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SF PERUSALS

A Lesson from Aloes

A Drama

by Athol Fugard

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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THE CAST

A LESSON FROM ALOES, written and directed by Athol Fugard; sets by Michael H. Yeargan; costumes by Susan Hilferty; lighting by William Armstrong; executive producer, Ashton Springer. Presented by Jay J. Cohen and Richard Press, in association with the Yale Repertory Theater, Lloyd Richards, artistic director. At 359 West 48th Street.

Piet Bezuidenhout ..... Harris Yulin

Gladys Bezuidenhout ..... Maria Tucci

Steve Daniels ..... James Earl Jones

IMPORTANT ADVERTISING NOTE

The Yale Repertory Theatre is to receive credit in any production in the United States and Canada in all programs as follows:

"American Premiere by The Yale Repertory Theatre, New Haven, Connecticut"

CHARACTERS

PIET BEZUIDENHOUT .... An Afrikaner, in his mid-forties.

GLADYS ..... His wife, the same age.

STEVE DANIELS. ..... His friend, a Coloured man. The same age.

The action of the play moves between two areas representing the backyard and the bedroom of a small house in Algoa Park, Port Elizabeth.

A LESSON FROM ALOES

ACT I

SCENE 1

The backyard. It is cluttered with a collection of Aloes in a variety of tins of all shapes and sizes. There is a gate with a nameboard: Xanadu.

PIET, *seated at a garden table with an Aloe in front of him, is studying a small field-book on the plants. He is wearing short trousers, no shirt, and sandals without socks. Spectacles.*

GLADYS, *behind sunglasses, sits very still on a garden bench.*

Time: late afternoon.

PIET. (*Reading from the book.*) ". . . small, glaucous leaves, erect or incurved . . ." (*Studies the specimen in front of him then back to the book.*) "Tuberculate-based . . ." (*Turns to the glossary at the back of the book.*) Tuberculate . . . "Having knobby or warty excrescences." (*Back to the entry he was reading.*) "Tuberculate-based soft prickles on both surfaces." (*He holds the book at arms length for a comparison between the illustration and his plant. He shakes his head.*) No. That's not it. (*The book is closed, the spectacles come off. He gets up quietly, the Aloe in his hands, and looks at* GLADYS.)

GLADYS. (*Without moving.*) I'm awake.

PIET. Well my dear, we have a stranger in our midst. Aloe Anonymous! Because that is what it is until I know its name. I've been through my book twice, page by

page, but there is nothing that looks quite like it. (PIET *rises crosses US to watering can and soaks rag.*) I don't think I can allow myself to believe I've discovered a new species. That would be something! I'd name it after you my dear. Hail Aloe Gladysiensis! Sounds rather good doesn't it. (*The other Aloes.*) Hail Ferox! And you Aristata . . . Arboresence . . . Ciliaris (PIET *crosses back to table—picks up large plant and places it on DS bench, SL side.*) . . . and now Gladysiensis all hail! Welcome to the most noble order of Eastern Cape Aloes. An impressive array of names isn't it.

(GLADYS *remains seated.*)

And yet, as little Juliet once said: What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.

(GLADYS *remains seated.*)

(*These lines, and all his other quotations, although delivered with a heavy Afrikaans accent, are said with a sincere appreciation of the words involved. He thinks about those he has just quoted.*) Alas, it's not as simple as that is it.

GLADYS. Are you talking to me?

PIET. Who else my dear?

GLADYS. The aloes . . . or yourself. I'm never sure these days.

PIET. Names are more than just labels.

(PIET *crosses SL and sits SL of* GLADYS *on bench.*)

Pietrus Jacobous Besidenhout.
Petrus Jacobus Bezuidenhout.

(*A little smile.*)

So, would Petrus, were he not Petrus called,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes without that title?

GLADYS. What are you talking about?

(PIET & GLADYS *remain seated.*)

PIET. The balcony scene. Where the little lady laments Romeo's name. I was just thinking about mine.

GLADYS. And?

PIET. For better or for worse I am Piet Bezuidenhout positively identified species, Afrikaner; habitat Xanadu Algoa Park, Port Elizabeth . . . and must accept the consequences. (PIET *wipes hands with rag and looks at his wrist watch.*)

GLADYS. What is the time now?

PIET. Just on four o'clock.

(PIET AND GLADYS *remain sitting on center bench.*)

GLADYS. It's passing very slowly isn't it.

PIET. Yes it is. The sun is as lazy as us this afternoon.

GLADYS. (*Shaking her head.*) It's because we're waiting.

PIET. Would you like something to read.

GLADYS. I'm alright.

PIET. I've got today's paper inside.

GLADYS. Stop fussing Peter. I've learn't how to sit and wait. When must we expect them?

PIET. (*Folds rag.*) I didn't fix a definite time. I just said: Supper. So what do you think? Half-past six? Seven? They won't be too late because of the children. If we start to get ready at five we should be alright. Everything under control in the kitchen?

(GLADYS *remains seating US center.*)

GLADYS. Yes.

PIET. Then relax my dear. Enjoy the sunshine.

GLADYS. I'm perfectly relaxed.

PIET. Good. (PIET *rises, crosses US crumbling paper, then steps US of bench and behind it.*)

GLADYS. You're the one who can't keep still.

PIET. (*At the garden table where we first saw him.*) I'm just going to tidy up my mess.

GLADYS. I hope I'm not getting too much sun.

PIET. No danger of that on an autumn afternoon. This is the start of our gentle time Gladys . . . our season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, close bosom friend of the maturing sun. Keats ode to Autumn.

(GLADYS *remains sitting.*)

On the farm there was almost a sense of the feld sighing with relief when autumn finally set in. We certainly did. (PIET *throws away paper US in trash can.*) Man and animal. Months of grace while we waited for the first rains.

GLADYS. My skin can't take it. I learnt that lesson when I was a little girl.

PIET. Sunburn. (PIET *wipes table clean hurrys SR.*)

GLADYS. Yes. A holiday somewhere with my mother and father. On the very first day I picked up too much sun on the beach and that was the end of it. My mother dabbed me all over with calomille lotion to soothe the pain. I can remember looking at myself in the mirror . . . a frightened little white ghost. Mommy was terrified that I was going to end up with a brown skin. But she needn't have worried. It all peeled away and there I was the same as before.

PIET. The fortracker women had the same problem. (PIET *sits on SR arm of SL chair.*) That's where the old white bonnet comes from. Protection.

GLADYS. I think it was Cape Town. Not that it made any difference where I was. All I remember of the outside world was standing at a window and watching the dogs in the street go beserk when the dirtboys came to empty the bins.

(PIET *remains sitting on SR arm of SL chair,* GLADYS *still sitting on bench.*)

Heavens! What a terrible commotion that was. A big grey lorry with its mountain of rubbish, the blackmen banging on its side and shouting, the dogs going for them savagely . . . (*Breaking out of her reverie.*) I think I need my sunhat.

PIET. Don't move. (*To the backdoor.*) Where is it?

GLADYS. In the bedroom.

(PIET *exits into the house—the bedroom—and returns a few seconds later with the sunhat.*)

PIET. Here you are.

(GLADYS *watches him.*)

Anything wrong?

GLADYS. Did I put away my diary?

PIET. I didn't notice.

(GLADYS *rises and crosses into bedroom—looks in vanity for diary—takes it out—hides it under DS edge of bed.* PIET *with hat in hand crosses to table. Places hat on SL table— puts shirt on.*)

GLADYS. (*Crossing back into yard.*) Safe and sound.

PIET. I'll never interfere with it my dear.

GLADYS. I know that!

(PIET *picks up hat and hands it to* GLADYS.)

PIET. So, where were we? Yes, our nameless friend. (*The unidentified Aloe.* PIET *crosses DS of table—SL of table—picks up Aloe and places it back down.*) I'll have to wait for him to flower. That makes identification much easier. And he will! He's got no choice. I've put him in a tin, so it needs me now. A little neglect on my side and he will be into a drought as fearsome as anything out there in the feld.

(GLADYS *remains sitting with hat on.*)

If plants have feelings this is as bad as keeping animals in cages. It's the roots that upset me. (PIET *crosses DS of table—goes around it—stops SL.*) Even with all my care and attention they are still going to crawl around inside this little tin and tie themselves into knots looking for the space creation intended for them.

GLADYS. (*Obviously not listening to him.*) And you are quite certain they're bringing the children.

PIET. Yes. I very definitely made it an invitation to the whole family. It's hightime we saw our godson again. Children grow fast at his age. And little Lucille should be quite the young lady by now.

GLADYS. How many of them are there again?

PIET. (*Crossing between chair and table.*) Steve and Mavis, the three little girls, little Pietertkie and then the two of us. Eight all told. It will be quite a party. Have we got enough to feed the hungry hordes?

GLADYS. (*Betraying a nervousness.*) More than enough. That's not going to be the problem.

PIET. (*Sits on bench SL of* GLADYS.) Then what is?

(GLADYS *doesn't answer.*)

They're not strangers Gladys. It's Steve and his family.

GLADYS. It's a big family.

PIET. We've had them all here before and you coped splendidly.

GLADYS. That was some time ago. I'm out of practise remember. I know what's going to happen. You and Steven will end up in a corner talking politics all night and I'll be left with the rest of them trying to make polite conversation. (GLADYS *rises—crosses D SR in yard below gate SR.*) I can't even remember their names Peter!

PIET. Mavis, Lucille, Charmaine . . .

GLADYS. And then that little boy . . . !

PIET. (*Rises and crosses SR to* GLADYS—*buttons sweater.*) Yes I know. Little Pietertjie can get a bit boisterous at times, but don't worry my dear. Steven knows how to handle him. You must admit the girls are well behaved. You always admired their manners remember. Please and thankyou and speak when you're spoken to. Please relax my dear. You won't have any trouble.

GLADYS. Well . . . you can't deny we are going to be crowded.

PIET. (*Crosses to SR table and moves it center stage and places other table next to it.*) Yes I do. Observe. (*Placing two tables in front of the garden bench.*) The Festive Board! (*Positioning chairs. He works hard at trying to allay* GLADYS' *anxieties.*) The Lord and Lady of the Manor . . . (PIET *moves bench in front of table.*) our two honoured guests . . . and then in descending order of age . . . Lucille, Charmaine, Beryl and Little Pietertkie.

(GLADYS *studies the seating arrangement in silence.* PIET *crosses US around bench and stops SR of bench.*)

Does that look crowded?

GLADYS. No.

PIET. Then what's the matter?

GLADYS. You've got the little boy next to me.

PIET. Because Steve is sitting there and I thought . . . Alright alright! We'll change it around in ascending order of age. Pietertkie here and then Beryl, Charmaine and Lucille next to you. How's that?

GLADYS. Thankyou. It's not that I don't like children.

PIET. Say no more my dear. I understand. (*Surveys the table.*) We mustn't forget your brass candlesticks. That was an inspired thought. Al fresco and candlelight. It's going to look very good. Continental!

(PIET *crosses SL to table and strikes plants and shovel from table.*)

GLADYS. Don't expect too much from me. I can only manage cold meats and salads.

PIET. Have we got a little pudding?

GLADYS. Yes. Jelly and custard. I've tried my best Peter!

PIET. (*Crosses SR to* GLADYS *in yard again.*) I know that my dear. I was just thinking of the children.

GLADYS. (*Stands SR.*) If you want the menu it's assorted cold meats . . . ham, brawn and polony . . . three salads . . . potato mayonaise . . .

PIET. (*Crosses SL to center tables.*) What could be better? A cold buffet! It's going to be a warm evening. I must remember to chill the wine. (*Looks at his wristwatch.*)

GLADYS. (*Anxiously.*) Is it time? (GLADYS *slowly crosses to bench center stage.*)

PIET. No, not yet.

GLADYS. How much longer? (*She continues crossing slowly.*)

PIET. Let's try to forget it my dear and enjoy what's left of the afternoon. That's why it's passing slowly. We're flattering time with too much attention.

GLADYS. (*Stops SR of US bench.*) You can't exactly blame us. They'll be our first visitors since I've been back.

(*She waits for* PIET *to respond. He doesn't.*)

You do realise that don't you?

PIET. Yes, now that you mention it. All the more reason for a celebration. (PIET *SL of bench and table facing* GLADYS.)

GLADYS. I won't have any trouble finding something to write in my diary tonight. "At last! Other people! Just when it was beginning to feel as if Peter and I were the last two left in the world, Steven and his family came to supper."

PIET. (*Back with his unidentified Aloe.*) So . . .

(PIET AND GLADYS *sit on bench.* PIET *SL of* GLADYS.)

What I think I'll do is make some notes so I can go to the library and sit down with Gilbert Westacott Reynolds. "The Aloes of South Africa." A formidable prospect! Five hundred and sixteen big pages of small print . . . and that is not counting General Smuts'

Foreword. A lifetime's work so that ignoramusses like myself can point to an Aloe and say its name. (*Both still sitting.*) And make no mistake about it . . . I want to. So . . . let us attempt a sketch.

(GLADYS *removes hat.*)

What is it that makes knowing them so important?

GLADYS. Aloes?

PIET. No, their names. Just names in general. Yours, mine . . . anything! There's a lot of mystery in them isn't there.

(*Both remain seating.*)

GLADYS. Peter and Gladys Bezuidenhout, 27 Kraaibos Street, Algoa Park. It sounds very ordinary to me.

PIET. Because it's your own. Familiarity has bred contempt. I can remember very clearly how when we first met "Gladys Adams" was a name to conjure with.

(*Both remain seating.*)

GLADYS. Oh come Peter!

PIET. It's the truth my dear. How did you feel about mine?

(PIET AND GLADYS *remain seated on US bench.* PIET *has sketch pad on lap.*)

GLADYS. I liked it. Very much. It was certainly much longer than anything I'd hoped for. I thought it had a strong earthy sound . . .

PIET. Yes, it has got that. Bezuidenhout! Origin: Dutch. The first one arrived in 1695.

GLADYS. But to be quite frank I wasn't sure that Gladys went with it.

PIET. Really? Gladys Bezuidenhout. Sounds alright to me.

GLADYS. Familiarity has bred contempt Peter.

(*Both remain seated.*)

PIET. Touché! But it goes even deeper than that. What's the first thing we give a child when it's born? A name. Or when strangers meet, what is the first thing they do? Exchange names. According to the bible that was the very first thing Adam did in Eden. He named his world. "And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." No. There is no rest for me until I've identified this.

GLADYS. Can I see it?

(PIET *moves small plant across table in front of* GLADYS.)

PIET. (*His field book.*) This is the nearest I could get to it. Aloe Humilis. But it's not right is it.

GLADYS. They all look alike to me. Thorns and fat fleshy leaves.

PIET. Of course. The distinguishing characteristics of the genus, the family being Lillyáysye. Protection against grazing animals and the storage of moisture during periods of drought. But what species! Aye, there's the rub.

GLADYS. Do any of them have any scent?

PIET. No. That they don't have. But the old people use to make a purgative from the bitter juice of the leaves. And they are mentioned in the Bible.

(GLADYS AND PIET *still seated.*)

GLADYS. Really Peter! That doesn't help them. Purgatives and the Bible! It only makes it worse.

PIET. How do you mean?

GLADYS. Well they're not very pretty plants you know. Is there a good word for something you can't

and don't want to touch? That would describe them. (GLADYS *moves plant back to* PIET.)

PIET. (*Looking around at his collection.*) This is not fair to them. An Aloe isn't seen to its best advantage in a jam tin in a little backyard. They need space. The open veld with purple mountains in the distance. (PIET *rises—crosses SL to shelf—picks up plant and returns to table. He places plant on table.*) This one . . . Arboresence . . . I think it is possibly my favourite . . . we had one on the farm growing around a goat kraal. Eight, ten foot high and so thick a chicken couldn't push its way through. You should have seen that when it was flowering. A veritable forest of scarlet spikes with the little saykerbekkies . . . honey birds . . . sucking up the nectar. Or even old Ferox, with all its thorns! (PIET *picks up both plants off DS bench and places big one on table.*) A hillside covered with them in bloom!

"A glory such as from scant seed
The thristy rocks suffice to breed
Out of the rainless glare."

Roy Campbell. (PIET *places small Aloe on table.*) He understood them. And remember it's a defiant glory Gladys. That feld is a hard world. They and the thorn trees were just about the only things still alive in it when I finally packed-up the old bakkie and left the farm. (PIET *crosses US around table SR by gate and turns and faces* GLADYS *still sitting.*) Four years of drought but they were flowering once again. I'm ashamed to say it but I resented them for that. It's a small soul that resents a flower, but mine was when I drove away and saw them there in the feld, surviving where I had failed.

GLADYS. Is that the price of survival in this country? Thorns and bitterness.

PIET. (*Crosses SL and removes big Aloe to DSL. He crosses and places small Aloe DSL too.*) For the aloe it is. Maybe there's some sort of lesson for us there.

GLADYS. What do you mean?

PIET. We need survival mechanisms as well.

GLADYS. Speak for yourself Peter. I'm a human being not a . . . prickly pear.

PIET. (*Stares at her appalled.*) Oh, Gladys.

GLADYS. (*Still sitting.*) What's the matter?

PIET. The prickly pear isn't an Aloe Gladys.

GLADYS. Please Peter . . . !

PIET. It's not even indigenous my dear. The jointed cactus is a declared weed.

GLADYS. This conversation is upsetting me Peter.

PIET. Sorry my dear. What have I said?

GLADYS. We've already had droughts, prickly pears and despair. I suppose we'll be into politics next and the blackman's misery.

(GLADYS *rises and crosses up to door. She stops below step.* PIET *is DSL by dwarf Aloes.*)

I'm not exagerating Peter. That is what a conversation with you has become . . . a catalogue of South African disasters. (GLADYS *exits into house for table cloth and returns crosses to table.*) And you never stop! You seem to have a perverse need to dwell on what is cruel and ugly about this country. Is there nothing gentle in your world?

PIET. (*Crosses US of table SL side and strikes pad plant, Aloe US. He places Ferox SL shelf.*) Is it really as bad as that?

GLADYS. Yes it is. And don't make me feel guilty for saying it. (*The Aloes.*) Look at them! Is that what you hope for? To be like one of them. (GLADYS *places table cloth on table.*) That's not the only possibility in life you know. If that's what your expectations have shrunk

to it's your business, but God has not planted me in a jam tin. He might have cursed you Afrikaners but not the whole human race. I want to live my life, not just survive it. I know I'm in this backyard with them but *that* is not going to happen to me.

(PIET AND GLADYS *remain standing US of table.*)

PIET. I . . . (*Helpless gesture.*) . . . what can I say? I'm sorry you don't like them.

GLADYS. Don't like them! It's worse than that Peter. (*He looks at her.*) I'm going to be very honest with you. They frighten me. Yes. Thorns and bitterness? I'm afraid there's more than that to them. They're turgid with violence, like everything else in this country. And they're trying to pass it on to me.

PIET. (*Carefully.*) What do you mean my dear?

GLADYS. Don't worry. I won't let it happn. I won't! (*Pause.*)

(*Both remain standing.*)

PIET. (*Trying to break the mood.*) Well . . . (*Looks at his wrist watch.*) Almost time to get ready. They'll be here soon.

GLADYS. (*Fear.*) Who?

PIET. Steve and Mavis. (*Pause.*)

GLADYS. Yes of course.

PIET. I'll look after the table.

GLADYS. (*Hands to her face.*) I think I have picked up too much sun you know. I feel quite flushed. I wonder if we've got any calomille lotion in the house. (*She exits into the house leaving* PIET *alone.* PIET *then exits into house.*)

ACT I

SCENE 2

The Bedroom.

GLADYS *is at her dressing table.*

There is a knock on the door. She tenses.

PIET. Gladys! Can I come in? (*Pause.*)

GLADYS. Yes? One moment. (GLADYS *turns on table lamp. She looks back abruptly at her bed where her diary is hidden. She retrieves it and after a few desperate seconds of trying to find another hiding place, she sits down with it at her dressing table.*)
Alright!

(PIET *enters in shorts with towel. Crosses to dresser picks up cloths.*)

PIET. I thought you might be changing.

GLADYS. I will in a minute.

PIET. (*Crosses down to bed.*) Well I'll make a start. I won't be long. (*In the course of this scene he changes into a Safari suit—short trousers—and long socks and brown shoes.*) Shorts won't be out of place will they. It's not really a formal occasion, and it is outdoors. (PIET *puts on shorts.*) I am sure you ladies will look after the finery. (*He becomes conscious of her sitting very still at the dressing table.*) Were you busy with your diary.

GLADYS. What do you mean?

PIET. Making your entry for the day.

GLADYS. (*Still sitting at vanity.*) It's too early for that. Nothing has happened yet.

PIET. (*Sits on DS edge of bed.*) True. But as you said my dear, you will certainly have subject matter tonight.

GLADYS. I was just paging through it.

PIET. (*Sitting on bed puts on socks.*) Reading the old ones.

GLADYS. (*Remains at vanity.*) That's right. Reminding myself of the exciting life I've been living. (*Opening her diary but in such a way that he can't see it.*) This hasn't been such a good week. Let's see . . . an old woman looking for work, the meter-reader . . . who else. Oh yes! Those little black boys selling brooms and baskets. But they're always around. Last week I had a gentleman from the Watch Tower Society at the front door. That was a long talk. I was a bit nervous at first because he asked if he could come in, but he turned out to be very nice. Do you know they've got a date worked out for the end of the world? It's not far off either. I almost told him there are times when I think it has already happened.

(PIET *smiles.*)

I'm not joking. It can be very quiet here in the house when you're at work. If I haven't got the radio on or a car isn't passing in the street it's hard sometimes to believe there is a world out there full of other people. Just you and me. That's all that's left. The streets are empty and I imagine you wandering around looking for another survivor. If you ever find one Peter you must bring him home.

PIET. (*Still on bed DS edge.*) Well, I've got news for you. I found six of them and they'll be arriving in a short while. (PIET *puts on right sock then other sock.*) I know it's been a quiet time, but under the circumstances don't you think that's been for the best?

GLADYS. (*Still at vanity. A little laugh.*) Quiet time! You're an unpredictable mixture of understatement and

exaggeration. I never know which to expect. How long have I been back? Six months? Seven?

PIET. Nearly seven.

GLADYS. And you don't find it strange that in all that time not one of our friends has been around to see us or invited us to see them? Solly, or Mervyn or Betty . . . there was never any shortage of comrades in the old days. Is it because of me?

PIET. (*Rises puts on shirt.*) No. You mustn't think that.

GLADYS. (*Still sitting.*) Then say something! Every-time I mention it you either ignore me or change the subject.

PIET. (*Trying to placate her.*) Alright my dear! Relax.

GLADYS. God I wish you would stop saying that!

PIET. There's no mystery Gladys. A lesson in human nature maybe, but that's all. It's a dangerous time and people are frightened.

GLADYS. Of what?

PIET. Isn't that obvious.

GLADYS. I don't know. You tell me.

PIET. (*Rises and finishes putting on shirt.*) The police raids, then Steve going to gaol, the banning of the congress . . . everyone has crawled away into his own little shell. It's as simple as that. Why do you shake your head.

GLADYS. It's too simple.

PIET. Most explanations of human behaviour usually are.

GLADYS. Peter . . .

PIET. Yes my dear.

GLADYS. Is there something I don't know.

PIET. (*Evenly.*) If there is I know nothing about it as well. (PIET *sits middle of bed.*)

GLADYS. Then I am even more surprised at how easily you accept the situation.

PIET. I don't accept it easily, but there is nothing else to do. I can't change human nature. (PIET *folds towel.*)

GLADYS. Not even a complaint about its lack of courage and faith. After all it has meant the end of "The Cause."

PIET. No. I don't want to sit in judgement on others.

GLADYS. And what about you Peter?

PIET. Why should I be any different. Anyone is justified in feeling nervous and uneasy these days.

GLADYS. (*Still at vanity.*) The word is frightened. (*Pause.*) Well?

PIET. Yes I am.

GLADYS. That's very hard to believe. Watching you with your Aloes, quoting your Poetry . . . in spite of all that has happened you've still got a whole world intact. You seem very safe to me.

PIET. (*Still sitting on bed.*) The Aloes give me pleasure Gladys, not a purpose.

(*She smiles.*)

What's the matter?

GLADYS. (*Closing her eyes.*) Don't say anything! I am going to try to remember. And no prompting. (*She quotes from memory.*) "There is a purpose to Life, and we will be measured by the extent to which we harness ourselves to it." And the author . . . Thoreau.

PIET. (*Slaps hands. Still on bed.*) Correct.

GLADYS. (*Still sitting.*) Word perfect?

PIET. Yes.

GLADYS. (*Delighted with herself.*) So I get full marks! That's encouraging. After all it was quite a few years ago. Can you remember when?

PIET. No.

GLADYS. (*Turns SR to bed. Faces* PIET.) Oh Peter! How sad. Our very first meeting . . . the concert . . . you walked me home afterwards.

PIET. Yes, yes of course. I had forgotten.

GLADYS. But I'm cheating a little. I only remember it that clearly because I wrote it down that night and read it to myself many times afterwards. That's how my diaries started you know. The very first entry. I was so impressed with the words and your faith in them. (*Closing her eyes again as she tries to remember.*) You said goodnight to me on the verandah and I let myself into the house. My mother was still awake, and angry. I tried to apologise to her for being late but she wouldn't accept it. She just sat there in bed, propped up against her pillows, ignoring me. I made her a cup of ovaltine, went to my room, sat down at the dressing table and wrote: There is a purpose to Life . . . (*Very proud of herself.*) How's that?

PIET. (*Still on bed.*) Very good.

GLADYS. (*At vanity.*) Do you still believe it?

PIET. Yes. It's not as easy as it use to be, but I still do.

GLADYS. I envy you, as I did then. Nothing seemed more without purpose than the Gladys Adams I looked at in the mirror, in that stale room, with my mother sick and sulking on the other side of the wall. She had a purpose. A terrible determination not to die. I'm not exaggerating. Dr. Finnemore said her last six years were a miracle. I was convinced she was going to live longer than me. At times I still find it hard to believe that she is dead and I'm the one who's alive. It's very unfair. That was another entry in the first diary. "My mother died today. I haven't cried yet, and I don't think I'm going to."

PIET. Don't brood about bygones my dear. It's all over and done with. (*Trying to change the subject.*) That one must be nearly full now.

GLADYS. How do you know?

PIET. Page a day. It's nearly a year since I gave it to you.

GLADYS. (*Sharply.*) I see. It's going to be like a birthday is it, or our anniversary. A date that mustn't be forgotten. "Give Gladys another diary."

PIET. Right. I'll forget it if you want me to.

GLADYS. Just like that? That's more than I could do.

PIET. I'll try.

GLADYS. No, don't do that. It was a very touching gesture, even though I wasn't in a state to appreciate it at the time. (*Takes out card from diary.*) I've kept the card. I use it as a marker. (*Reading.*) "Take this sweet soul! We'll start again. They've come and gone and all in vain For we live on." It was so appropriate. Where does it come from?

PIET. (*Still on bed.*) Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

GLADYS. (*Her diary.*) I'd be lost without this. It's where I keep all my little secrets. A woman needs them, and as you know I did lose all of those I once had. You were given a receipt for them remember. A little piece of paper torn from a grubby notebook.

PIET. Yes I do. But that is something we must try to forget Gladys, not remember.

GLADYS. Yes, I realise that. But I can't help myself sometimes. There's so much that keeps reminding me. After all it was in this very room. He sat down here at that table, opened the first one, and started to read . . .

PIET. (*His desperation growing.*) I remember it very clearly my love! I was here! With you! (*Pause.*) Maybe if we changed the room around . . . rearranged the furniture! That might help. What do you think?

GLADYS. (*Remains seated at vanity.*) You could try.

PIET. I know what it really needs though. (*Still sitting on bed.*) More light! This is a dark little room. I know what that means. I've had my occassions to sit brooding in them as well. That's the answer Gladys! As soon as we've got a little something together in the bank again I'm going to buy some materials and put another window

in that wall. (PIET *rises.*) Light! That's what we need. And change the furniture as well. It will be a different room. I should have thought of it before.

GLADYS. (*She hasn't been listening to him.*) Yes . . . you led them in and then stood there next to the doorway. I can't remember much about you after that. I was still trying to get into my dressing gown. Then the one in charge saw them on the table, asked you what they were . . . you told him . . . he apologised to me nicely and started to read them . . . page by page. (PIET *paces US to dresser.*) I couldn't believe it was happening. Did I ever get my dressing gown on?

PIET. (*Crosses back DS to SR side of bed stands.*) Please . . . Gladys.

GLADYS. (*Violently.*) That's an important question Peter! Did I ever get my dressing gown on?

PIET. No.

GLADYS. So I just stood there . . . ! What did I look like.

PIET. For God's sake Gladys! What do you want!

GLADYS. An answer to a simple question! What did I look like? (GLADYS *remains seated.*)

PIET. (*Remains standing.*) You had just woken up, you were sleepy, you didn't know what was going on . . .

GLADYS. (*The dressing table mirror.*) Me. (*Pause.*)

PIET. They won't visit us again Gladys.

GLADYS. What makes you so sure of that?

PIET. Because there is nothing to be found here, and they know it. (PIET *crosses US of* GLADYS *SR of vanity and picks up Bible. Then crosses DS between bed and vanity.*) They're not fools. *Please* believe me. Here's my Bible.

GLADYS. What are you going to do with that!

PIET. Listen to me now. On this book . . . on my mother's grave . . .

GLADYS. Oh shut-up! Just say what you want to.

PIET. (*Crosses US then back DS of vanity.*) The search that night had nothing to do with you. They were looking for . . . God knows what! . . . banned literature, political secrets that didn't exist.

GLADYS. (*Still sitting.*) And instead they found my diaries, and they did take them away and they haven't given them back.

PIET. I'm still trying. That's why I've kept the receipt.

GLADYS. (*Outraged.*) You what?

PIET. Kept the receipt.

GLADYS. Get it.

(*He hesitates.*)

Where's the receipt Peter!

(*He produces it from inside the Bible. She can barely articulate herself.*)

What's written on it?

PIET. (*Reading the scrap of paper.*) "Gladys Bezuidenhout's diaries . . ." then Strydom's signature, the date and our address. (PIET *standing by DS edge of bed puts Bible on bed.*)

GLADYS. Tear it up. Small pieces!

(*Pause.*)

(PIET *rips up receipt. Hands small pieces to* GLADYS. *She holds out a hand, takes the pieces and puts them down carefully on the dressing-table. For a few seconds she lapses into an almost bland normality.*)

There. I've cancelled those years. I'm going to forget I ever lived them. They weren't just laundry lists you know. There were very intimate and personal things in those diaries, things a woman only talks about to herself. Even so it took me a lot of trust and courage to do that. I know I never had much of either but I was learning. (*Her hysteria beginning to surface again.*) You were such a persuasive teacher Peter! "Trust Gladys.

Trust yourself. Trust Life." There's nothing left of that. (*Her diary.*) Must I tell you what I've been trying to do with this all day? Hide it. It's been behind the dressing table . . . under the mattress . . . Can you think of somewhere really safe? (GLADYS *rises crosses US to door, slams door shut turns and faces* PIET.) Where nobody would find it, including yourself? There isn't, is there. (GLADYS *crosses DS to* PIET *by bed.*) Do you know what I would really like to do with this? Make you eat it and turn it into shit . . . then everybody would leave it alone. Yes, you heard me correctly. Shit! I've learnt how to use my dirty words. And just as well, because there's no other adequate vocabulary for this country. (*She crosses to vanity, removes pen and sits at vanity.*) Maybe I should do that in case they came again. A page full of filthy language. Because that is what they were really hoping for when they sat down with my diaries. Filth!

PIET. (*Still SR of bed.*) I don't know what to say.

GLADYS. (*Sitting at vanity.*) Thank God! Because if you were to tell me once more that they won't come again . . . ! To start with I don't believe you, but even if I did, that once was enough. You seem to have a lot of difficulty understanding that Peter. It only needs to happen to a woman once for her to lose all trust she ever had in anything or anybody. They violated me Peter. I might just as well have stayed in that bed, lifted up my night dress and given them each a turn. I've shocked you. Good! Then maybe now you understand. Yes, I can see it now. You are frightened.

PIET. (*Sits on bed.*) That's right. Please be careful.

GLADYS. You're too late with that advice. You should have given it to the Gladys Adams you conjured with instead of persuading her that life was to be trusted. Not that she needed that advice. She'd been warned. She knew the dogs are mad. They're guarding our dirt-

bins, not us. I discovered that as a little girl. Forgetting it was the biggest mistake I ever made . . . and it was you who made me do it. Are you feeling guilty?

PIET. Yes. I know that nothing of what you've been through would have happened if you hadn't married me.

GLADYS. (*Rises, crosses to* PIET, *fights with him.*) That's perfectly true. Which makes you as responsible for my condition as them. (*Stopping herself.*) No . . . No . . . ! (*She crosses to door with diary.*) Why don't you stop me!

PIET. (*Rises, crosses US. Nearly frantic.*) I can't! I've tried.

GLADYS. (*Appalled.*) I didn't mean that. I'm sorry. (*A pause . . . then quietly . . .*) What are we going to do Peter?

PIET. About tonight?

GLADYS. And tomorrow . . . and the next day . . .

PIET. (*Trying his utmost to calm her down.*) I know. First thing . . . I want you to lie and relax in a nice hot bath. I'll run it for you. Just lie and relax. And while you're doing that I'll take a bus into Gelvandale and put off Steve and Mavis . . .

GLADYS. No.

PIET. Just listen. I'll take the wine I bought and have a drink with them at their place. It won't be obvious. I'll say . . . I'll say something has come up at work . . . overtime . . .

GLADYS. No. Don't you think we're coping with enough lies already. Let them come. (GLADYS *crosses slowly DS to vanity.*) I'll be alright. (PIET *is not convinced.* GLADYS *puts her diary down on the dressing table.*) There. No more hiding it away . . . or anything. Don't you trust me? (GLADYS *places diary on vanity.*)

PIET. Yes. Of course I do. But are you quite sure you want them to come.

GLADYS. Yes. And to prove it, I'd like to change now please.

PIET. (*Picks up towel and Bible.*) Sorry my dear. I'll . . . I'll start to get things ready.

GLADYS. (*Sits at vanity. As he is leaving the room.*) I am trying Peter.

PIET. I know that. (PIET *exits bedroom.* GLADYS *puts on pearls, she rises, crosses to lamp, turns it off and exits.*)

ACT I

SCENE 3

The backyard.

PIET *is laying the table.*

GLADYS *comes out of the house. She has changed and has a shawl over her shoulders. Her manner—quiet and composed—is in direct contrast to the violence and hysteria of the bedroom.*

PIET *watches her expectantly.*

She goes to the table.

GLADYS. Is this where Mavis sits?

PIET. Yes.

(GLADYS *places a little parcel.*)

What is it my dear?

GLADYS. A small gesture, that's all. A little embroidered handkerchief. It's not very much but the needlework is very fine. My mother would never let a

visitor leave the house without some little souvenir of the occasion.

PIET. That's a lovely thought Gladys. And you look splendid!

GLADYS. Thank you. (*The table.*) Well, you're quite right Peter. It is going to look very good.

PIET. (*Crosses SL gives napkins to* GLADYS *crossing from SR. They meet US of table.*) Everyman's altar to the civilised virtues . . . a well laid table with food waiting and friends coming. The candlesticks create a sense of occassion don't they. You wouldn't like to do your fancy thing with the serviettes would you?

GLADYS. If it will make you happy. (*She sits down at the table and starts to fold them.*) You look nervous Peter. Please don't worry about me. I promise everything will be alright.

PIET. I know that! I'm just over anxious for us all to have a good time tonight. (*He takes a little book out of his pocket.*)

GLADYS. What are you reading?

PIET. My little book of poetry. I'm looking for a few strong lines for a toast when we sit down to eat.

GLADYS. What have you found?

PIET. (*Opening the book and reading.*) Where is it . . . where is it . . . Yes!

(PIET *and* GLADYS *standing between bench and table with book and glasses.*)

"Sweet is the scene where genial friendship plays
The pleasing game of interchanging praise."

There's that. Then this:

(GLADYS *begins to fold napkins.*)

"What is the odds so long as the fire of soul is kindled at the taper of conviviality, and the wing of friendship never moults a feather."

Or this!

"Thy friendship oft has made my soul to ache.

Do be my enemy—for friendships sake."

GLADYS. (*Folding napkins.*) Let me hear the second one again.

PIET. "What is the odds so long as the fire of soul is kindled at the taper of conviviality . . ."

GLADYS. Yes, that's the one. Tapers . . . candles! It fits in.

PIET. I never thought of that! Settled. I shall now commit it to memory. (*He crosses US into house.*)

(GLADYS *sits CS on bench.* PIET *reenters with tray of silverware. He places tray on USR edge of table.*)

GLADYS. Steven means a lot to you doesn't he.

PIET. Yes he does. After you I owe him more than anybody else in this world. If it wasn't for Steve I suppose I'd still be sitting in a little room somewhere hating rain . . . because it had come too late. That's how I ended up when I left the farm. A little room in Havelock Street. I use to pull the curtains and stuff cottonwool in my ears so that I wouldn't hear it.

GLADYS. That doesn't sound like you.

PIET. That was me alright. (*He goes into the house and returns SR of bench with a few more items for the table.*) Doesn't seem right does it that something so important in your life should depend on chance. Because that is all it was. It could just as easily not have happened. But one of the other drivers was sick one morning and they took me off the Humewood run and put me onto No. 11 . . . Market Square to Cadles. I was even fed-up about it. Instead of that nice drive next to the sea, it was into that ugly Coloured area with all the factories. (*He crosses 2 steps SR toward gate.*) But it also happened to be the morning the bus boycott started. I'd heard talk about it in the sheds, but so what! It had nothing to do with me. Politics! . . . (*He smiles.*) . . . until I drove my empty bus through that crowd walking to work. Hell Gladys, it was a sight! (*He*

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