.

RITA
Will you show it to me?

FRANK
Perhaps. One day, perhaps.

RITA
So, you wrote a bit and drank a bit. Is that all?

FRANK
(matter of factly)
Julia left me.

RITA
What?

FRANK
Yes. But not because of the obvious. No, it had nothing whatsoever with the ratatouille. It was actually caused by something called ~~oeufs en cocotte~~ ^{eggs}.

RITA
What?

FRANK
Eggs, my dear, eggs. Nature in her wisdom, cursed me with a dislike for the egg, be it cocotte, Florentine, Benedict or plain hard boiled. Julia insisted that nature was wrong. I defended nature and Julia left.

RITA

Because of eggs?

FRANK

Well, let's say it began with eggs. Anyway, that's most of what happened in France. But now the holiday's over. You're back. Julia's back.

RITA

Is she? Is she all right?

FRANK

Perfect. I get the feeling we shall be together for ever. Or until she discovers ~~oeufs a la crecy~~. *for omelette*

omelette RITA

~~Oeufs a la crecy?~~ Does that mean eggs? Trish was going on about those. ~~Is that all it is?~~ Eggs?

FRANK

Trish?

RITA

Trish, my roommate, Trish. Gosh, is it that long since I've seen you Frank? She moved into the place with me just before I went to summer school.

FRANK

Ah. Is she a good roommate?

RITA

She's great. You know, she's so classy. You know, like she's got taste. Like you, Frank, she's just got it. Everything in the place is just perfect, just books and plants everywhere. Do you know something, Frank? I'm having the time of my life, I am, you know. I even feel - I feel young, you know, like them down there.

FRANK

My dear, twenty six is hardly old.

RITA

I know that. But I mean, I feel young like them. I can be young.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)
 (she goes to her bag)
 Oh. Listen.
 (pulling a box out of her
 purse)
 I got you a present - it isn't much
 but I thought
 (she passes it to him)
 Here.

Frank puts on his glasses, gets the scissors out of the pot on the desk, cuts the string and opens the box to reveal an expensive pen.

RITA (CONT'D)
 See what it says - it's engraved.

FRANK
 "Must only be used for poetry. By
 strictest order - Rita."

RITA
 I thought it would be like a gentle
 hint.

FRANK
 Gentle?

RITA
 Every time you try and write a
 letter or note with that pen - it
 won't work. You'll read the
 inscription and it'll make you feel
 guilty - because you're not writing
 poetry.

FRANK
 (quietly)
 Thank you, Rita.

RITA
 It's a pleasure. So come on, now.
 (1) — What are we doing this term? Let's
 do a good poet. Come on, let's go
 and have the tutorial down there.

Rita points out the window.

FRANK
 (appalled)
 Down where?

RITA
 Down there, on the grass. Come on.

FRANK

On the grass? Nobody sits out there
this time of year.

RITA

They do - there's some of them out
there now.

FRANK

Well, they'll all have wet bums.

RITA

What's so bad about a wet bum? You
can sit on a bench. Come on.

FRANK

Rita, I absolutely protest.

RITA

Why?

FRANK

Like Dracula. I have an aversion to
sunlight.

RITA

(sighs)

All right. Let's open a window at
least.

FRANK

If you must open a window then go
on, open it.

Rita attempts to open the window but it won't open.

RITA

It won't budge.

FRANK

I'm not surprised, my dear. It
hasn't been opened for generations.

RITA

(giving up)

You need air in here Frank. The
room needs airing.

Rita opens the door.

FRANK

This room does not need air, thank
you very much.

RITA

Of course it does. A room is like a plant.

①

FRANK

A room is like a plant?

RITA

Yeah. It needs air

FRANK

And water, too, presumably?

(Frank shuts the door)

If you're going to make an analogy why don't we take it the whole way? Let's get a watering can and water the floor, bring it two tons of soil and a bag of fertilizer. Maybe we could take cuttings and germinate other little rooms.

RITA

Go away, you're mental.

FRANK

You said it, distinctly, you said, a room is like a plant.

RITA

Well, any analogy will break down eventually.

FRANK

Yes. And some will break down sooner than others.

②

Frank goes to book shelf and looks for a book.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Look, come on. A great poet you wanted - we have one for you. I was going to introduce you to him earlier.

Frank pulls books and some fall to one side, revealing a bottle of whiskey which has been hidden behind it.

put bottle on table

FRANK (CONT'D)

Now where is he?

③

Rita picks out the bottle.

RITA

Are you still on this stuff?

FRANK

Did I ever say I wasn't?

RITA

(putting the bottle down)

No, but ...

FRANK

But what?

RITA

Why do you do it when you've got so much going for you Frank?

FRANK

It is indeed because I have "so much going for me" that I do it. Life is such a rich and frantic whirl that I need the drink to help me step delicately through it.

RITA

It will kill you, Frank.

FRANK

Rita, I thought you weren't interested in reforming me.

RITA

I'm not. It's just ...

FRANK

What?

RITA

Just that I thought you'd start reforming yourself ...

FRANK

Under your influence?

Rita shrugs.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Yes. But Rita, if I repent and reform, what do I do when your influence is no longer here? What do I do when, in appalling sobriety, I watch you walk away and disappear, your influence gone forever?

RITA

Who says I'm gonna disappear?

FRANK

Oh you will, Rita. You've got to.

RITA

Why have I got to? This course could go on for years. And when I've got through this one I might even get into the proper university here.

FRANK

And we'll all live happily ever after? Your going is as inevitable as - as ...

RITA

Macbeth?

FRANK

As tragedy, yes. But it will not be tragedy, because I will be glad to see you go.

RITA

Thank you very much. Will you really?

FRANK

Be glad to see you go? Well, I certainly don't want to see you stay in a room like this for the rest of your life. Now.

Frank goes back to looking for the book.

RITA

You can be a real misery sometimes, can't you? I was so happy a minute ago and then you start and make me feel like I'm having a bad night in a mortuary.

Frank finds the book he has been looking for and moves towards Rita with it.

FRANK

Well, here's something to cheer you up. Here's our 'dead good' poet - Blake.

RITA

Blake? William Blake?

FRANK

The man himself. You will understand Blake. They overcomplicate him, Rita, but you will understand. You'll love the man.

RITA

I know.

FRANK

What?
(opening the book)
Look, look. Read this.

Frank finds a page and hands the book to Rita. He sits in his desk chair.

Rita looks at the poem, smiles, shuts the book and recites from memory.

RITA

O Rose, thou art sick!
The invisible worm
That flies in the night,
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

FRANK

You know it!

RITA

Yes
(tossing the book aside)
We did him at summer school.

FRANK

Blake at summer school? You weren't supposed to do Blake at summer school, were you?

RITA

No. We had this lecturer though, he was a real Blake freak. He was on about it every day. Everything he said, honest, everything was related to Blake - he couldn't get his dinner in the refectory without relating it to Blake - Blake and Chips. He was good though.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

On the last day we brought him a present, and on it we put that poem, you know, "The Sick Rose." But we changed it about a bit. It was ... ummm ...

(trying to remember)

O Rose, though aren't sick Just mangled and dead Since the rotten gardener Pruned off thy head.

(something)

We thought he might be angry but he wasn't. He loved it. He said, what was it? He said, "Parody is merely a compliment masquerading as humour."

FRANK

(putting the book back on the shelf where it belongs)

So, you've already done Blake? You've covered all the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*?

RITA

Of course. You don't do Blake without doing *Innocence and Experience*, do you?

FRANK

No. Of course.

Blackout.

SCENE TWO

① Frank is sitting at his desk, marking an essay. *a pile of essays.*

There is a knock at the door.

FRANK

Come in.

Rita enters, closes the door, goes to the table and dumps her bag on it. She sits at her chair.

RITA

(in an accent)
Hello, Frank.

FRANK

(without looking up)
Hello. Rita, you're late.

RITA

I know Frank, I'm terribly sorry.
It was unavoidable.

FRANK

(looking up, confused)
Was it really? What's wrong with
your voice?

RITA

Nothing is wrong with it, Frank. I
have merely decided to talk
properly. As Trish says there is
not a lot of point in discussing
beautiful literature in an ugly
voice.

FRANK

You haven't got an ugly voice. At
least you *didn't* have. Talk
properly.

RITA

I am talking properly. I have to
practise constantly, in everyday
situations.

FRANK

You mean you're going to talk like
that for the rest of this tutorial?

RITA

Trish says that no matter how
difficult I may find it I must
persevere.

FRANK

Well, will you kindly tell Trish
that I am not giving a tutorial to
a parrot.

RITA

I am not a parrot.

FRANK

(appealing)
Rita, stop it!

RITA

But Frank, I have to persevere in
order that I shall.

FRANK

Rita! Just be yourself.

RITA
 (reverting to normal voice)
 I am being myself.

Rita stands up and moves her chair, turning her back to Frank.

FRANK
 What's that?

RITA
 What?

FRANK
 On your back.

RITA
 (looking and noticing)
 Oh, it's grass.

FRANK
 Grass?

RITA
 Yes. I got here early today. I started talking to some students down on the lawn.

FRANK
 You were talking to students. Down there?

RITA
 Don't sound so surprised. I can talk now, you know, Frank.

FRANK
 I'm not surprised. Well - you used to be quite wary of them, didn't you?

RITA
 God knows why. For students they ~~don't half~~ come out with some *say some* rubbish, you know.

FRANK
 You're telling me?

RITA

I only got talking to them in the first place because as I was walking past I heard one of them saying as a novel he preferred *Lady Chatterly* to *Sons and Lovers*. I thought, I can keep walking and ignore it, or I can put him straight. So I put him straight. I walked over and said, "Excuse me but I couldn't help overhearing the rubbish you were spouting about Lawrence." You should have seen the faces on them, Frank. I said trying to compare *Chatterly* with *Sons and Lovers* is like trying to compare sparkling wine and champagne. The next thing is there's this heated discussion, with me right in the middle of it.

FRANK

I thought you said the student claimed to "prefer" *Chatterly* as a novel.

RITA

He did.

FRANK *incredulous*

So he wasn't actually suggesting that it was superior.

RITA

Not at first - but then it did. He walked right into it.

FRANK

And you finished him off, did you, Rita?

RITA

Frank, he was asking for it. He was an idiot. His argument just crumbled. It wasn't just me. Everyone agreed with me.

Frank smiles and goes back to his essay.

RITA (CONT'D)

There was this really mad one with them.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

I've only been talking to them for five minutes and he's inviting me to go abroad with them all. They're going to the south of France over the Christmas holidays, backpacking.

FRANK

You can't go.

RITA

What?

FRANK

(looking up from his paper)
You can't go - you've got your exams.

RITA

My exams are before Christmas.

FRANK

(looking back down at his paper)
Well, you've got your results to wait for ...

RITA

No. I couldn't go anyway.

FRANK

(stopping, but not looking up)
Why?

RITA

It's all right for them. They can just jump into a van and go away. But I can't.

(beat)

Tiger they call him, he's the mad one. His real name's Tyson but they all call him Tiger.

FRANK

(looking up and pointing to his essay)
Is there any point me going on with this?

RITA

What?

FRANK

Is there much point in working towards an examination if you're going to fall in love and set off for the South of -?

RITA

(shocked)

What?! Fall in love? With who? My gosh, Frank, I've just been talking to some students. I've heard of match making but this is ridiculous.

FRANK

(looking back to his essay)

All right, but please stop burbling on about Mr. Tyson.

RITA

I haven't been burbling on.

(beat)

Is that essay mine?

FRANK

Yes.

RITA

(beat)

What's it like?

FRANK

(giving up and tossing it on the pile of other essays)

Oh, it - well, it wouldn't look out of place with the rest of these.

RITA

Honest?

Frank looks at her squarely, then smiles.

FRANK

Honest.

Rita reacts.

Blackout.

① SCENE THREE

Rita is sitting in the armchair by the window, reading a heavy tome with her bag left of the chair. There is the sound of muffled mumbling from behind the door.

Frank enters, carrying his briefcase. He is very drunk.

② FRANK

Who needs you! Forget you!

(sees Rita)

Who needs them, eh Rita? I don't need them.

Frank puts his briefcase on the desk, opens it, removes a half empty whiskey bottle and takes it to the bookshelf.

③ RITA

Who?

FRANK

You'd tell them, wouldn't you?
You'd tell them where to get off.

RITA

Tell who, Frank?

FRANK

Yes. Students. Students reported me. Me. Complained. You know something? They complained and it was perhaps the best lecture I've ever given.

Frank finds a spot to put the whiskey and covers it with a book.

RITA

Were you drunk?

FRANK

Drunk? I was glorious. Fell of the rostrum twice.

RITA

Will they fire you?

Frank finds a nice place on the table to lie down. *Use a book*

④ FRANK

Fire me? No. That would involve making a decision. Drunk is all right. To get fired I'd have to commit some kind of assault.

(MORE)

for a pillow.

FRANK (CONT'D)

And not just on the students. That would only amount to a slight misdemeanour. For dismissal I'd have to decapitate the dean.

(beat)

They suggested a sabbatical for a year - or ten. Europe or Asia. I suggested Australia might be more apt. But the allusion was lost on them.

RITA

Frank, you're insane. Even if you don't think about yourself, what about the students?

FRANK

What about the students?

RITA

Well it's hardly fair on them if their lecturer's so drunk that he's falling off the rostrum.

The room is beginning to spin for Frank. He has to sit up.

① —————
FRANK

I might have fallen off, my dear, but I went down talking. And came up talking. Never missed a syllable. What have they to complain about?

RITA

Maybe they did it for your own good.

FRANK

Or maybe they did it because they're a crowd of mealy-mouthed jerks who wouldn't know a poet if you beat them over the head with one.

Frank stands up and crosses to his desk.

② —————
FRANK (CONT'D)

"Assonance," I said to them, "Assonance means getting the rhyme wrong"

(stumbles toward Rita
before grabbing his desk
and leading himself over
to his chair)

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

They looked at me as though I'd defecated on Wordsworth's tomb.

Rita stands and crosses to the door.

RITA

Look, Frank. We'll talk about the Blake essay next week, OK?

FRANK

Where are you going? We've got a tutorial.

RITA

Frank, you're not fit for a tutorial. I'll leave it with you and we can talk about it next week. OK?

Frank crosses to the table.

FRANK

No. No. You must stay. Watch this. Sober. Sober. Come on.

Frank points to his chair. She looks at him for a moment, then gives in and crosses to sit in his chair.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You can't go. I want to talk to you about this.

Frank crosses to his briefcase and takes out her essay. He drops it on her.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Rita, what's this?

RITA

Is there something wrong with it?

FRANK

It's just, look, this passage about "The Blossom" - you seem to assume that the poem is about sexuality.

RITA

It is!

FRANK

Is it?

RITA

Well, it's certainly like a richer poem, isn't it? If it's interpreted in that way.

FRANK

Richer? Why richer? We discussed it.

(turns away from her and crosses to centre)

The poem is a simple, uncomplicated piece about a blossom, as if seen from a child's point of view.

RITA

(shrugging)

In one sense. But it's like, like the poem about the rose, isn't it? It becomes a more rewarding poem when you see that it works on a number of levels.

FRANK

(turns to face her)

Rita, "The Blossom" is a simple, uncomplicated ...

RITA

Yeah, yeah. That's what you say, Frank. But Trish and me and some others were talking about it the other night, about Blake, and what came out of our discussion was that apart from the simple surface value of Blake's poetry there's always a like, a - kind of a ...

FRANK

Go on.

RITA

Like a vein. Of concealed meaning. I mean if that poem's only about a blossom then it's not much of a poem, is it?

FRANK

So? You think it gains from being interpreted in this way?

RITA

(defiant)

Is my essay wrong then?

FRANK

It's not - wrong. But I don't like it.

RITA

You're being subjective.

Frank reaches back to the chair by the window and sits on an arm.

FRANK

Yes, yes I suppose I am.

RITA

If it was in an exam what sort of mark would it get?

FRANK

A good one.

RITA

Well, what are you saying then?

FRANK

(shrugging)

What I'm saying is that it's up to the minute, quite acceptable, trendy stuff about Blake. But there's nothing of you in there.

RITA

Or maybe, Frank, you mean there's nothing of your views in there.

After a long moment to think about it.

FRANK

Maybe that is what I mean.

RITA

But when I first came to you, Frank, you didn't give me any views. You let me find my own.

FRANK

And I still value your views. But, Rita, these aren't your views.

RITA

But you told me not to have a view. You told me to be objective, to consult recognised authorities. Well, that's what I've done.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

I've talked to other people, read other books and after consulting a wide variety of opinion I came up with those conclusions.

Frank takes a long large sigh.

FRANK

Yes. All right.

RITA

(standing up for herself)
Look Frank. I don't have to go along with your views on Blake, you know. I can have a mind of my own, can't I?

FRANK

I sincerely hope so.

RITA

And what's that supposed to mean?

FRANK

It means - it means be careful.

Rita stands.

RITA

(offended)
What do you mean "be careful?" I can look after myself. Just cause I'm learning, just cause I can do it now and read what I want to read and understand without having to come running to you every five minutes you start telling me to be careful.

Rita crosses past the desk to the left of the chair Frank sits on. She awkwardly grabs the bag at his feet.

FRANK

Because. Because - I care for you.
I want you to care for yourself.

He grabs her bag?

RITA

I care for you, Frank. But you've got to - leave me alone a bit. I'm not an idiot now, Frank. I don't need you to hold my hand as much. I can - I can do things on my own more now. And I am careful. I know what I'm doing.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

Just don't - don't keep treating me as though I'm the same as when I first walked in here. I understand now, Frank. I know the difference between - between Thomas Hardy and Rita Mae Brown. And you're still treating me as though I'm hung up on Rubyfruit Jungle.

Rita realizes she may have been too hard on him.

RITA (CONT'D)

You understand, don't you Frank?

FRANK

Entirely, my dear.

RITA

I'm sorry.

FRANK

Not at all.

Rita opens the door to leave.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I got round to reading it you know. Rubyfruit Jungle. It's excellent.

RITA

Oh, go away Frank. Of it's type it's quite interesting but it's hardly excellence.

Rita is out the door.

① Blackout.

SCENE FOUR

② Frank is sitting in his desk chair.

Rita enters and goes to the table. Begins to unpack her bag.

RITA

I know I'm late. I'm sorry.

(turns to look at Frank)

Am I too late? We were talking. I didn't notice the time.

FRANK

Talking?

RITA

Yes. If it means anything we were talking about Shakespeare.

FRANK

Yes. I'm sure you were.

RITA

Am I too late then? All right. I'll be on time next week, I promise.

She starts to pack her bag.

FRANK

Rita. Don't go.

Rita turns to look at Frank.

RITA

No. Honestly Frank. I know I've wasted your time. I'll see you next week, eh?

FRANK

(seriously)

Rita. Sit down.

Rita sits in the chair beside the door.

FRANK (CONT'D)

When you were so late I phoned the shop.

RITA

Which shop?

FRANK

The hairdresser's shop. Where you work. Or, I should say, worked.

RITA

I haven't worked there for a long time. I work in a bistro now.

FRANK

You didn't tell me.

RITA

Didn't I? I was telling someone.

FRANK

It wasn't me.

RITA

Oh. Sorry.

FRANK

It struck me that there was a time
when you told me everything.

Frank crosses to far left of bookshelf with his mug.

RITA

I thought I had told you.

FRANK

No. Like a drink?

RITA

Who cares if I've left hairdressing
to work in a bistro?

FRANK

(looking through books for
a bottle)

I care. You don't want a drink?
Mind if I do?

RITA

But why do you care about details
like that? It's just boring,
insignificant detail.

FRANK

(pouring himself a drink)

Oh. Is it?

RITA

That's why I couldn't stand being
in a hairdresser's any longer.
Boring irrelevant detail all the
time, on and on - well, I'm sorry
but I've had enough of that. I
don't want to talk about irrelevant
garbage any more.

FRANK

And what do you talk about in your
bistro? Cheers.

RITA

Everything.

FRANK

(Significant shift)

Everything.

①

②
5:15 on
table

RITA

Yes.

FRANK

Ah.

RITA

We talk about what's important, Frank, and we leave out the boring details for those who want them.

FRANK

Is Mr. Tyson one of your customers?

RITA

A lot of students come in. He's one of them. You're not going to give me another warning, are you Frank?

FRANK

Would it do any good?

RITA

Look, for your information I do find Tiger fascinating, like I find a lot of the people I mix with fascinating. They're young, and they're passionate about things that matter. They're not trapped - they're too young for that. And I like to be with them.

Frank crosses back to his desk. Leans against the desk by the window.

FRANK

Perhaps, perhaps you don't want to waste your time coming here any more?

RITA

Don't be stupid. I'm sorry I was late.

(beat)

Look, Frank, I've got to go. I'm meeting Trish at seven. We're going to see a production of *The Seagull*.

FRANK

Yes. Well then, when Chekhov calls.

Rita shakes her head. She knew he would react like this.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You can hardly bear to spend a moment here, can you?

RITA

(standing)

That isn't true. It's just that I've got to go to the theatre.

FRANK

And last week you didn't turn up at all. Just a phone call to say that you had to cancel.

RITA

It's just that - that there are so many things happening now. It's harder.

FRANK

As I said, Rita, if you want to stop coming ...

RITA

Really Frank! I don't want to stop coming here. I've got to come here. What about my exam?

FRANK

(crossing to the other side of the desk)

Oh, I wouldn't worry about that. You'd sail through it anyway. You really don't have to put in the odd appearance out of sentimentality. I'd rather you spared me that.

Frank sits and drinks.

RITA

If you could stop pouring that junk down your throat in the hope that it'll make you feel like a poet you might be able to talk about things that matter instead of where I do or do not work, and then it might be worth coming here.

FRANK

Are you capable of recognising what does or does not matter, Rita?

RITA

I understand literary criticism,
Frank. When I come here that's what
we're supposed to be dealing with.

FRANK

You want literary criticism?

Frank gets up, shoots the rest of the mug, puts it down and
crosses to the bookshelf. He goes to the far end and at the
bottom shelf pulls out two small texts and tosses them to
her.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I want an essay on that by next
week.

RITA

What is it?

FRANK

No sentimentality, no subjectivity.
Just pure criticism. A critical
assessment of a lesser known
English poet.

(beat)

Me.

Rita looks at him and down at the books.

Blackout.

SCENE FIVE

Frank is sitting in the chair by the window with his mug. A
new bottle sits on his desk with an empty one.

A knock at the door.

Frank puts the empty bottle behind the chair.

FRANK

Come in.

Rita enters.

FRANK (CONT'D)

What are you doing here? I'm not
seeing you till next week.

Rita sits in Frank's desk chair.

RITA

Are you sober? Are you?

FRANK

If you mean am I still this side of reasonable comprehension? Then yes.

RITA

Because I want you to hear this when you're sober.

(pulling his books out of her bag)

These are brilliant, Frank, you've got to start writing again. This is brilliant. They're witty. They're profound. Full of style.

FRANK

(sarcastic)

Ah. Tell me again, and again.

RITA

They are, Frank. It isn't only me who thinks so. Me and Trish sat up last night and read them. She agrees with me. Why did you stop writing? Why did you stop writing when you can produce work like this? We stayed up most of the night, just talking about it. At first we just saw it as contemporary poetry in its own right, you know, as something particular to this century but look, Frank, what makes it more - more - what did Trish say? More resonant than - purely contemporary poetry is that you can see in it a direct line through to nineteenth century traditions of - of like wit and classical allusion.

Rita stands.

FRANK

Well. That's, marvelous, Rita. How fortunate I didn't let you see it earlier. Just think if I'd let you see it earlier. Just think if I'd let you see it when you first came here.

RITA

I know. I wouldn't have understood it, Frank.

FRANK

You would have thrown it across the room and dismissed it as a heap of garbage, wouldn't you?

Rita crosses to bookshelf with the books in her hands.

RITA

I know. But I couldn't have understood it then, Frank, because I wouldn't have been able to recognise and understand the allusions.

FRANK

Oh, I've done a fine job on you, haven't I?

RITA

(stops crossing, turns to face him)

It's true, Frank. I can see now.

FRANK

You know, Rita, I think - I think that like you I shall change my name. From now on I shall insist upon being known as Mary. Mary Shelley. Do you understand that allusion, Rita?

RITA

What?

FRANK

She wrote a little Gothic number called Frankenstein.

RITA

So?

Frank struggles to stand up. He approaches her and grabs the books out of her hands.

FRANK

This -
(holding it up in her face)
This, clever, pyrotechnical pile of self conscious allusion is worthless, talentless dreck.
(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

(he lunges in her direction
and she backs up to sit in
the chair)

Are you familiar with that word,
Rita? Dreck? From the Yiddish?
Dung? Stool? Manure? Feces?
Excrement? That's all it is, Rita,
and could be recognised as such by
anyone with a shred of common
sense. It's the sort of thing that
gives publishing a bad name. Wit?
You'll find more wit in the
telephone book, and, probably, more
insight. Its one advantage over the
telephone directory is that it is
easier to rip.

He rips them both in front of her and drops them at her feet.

FRANK (CONT'D)

It is pretentious, characterless,
and without style.

RITA

It's not.

FRANK

Oh, I don't expect you to believe
me, Rita. You recognise the
hallmark of literature now, don't
you.

Frank makes a grand gesture, bowing and waving at the pile of
paper on the floor. Then he goes back to the chair by the
window and pours himself another drink.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Why don't you just go away? I don't
think I can bear it any longer.

RITA

Can't bear what, Frank?

Frank stares into her.

FRANK

You my dear. You.

Rita stares back right into him.

RITA

I'll tell you what you can't bear,
Mr. Self pitying piss artist.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

What you can't bear is that I am educated now. What's up Frank? Don't you like me now that the little girl's grown up, now that you can no longer bounce me on Daddy's knee and watch me stare back in wide eyed wonder at everything he had to say? I'm educated, I've got what you have and you don't like it because you'd rather see me as the peasant I once was. You're like the rest of them. You like to keep your natives thick, because that way they still look charming and delightful. You think you're Zeus coming down to force yourself on the poor girl in the painting? I don't need you.

Rita stands up and throws her bag over her shoulder.

RITA (CONT'D)

I know what clothes to wear, what wine to buy, what plays to see, what papers and books to read. I can do without you.

FRANK

Is that all you wanted? Have you come all this way for so very, very little?

RITA

Oh, it's little to you, isn't it? It's little to you who squanders every opportunity and mocks and takes it for granted.

FRANK

Found a culture have you, Rita? Found a better song to sing, have you? No. You've found a different song, that's all - and on your lips it's shrill and hollow and tuneless. Oh, Rita, Rita.

RITA

Rita?

(scoffs, opens the door and stands in the frame)

Rita? Nobody calls me Rita but you. I dropped that pretentious crap as soon as I saw it for what it was. You stupid - nobody calls me Rita.

FRANK

What is it now, then? Virginia?

Rita exits, slamming the door.

Frank looks into his mug.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Or Charlotte? Or Jane? Or Emily?
Virginia?

Blackout.

SCENE SIX

Frank sits at his desk talking into the phone.

FRANK

Yes. I think she works there. Rita
White. No, no. Sorry - erm. What is
it? Susan White? No? Thanks, thank
you.

(hangs up and dials another
number)

Yes - erm - Trish is it? Yes. Could
you just say that - well - I've -
it's Frank here. Her tutor. Yes.
Well, could you tell her that I've
entered her for her examination.
Yes, you see she doesn't know the
details. Time and where the exam is
being held. Could you tell her to
call in? Please. Yes. Thank you.

Blackout.

SCENE SEVEN

The room is poorly decorated for Christmas. A small tree sits
on Frank's desk and a string of cards hangs over the window.

There is a trunk sitting on the student table and a shelf of
books already empty. Empty bottles sit on the shelf and
table.

Rita enters and shuts the door. She takes an envelope out of
her bag opens it to reveal a Christmas card which she hangs
with the others. She looks around the room as if to say
goodbye and opens the door to leave.

Frank is standing at the door holding a large box. They stare at each other awkwardly for a moment before Frank slips past her to the student table. He makes room for the box on the far left of the table and begins to select books to put in the box.

Rita continues to watch him but Frank continues as if she is not there.

RITA
Merry Christmas, Frank. Have they
fired you?

FRANK
Not quite.

RITA
Well, why are you packing up your
books?

FRANK
Australia. Some weeks ago I made
quite a night of it.

RITA
Did you decapitate the dean?

FRANK
Metaphorically. And as it was
metaphorical the sentence was
reduced from the sack to two years
in Australia. Hardly a reduction in
the sentence really. But ...

RITA
You could pay for you plane ticket
if you returned all these empty
bottles.

FRANK
(looking at all the empty
bottles)
I suppose I could.

RITA
What did Julia say?

FRANK
Bon Voyage

RITA
She's not going with you?

Frank stops with the books. He shakes his head no.

Rita stands on the other end of the table and begins to fill the trunk.

RITA (CONT'D)

What are you going to do?

FRANK

What do you think I'll do? Aussie?
It's paradise for the likes of me.

RITA

Oh, come on, Frank ...

FRANK

It is. Didn't you know the
Australians named their favourite
drink after a literary figure?
Forster's Lager they call it. Of
course they get the spelling wrong
- like you once did.

RITA

Be serious.

FRANK

Rita why did you come back here?

RITA

I came to tell you you're a good
teacher.

(beat)

Thanks for entering me for the
exam.

FRANK

That's all right. I know how much
it had come to mean to you.

Rita puts a book down and crosses to the desk. She pushes the
tree aside and sits on the desk.

RITA

You didn't want me to take it, did
you? You would have loved it if I'd
written "Frank knows all the
answers" across my paper, wouldn't
you? I nearly did. When the
invigilator said, "Begin," I turned
over my paper with the rest of
them, and while they were all
scribbling away against the clock,
I just sat there, looking at the
first question. You know what it
was Frank?

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

"Suggest ways in which one might cope with some of the staging difficulties in a production of *Peer Gynt*."

Frank starts organizing the books in the box.

FRANK

Well you should have no trouble with that.

RITA

I did though. I just sat looking at the paper and thinking about what you had said. I tried to ignore it, to pretend that you were wrong. You think you gave me nothing, did nothing for me. You think I just ended up with a load of quotes and empty phrases. And I did. But that wasn't your fault. I was so hungry. I wanted it all so much that I didn't want it to be questioned. I told you I was stupid. It's like Trish. You know, my room mate. I thought she was so cool and together - and I came home the other night and she'd tried to kill herself. What's all that about? She spends half her life eating wholefoods and health foods to make her live longer and the other half trying to kill herself. I sat looking at the question, and thinking about it all. Then I picked up my pen and started.

FRANK

And you wrote "Do it on the radio?"

RITA

I could have. And you'd have been proud of me if I'd done that and rushed back to tell you, wouldn't you? But I chose not to. I had a choice. I did the exam.

FRANK

I know. A good pass as well.

RITA

Yeah. And it might be worthless in the end. But I had a choice. I chose, me.

(MORE)

RITA (CONT'D)

Because of what you had given me.
I had a choice. I wanted to come
back and tell you that. That you're
a good teacher.

FRANK

(stops organizing books)
You know, I hear very good things
about Australia. The thing is, why
don't you - why don't you come as
well.

RITA

Well look how popular I am. Tiger's
asked me to go to France with his
gang.

FRANK

Will you?

RITA

I don't know. He's a bit of a fool
really. But I've never been to
France. And my mother's invited me
to her place for Christmas.

FRANK

What are you going to do?

RITA

I don't know. I might go to France.
I might go to my mother's. I don't
know. I'll make a decision, I'll
choose. I don't know.

Frank grabs a book off the shelf.

FRANK

Whatever you do, you might as well
take this.

① —————
He holds the book out to her and she crosses toward him to
take it. She reads the spine.

RITA

What?

FRANK

It's, well, it's - I thought it
would make a good gift for an
educated woman friend of mine.

RITA
Collected Works of George Bernard
Shaw?

① ————— FRANK
There's a beautiful play in there.
Pygmalion.

RITA
(smiles)
I've heard of it.

FRANK
That Higgins character though is a
real jerk.

Beat

RITA
All I've ever done is take from
you. I've never given you anything.

FRANK
That's not true. You've ...

RITA
It is true. I never thought there
was anything I could give you. But
there is.

② ————— Rita crosses to Frank's desk.

FRANK
What?

③ ————— Rita grabs his desk chair and pulls it to Centre and stands
behind it.

RITA
Come here. Sit down, Frank.

Frank freezes. What is going on?

RITA (CONT'D)
Sit.

Cautiously, Frank sits. Rita reaches down into her bag and
pulls out a pair of scissors.

RITA (CONT'D)
I'm going to take ten years off
you.

Blackout.