

BELLES

Television play. (Produced BBC2 1983)

by

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1. INT. DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Below ground level, part of a south coast sea-side hotel. Originally intended for storage, it has been roughly converted to be a dressing room. Bare concrete walls partly decorated with old theatre and variety bills. A few faded photos of unknown performers. There is one door with a small step going down into a corridor.

A low ceiling and one window: small, set high on one wall and barred. It opens on to a basement area with a glimpse of the sky beyond - the town's sea-front.

Along the same wall at ceiling height run a cluster of thick hot water pipes. Below them is stacked an assortment of junk: several small rostra, a set of steps, pieces of boarding painted gaudily.

A "Lucky Fortune Wheel" with the name "El Tropicana" picked out on it. An old speaker with a torn front and a microphone stand. A box full of paper chains and artificial flowers - in short, the flotsam of past entertainment.

The wall facing it has two mirrors attached to it and a narrow make-up table beneath. Four metal chairs, a rickety table and a waste-paper bin complete the furniture in the room.

Opening shot: it is late afternoon and raining heavily. The dismal squawking of sea-gulls outside. A little grey light filters in from the window almost reaching as far as the door.

Titles and credits: while we move slowly towards the door, lingering on the faces of forgotten artistes. Then a key turns in the door.

EDDIE'S voice off:

EDDIE'S VOICE:

How did you come - by car or rail?
Well, keep a tight hold on those
returns. (chuckles) Some of us
natives will kill for them . . .

The door opens. Eddie, late fifties, is putting a bunch of keys away.

EDDIE has the remains of boyish good looks and an easy manner, not without charm. A certain sadness can show itself though under the childish openness. He wears a blazer and flannels, open neck shirt.

He continues speaking to somebody in the corridor:

EDDIE

Its not exactly a star turn billet. Still - cosy enough. And warm. The central heating starts down here.

EDDIE begins coming into the room, leaning heavily on a stick

EDDIE (cont'd)

Some quite big names have pigged it in here. Well, one I could mention - if I wanted to drop it.

(turns at the door)

Gentlemen. Mind that step, won't you ...

LENNY and MICHAEL follow him in. Both are soaked with rain and burdened down.

LENNY comes first. He is late thirties, tallish. Fine regular features that could be strongly handsome but for a softness around the face.

He wears a light rain-coat over expensive clothes; polo neck, leather jacket, 'good' shoes. A conscious gracefulness in his movements. He carries a large shoulder bag and several plastic suit protectors.

MICHAEL, late twenties, follows. In contrast to lenny, there is a scruffiness, almost a wildness about him. Dark hair and a face just a little too sharp to be pretty; pale with dark eyes.

MICHAEL wears jeans and a tee-shirt with a bomber style jacket. A small gold earring and a livid bruise on his right cheek.

He carries a suitcase and a cassette recorder in a transparent plastic bag, both of which he puts down immediately.

EDDIE waits until they are both inside.

EDDIE (cont'd)

Have some light on the subject,
shall we?

He finds the light switch, flicks it on.

Pause - while they stare in disbelief at the
room. It is lit by a single bulb, hanging from
the ceiling.

Over it someone has draped a pair of scarlet
panties giving the scene a rosy glow.

It is incredibly filthy now we can see it
properly. Debris litters the tables and
floors; beer cans, newspapers, cartons of take-
away food, etc.

Graffiti of the more banal kind on the mirrors
and part of the walls: "Tracy woz here Danny
is a wanker - Reggae is crap" and so on.

A lot of care has been taken however to paint
or spray on the largest free surface a huge
red SWASTIKA with the unfinished legend: "Sieg
heil! You bastards are going to . . ."

LENNY

Oh dear.

EDDIE

Dear God.

MICHAEL

Oh, very cosy. (moving forward)
Lovely. We'll take it, won't we?

LENNY

Somebody seems to have had a party.

EDDIE

(shaking his head)
Dear God. I had no idea.

MICHAEL

Who decorates for you, British
Rail?

EDDIE

Simply never occurred. What can I
say?

MICHAEL

So this is what "big names" get up
to -

(takes down the panties)

Anyone we might have heard of?

LENNY

(sharply)

Michael, put them down.

EDDIE

Believe me, I can promise you ...
Nothing like this has happened
before.

LENNY

Well. Not the end of the world.

EDDIE

Can't say how extremely sorry I am.

LENNY

Oh. No need.

EDDIE

There's a woman who cleans of
course. Week-days - this being a
week-end, you see.

LENNY

We understand.

EDDIE

(not listening)

But really, I mean - there's no
excuse. I never expected ... this.

(He pokes vaguely at the
rubbish. They wait)

Have to have words with Phil about
it. Strong words, I'm afraid. He
should have made sure.

LENNY

(patiently)

Yes?

EDDIE

Yes.

(realising)

Yes, the "disco" thing on Friday.
Phil hired some musicians to play
at it. Can only think - their
responsibility.

MICHAEL

Not your usual "star artistes"
then?

EDDIE

(seriously))

Good god, no. No, you mustn't think
that. Something entirely new for us
actually. The, erm, "disco" affair
was Phil's notion. Supposed to help
the cash-flow situation. He claims
it will bring new blood into the
place.

MICHAEL

He was right. There's still some of
it stuck to this wall. And that's
not all. A small souvenir-

(He grins, shows them the
wastepaper bin)

Touching, mm?

EDDIE

Unbelievable.

MICHAEL

A sincere simple gesture.

EDDIE

Like animals.

LENNY

No need to wave it under our noses.

EDDIE

Well, that puts the cap on it 'far
as I'm concerned. The state of this
room is disgraceful. When I've
spoken to Phil we shall make a
complaint. Someone should be told,
if it's only their parents.

LENNY

Look, about us.

EDDIE

Ah.

LENNY

You mustn't worry. I'm sure there's
somewhere else we can change.

EDDIE

That's just it. Unfortunate. I'd offer you somewhere else naturally. But the fact of the matter ... we're a little short of space. There's my office but that's upstairs in the hotel.
(apologetic)
Leaves us with a bit of a problem.

MICHAEL

(quiet)
Great.

LENNY flashes him a look.

EDDIE

If the cleaner was coming in, I might have made arrangements. As it is ...
(trails off)
... I simply can't think at the present.

LENNY

Have to manage then.

EDDIE

Lord, I wasn't suggesting for a moment

LENNY

It's alright We can cope. Just have to tidy up ourselves as we go along, won't we?

He puts his bags down carefully.

EDDIE

No, I couldn't possibly ask you

LENNY

Leave it to us. We don't mind. Do we, Michael?

EDDIE

(hesitates)
Well. If you're sure ... absolutely sure, I mean.

MICHAEL

(sour)
Oh absolutely.

EDDIE

Very decent of you both. I'll tell you what ... in that case ... there are some bits and bobs - brooms and things, next door. Let's see. Yes, I've got the key here. Won't take me a second to nip out and fetch them.

(starts to limp to the door)

I feel very bad about this. Putting you two to this trouble but -

(he winces suddenly, rubs his leg)

I do appreciate it. If you hold on a minute.

LENNY

I'll fetch them. Tell me where.

EDDIE

Oh. Very kind of you. Thank you.

(gives him the keys)

First on the right as I remember. The big one should do it.

LENNY

(to MICHAEL)

You can start unpacking. Find a clean space.

(meaningfully)

And be careful, mm?

LENNY goes out. EDDIE sinks thankfully onto a chair, takes out a cigarette case. MICHAEL takes the suitcase to the make-up table, sweeping the rubbish aside. He takes out a towel, begins rubbing his face and hair. He ignores EDDIE.

EDDIE

Nice of your friend to be so understanding.

MICHAEL

You took advantage. He never could resist Robert Donat.

EDDIE

Smoke?

(MICHAEL refuses)

I will, if you've no objection. Filthy habit, I know.

(He looks at the swastika)

(MORE)

EDDIE (cont'd)

Now that is something I don't understand. This modern obsession of their's with the jackboot. Is it meant to be terribly sinister?

MICHAEL

No, it's meant to be terribly butch.

(sneers)

Pathetic.

EDDIE

Must be a reason though. I mean, you see that damn thing everywhere now. Bog walls, on their shirts, tattoos ... you name it. Maybe the psychiatrists can explain it.

MICHAEL

One did.

EDDIE

Oh yes?

MICHAEL

Sex. Surprise, surprise.

EDDIE

Really, that's jolly interesting. What happened to all those beads and flowers? "Make love, not war". I found that rather touching.

MICHAEL

You would.

LENNY appears in the doorway, laden with broom, bucket, dustpan and brush. Sensing a slight atmosphere, he poses comically.

LENNY

Woz this the address as wot needed an 'elp?

MICHAEL

That's right. Who are you, the Good Fairy?

LENNY

Here.

(holds out the bucket)

There's a basin and loo at the end of the corridor. Fill that up and rinse out the rags.

(MORE)

LENNY(cont'd)

I'll sweep up, then you can give the mirrors a wipe. As long as we can see to get our slap on.

(MICHAEL doesn't move.)

Come on. Haven't got all day. Start earning your keep for once in your life.

MICHAEL

(acid)

I'll let you know, if I ever decide not to.

He takes the bucket reluctantly.

LENNY

Wait. While you're there
(fetches the waste-paper
bin)

Flush this away.

MICHAEL gives a mock curtsy to EDDIE.

MICHAEL

Hope I get a good reference.

He goes out. LENNY dries himself with the towel.

EDDIE

I'm terribly sorry. Of course, you shouldn't be doing this.

LENNY

Good for him.

EDDIE

Still, I can see his point.

LENNY

Please take no notice.

He picks up the broom.

EDDIE

Look, let me lend you a hand

LENNY

You sit tight. Finish your ciggie.

EDDIE

We had rather an interesting chat actually. About that - the Gerry symbol, you know.

LENNY

Oh dear. Hope he wasn't too boring.

EDDIE

Not at all. I never realised.

LENNY

Would have thought you could tell him a few things. He's too young to even remember the War.

EDDIE

Not really.

LENNY

Oh? I did think ... The distinguished way you lean on that stick?

EDDIE

What? Oh, the leg.

(chuckles)

Heavens, nothing so glamorous, I'm afraid. No, that's down to these -
(waves cigarette)

And my weak character. If you will keep on puffing away at my age - veins in the leg start to cave in on you. Doc's warned me now. Next time I get the peg and the parrot.

LENNY

Don't you think you should listen?

EDDIE

Not a chance, old boy. With some it's the bottle. Me ... the weed. Too old to reform myself now. Nice of you to be worried though.

A short silence. LENNY continues sweeping.

EDDIE (cont'd)

So how were you struck by our lovely resort?

(smiles)

The "Last Resort" as I like to call it.

LENNY

(cautiously)

Difficult to say. A lovely view over the bay.

(MORE)

LENNY(cont'd)

I noticed that on the way from the station. Seems nice and quiet.

EDDIE

Dead as a dodo, you mean. Yes ... even in season, it isn't much better. The truth, have to face it, ... places like this have had their day. Cheap aeroplane tickets, everyone flying off to "sunny Ibiza" wherever. And who can blame them, eh? Not me. Come along the sea-front did you?

LENNY

We did our best.

EDDIE

Pretty blowy, I know. Even the sea-gulls have to walk here ...

(chuckles)

An old joke from my weekly rep days. Expect you passed by the old Surrey Pavilion. That's where I began back in ... forty six, was it? God, more years than I care to remember. Some very good people started off in that building ... "Bunny Bennet's Pavilion Players" - still see the odd face on the box sometimes. Closed down now - like most of the places around here. I married a local, you see, stayed on. Very sweet girl, owns the hotel. A good little business it was in those days.

(cheerfully)

Still. We've kept going ... 'main thing, isn't it? That's what makes tonight a special occasion.

LENNY

Special?

EDDIE

Oh? Didn't Jack tell you? Yes, something of a small celebration. The "El Tropicana's" thirtieth birthday. Not bad going, when you consider.

LENNY

Congratulations.

EDDIE

All the old faithfuls should be there tonight. Some of them have been coming here for years. A chance to look back and remember the "good times". We were quite a feature once, you know. Had our own dance band, that used to count for something. Still do - though now it's more of a "combo". But you'll find them quite experienced. Just give them the notes and they'll sort something out.

LENNY

Can I ask you a question?

EDDIE

Fire away.

LENNY

Why did you - What made you pick us? This act?

EDDIE

Well, I do hope you won't be offended ... but you were rather a "second-choice" for us. We had our hearts set on an old friend of mine. Lady singer, quite well-known actually. But she had to cancel, previous engagement. Very apologetic and all that ... but it left us high and dry at the last minute, you see. Luckily I telephoned Jack and well, here you are. Two for the price of one, you might say.

LENNY

Jack's told you about us, has he? That we do in the act?

EDDIE

(hesitates))
Well, not exactly.

LENNY

He didn't?

EDDIE

Jack wasn't there when I telephoned actually. Spoke to a young chap, his assistant I think.

(MORE)

EDDIE (cont'd)

Very helpful. I explained what we needed, somebody to step in at short notice. A singer, not one of those caterwaulers. Someone who knew the old favorites.

LENNY

And he sent you us? This helpful young man?

EDDIE

Our luck was in.
 (He catches LENNY's expression.)
 Nothing wrong, I hope? I mean, you are singers?

LENNY

(nods)
 I might have guessed

EDDIE

That's alright then. Hate to think there'd been a mistake.

LENNY

(decisively)
 Mr. King...

EDDIE

Please. Call me Eddie.

LENNY unzips the hold-all, takes out a photograph album. Offers it to EDDIE.

LENNY

I think . . . perhaps you'd better look at these . . .

EDDIE opens the album. His P.O.V.: A BLOW-UP of LENNY in full drag. He turns the pages. More photographs of LENNY and MICHAEL in drag. LENNY watches him.

LENNY (cont'd)

(finally)
 I thought you should know.

EDDIE

Yes. Yes, I quite see

The door opens with a crash, they jump. MICHAEL enters, dropping the bucket noisily.

MICHAEL

That if you're interested, leaks like a sieve. I filled it up twice. But don't worry, most of it's still in my shoes.

(He sits down, begins taking them off. LENNY ignores him)

LENNY

(to EDDIE)

So. What are we going to do?

EDDIE

Good lord, I don't know. It's all beyond me.

(He shuts the album with a snap)

Oh hell. Well, you're here. That's something, I suppose.

MICHAEL

Not dragging out the family snaps already?

LENNY

(quiet)

Shut up, Michael.

EDDIE

Why not, eh? Just have to see. Too late to change things now.

(He stands)

Bit of a shock though I must admit. Still -

(smiles uncertainly)

Certainly different. Might go down quite well. Who knows? Go with a bang at any rate.

(He gives the book back to LENNY. Looks at their luggage with renewed interest)

You really do this for a living? Sorry, I mean, of course you do. Shouldn't surprise me, I suppose. Used to see a lot of it in the army-chaps dressed as women - entertaining the troops. Mind you there was a reason for it then - shortage of the real thing, you know.

MICHAEL

Think of it as a "camp tradition".

EDDIE

Yes. If you like.

(pause)

Well, then. Glad that's settled.
Better leave you to it, get out of
your way.

He turns towards the door.

LENNY

Mr. King ... Eddie.

(EDDIE turns. Quietly:)

Thank you. It will be a good show.

EDDIE

I'm sure. If there's nothing else
then?

LENNY

Just - what time will you want us
on?

EDDIE

Oh, didn't I say? Let me see. The
buffet's at seven then the Grand
Draw - Around eightish, I should
think, if that suits you. I'll
check with Phil. He usually handles
that side of things, the compéring
and so on. The musicians usually
come in around six. Should give you
a few hours to run through your
stuff.

(He reaches the door)

Any problems, you'll find me
upstairs. See you later then.
Cheerio.

He goes out.

MICHAEL

(snorts)

Pip-pip, old fruit. Do you believe
him?

LENNY

Thank you, Michael. You were a big
help.

(He begins unpacking.)

Was it necessary to be quite so
unpleasant?

MICHAEL

Me? I was sweetness itself to the dear old fart.

LENNY

He was nice. Makes a change from the usual types. It wasn't his fault.

He is determinedly calm and casual, hanging up clothes as he talks. But both are aware of an undercurrent - a continuation of a quarrel.

MICHAEL

So - a wonderful human being. Did Biggles fill you in on the gig then?

LENNY

Why? Are you interested?

MICHAEL

Pardon?

LENNY

I said, I'm surprised you bothered to ask.

MICHAEL

(shakes his head, slowly)
No, too subtle. I'm a little slow today. Would you hit me over the head with that again, please?

LENNY

I'm not playing games with you, Michael. It's time you realised that this is a business. And we're professionals - meant to be anyway. When you're getting paid to do something, the least you can show is a little commitment.

MICHAEL

I'm here, aren't I? In this lovely rats-nest

LENNY

(controlled anger)
Just, only just!
(Looks at MICHAEL for the first time)
Ten minutes before the taxi was due.

(MORE)

LENNY(cont'd)

Me - up half the night, frantically phoning. And you roll up as though nothing had happened.

(He lets it go)

We're lucky to be here, you know.

MICHAEL

Must be going deaf as well. I thought you said ... well, never mind.

LENNY

Listen to me.

(measured)

Two minutes ago - we could've blown it. Right now, we could be outside in that; humping our gear back up to the station. That's always assuming he gave us our fares since, I needn't remind you, we're practically penniless. But - no thanks to you - we're keeping the booking.

MICHAEL

My, so I've got it all wrong. I had the idea that they asked us to visit them in this rancid wind-tunnel.

LENNY

I'll try to explain this simply. They asked for a vocalist, right? A straight singer, nostalgia expert. And that little sod of Jack's sent them us.

(grim)

No doubt thought it would be a great joke.

MICHAEL

In other words -

LENNY

A cock-up. Yes.

MICHAEL

You mean - they were expecting Frank Ifield?

LENNY

And they wound up with the Beverly Sisters. Now do you see?

(MICHAEL splutters)

Glad you find it funny.

MICHAEL

All that wondering after the phone-call, which friend-in-high-places had put in a word? How our fame had spread to such distant corners?

LENNY

(impatiently)

It doesn't matter now. We're staying. Because that 'old fart' was willing to risk it. That means there have got to be some changes made. We can't use our usual material.

MICHAEL

What's wrong with it?

LENNY

Use your head, love. This isn't some gay pub in Vauxhall. It'll be twin-set and pearls out there tonight. We have to go carefully. Clean up the gags for a start. Tickle their fancies, but don't get too crude, right? Nothing you wouldn't hear on the telly.

MICHAEL

Just nice normal jokes about paddies and queers.

LENNY

I'll take the first half as usual. Should be no problem there. Thank God I hung on to all my old sheet music. Scraping the barrel time - but I should have enough golden oldies to get by.

MICHAEL

We know what a trusty old trouper you are. I have to ask myself - is it worth it?

LENNY

Oh, come on.

MICHAEL

(sharply)

I mean it. Tickling the fancies, as you like to put it, of grey faced old biddies under the table. Do I want to be bothered?

(MORE)

MICHAEL(cont'd)

I mean, don't the Japs make machines for that now?

LENNY

There are things called bills which need to be paid. Remind me show you our unique collection. We're earning twice what we'd get in the pubs. Money - you do remember that?

MICHAEL

No, but hum a few bars - it'll come back to me.

LENNY goes back to his unpacking.

LENNY

We're wasting time. Let's get this stuff laid out. Then maybe we'll have time to make some kind of plan. Get organised, like we should have done yesterday, so nobody's left with egg on their faces...

MICHAEL takes a half bottle of vodka from one of the bags, sits down and unscrews the top thoughtfully.

LENNY (cont'd)

If I've forgotten anything it's just too bad. Since you left me to do all the packing -

(sarcastic)

Don't stir yourself, will you? Expect you're tired out. Don't worry. I'm not going to ask. Just, next time, do us a favour, will you? If you're going to stay out all night, at least phone me. Ring-ring, you know? I assume he did have a telephone.

MICHAEL doesn't reply, drinks from the bottle thoughtfully.

MICHAEL

No.

LENNY

What?

MICHAEL

No. I don't think I want to.
(softly)
Not tonight

LENNY

Don't be daft, we can't back out now. We promised.

MICHAEL

Tough titties.

LENNY

(tightly)

Look, we all know there's been a mistake

MICHAEL

Sorry.

LENNY

We haven't exactly been fighting them off.

MICHAEL

Speak for yourself.

LENNY

Artistic temperament's one thing, dear. I'd have thought the least you could do -

(exploding)

Christ Almighty, Michael!

(A pause. He controls it)

Don't know what's got into you lately. Not one word all the way down - didn't even open your mouth. Then, as soon as we get here, this .. childish sulking. Honestly, I don't understand you.

(MICHAEL stays silent)

Fine. You just carry on. But let me tell you a secret - unless you're prepared to take things as they come - and make the best of them better forget it. If you want to spend the rest of your life selling underpants over the counter well, better get used to it. Don't start complaining.

(MICHAEL drinks again.)

LENNY watches, concerned)

Don't do that, love. You know it doesn't help. Here.

(Takes out a jersey)

Change out of those wet things. Stupid boy ... should have remembered your mack.

He comes to MICHAEL, starts to dry his hair with the towel.

LENNY (cont'd)

Mr. Samuels phoned yesterday. Wanted to know where the hell you were. Had to tell him your mother had died.

MICHAEL

Wishful thinking. It got me nowhere.

LENNY

It kept you the job.

MICHAEL

Aren't I lucky.

LENNY helps him take off his jacket.

LENNY

If you hate it so much, why not get something better? You've got enough qualifications. I've told you -

He stops. MICHAEL has winced as the jacket comes off. LENNY carries on:

LENNY (cont'd)

What's the point of a good education? I don't mind admitting, if I had your advantages, I might have jacked it in long ago.

MICHAEL

Can't. My adoring public won't let me.

LENNY hangs up the jacket.

LENNY

Remember when you used to come to that place in Ealing? Hang about 'til I'd finished the act? I thought, well, you know what I really thought? Fish out of water. A nice boy though. Shy, a bit serious . . . frightened.

MICHAEL

What?

LENNY

(nods)

Scared. The way you kept looking around. As if there was somebody ... following you. Watching.

(MICHAEL snorts uneasily)

And then, when you kept on at me asking ... I thought - not in a million years, darlings. But you were a natural, have to admit it. Hey, what about our first gig together? Remember that?

MICHAEL

Will I ever forget it?

(shakes his head)

An Irish pub too. Trust you to pick that. They must have been mad or we were.

LENNY

You had them eating out of your hand.

MICHAEL

After you'd scraped me down from the wall.

LENNY

First night nerves. It's never happened again, has it?

MICHAEL

(laughs)

And me swearing Father Mooney was waiting out there - sent by my dear mother to spy on her son. Anyhow, you know damn well, it was your 'Ave Maria' that did it. A pub full of Micks sobbing into their Guinness. Kitty O'Shea roll over. Jasus!

A small silence. The first moment of real warmth between them.

LENNY

See? It's never as bad as you think. People are all the same, just want you to entertain them, keep them happy. That's what you're paid for, nothing else matters believe me.

MICHAEL

Is that so?

(with an edge)

Tell me - is that the secret of our amazing success? This . . . meteoric rise to fame!

(LENNY sighs)

No, I'd like to know. Haven't you just once or twice maybe, in all of these years, wondered how long it was going to last? Or what it was for . . .

(searches for the words)

Us, what we do. Why they watch us up there . . . pretending.

LENNY

It's a game, dear. They know that. No harm in a bit of pretending.

MICHAEL

(angrily)

It's not that easy. If we jump through their hoops what does that make them? Who are the freaks, ever ask yourself that?

LENNY

(shrugs)

I don't have to, love,. As long as they like me. a very old business, you know.

MICHAEL

Yeah, and the novelty's wearing off fast. Face it - wherever you look now, the freak-show's expanding. Chartered Accountants in earrings and eye-shadow. No wonder they've begun greeting us with a yawn.

LENNY

If you say so.

MICHAEL

They've taken out our fuse, there's not much point left. Another cottage industry bites the dust, right?

(He laughs, drinks)

Twenty eight and I'm redundant already.

LENNY

Yes, well, why don't you write a book about it sometime? Meanwhile, we've got a job to get on with.

(MICHAEL lifts the bottle again.)

So for Christ's sake, lay off that stuff, will you? Give it to me, please.

A pause. MICHAEL smiles, mock acquiescent, gives him the bottle. LENNY puts it down, picks up the jersey.

LENNY (cont'd)

Arms up.

MICHAEL lifts his arms. LENNY peels off his tee-shirt. MICHAEL'S back and ribs are covered with bruises and abrasions.

LENNY (cont'd)

(casual)

You look like a boiled sweet ... black-currant flavour. Hold still, I'll get my ointment.

(goes to the suitcase)

No wonder you've been a bit off today. Suppose you don't want to tell me what happened?

MICHAEL

I met this tall Zulu in Notting Hill Gate. Passionate people, the Zulus.

LENNY

Suit yourself, dear, I'm not going to pry.

(He begins to rub in the ointment)

Just thought it might make you feel better.

MICHAEL

Who, me? I'm fine.

LENNY

I'm used to it, of course. Your "disappearing act" every so often. But this time I wish you'd warned me.

MICHAEL

Why?

LENNY

Why'd you think? I was worried.
Seems like I had reason to be too.

MICHAEL

I went for a little walk, that's
all.

LENNY

Into a lamp-post? I bet.

MICHAEL

(quiet)

I had some thinking to do

LENNY

Told you, you were taking a risk
There's places I go in broad
daylight, let alone in the middle
of the . . .

MICHAEL

(sharply)

Thank you, Shaw Taylor. Just give
it to me.

(He takes the jersey, puts
it on)

I'm fresh as a daisy if you're
really interested. After a perfect
evening like that. Healthy
exercise, followed by a gentle
massage. That was free of charge
from some obliging young men.

LENNY

With steel-capped boots.

MICHAEL

With attention to detail. Don't
interrupt. Anyway they never
finished because two Police
Constables decided to join us at
that point.

LENNY

Did they catch them?

MICHAEL

(shakes his head)

They didn't have time.

(MORE)

MICHAEL(cont'd)

Too busy asking me some very important questions - like who was I?

(retrieves the bottle)

What did I have for breakfast? How could I explain the wig and the dress?

LENNY

What?

MICHAEL

That I was carrying in my bag at the time.

LENNY

Oh. Surely they must have had some idea?

MICHAEL

Several. And pretty hilarious, too. I'll say this though, they both kept straight faces as they took it all down. In fact, I'd say one at least was genuinely sorry. He'd liked to have been there.

LENNY

(exasperated)

God, you can be a stupid sod sometimes. How'd you get home? Walked, I suppose. You might have phoned me.

MICHAEL

I thought the good news could wait.

LENNY

We ought to have had you looked at. You might have broken a rib.

MICHAEL

(dismissively)

I'm alright.

LENNY

You should have told me.

(A short silence. LENNY sighs.)

Let's get on with it then. If we're ready in time, I'll nip out for some food.

MICHAEL

Did I tell you what my mother says to the neighbours? Father Mooney, when he drops round for tea? "Michael's gone away to America." Yes, doing quite well for himself over there, I hear. Gone into business now, owns his own company. Might even get married one of these days.

(A pause. He laughs.)

You know, I keep thinking, one day I'll meet him. This mythical Michael who's "doing so well". One day he'll be sitting out there in the audience. Neat and tidy in his best straight-jacket - all genitalia in apple-pie order. And I'll swish up to him in my panties and tights. Look him straight in the eye and I'll say to him - What?

(With a kind of baffled anger)

You think I'm afraid? You never understood, did you? It's them, can't you hear it? Underneath the laughter - fear. We cover it up, make it safe for them, pretend. Christ, don't you feel it sometimes?

(Ironical:)

Its voodoo, sweetheart. Power. Old magic. Yeah, African idols with ebony tits. Angels painted with young girl's sad faces . . .

LENNY

(examines a dress)

This'll have to be ironed. Mirrors still need cleaning if you're feeling up to it.

MICHAEL

Jesus!

Suddenly an ominous roll of thunder. The lights flicker off and come on again

MICHAEL (cont'd)

Well, you can cut that out for a start.

More thunder. This time the lights go out.

2. DRESSING ROOM. NIGHT.

A few hours later. MICHAEL'S face in the mirror, lit by candlelight, now wearing make-up and a wig.

ON SOUND: ORCHESTRA INTRO.

He begins "singing", synching his lips to the female voice on tape.

We should be convinced and oddly moved.

Pull back to show him alone in the darkened dressing room. A candle burns in front of him and music comes from a nearby cassette recorder.

He begins distorting his facial expressions gradually until he is caricaturing the conventional singer's posing. Finally switches off the recorder. Leans forward to adjust his make-up.

The door crashes open. A flashlight appears.

PHIL

(OFF)

Alright in there? 'Mind if I come in a minute?

PHIL stumbles in through the door, carrying a speaker cabinet. MICHAEL doesn't turn around.

PHIL (cont'd)

Jesus H Christ
Bloody lethal here. Excuse me, love
Darker than a nig-nog's
arm-pit . . .

(He puts the speaker down
inside the door. Flashes
his torch at MICHAEL.)

You managing then? Coping alright
by yourself in the dark? Not to
worry. Soon have it mended.

(PHIL is in his forties,
thick set. Wears a dinner
jacket, frilly shirt, bow
tie)

Happens sometimes. It's the age of
this place. Wiring was done by a
foreign contractor

(chuckles)

(MORE)

PHIL(cont'd)

Firm run by some fella called Julius Caesar. Don't worry - electrician's on the job now.

(He comes towards MICHAEL who keeps his back turned)

Didn't frighten you, did I? Sorry about that - should have realised. All alone in this place - expect you get a bit jumpy. Never mind, love. Somebody here to hold your hand now. Phil's the name - expect Eddie's told you? I'd have been down to see how you were before. I mean, usually that's one of my points - to make sure the artistes are settled in - happy. Especially the ladies. I like to make sure. But, well, you can see. It's been bloody chaos.

(He comes closer)

See - strictly speaking, I'm entertainments. The club manager only - going by the book. Between you and me though - it's me that they count on. Eddie, well, Eddie's more public relations. It's me they count on to keep things going. Not that I mind- understand. Someone's got to do it. It's nice to know you're appreciated. Right?

(MICHAEL says nothing.

PHIL goes back to the speaker, drags it to a pile of junk in the corner)

Eddie tell you about the do tonight? Looking back to the good old days of "The Tropic". A chance for the old folks to get legless really. I've nothing against that, mind you, - very nice, when you have a good record to celebrate. But I tell Eddie this, straight to his face - it's the future we should be worrying about. Up-dating is what this club wants. New decor, lighting - could go a bomb. Build up the local trade - know what I mean? Get the kids down here, spending their cash. Who needs a night out in a flippin' museum, eh?

(Shakes his head)

He just won't see that - our Eddie. He won't.

(MORE)

PHIL(cont'd)

Christ knows where he thinks we'll end up!

(He straightens, looks at MICHAEL)

Listen, love. I wasn't going to mention this . . . not yet

(Starts to come back)

But it could be - I might manage to do you a favour. Possible, mind you, not a hundred percent - I could put something your way tonight. Yes. We've got someone up in the hotel - T.V. director down here on location. Making one of those documentaries, you know? Well - wouldn't say that I was a great pal but I've been chatting him up a bit - buying a few drinks. I'm not promising anything, see. I just thought that, after you've finished the show, if you and your friend .

. . .
(The other make up place is obviously occupied)
. . . hadn't made any plans, you could catch us up in the bar? Have a chat and a drink. Never know, do you? Might be your lucky night.

LENNY appears in the doorway, carrying a tray with glasses, sandwiches and a candle. He is also in costume but wearing his raincoat over most of it. PHIL flashes the torch at him, blinding him momentarily.

LENNY

Hey!

PHIL

Oh, sorry, love,

LENNY

Hello?

He comes in.

PHIL

Hello. Been up to the bar then? Good - hope they've been looking after you properly

LENNY

Fine. Thank you.

He goes to the make-up table. Begins unloading the tray.

PHIL

Shouldn't take long. I was telling your friend. Normal service soon be resumed.

LENNY

That's good.

PHIL

(now uneasy)

It's happened before when the weather gets bad. Bad insulation tip on the roof. The age of the place - I was saying to your friend. Nothing serious though, We'll get it put right in time for the show. Wiring was done by a foreign -

LENNY takes off his wig.

LENNY

That's better.

(to MICHAEL))

This one's itchy. Be a love, would you, and talc it for me?

(Smiles at PHIL)

I'm sorry?

MICHAEL

This is Phil.

LENNY

You're Phil. I see. Nice to meet you. Lenny - if Michael's not told you already.

MICHAEL

No.

LENNY

Mr. King said you'd be down to see us.

PHIL

Uh, did he? I haven't seen him yet.

LENNY

Not surprising. Its pitch black out there.

MICHAEL turns around.

MICHAEL:
We'd better be good tonight. A
V.I.P. in the audience.

LENNY
Really, who?

MICHAEL
A famous T.V. director. Phil knows
him well. Behave ourselves - we
might get to meet him.

LENNY
What's his name? I might have heard
it.

MICHAEL
You'll have to ask him.

PHIL
Oh. Stanley ... eh, Robert I think.

LENNY
You're joking? Not the Bob Stanley.

MICHAEL
(maliciously)
This could be our big break. If we
play our cards right -

LENNY
Darling, forget it. I know that old
faker. You have to be dead to get
on one of his shows. Strictly the
"highly significant" type.

MICHAEL
A working girl can't afford to be
choosy.

PHIL backs towards the door.

PHIL
Well, erm, excuse me, will you?
Better check I'm not wanted
upstairs . . .

He flees. LENNY lifts his eyebrow.

LENNY
Funny.

MICHAEL

They do tend to come out when it's dark.

The lights come back on.

LENNY

At last. Now maybe I'll find those eye-lashes. Close the door, would you? There's a bit of a draft.

(MICHAEL obeys, comes back to his seat.)

Let's have a look. What's that meant to be? Why didn't you wait for the lights? Come here. I'll scrape off that muck.

MICHAEL

I can do it. You look for your eye-lash.

LENNY

Are we ready for a little run-through?

MICHAEL

Again?

LENNY

It's what we in the trade call "re-hearsing", dear. And this time could we please cut the ad-libbing.

(Adjusts his make-up)

Stick to the material - concentrate on getting that right. Polish - I've always said. That's what this act needs if we're going to keep it going.

MICHAEL

Yes ... we should if we were. But are we?

LENNY

Pardon?

MICHAEL

Are we? Keeping it going?

LENNY

What do you mean?

(MICHAEL shrugs)

You're not backing out now? We agreed.

MICHAEL

The future - I was thinking about.

(Casually)

Let me be the first to congratulate you by the way. They say Bradford's lovely - this time of year. Spring in the air and the gas-work's' in bloom.

A silence. LENNY puts down his brush.

LENNY

How did you know?

(MICHAEL smiles.)

I see. A little bird told you. I'll strangle that little sod when we get back to London. Jack or no Jack, he should mind his own business. I would have told you.

MICHAEL

How else would I know to cancel the extra pint?

LENNY

Only six weeks. You won't know I'm gone. I've played clubs up there before you see. Back when I was still on the circuit. They know my work. Jack tried his hardest to sell them a double but those Northeners . . . well. I was going to tell you.

MICHAEL

Of course.

LENNY

And I don't think you realise - sometimes - what it's been like. Me, stuck in the flat all day. With just the radio and the cat. Waiting for the phone to ring, you to come home from work.

MICHAEL

(flat)

I can imagine.

LENNY

It's not been fun. And you . . . your moods. Not easy either. Honestly Michael, I . . . I'm not sure I can cope any more.

(MORE)

LENNY(cont'd)

I do understand - a little . But I don't know what I can do. You've become different - harder. Oh, underneath still the same, I can see that, the same serious boy. But ... I wish I could help.

MICHAEL

(gently)

Lenny ... love. It doesn't matter. I'm glad. Really I am. Miss you of course. Can't speak for the cat. But we'll be all right.

(He turns back to the mirror)

In any case, it's over for me. I've decided. Like you said - time I called it a day. This is no job for a nice Catholic boy.

LENNY is about to answer. A knock on the door.

LENNY

Come in if you're handsome.

EDDIE enters in evening dress.

EDDIE

Thought I'd see how you were getting on.

LENNY

Fine thanks. No problems.

EDDIE

Good, good. Bit of a panic on for a while - you might have gathered. Over now, thank heavens. Seen Phil, have you?

LENNY

I'm afraid you've just missed him.

EDDIE

Oh dear. Must try to run him down. The guests are arriving. There was something . . . Oh yes! The musicians are here. So when you're ready?

LENNY

One second.

(He adjusts his wig)

Ready.

EDDIE
Your friend?

MICHAEL
No, I'll sit this one out.

EDDIE
Shall we go then?
(As he limps through the
door)
Where on earth can Phil be hiding
himself?

LENNY hesitates in the doorway

LENNY
Wish me luck?

MICHAEL nods, smiles. LENNY goes. MICHAEL
looks at himself in the mirror - resumes
cleaning his face.

3. DRESSING ROOM. NIGHT. A FEW MINUTES LATER

MICHAEL's make up is off. He removes his wig.
PHIL enters and stops.

PHIL
You seen Eddie?

MICHAEL makes him wait as he begins to re-
apply fresh make-up.

MICHAEL
He was here. Just gone.

PHIL
I can see that. Where?

MICHAEL
To look for you. I imagine.

PHIL notices the graffiti and piles of litter.

PHIL
Christ on a bicycle! What happened
here?

MICHAEL
We were wondering that.

PHIL

Pardon?

MICHAEL

He said you might explain it -
Eddie.

PHIL

Me? I've not been in here before.
Look at it

MICHAEL

He said that too.

PHIL

You what?

MICHAEL

Something about - "checking up in
future". Probably tell you himself
when he sees you.

PHIL

That's just the point. I can't find
the bugger! Punters arriving and
nothing's laid on. Food, booze - a
complete bloody shambles. Sound
system up the creek of course - and
whose left to sort it all out -
(Starts to viciously yank
the junk aside to reach a
microphone stand)
Everything left to yours truly - as
usual. Sitting upstairs now - I
shouldn't wonder - sipping flipping
Campari through a straw. While
muggins here does the dirty work
for him. Ow!

He catches his finger on something.

MICHAEL

(Mutters)

. . . to be appreciated.

PHIL

Eh?

MICHAEL

(neutrally)

I said - you have got problems.

PHIL looks at him with pure hatred for a
second. Then he seems to relax. He smiles.

PHIL

Eddie must have been off his flipping head.

MICHAEL

It's easy to see you get on well.

PHIL

(chuckles)

Hiring a couple of - hiring you two. I mean for a posh do like this one. What did he think he was playing at, I wonder?

MICHAEL

Why don't you ask him?

PHIL

What for? Not my worry. Nothing to do with me. He gets the credit for this fiasco. "Leave it to me, old boy. Know just the thing." Least I'd have got in something that fitted the bill. And what does he book? Well - what do you call it?

He comes closer.

MICHAEL

(slowly)

I think ... a mistake. Yes. That's what I'd call it.

PHIL

Right. I'd say - about right.

(Contemptuous)

They're going to love you - this crowd tonight. This isn't flipping London you know. I mean they still go in for toasting the Queen - just the one, if you get me.

(MICHAEL meets his eyes in the mirror.)

No offence. I'm not including myself. Of course you see it all in the Navy, don't you? Some things you wouldn't believe. I'm just saying - don't say you weren't warned? All right in it's place - I'm sure, but . . .

MICHAEL

Why, Phil, does this mean I won't be meeting this important director person after all? You do know how to hurt a girl's feelings.

PHIL recoils, disgusted.

PHIL

You liked that - didn't you? Being took for a bird.

MICHAEL

In the dark - we know.

PHIL

Look at you - all tarted up . . .

MICHAEL

A 'natural mistake'.

PHIL backs away.

PHIL

Sick - you must be sick, you know that? Get a big kick out of it - did you?

MICHAEL

(Quizzical)

Did you?

PHIL grimaces. He goes to pick up the stand.

PHIL

I'm not staying for this. Being a bloody nancy boy is one thing -

MICHAEL

(smiling)

What a quaint vocabulary you have.

PHIL

Don't say you weren't warned, that's all. This lot aren't going to take to your sort. Believe me, darling, you should've stayed home.

EDDIE's voice from the corridor:

EDDIE O.S.

Phil? Are you there?

MICHAEL
You're wanted.

PHIL goes to the door.

PHIL
Eddie must've been off his flipping
head.

He goes out with the stand. MICHAEL'S face is
expressionless. He notices his hand is
shaking, puts down his pencil and sighs. He
gets up and fetches the bottle.

4, DRESSING ROOM. NIGHT. LATER

MICHAEL seated. LENNY standing a few feet away
doing his breathing exercises. He sings a
scale. His voice is surprisingly good. LENNY
comes back to his place, taking a quick drag
on a cigarette burning there. He is ready now
and nervous. Peers at himself in the mirror,

LENNY
So I had to ask him to change the
key. Reach up there, love, you must
be kidding. Wait 'til you see -
talk about tiny. You're right in
their laps. Where's my pills? Oh
thanks. All pastels and gold paint -
like the Essoldo.

He pours out two pills, swallows them

MICHAEL
Don't know else what you expected.

LENNY
As for the "combo". Piano and
drums. You think at least they'd
have managed a bass. Both over
sixty - if they're a day.

LENNY starts to pour out another pill. MICHAEL
takes them away

MICHAEL
That's four. Enough.

LENNY

The eyes still aren't right. Have to do now. Mother, how'd I get into this business?

MICHAEL

It's too late to start asking trick questions.

MICHAEL is uncharacteristically subdued

LENNY

Have you laid out the things for my quick change?

MICHAEL

I have.

LENNY

Did I tell you he wants us finished by ten? Suits me, the sooner the better. Apparently there's going to be speeches afterwards. The Mayor and his lady wife - gawd help us.

(He glances at MICHAEL)

How are you? A bit quiet. You will be careful, won't you? You promised.

MICHAEL

I'll be angelic.

LENNY

Want to give the Sister's routine one more go?

MICHAEL

No.

A rapid knock on the door

LENNY

What's the time? That must be our call.

(He checks himself)

All right at the back?

(Moves to the door)

Here we go then. Keep 'em crossed.

MICHAEL

I'll tie a knot in it - if you like.

He smiles. LENNY goes.

5. NIGHT CLUB. STAGE. NIGHT

The stage inside the "El Tropicana" - a narrow platform in a corner of a large room. Two concrete pillars make some kind of proscenium arch. Curtains at side and back. The stage is brightly lit, the rest of the room in darkness, unseen.

ON SOUND, audience buzz, glasses tinkling etc.

PHIL and EDDIE standing downstage, on front of a microphone. EDDIE takes a ticket from a mocked up top-hat barrel which is held by PHIL, gives it to him, smiling. PHIL turns to the microphone.

PHIL

And our lucky number is. . . Ooh, a good one. Blue, sixty-nine! Hands up, please - blue sixty-nine. There you go, sir. A bottle of bubbly for you and the missus. Just ask our Jim at the bar. Speak nicely to him - he'll throw in the straws.

Congratulate our lucky winner then!

(He claps with EDDIE. Mild applause.)

Never mind sir. Your turn will come. Yes, I know it's not always the prettiest. I'd like you to thank our own Mr. King - Eddie - for coming up here to dip into the hat.

(More clapping, EDDIE smiles, nods. Mutters something to PHIL, before limping off)

How are we doing? Everyone happy? Good. All had a bite and something to drink? Eddie's asked me to say on behalf of the management - we're sorry some of you had to wait for your suppers.

(Goes close to the mike, announcer's voice:)

We regret to announce the late arrival of services. Oops, sorry. That's me day job . . . No, but seriously, ladies and gents. These things happen - as you all know. I mean, what can you do if you've got a short circuit? What's that? Try standing closer?

(MORE)

PHIL(cont'd)

Oh, speaking from experience, are you, madam? No really, we're sorry our fuses got blown. But you'll understand why when I tell you the name of tonight's entertainer. A special item we've lined up for you - Racquel Welch. You have heard of her? You can see he has - yes, his glasses have steamed up. No Racquel had to stop home tonight. Her turn to mind the kids. So - with no thought of added expense, we've got you -

(He breaks off.

Confidentially:)

Gents, if you've ever seen something, you know . . . gorgeous. Really. . .

(makes curvy gesture)

And you've thought: Gor! Wish that were mine! Well, here's someone who can tell you how - no kidding. Ladies and gentlemen, are you ready? Here comes tonight's surprise guest. A big hand please for the Lovely Lenora!

LENNY comes on smiling. Applause. He approaches the microphone. PHIL backs away, grinning.

LENNY

Thank you very much.

The applause dies away. A ripple of surprised murmuring, some laughter. LENNY adjusts the microphone. His stage persona is breathless, a little throaty, and quite "straight".

LENNY (cont'd)

Ladies and Gentlemen. First I'd like to say, it's a great pleasure to be here tonight. I'll be singing some songs for you and I'm going to begin now with a favourite of mine. And yours too, I hope. It's called -

SONG TITLE. He signals the pianist, begins. After a couple of bars . . .

FADE TO:

6. INT. DRESSING ROOM. NIGHT

Music from the cassette recorder. MICHAEL swigs the last of the vodka and wipes his mouth.

He switches off the recorder and moves towards the door.

7. INT. NIGHT CLUB - LATER

LENNY coming to the end of his song. Scattered applause as he finishes.

LENNY

Thank you. I understand tonight is a special occasion - is that right? I am right? A birthday party? It's been so long since I got asked to anyone's party! If I'd known I'd have baked a cake or something. But - as I haven't brought a present - here's a song instead. This one's dedicated to the club. And to all you people. Thanks for inviting me, I mean it. Many happy returns and lots of luck!

(Applause)

Yes, everyone needs it!

The music starts.

FADE TO:

8. INT. DRESSING ROOM. NIGHT.

The room is empty. A knock - PHIL enters carrying the top hat.

He throws it carelessly with the other junk, sits down on a speaker and lights a cigarette. He stares at the room disgustedly.

Then he gets up, begins to wander around.

He examines LENNY's pills, pokes about. Finally comes to the costumes. A large KIMONO catches his eye. He fingers it, grins suddenly.

He drops his cigarette and takes it down from its hanger. He chuckles. He crosses to an orange wig on a wig-block. He tries it on, looks in the mirror and laughs.

He sits down, picks up a stick of make up.

9. INT. NIGHT CLUB. MIGHT

LENNY in the middle of a Latin American number. He shakes a pair of marracas, moves about. He is beginning to enjoy himself

MICHAEL watches from the side.

LENNY turns up-stage, catches his eye, raises an eyebrow interrogatively.

MICHAEL smiles, nods slightly.

LENNY turns away to finish the number.

MICHAEL watches him, then suddenly turns and disappears.

The song ends with a flourish, clash on the cymbals.

WARM APPLAUSE this time.

10. INT. DRESSING ROOM. NIGHT.

PHIL, now grotesquely made up and wearing the wig and kimono, is struggling out of his clothes.

Jacket and shirt removed, vest still on. He is fumbling with his trousers when the sound of a lavatory flushing nearby makes him freeze.

He scoops his clothes up hurriedly into a bundle and tip-toes in the direction of the door.

11. INT. NIGHT CLUB - MOMENTS LATER

The applause dies away to an appreciative buzz.

LENNY

(Smiling)

Thank you. Phew - just get my breath back. Ooh, that's made me quite dizzy. Well, it does -shaking your marracas for so long. Yes, he knows what I mean. Now - what am I going to do with them?

(Turns to the piano, whips around - indignant:)

Thank you. When I need your advice!
(He puts them down, comes back to the mike)

Now ... as you've been such a lovely audience. No, really. Since you have ... I'd like you to meet a good friend of mine. You see, normally - normally - I don't do this by myself. Well, it's more fun with two, isn't it? Like most things, yes. She's what you might call my partner - well, that's one of the things she gets called. No, honestly, you'll like her. Not like me at all - she's got "class", you know? No, it's true. Well, all her tattoos are spelled right for a start. So ...

LENNY backs up-stage and sees MICHAEL isn't there. He continues quickly:

LENNY (cont'd)

You'll be meeting her a little later on - something to look forward to. In the meantime - get your hankies out, if you've brought 'em Who has? Not those, madam. Put them back on. This is a really sentimental song - one that a certain lady made famous. I'm sure you all know it.

SONG TITLE. He signals the PIANIST.

12. INT. DRESSING ROOM. NIGHT

MICHAEL comes in, looking pale and shaky. He has just thrown up. He grimaces, wipes his mouth.

He crosses to the makeup table, sits down. He stares at his make-up things for a moment.

Then he reaches a decision, takes off his wig, begins undoing his dress.

Behind him unnoticed, PHIL emerges, grinning from behind the door

13. INT. NIGHT CLUB. NIGHT

CLOSE UP of LENNY's face singing. His eyes are watchful and a little sad behind the conventional singer's mask.

14. INT. DRESSING ROOM. NIGHT

MICHAEL is busy with his dress.

PHIL
Hello, darling.

MICHAEL flinches and whips around. PHIL stands behind him wearing the kimono, orange wig and full make-up. The effect is ludicrous but also menacing. PHIL poses.

PHIL (cont'd)
What do you think then? Lovely -
wouldn't you say? Mm? Think it
suits me?
(He pouts and bats his
eyes. MICHAEL turns his
back. His face is calm
and watchful but his body
is tense.)
Don't mind me borrowing 'em, do
you? Well, I thought since we're
going in for it tonight like. Might
as well join you.
(Lisps)
Just one of the girls . . . Good
way to finish off the show I
thought. Should get a laugh, eh?
Me, coming on in this. What you
think?
(MICHAEL says nothing)
Go on then . . .
(Edged)
(MORE)

PHIL(cont'd)

Tell me how gorgeous I am . . .
What's the matter? Not pretty
enough?

(He moves closer, his face
getting ugly)

Come on. Don't tell me you don't
fancy me or something? Don't I turn
you on then? Get you going? You
were quick enough to lead me on
before. Look at me then - tell me
what's wrong. Too much lip-stick?
Not enough eye shadow? What don't
you like? Come on, give us a clue
(sharply)

Go on, have a look. Look at me,
will you ...?

SHARP CUT TO:

15. INT. NIGHT CLUB. NIGHT

CLOSE UP: LENNY singing as before.
NO SOUND-TRACK.

SHARP CUT TO:

16. INT. DRESSING ROOM. NIGHT

NO SOUND-TRACK.

MICHAEL standing. PHIL talking behind him.
PHIL reaches out and grabs MICHAEL by the
shoulder.

SOUND BREAKS THROUGH:

PHIL
. . . Look at me, will you?

MICHAEL turns. In a single, swift, controlled
movement, he picks up the vodka bottle and
strikes.

SHARP CUT TO:

17. INT. NIGHT CLUB. NIGHT

LENNY builds towards the song's climax. He
throws back his head and closes his eyes.

SHARP CUT TO:

18. INT. DRESSING ROOM. NIGHT

CLOSE UP: PHIL'S face, frozen in shock.

He lifts his hand to his head where blood is starting to seep from under the wig.

MICHAEL watches, blank-faced.

PHIL stretches his bloody hand towards him, almost a beseeching gesture.

MICHAEL backs away a step, poised like an animal, the stump of the bottle still clutched in his hand.

Incomprehension in PHIL'S eyes.

PHIL
(hoarsely)
You're bloody mad!

He stumbles away, tearing off the wig and kimono as he goes.

MICHAEL watches. Then, smiling faintly, he moves forward and stoops.

19. INT. NIGHT CLUB. NIGHT

Applause.

LENNY stands at the mike: sweating, smiling and nodding. He turns. MICHAEL is standing at the side in the shadows.

LENNY raises his eye-brows enquiringly. He turns back to the mike

LENNY
Ladies and gentlemen, thank you so much. You've been a super audience - I must say. Well. I'm going to take a short break now
(Groans. Clapping, etc.)
But I'll be back I promise - in just a few minutes. In the meantime Ron - over here on piano. And Sydney - he's the one with the big drumstick - are going to keep you warm for me by playing a few old favorites.

(MORE)

LENNY(cont'd)

Ladies and gentlemen, Ron and Sydney - I don't know what I'd have done without them.

(scattered applause)

See you soon.

LENNY blows the audience a kiss, walks off. The drummer and pianist start to busk a number.

LENNY comes towards MICHAEL. A towel, face-cloth and glass of water have been set on a chair at the side of the stage. He uses them as he speaks

LENNY (cont'd)

What did you think? Never worked so hard in my life. Bit sticky but I think I've broken the ice.

He registers MICHAEL. He stands looking out on to the stage with the same faint smile. He wears the kimono, tied at the waist, and the orange wig

LENNY (cont'd)

So where the hell were you, dear? Left me feeling a right fool. Come on - you should be changed by now. It's only a short break, you know.

MICHAEL turns and looks at him, still smiling.

LENNY (cont'd)

(impatiently)

Are you listening? And take off my gear, you know I don't like you -

(He stops. Suspiciously)

Oh, Christ, darling - you're not pissed are you? Look, take that off - now!

(He reaches to grab the wig. His hand comes away bloody. Looks at MICHAEL, appalled.)

What have you ...?

MICHAEL grins at him intimately - as though at a shared joke. Then he goes on stage

AUDIENCE P.O.V: MICHAEL comes on. The PIANIST and DRUMMER falter and stop.

MICHAEL comes to the mike. He surveys the audience. Their buzz subsides slightly

MICHAEL

Well ...

(He holds the pause)

At last.

(He grimaces)

Thought she'd never leave, didn't you? You did. Thought she'd never get off. Enjoying ourselves, are we? Why? - what are you doing? Right - that's enough of that for one night.

(MICHAEL'S stage persona is sharp, almost severe.)

Just a minute. I want to look at this

(He glances around appraisingly.)

Not bad, I suppose. Lovely wall-paper - reminds me of choking to death on a goldfish. Makes you wonder, doesn't it? Whatever happened to good old fashioned morgues?

(A few uncertain titters)

So - I got here in the end. It's the dressing room, yes - somewhere down there it is. I'd have been here sooner but my pit pony cast a shoe on the way up. Still I'm here now - ready to do your pleasure. No, not now, dear. After the show, I said. And remember you're buying me dinner - so don't go ruining your appetite. Put that stick of rock back in your pocket. Well, whatever it is, don't start sucking it now ..!

(Slightly nervous laughter. A lot of his patter is automatic, tinged with contempt. He seems to be toying with his audience.)

Sorry, I shouldn't be raising that here. Yes, people are always asking, it's true: is it a strain, they say, keeping it up night after night? No, they think it's a soft life. Really. But believe me, I've had it hard in my time. I didn't always do this for a living. I was in men's wear for a while. You're right, didn't suit me a bit.

(MORE)

MICHAEL(cont'd)

You know, people often ask me - what's your background? Well, I come from a very talented family. My mother, she does impersonations. You should see her, dressed all in white - lovely. She looks completely convincing. No, you'd swear it was really the Pope -

LENNY comes back on behind him, looking shaken. He goes to the PIANIST, confers; glancing frequently at MICHAEL

MICHAEL (cont'd)

(pulling a face)

Ooh, don't look now. She's back again

(LENNY leaves the stage quickly. Confidentially:)

Don't know why I bothered to bring her. Always pack something you don't really need. No, she's alright really. Worries a lot, poor thing. I've told her: It's no good getting worked up over little things. It's the big things that get on top of me. Mind you, when she's working, she's fine. Get her up here - happy as a pig in chiffon Oh, good. She's gone. Now - where was I?

(He contemplates the audience for a moment, sizing them up. A change of gear, increasing irony underneath the patter)

Oh yes, my mother. How many mothers out there tonight? Hands up. Let's see. Really, sir? It doesn't show yet. No, I think that's wonderful. I do, honestly. I mean, where would we be if we didn't have mothers? Mothers and father too. Let's not forget them. I mean, we wouldn't know where we were at all, would we? No-one to set an example to us. Help us to grow up normal - like me. It's true. Everyone needs them. To tell us how to behave, how to dress properly - little things like that

(He smooths his dress ingenuously)

Don't laugh. It could get very confusing.

(MORE)

MICHAEL(cont'd)

You'd have to keep checking, aren't I right? Just to be sure. So it's lucky you can see which I am. . .

(raising his eyebrows)

Well, I'm willing to take your word for it. It all starts when we're little kids, doesn't it? Playing that game, you know, "Mummies and Daddies"? Come on, don't tell me you never played that one!

Remember? 'Course you do. Like "Snakes and Ladders" without the dice. Tiddleywinks was never such fun again, was it? Oh, yes, I used to love it. One of my favorites. My little friend sucking on her grandad's pipe and me - oh, I was a picture - felt so grown up - even if the high heels were a bit large. Many's the time - but still. What happened to those days? We were so innocent, weren't we? My mother was a wonderful woman. She soon put me straight about S-E-X. The facts. None of that rubbish about storks and bundles. No. I had to be told the truth: 'where babies come from'. Well, you can imagine when I found out . . . there wasn't a gooseberry bush for miles. . . I'm joking. She was very good really. I remember the first time I started

...

(Dropping his voice)

. . . you know, bleeding. She told me plainly, no beating about I'd have to put a new blade in my razor. She did. And let me say something else . . . I hope, when my turn comes, I can do half as well. Well, it's a big responsibility. You've got to have it in you, haven't you?

(He looks down at his stomach coyly)

All those decisions. Is it too late to book the Barmitzvah already? Can I still keep my night job at the abattoir? Will this ruin my chances as Mother Superior? Silly things you worry about. Still, at least, I've chosen a name. "Michael" - well, it's plain and simple. After a distant relation of mine.

(MORE)

MICHAEL(cont'd)

(LENNY reappears at the side of the stage with EDDIE. They whisper. MICHAEL comes closer to the mike)

Listen, there's something I want to explain. Quickly - 'cos I think the pips are going. Mustn't be greedy, must we? Give her a chance - it's only fair. And you'll need a good rest after all this excitement. No, listen. I feel I should apologise really. It's like I was saying before. I should've been up to see you much sooner. But . . . I ran up against this small technical problem.

(Pauses)

You see - how can I put this? Something has been bothering me lately. Ask her I'm a perfectionist. Everything has to be just right. I like to give value - you can see that, can't you? Nose, eyes, teeth - everything's real. All my own I've kept the receipts. I don't like to cheat, you see, that's the point. But . . . there was still one little "detail". Spoiled it for me. It's the details that count.

(He smiles, holds the pause)

I said - I'm not a deceitful person. Not in my nature. So, in the end. I thought - why don't I? Get to the root of the problem, you could say - try and solve it once and for all. Bit painful . . .

(He studies his hands)

But I thought it was worth the trouble. . . .

(He shows the blood on them, still smiling.)

And, you want to know something? It wasn't that bad. You'd be surprised. Not such a big deal. Just one quick, clean . . . snip. And it's all over. See?

Slowly, teasingly, he undoes the kimono, lets it fall open. He is bare-chested, naked to the waist, below that female underclothes, stockings.

Some blood smears - but not on his genitals.
The effect - a strange androgyne, holding his
hands out in a mock benediction.

MICHAEL (cont'd)

There.

(Laughs)

There. Nothing fake from now on.
Check, if you like. I'm not shy.

(He turns like a model)

No bumps or lumps - nothing
concealed about me. I wouldn't play
tricks on you.

(He returns to the mike)

Well? Isn't that better, eh? Go on -
you can tell me?

(He waits. Then - almost
wearily - he takes off
his wig.)

Alright. I just thought you might
be tired. It's . . . Even the best
jokes have to end somehow. Can't
keep up the suspense forever. So
maybe it wasn't that funny. At
least it's finished. At least we
got to the punch-line at last.
Here.

(He throws his wig into
the audience.)

Keep it. Souvenir

(He looks at them)

Let me ask you . . . maybe you can
tell me how deep do you
have to make the cut? How many
layers do you have to slice
through?

(He shakes his head,
smiles.)

Not you. Better not. You might just
smash . . . like an egg. That nice,
safe shell - it might just crack
open. And who knows what might come
oozing out then? Some whimpering .
. . thing. Yeah, how could you
tell?

(Slowly, groping for the
words:)

You . . . watch . . it. Laugh at
it. It's . . . laughing at you.
Inside . . . it's . .

LENNY appears beside him, puts his hand on his
shoulder. MICHAEL starts like someone waking
from a trance.

A pause. He looks at LENNY. Then he turns back to the audience - stares at them one last time.

He gives a small shrug. Very simply:

MICHAEL (cont'd)

I'm sorry. But you've been asking for it.

He leaves the stage unhurriedly.

LENNY exchanges a few words with EDDIE, comes to the mike.

LENNY

(Shakily)

Ladies and Gentlemen, I'm sorry. My friend . . . didn't mean . . .

(He collects himself)

Eddie has asked me to tell you that, as from this moment, the drinks will be on the house. If you care to go to the bar and ask them, they'll be happy to serve whatever you want. Don't know about you - but I wouldn't mind one myself. In a moment, Eddie will be talking to you about the club. Looking back over some of it's happier moments in the past and telling you about the plans for it's future. But in the mean time, here is a song which also looks back over . . . happier days.

He signals the pianist. Music.

SLOW FADE. CREDITS.