

HETTY. Or are men moulded by the women around them – their adoring mothers, their subservient wives . . . or in the case of Mister Errol Flynn . . .

*Everyone goes ‘Oooh!’*

Exactly . . . the hysterical female response to a meagre moustache and a tight pair of breeches . . .

FLORA. We shall be grappling with thirty-five of the greatest works of the last four hundred years . . . Sophocles to Winnie the Pooh . . .

HETTY. But to achieve all this we must begin by grappling only one, *Macbeth* . . . It is a timely play – a play about the thrilling ascendancy of evil and the halting retaliations of the good . . . We have just one month to prove to the Ministry that we’re worth their money and every hope that our first performance will be given in the legendary Hoxton Hall . . . which very fittingly is a place renowned as a home for theatrical innovation . . . Now this might be a good moment for me to call a break.

*Everyone freezes. Except ROSALIND and CHARLIE.*

CHARLIE. But you didn’t – worst luck – you got us doing some sort of poxy game thing . . . to show us just how much we’d have to rely on each other.

ROSALIND. ‘Take a line each of this speech . . .

CHARLIE. . . . and like a relay-runner pass the baton to your team-mate – pass on the thought . . .

ROSALIND and CHARLIE. . . . You won’t achieve anything that sounds remotely human to begin with . . .’

*The scene returns to the past.*

HETTY (*hands out papers*). . . . but we shall persist and in the end we shall seem to be one voice, thinking with one mind, feeling with one heart . . .

‘Tomorrow . . . and tomorrow and tomorrow . . .

FLORA. . . . Creeps in this petty pace from day to day . . .

ROSALIND. To the last syllable of recorded time . . .

CHARLIE. And all our yesterdays have lighted fools . . .

VOICE 1. The way to dusty death . . . Out, out, brief candle.

VOICE 2. Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player . . .

VOICE 3. That struts and frets his hour upon the stage . . .

*IVY and JOSEPH are walking in the dark under an umbrella. They have a torch. JOSEPH is reading out the typed sheet of ‘Tomorrow . . .’*

JOSEPH. And then is heard no more; it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury . . .

IVY. . . . signifying nothing . . .’

Bloody bogger it. Is that what Shakespeare’s like? It’s incredibly depressing . . .

JOSEPH. No no, Ivy . . . His language . . . it is his swing music and his blues . . . O that I were a glove upon that hand . . .

*He takes her hand.*

IVY. Shurrup, you daft plonker . . . Anyway, your mum would be none too happy about that . . . Hey, what does it say on the bench, Joe? . . . Switch the torch on a minute . . .

JOSEPH. ‘Jim and Elsie always and forever . . .

IVY. . . . 1914.’ I wonder if they made it through . . .

*They sit down.*

JOSEPH. So what is the story of Ivy?

IVY. There’s nothing to say really . . . I’ve always been in domestic service even though I’m rubbish at it. Sometimes I say my dad’s Paul Robeson but I’ve never had a family, like a mum or anything . . . I was brought up in an orphanage . . . you know Doctor Barnado’s Home?

JOSEPH. Oh . . . Has he been away?

IVY. So what about your dad?

JOSEPH. My father, he is doctor . . . his especial job is bring babies into this world . . . Jewish babies, Christian babies . . . he is not judging . . .

IVY. Why didn't he come to England with you?

JOSEPH. Kristallnacht – the night of broken glass – there is much violent against the Jewish people . . . a woman is coming to our house with a baby in her arms . . . its little body so bloody and she is begging, 'Lass mein Baby nicht sterben' . . . 'Don't let my baby die' . . . My father is holding baby in his arms as it is screaming. My mother has only hatred for those who are doing this . . . my father has only love for those who are suffering . . . So no . . . no . . . he is not for leaving . . .

*They hold hands under the umbrella in silence. An ARP WARDEN shouts 'Put that light out.'*

HETTY *reads another letter at the bureau.*

HETTY (*reads*). 'My own dear Crispian. My darling, you are the only person I can tell how sick I feel before every rehearsal – a combination of adrenalin and animal fear . . . I have to sit on the floor of the bathroom and talk myself into getting to my feet and going to confront all those expectant faces . . . It must be something like this going into battle . . . dear God, how shameful of me to compare the two . . .'

ROSALIND and CHARLIE *cross the stage fighting to Gracie Fields' 'Sing as You Go'.*

ROSALIND. Left right, left right, spin and lunge . . . Ouch! You clumsy oik! Come on, we've only got ten more days, you're supposed to have learned it by now.

CHARLIE. Keep your hair on, Douglas Fairbanks . . . We ain't got Hoxton Hall and we ain't gonna make that deadline so it's all a waste of bloody time . . . I'm gonna get myself a nice cuppa char . . .

ROSALIND. Oh right . . . that's marvellous . . . So if we do get a venue, I'm supposed to look a ninny in the fights just because you want to slob about drinking nice cuppas of char.

ROSALIND *leaves as IVY and REGGIE arrive. They are carrying tea things.*

IVY. If you were ever a Hollywood star, what would you call yourself?

REGGIE. Gosh . . . I don't know . . . Victor Immature . . . or maybe Larry Panache . . .

IVY. I'd call myself Bliss . . . Bliss Williams . . . that'd be nice. Mister Pelmet, with all this Shakespeare stuff going on, can I ask you something that's bin worryin' me?

REGGIE. Fire away, Miss Williams . . . or can I call you Bliss?

IVY. In the olden days – like, say, the actors in Shakespeare an' all that – well, what did they use for toilet paper?

REGGIE. Well . . . books and scripts were written on very thin paper – so once they'd learned their parts – Romeo, Julius Caesar, whatever . . . the actors . . .

IVY. Really?

REGGIE. Absolutely.

IVY. I've never seen a Shakespeare play – What're they like?

REGGIE. Long . . .

IVY. Oh right . . .

REGGIE. Lots of yattering – shouting – that sort of thing . . .

IVY. Don't they sing?

REGGIE. Not enough . . . Come on, Charlie, let's go look at the car . . . I'm afraid it hasn't been out of the garage for ten years . . .

CHARLIE. You mean I really am in charge of a Silver Ghost Rolls-Royce?

REGGIE. Her name's Caprice . . . which, as I remember, is also her temperament.

*He takes a sandwich.*

Oh and Ivy . . .

IVY. Yes?