Acting Edition

NOËL COWARD'S THE RAT TRAP

REIMAGINED BY BILL ROSENFIELD

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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NOTE

This edition reflects a rehearsal draft of the script and may differ from the final production.

The World Premiere production of this reimagined version of Noël Coward's *The Rat Trap* opened on Wednesday, 28 January 2026 at Park Theatre and was produced by Ashley Cook for Troupe Productions Ltd. The cast was as follows:

OLIVE LLOYD-KENNEDY ..... Gina Bramhill
SHEILA BRANDRETH ..... Lily Nichol
KELD MAXWELL ..... Ewan Miller
NAOMI FRITH-BASSINGTON ..... Ailsa Joy
EDMUND CROWE ..... Daniel Abbott
BURRAGE ..... Angela Sims
RUBY RAYMOND ..... Zoe Goriely

Creative and Production Team

Reimaginer ..... Bill Rosenfield
Director ..... Kirsty Patrick Ward
Set and Costume Designer ..... Libby Watson
Lighting Designer ..... Jamie Platt
Sound Designer and Composer ..... Ed Lewis
Movement Director ..... Ingrid Mackinnon
Fight Director ..... Claire Llewellyn
Costume Supervisor ..... Caroline Hannam
Stage Manager ..... Lois Sime
Assistant Stage Manager ..... Julia Wilkens
Assistant Stage Manager ..... Molly Nice
Assistant Stage Manager ..... Abigail Grimes
Assistant Stage Manager ..... Natasha Werblow
Assistant Director ..... Kyle Smith
Production Manager ..... Lewis Champney
Producer ..... Ashley Cook

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Production Image and Programme Graphic Design | Rebecca Pitt Creative
Publicity, Rehearsal and Production Photography | Mitzi de Margary
Production Insurance | Robert Israel for Gordon & Company
Production Accountancy | Lois Hargreaves for Collins & Company
Bookkeeping | Magita Constantine and Michelle Brooks for Collins & Company

The first production of *The Rat Trap* opened at the Everyman Theatre, Hampstead on Monday, 18 October 1926. The play was presented by Raymond Massey, Allan Wade and George Carr, who also directed, with the following cast:

SHEILA BRANDRETH . . . . . Joyce Kennedy
KELD MAXWELL . . . . . Robert Harris
OLIVE LLOYD-KENNEDY . . . . . Mary Robson
BURRAGE . . . . . Clare Greet
NAOMI FRITH-BASSINGTON . . . . . Elizabeth Pollock
EDMUND CROWE . . . . . Raymond Massey
RUBY RAYMOND . . . . . Adrianne Allen

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Alan Brodie, Alison Lee and Ella Radley at Alan Brodie Representation, Jez Bond, Amelia Cherry, Joshua Goodman, Dawn James, Nicci Allt, Monique Walker, Eliza Jones, Tom Bailey, David Hunter, Gianluca Zona and Matthew Barker at Park Theatre, Kim Poster, Robert and Olivia Temple, Oliver Soden, Blueprint Pictures, National Theatre Studio, Rita Patrocinio, Tom Hendryk, Evelien Van Camp, Becca Lymbourides, Emma Leon, Andrew Berekdar, Sir John Soane's Museum, Kishore Walker, Stephen and Elizabeth Cook, Oliver Cook and Keiron Cooke.

A WORD FROM THE REIMAGINER

Noël Coward was 18 years old when he wrote *The Rat Trap* in 1918. Eight years later, after his great success with *Hay Fever*, *The Vortex* and *Fallen Angels* it was produced to a decidedly mixed reception for a two week run at the Everyman Theatre in Hampstead. However, he didn't see it as he was in New York.

The Rat Trap was first published in 1924 as part of the Contemporary British Dramatist series (Vo. 13). That initial publication was dedicated to a promising young actress, Meggie Albanesi, a close friend of Coward's who, rumour has it, died from complications of a botched abortion. Her close friend, Lorn Lorraine, became Coward's personal secretary for the next 40 years.

In 2006 it was finally produced in London at the 50 seat Finborough Theatre where it, as before, received a mixed critical reception. I happened to see it and to be honest I found it to be over-written and dull. And yet in 2021, in conjunction with the lavish Coward Exhibition at Guildhall Art Gallery, I couldn't resist the temptation to attend a 'Rehearsed Reading' of the play. It was still over-written, but thanks in good part to a youthful diverse cast in contemporary dress, it was far from dull. I found that it leaned more toward 'Ibsen' than what we now think of as 'Coward'.

I wrote to Alan Brodie (who alongside Alison Lee manages the Coward Estate) and told them my thoughts about the play. They, in turn, offered me the opportunity to explore the play and see what I could do with it. I dove in and soon realised that this was an important rediscovery in the Coward canon. Written at the end of the Edwardian era the play addresses the very modern idea of women having an equal place alongside men in society. It highlights themes of the subjugation of women with a frankness which is, unfortunately, still relevant to today's audiences.

From this very early effort Coward was depicting human relationships (be they romantic, platonic, or artistic) with a characteristic confidence, incisiveness, and wit, which would later be more maturely addressed in plays such as *Private Lives*, *Hay Fever*, *Design for Living* and *Present Laughter*.

My 'reimagining' of the play allowed me to cut or revise a significant amount of dialogue which had detracted from the deeper themes within the work. Something that in retrospect Coward might have done at some later date. In the first volume of his autobiography *Present Indicative* Coward stated:

'It is not without merit. There is some excruciatingly sophisticated dialogue in the first act of which, at the time, I was inordinately proud. From the point of view of construction, it is not very good except for the two principal quarrel scenes. The last act is an inconclusive shambles.'

I hope that I've satisfactorily rectified those flaws and in the process have given a new life to one of our great playwright's earliest works.

– Bill Rosenfield, 2026

CHARACTERS

SHEILA BRANDRETH
KELD MAXWELL
OLIVE LLOYD-KENNEDY
BURRAGE
NAOMI FRITH-BASSINGTON
EDMUND CROWE
RUBY RAYMOND

SETTING

ACT ONE – Olive Lloyd-Kennedy's flat in Kensington
ACT TWO – The study of the Maxwells' house in Belgravia, six months later.
ACT THREE – The same as Act Two, one year later
ACT FOUR – The living room of 'Iverna Cottage', The Lizard, Cornwall, four months later.

TIME

The early 1920s.

REIMAGINER'S NOTES

All roles can be played by actors of any ethnicity, but Sheila should be played by an actor from the Global Majority.

The Reimaginer would like to dedicate this work to Alan Brodie and Alison Lee who gave him the opportunity and honour to collaborate with 'The Master'.

ACT ONE

(The drawing-room of **MRS OLIVE LLOYD-KENNEDY***'s flat in West Kensington.)*

*(***OLIVE***,* **SHEILA** *and* **KELD** *are just finishing dinner.)*

OLIVE. Now, I'll give you a toast. I only want to wish you both absolute unclouded happiness – I feel a little sad when I think of Sheila leaving me, we've been awfully happy together. But Keld dear, I trust you to look after her always, she's worth it.

SHEILA. Thank you, Olive darling. Keld?

KELD. I'll only just say thank you – like Sheila.

SHEILA. I'm glad my last night of blessed singleness has been like this, just with the two people I love best in the world. All today has been deliciously free from fuss. I always imagined a wedding eve to be full of boxes with their lids off, and new frocks lying over the backs of chairs and bright girlish bridesmaids asking foolish questions.

OLIVE. It would be like that if you were having an ordinary orthodox performance in church. Weddings are the most horribly indelicate affairs; why on earth can't people marry privately and give a reception to their well-wishers when they return from their honeymoon?

KELD. I know what you mean; it's unpleasant to feel that when the couple have arrived at their destination the relatives and friends all sit at home and say "I wonder if

they'll go out tonight." A honeymoon is a thing for two, and no one else should know anything at all about it.

SHEILA. *(Raptly.)* Oh, Keld, just think of it – our Cornwall. I'm so thankful we both love it; it would have been awful if you had wanted Devon.

OLIVE. But South Devon is very sweet darling. It has nice red cliffs and a blue postcardy sea with little boats, and it's all very sunny and pretty.

SHEILA. I wonder if Cornwall will ever get civilized and horrible.

KELD. I suppose so, some day, now that the labour classes are so firmly getting the upper hand; all the beauty of England is bound to be spoilt eventually.

OLIVE. *(Rising.)* Well, let's leave these depressing remains now; isn't it comforting to feel that we have done the right thing, oozed sentiment over one another and drunk toasts. It gives one such a lovely glow of satisfaction to feel thoroughly in the picture, even over a trifle.

SHEILA. Do you consider our marriage a trifle?

OLIVE. Marriage nowadays is nothing but a temporary refuge for those who are uncomfortable at home. Come in here so that the servants can clear away.

SHEILA. I thought it was her evening out?

OLIVE. No dear, every *second* Tuesday, you ought to know by this time. By the way, Naomi Frith-Bassington wants to come up for a while this evening.

KELD. Who is she?

OLIVE. A placid creature who writes fiercely sensuous novels; she's bringing her man with her.

SHEILA. What kind of man – husband, father, brother, or only lover?

OLIVE. Only lover. They live in mild unassuming sin on the first floor. They'd much rather be married really, but someone once told them that free love was Bohemian. His name is Edmund Crowe. He writes poems for very inferior art periodicals and haunts the Poetry Bookshop.

KELD. That brands him as a *minor* literary at once.

SHEILA. Haven't I met *her* before somewhere?

OLIVE. Yes, at the Next Week Club; she gave a lecture the other night on books one should read, and Rebecca North replied with a few pointed remarks on "Books one should not write." Poor Naomi was completely routed.

KELD. Would she be good copy?

OLIVE. Excellent, she's a "soul"; she does her own washing up with a volume of Verlaine wedged in the soap box. She says she couldn't live without the classics, and seems to imagine that the classics couldn't live without her.

KELD. Oh do fetch her, Olive, I'll put her in a play.

OLIVE. I'm afraid she's a rather basic type , but still –

(She rises.)

KELD. Nevermind.

OLIVE. I shan't be long.

(Exit **OLIVE**.*)*

KELD. Well, it's your last night of freedom, do you feel frightened?

SHEILA. Of course not, I'm thrilled.

KELD. So am I, but I'm frightened as well – terrified! I suppose it's silly nerves, but to be on the brink of a great happiness is a scarifying feeling.

SHEILA. You'll be a wreck tomorrow if you go on worrying over nothing.

KELD. Oh, no I shan't, there's not much longer to wait now, thank heaven – we've been very patient. I say, doesn't "we've" sound simply wonderful; a few months ago there wasn't any "we've" only "I've"!

SHEILA. Yes, it stands for our love and our happiness and the joy of working together and helping one another to make our way in the world. Oh, Keld darling, wouldn't it be awful if we failed!

KELD. You're getting nervous now.

SHEILA. I'm not nervous over the immediate future; I'm looking further ahead; we might be over ambitious and wreck our happiness or under ambitious and wreck our *careers*.

KELD. We must make up our minds firmly to stick to the middle way and have both happiness and careers.

SHEILA. It sounds easy but it will probably be a struggle.

KELD. Well as long as we struggle together it won't matter.

SHEILA. *(With fervour.)* Yes! That's what we must do. Struggle together. Don't lets part in thought for one minute, or even have a difference of opinion, they *are* so undermining.

KELD. *(Laughing.)* Darling, you must be reasonable. I'm afraid we shan't be able to get to the end of our married life without occasional arguments.

SHEILA. Yes, but let's keep to little ones, they're less dangerous. Oh I do love you Keld; but somehow I don't believe there is enough of the maternal in my affection; I feel that to be a good wife I should want to smooth your hair and warm your slippers and be tactful at breakfast, but I don't. I want to kiss you – and to ruffle your hair hard, not smooth it.

(She does so.)

KELD. *(Kissing her passionately.)* You're adorable, you're wonderful! I – I – Oh God! *(His words are lost in an increasingly passionate kiss.)*

SHEILA. *(Half-laughing and breaking away.)* Do stop Keld.

KELD. I like that! You ruffled my hair first.

SHEILA. I couldn't help it, it was asking to be ruffled, all sleek and flat *(She rubs her hands together.)* – and greasy.

KELD. It's the best hair wash in London – smell. *(He proffers his head.)*

SHEILA. *(Sniffing.)* Yes, it is rather nice.

KELD. If you were a proper girlish bride you'd like me to reek of tobacco and tweed, and you could call me your "grumpy daddy"; don't you think that would be awfully attractive?

(There is the noise of the outer door opening.)

SHEILA. Look out, here they come – do let them catch us embracing, they rather expect it of us – I hate disappointing people!

(They embrace.)

(Enter **OLIVE**, **NAOMI** *and* **EDMUND**. **KELD** *and* **SHEILA** *break away from one another in assumed embarrassment.)*

KELD. By Jove, I –

SHEILA. We never heard you, I –

OLIVE. Don't pretend. You know you wouldn't mind the whole world watching you kiss, you frequently do it on buses when your feelings become too much for you.

SHEILA. Olive, we only did it once, and that was outside with one old man looking on.

OLIVE. We won't argue about it now – you all know one another, at least by name, don't you? Naomi Frith-Bassington, Sheila Brandreth, Edmund Crowe, Keld Maxwell. How I loathe introducing people. Do sit down everybody and talk. I can't be entertaining tonight, it saps my vitality dreadfully having to keep a restraining hand upon Sheila's bubbling spirits. I've been terrified during the last few days that she'd suddenly scream with excitement in the street.

NAOMI. Miss Brandreth, how courageous it is of you to marry! I should never dare.

KELD. Why not?

NAOMI. Well Edmund and I realise the value of love shouldn't be fettered down by the chains of matrimony.

SHEILA. Keld and I don't intend to be fettered in any way; personally I think that the strain of living together openly would be much harder to bear. I should hate self-righteous people to look down their noses at me.

EDMUND. That sort of thing though is so trivial.

SHEILA. Trivial perhaps when you haven't got to make a success in the world, but you see we have, and we don't mean to be handicapped at the start by adverse public opinion. Also, we shall feel happier – married.

NAOMI. Of course, but that is just the horror of it, being married out of fear under those circumstances and not for love.

OLIVE. *(Laughing.)* In view of tomorrow's event, I think this is quite the most delicious argument I've ever heard.

NAOMI. You see Edmund and I are so happy, somehow I feel it my duty to try and help others be happy too.

SHEILA. Your theory is that love should be free?

NAOMI. *(Enthusiastically.)* Absolutely, free – always.

KELD. Like the National Gallery.

SHEILA. Keld.

OLIVE. Personally I agree with Sheila.

SHEILA. Then there's another point – how do you face the child problem? To me it seems terribly cruel to bring a child into the world under *any* circumstances, but to make it illegitimate as well, is surely adding unnecessary insult to injury.

NAOMI. Nowadays that sort of thing never matters; do you imagine that I should mind if I were illegitimate?

SHEILA. Perhaps not, but your son or daughter, when grown up might have different views.

(An awkward pause.)

NAOMI. Anyhow Edmund and I are not going to have any children.

KELD. Supreme faith in a benevolent Providence must be a great comfort.

*(***SHEILA** *and* **KELD** *exchange a look of mutual satisfaction.)*

EDMUND. *(With an air of taking up a pre-arranged cue.)* By the way, apropos of Providence, have you read Naomi's new book *Fate's Plaything*? It came out last week.

SHEILA. No, I'm afraid I haven't yet.

NAOMI. I'll send you a copy. I should value your criticism very highly.

SHEILA. Thank you so much –

NAOMI. Of course I'm afraid in some ways it is a little outspoken, but one can't write of Bohemia without defying convention a tiny bit.

KELD. I didn't know there was any Bohemia left now.

(Another slight pause.)

OLIVE. Personally I've given up writing with a message to humanity in it. *Only A Shop Girl,* for instance my masterpiece – eight thousand words – firmly refused by every editor in London. Even *Fireside Fun* turned it down.

SHEILA. Fancy sending it to such an awful –

OLIVE. *(Holding up her hand.)* Don't dear, don't. I won't hear a word against *Fireside Fun*. It may not like my story, its sense may not be attuned to the pathos and yearning of *Only a Shop Girl,* but in spite of that it is a splendid little paper, it says so on the cover and it ought to know.

NAOMI. I know the editor of *Home Happiness* perhaps it –

OLIVE. No, I've sent it there, they were nicer. They said it wasn't the type of thing that they published, but that they liked my style.

EDMUND. It is heartrending to send one's work to unappreciative boors who fail to understand one's message.

(Yet another awkward pause.)

KELD. Would you all think it frightfully rude of me if I went home to bed now?

SHEILA. Oh Keld!

KELD. Now don't press me to stay; we're going to be together to the end of our lives and I want a good night's rest in order to face the situation with the requisite courage.

SHEILA. *(Laughing.)* You are a beast.

KELD. Well anyhow, good night, darling.

(He kisses her fondly.)

SHEILA. Good night dear.

(He shakes hands with **NAOMI** *and* **EDMUND**.*)*

KELD. Olive.

(He kisses her.)

OLIVE. Good night Keld. Try to sleep.

*(***KELD** *laughs and goes off, followed by* **SHEILA**.*)*

NAOMI. I suppose we really ought to be going too.

OLIVE. Oh no, it's quite early yet.

NAOMI. *(Rising.)* But as it's your last night with Miss Brandreth I'm sure you'll want to be alone and talk! It must be a great wrench parting.

OLIVE. I shall miss her dreadfully.

EDMUND. *(Shaking hands with* **OLIVE**.*)* Good night, Mrs Kennedy; thank you so much for letting us come up.

OLIVE. Not at all. I hope you'll come again, and cheer my loneliness.

NAOMI. We should love to.

(They go to the door and meet **SHEILA** *re-entering.)*

Oh Miss Brandreth, I wish you all the happiness in the world; nothing can ever matter in life if people really love each other.

SHEILA. Thank you very much. You will come and see us soon, won't you?

EDMUND. Good night, all my best wishes too.

SHEILA. Thank you, you're both very kind.

(Exit **NAOMI** *and* **EDMUND**.*)*

*(***OLIVE** *sees them out and then returns.)*

*(***SHEILA** *sinks into a chair. She continues...)*

How nice it is of people to be so kind, and how perfectly awful to have to keep saying "Good night – Thank You", "Good night – Thank you so much", "Thank you – good night."

OLIVE. It is difficult to keep from being monotonous; I suppose we really ought to manage it by inflection. "*Good* night, thank you. Good *night*, thank you."

SHEILA. If I hear those words again I shall go raving mad.

OLIVE. I feel that the moment has now arrived for us to say a few sentimental words to each other and retire firmly to bed.

SHEILA. Oh, Olive, isn't it awful, the last evening in this flat together! I'm so miserable.

OLIVE. *(Laughing.)* Miserable! If only you could see yourself at the moment, so bubbling over with happiness that you can hardly speak. You're going to have a nice strong husband to honour and obey you, and endless love and romance, and – the thought of it makes me quite maudlin – I shall be left alone, Sheila, all alone, when you are giving your gorgeous dinner parties and receptions and standing at the top of the staircase superbly dressed receiving your guests, I –

SHEILA. As we don't intend to entertain our guests in the bathroom, dear, it would be simpler to receive them in the hall – the staircase is *very* narrow.

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