

AND FLIGHTS OF ANGELS
SING THEE

A play by

Warren John Deacon
and
Timothy Constant

Dramaturge
P. Plaza

warren@newbiyou.com
949 872 0978
© 2017 by Warren Deacon & Tim Constant
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Cast of Characters
(in order of appearance)

JOHN: As a young man, he is tall and graceful with all of the charm and flawless bearing one would expect in someone groomed from early childhood to be a prince of the English theater. He is always immaculately and rather conservatively tailored. His features are straight and strong and fine but curbed from real beauty by an almost dour seriousness of expression reflecting a controlled and even priggish self-righteousness. He can seem cold and even distant -- a disapproving aura which vanishes like a magician's dove when he laughs, something which he does often, if only for a short time. His hair is, contrary to the fashion of the day, rather long. As an older man, his face is increasingly hawk-like without losing one jot of its nobility. His posture remains stick-straight and his legendary voice, instead of becoming reedy, seems to increase in range and power.

RALPH: A walking contradiction -- a sweet, childlike innocence combined with a glacial intelligence concealed in calculated absentmindedness which his contemporaries find both endearing and deeply vexing. His manner of dress is careless and whimsical. It would not be unusual to see him pull a sock from his breast pocket instead of a handkerchief to soothe a runny nose. At twenty Ralph looks thirty-five and routinely plays fifty on the stage. He has the mind of a poet-philosopher, the soul of Peter Pan, and the broad, square, face and body of a lumbering tradesman. Were it not for his eyes, which are large and wide set -- the questioning eyes of a six year old savant or budding saint -- his face would be completely nondescript at best. He has, in short, an almost perfect face for a character actor.

LARRY: Not at all handsome in a conventional sense but seductively charismatic and possessed of a strange androgyny which is compelling to both men and women. He is quite aware of the effect he has on people and uses it shamelessly. His movements are feline but in rare moments of repose he reminds one of a dangerously coiled spring which is about to snap. He does not dress so much as costume himself. He might, for example, wear a mustard-colored suit paired with a chocolate brown great-coat, ruffled shirt, cowboy boots and a pork-pie hat. As he ages he loses his hair and leans toward portliness and though plagued by ill health in later life retains, through compulsive exercise and great force

of will, his boundless energy and an almost preternaturally deep focus.

VARIOUS OFF STAGE VOICES

The Setting

An old theatre in the crumbling downtown district of a coastal English city.

Once the opulent heartbeat of a glittering social milieu during pre-war days, the building is all but forgotten amid upscale coffee bars and franchise fish-and-chip stands. The design should incorporate the architecture which exists in the theatre where the play is to be performed, including raw walls, fly gallery, etc., wherever possible.

The set revolves on a turntable, revealing three distinct areas hidden in the brooding darkness:

- a scruffy downstairs DRESSING ROOM,
- the gloomy BACKSTAGE area, from an actor's perspective looking through the proscenium and toward the audience,
- and the STAGE itself, ablaze in light, from an audience perspective.

With the turntable in motion, an actor could exit the dressing room, climb a few stairs to a landing, then step onto the stage. With his back to us, the turntable revolves again and he is now facing us. And we and his imaginary audience become magically one.

The mechanical guts of the turntable should be visible and wonderfully theatrical. When it rotates, it strains and shudders, nearly drowning out the actors.

At the axis of the turntable and always visible in all three environments is the traditional theatre work light -- a single bulb on a stand protected by a wire cover:

The warm center of a cool, vast universe.

ACT ONE, SCENE 1.

A dressing room below the stage. Three makeup tables, yellowed mirrors, circled in dusty bulbs.

At center sits JOHN, back to the audience, in a tattered wingback chair. His breathing is laborious, methodical.

RALPH'S VOICE

(off)
Ladies and gentlemen, places please. This will be your final call for places.

A long pause. John sucks in a swallow of air.

Huhhhhhnnnnnnn.

JOHN

Stands unsteadily. He's quite old and his hands shake. Yet, when he walks to the dressing table, it is with an elegance and grace that seems uninformed by his great frailty. He stares into the mirror, his head darting this way and that.

JOHN
"Now is the winter of our--".

Calls out.

JOHN
Line? "Now is the winter of our -- disengagement"?

THE WORK LIGHT FLICKERS. He turns suddenly and peers up at it.

JOHN
Don't tell me the damned -- dam-ned --
thing's chucking it in. Disconnection!
Line! "Now is the winter of our
disconnection?" God's decaying teeth!

Climbs the stairs
toward the work
light.

JOHN
Cheeky, disrespectful, thankless -- for a
lifetime of service. "Now is the winter of
our discombobulation." Blast!

Wanders out onto the
stage, his back to
us. He's washed in a
mysterious, blazing
light whose source
is ambiguous, and
much more powerful
than the flickering
work light.

JOHN
The fabulous invalid is about to piss on out
of it. Right in front of my nose. Without
so much as a fair thee well. Not from
mediocrity or sky high prices, nor even the
most vapid writing in a century.

Loudly, his voice
echoing in the vast
space.

JOHN
But from a chronic and obstinate failure --

Spits the words,
delighting in the
full, rich sound.

JOHN
-- a mis-guided, in-ex-pli-c-able failure
to pay the fucking light bill!

Taps the work light.
It flutters for a
moment. Goes out.
Then flickers back
to dim half-life.

JOHN
Make up your mind. Live or die. To be or not
to be. That's the bloody question here.
(off,
loudly)

Hel lo? Anyone here at all? What is the pl ay?
Where the hell is my tea? I 've always taken
tea, lemon, two sugars, no milk, no later
than the hal f.

Makes hi s way back
down to the dressi ng
room.

JOHN

(si ngs)
And will a' not come agai n?
And will a' not come agai n?
No, no, he is dead;
Go to thy death-bed;
He never will come agai n.

Ri fles through the
costumes on a rack
nearby.

JOHN

Now is the winter of our -- line!

RALPH

(off)
Di scontent!

JOHN

Thank you. "Now is the winter of our
di scontent."

A beat.

JOHN

Damn.

(cal ls off
loudl y)
Wrong pl ay. Don' t have a bl oody cl ue.

He si ts. Sl umps back
in hi s chair as
before. He breathes
a long si gh.

JOHN

(barely
heard)
What' s the pl ay?

THE WORK LIGHT
BRIGHTENS FOR A
MOMENT. THEN FADES
COMPLETELY.

A long si lence.

RALPH fl i es i nto the

vast space above the
dressing room.

Literally flies --
on shimmering wires
which the lighting
makes no attempt to
conceal. He wears a
driving duster and
goggles, a natty
suit and a pair of
small gossamer
wings.

RALPH

What shall we play tonight, Johnnie?

He's having some
trouble with the
wires. Gets
tangled. One of his
wings breaks off and
flutters to the
stage.

JOHN

Oh, dear. An angel with a broken wing. I
have a bad feeling about this.

RALPH

Sounds like something they say in the
cinema. We don't have much time, Johnnie.
Tick tock. Ticking clock.

JOHN

Something they also say in the cinema. I
suppose I should now place something
furtively in the drawer?

RALPH

Something to fall back on.

John stumbles to a
wicker basket in the
corner, opens it,
takes out a pistol.
Goes over to a
battered old chest
of drawers. Opens
it. Flamboyantly
places the gun in
the top drawer and
closes it.

RALPH
Not what I would describe as furtive.

JOHN
Don't let me forget where I put it.

RALPH
The audience will be thinking of nothing else.

JOHN
Especially if we bore them.

Ralph descends,
lights heavily like
an obese firefly
onto the stage.

Removes the wires.
Disconnects the
flying harness.
They disappear into
the abyss above.
Looks down at John,
smiling gently.

RALPH
What shall we play?

JOHN
You're asking the wrong man. I can't tie my
shoes or butter my toast.

RALPH
"But thy eternal
Summer shall not fade.
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his
shade."

Waves vaguely in the
air.

THE WORK LIGHT
SPUTTERS BACK ON.

John startles
upward in his chair.
Sucks in a long
breath.

JOHN
Huhhhhhnnnnnnn.

A beat. He glares
into Ralph's face.

JOHN

Well don't just stand there staring, man.
What the deuce are you doing here?

RALPH

Oh Johnnie, I do so admire your dour
consistency.

JOHN

Consistency can hardly be said to be
"dour". Speak the Queen's English on the
stage for God's sake or don't bother to
speak at all.

Stares up at the
work light above
them.

JOHN

Never saw anything like it. My great aunt,
Dame Ellen, always told me the theatre is
a temple. The actors its priests. The work
light burns everlasting. Signaling the
presence of Almighty God. Well, Almighty
God appears to be undergoing a slow and
painful demise by electrical fizzlement

Li stens agai n to the
sound of hi s voi ce.

JOHN

Fi zz-I e-ment!
(to Ralph)
Di fferent somehow.

RALPH

What?

JOHN

The house. Sound a little strange to you?

Claps hi s hands.

JOHN

Don't you thi nk?

Ralph snaps hi s
fi ngers. Li stens to
the hol low echo.

RALPH

Perhaps. Been a whi le.

JOHN

Hmmm?

RALPH

Si nce we pl ayed here.

JOHN
I don't have the slightest idea what you mean, dear boy.

RALPH
Well, it's been years, hasn't it?

JOHN
I don't even know what I mean, actually.

RALPH
Never mind. Takes time.

JOHN
Out of sorts somehow. What's the play tonight?

RALPH
Slipped your mind?

JOHN
Can't remember a bloody thing.

RALPH
Can't remember a single line. Haven't a clue who you're supposed to be. Actor's worst nightmare.

Leads John to the dressing tables.

JOHN
Stark naked. Your sagging prick lollygagging between your thighs in front of God and every groundling in London.

RALPH
But then you sit.

Sits down.

RALPH
Gaze into the glass. And there. There he is, just behind the frame, like a medieval painting, bathed in light, staring back at you.

JOHN AND
RALPH
(together)
And finally you know him, as though for the first time.

JOHN
And he you I dare say.

RALPH
You smell the electric hum of the hot lights.

JOHN
And suddenly you know the play.

RALPH
Everything is clear as crystal.

JOHN
Right as rain.

Ralph tucks a paper bib under his chin. Reaches for a jar of cold cream, slathers a blob on his face. Hands the jar to John.

RALPH
Start with a clean palate you used to say.

JOHN
I used to say a lot of things. But, what time is it? What -- time is -- this? What is the play?

RALPH
It will come presently.

John sits, begins to apply cold cream. The years begin to fall away.

JOHN
What's the time?

RALPH
Oh, past the half I should think.

JOHN
Oh Lord.

RALPH
Don't upset yourself. If you're not quite ready, they'll hold the curtain. Surely you've earned that small courtesy.
(to audience)

Ladies and gentlemen, your attention. We will be going up just a few minutes late this evening. But please be patient. Your kind indulgence will be rewarded by a brilliant performance from one of the theatre's most important thespians. And this reminder once again: please turn off all cell phones and pagers. Thank you.

John runs his fingers through his hair.

JOHN
Who's that handsome young man in the glass?

RALPH
Surely you remember. You were a Looker.

John studies his face in the mirrors.

JOHN
Do you think I'm handsome?

RALPH
There were always a dozen ripe beauties