

CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN PLAYS

Edited by Ernest Pereira



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EDITED AND INTRODUCED BY

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A RHINO FOR THE BOARDROOM

A RADIO PLAY

by

DOUGLAS LIVINGSTONE

A Rhino for the Boardroom was first broadcast by the SABC on 9 December, 1974. It was produced by Stephen Barden.



THE AUTHOR

DOUGLAS
LIVINGSTONE

Douglas Livingstone was born in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, in 1932. He was educated at schools in Malaya and Australia, as well as the Margate and Port Shepstone Government Schools and Kearsney College in South Africa. He qualified as a bacteriologist in Rhodesia in 1958. He has worked on Rhodesian tobacco farms and as a scuba diver on the Kariba dam. From 1959 to 1963 he was in charge of the pathological diagnostic laboratory at Kabwe (Broken Hill) General Hospital in Zambia. Since 1964 he has worked on the microbiology of marine pollution in the sea off Durban and has published several scientific papers. He is a recipient of the Guinness Poetry Prize, Cheltenham Festival, 1965, and a Cholmondeley Award for Poetry, London, 1970.

Volumes of poetry include *The Skull in the Mud* (London, 1960), *Sjambok and Other Poems from Africa* (London, 1964), *Eyes Closed Against the Sun* (London, 1970) and *A Rosary of Bone* (Cape Town, 1975). A verse play, *The Sea My Winding Sheet*, was first broadcast by the Rhodesian Broadcasting Company in 1964; it was staged and published by the Theatre Workshop

Company, Durban, in 1971. *A Rhino for the Boardroom* was broadcast by the SABC in 1974; in 1975 it was awarded the Olive Schreiner Prize for Drama, by the English Academy of Southern Africa.

ABOUT HIS PLAY LIVINGSTONE WRITES:

'Particular physical sections of the earth, its waters, soil, topographies, terrains, regional skies, etc appear to me, and I suppose to everyone, to have their own character or psychology (apart, that is, from the inhabitants). My involvement with this continent as a white African is to me a profound and passionate and (I hope) compassionate one. If I could I would heal the very earth on which I stand, the waters I sail on, swim in, work with, look over, drink from; and of course, myself, my fellow humans and the fauna and flora. The only scalpels and medicaments I have are a limited scientific training, a little insight and a small writing talent.

In my verse and the few plays I have attempted, I usually try to celebrate aspects of being alive. But *Rhino* got a few things off my chest as well: the rape of the old by the brashly new, the appalling vapidness of most social intercourse, the comical seriousness certain members of the scientific/academic fraternity bring to their learned transactions, a greater sense of our own responsibility perhaps that we should be directing towards the natural things that we lord it over, and of course, the few swift kicks I have aimed at Antigone's funny-bone. She is a lady who has irritated me ever since I met her: a sick exemplar for transcending mere survival if ever I heard one! I prefer calm knowledgeable courage to the hysterical challenge in my heroes and heroines, Aristophanes to Sophocles and Euripides, *The Tempest* to *Hamlet* and *Lear*.

Whatever the covert or overt philosophical or moral stance a poet or playwright adopts or has thrust upon

him, he must be judged in the main by his capacity to entertain, I think — that element of *play* which illuminates most art. I hope quite humbly *Rhino* includes some of this quality — it's supposed to be entertaining.'

NOTE (to the Thespians):

The play deliberately employs characters from Every-Day — so much so they are almost stereotypes, but *they* take themselves seriously enough, unconscious of the ironies, and unselfconscious anent the dramas of their everyday lives. Even the erudition/pseudo-erudition of the two professors is real enough to them. The Narrator sounds almost as if he's musing aloud. Similarly, Mrs Mop, Jennifer and Trudy, the Priest and the Interior Decorator, Jack and Jill are quite unselfconscious. Each reacts in his own way to the others, and to the alien presence.

There is no explicit sentiment in this social comedy, except perhaps between Jill and the animal; the pace is fairly rapid — a slice of extra-ordinary life briskly presented.

The animal represents the "soul" of a continent — a piece of the good Earth — none of its peoples.

CAST:

in order of appearance.

INTRODUCTORY:

1st GAME RANGER

2nd GAME RANGER

NELSON — A Black Game Guard

BLACK WORK GANG — (Game Park)

HIPPIE

TRUCK DRIVER

NARRATOR

BLACK WORK GANG — (City)

ENCYCLOPAEDIA SALESMAN — (One line only)

COP

FOREMAN

WORKMAN

MAJOR CHARACTERS:

HELMUT	} slightly dotty	{ German } professors of
CARSTAIRS		
MRS MOP	Lively, past-middle age Char (not quite cockney)	
TRUDY	} The slightly nicer	} of two suburban-socialite
JENNIFER		
PRIEST	Claustrophobic, a bit simple. About 45.	
HIGH CAMP INTERIOR DECORATOR (HCID)	About 25.	
JACK	}	A young couple in love. Early 20's.
JILL		
Also:	a hard-working lift, and one rhinoceros.	

The countryside. Peace. Quiet. The sound of bees amid the flowers, etc. The odd distant melodious bird-call, insects, etc. Prolong to contrast with what comes later. From the distance a jeep arrives. Two game rangers are in it. It gets closer and closer. Their voices are raised above the engine noise and rattles.

1st GAME RANGER: *(Not driving)* Where did Nelson spot him?

2nd GAME RANGER: *(Driving)* Hill 74. He must have got in . . . moved in during the last couple of days. He's the last of the current party. Elusive beggar . . . they don't usually wander about so much . . . Guns all right?

1st GAME RANGER: *(Slaps butt of one firearm, eases breech of other, a rifle)* Yep. *(Pause)* He must have forded the river at the border. The water-level's right down there . . .

2nd GAME RANGER: Twelve square miles of pretty tractable terrain and the beggar has to choose Hill 74. *(Grimly)* Won't help him though . . . we'll have him nailed in the next twenty minutes. Hang on . . . we'll be leaving the road here.

Jeep changes into bottom gear and bumps, churns its way with much gear work through the bush.

1st GAME RANGER: There's Nelson.

Jeep slows down. Stops.

2nd GAME RANGER: Hello, Nelson . . . good work. Where is he? Blast . . . *(Brushing and slapping himself)* . . . these bloody thorns.

NELSON: Good morning sirs. He's over there . . . past that clump. You won't see him from here unless he moves. There's a good sight of him from that dead tree.

2nd GAME RANGER: *(Reflectively)* Lousy shot . . . we don't want the ox-peckers to give the alarm. Range

400... (*Briskly*) O.K. Let's have 'Big Bertha'... Thanks. Same drill. You behind me, Nelson. Tom brings up the rear with the 303... Let's go...

Snick of rifle bolts, dissimilar, as two different weapons are cocked. Footsteps, making little noise, swish away in the long grass into silence. Fade in cicadas, fade out. Silence. Fade in a snorting, snoring, pig-like grunting; tufts of grass being torn out, chomped. A heavy body moves very slowly, grazing...

In the near distance: the sudden cough of the anaesthetic rifle, sounding like a silenced pistol. A not-loud, surprised cross between a yelp and a scream... Red-billed oxpeckers flap away from very near, crying... the large animal starts to lumber away, breaks into a trot, crashing through small trees... slows down... stops. Pants heavily, getting more rapid, then slows down... almost to a snore. Fade in a thin, high-pitched rapidly wavering note, gets louder, stops... a large thud-crash as a heavy body hits the earth. Silence. Fade in footsteps through the grass. They arrive. Stop.

1st GAME RANGER: (*Matter-of-fact*) Good shot.

NELSON: (*Matter-of-fact*) Good shot.

2nd GAME RANGER: Thanks... Well... Get base on the R/T, Nelson, and let's have the gang over here fast... with the truck and the crate. This is the last of the consignment, and quite a dance he's led us. (*Turns, slaps the hide with rough affection*) Sorry, old beggar. You'll be having breakfast in Frankfurt, though, tomorrow morning.

1st GAME RANGER: It wears off in a few hours, doesn't it? They have to keep them under on the plane...

2nd GAME RANGER: *I'll say...*

Silence. Fade in cicadas, faint bush sounds. Fade out.

Silence. Fade in confusion of "black" voices, occasional shouts, gradually becoming ordered to black work-gang's chant. Prolong. They are towing and lifting heavy body. Fade out. Fade in hammering of a large — 2x2x4 metres — crate. Very brief silence. Very heavy truck starts up and moves off... fades into distance. And silence.

Fade in initial bush sounds as before, but not for long. Fade out to silence.

Fade in heavy truck bowling along. Prolong. Then it slows down, stops, but continues idling noisily.

HIPPIE: (*Flat monotonous drawl throughout*) Where you heading, man?

TRUCK DRIVER: Airport. Past... (*Note: City is never identified. In this case drowned out by revving or a passing car.*)

HIPPIE: Give me, a you-know, lift, man...

DRIVER: Jump in.

Car door opens, slams shut.

DRIVER: Where you heading, mister?

HIPPIE: Like, anywhere, man...

Truck roars off and fades into silence. Fade in truck.

HIPPIE: (*Craning his neck*) What's with the dirty big box in the back?

DRIVER: Live freight... man...

Truck fades to:

Silence.

During following scene there is a gradual build up of big city sounds getting louder but not enough to strain the quiet even tones of the narrator. The presence of the city should be completely established. The sounds are more or less in order: Footsteps on concrete, snatches of conversation, snatch of news bulletin or weather report, snatch of transistor-radio music, dustbin lids, dog

barks, cat meows, elevators, machinery... fade out. Fade in high-pitched sustained note (An operating theatre)... "forceps"... "swab"... "swab"... chink of instruments on glass... fade out. Child stumbling through Mendelssohn's "Spring Song" on piano. Gulls, tugs, shipping... snatch of brass band. Toilet being flushed, electronic noises. Ticker tape, typewriters, phone ringing... supermarket, cash registers. Police / fire engine / ambulance / railway station sounds. Airport announcements: Aircraft taking off landing... fade... knock on door. It opens.

"Good morning, madam, may I make myself clear at once, I am not selling encyclopedias... I actually represent a company that gives them away. All you have to do..." (*Fade out*).

NARRATOR: (*Backed by above*)

Take a piece of land... build a house on it. Fill it with successive families, their laughter, fears, tears, living. Loving one another... snoring, boring one another. Crying, dying, moving on in space or time... giving way to other families, *their* laughter, fears, tears. Little by little the materials that went into building the house settle in with each other... the bricks press down more firmly, pillars stand more solidly through the years. The pipes and drains take on the roles of arteries and veins... the roof becomes ruggedly familiar to the skies, the sun and stars regularly observe it... the rain rinses it... and it stares back at the light, or unblinking through the hours that are black. Windows that open, and the doors, little by little get a bit stiffer... imperceptibly more arthritic. Occasionally a pipe bursts — a metallic aneurism, or the lights fail — a temporary paralysis...

The tiny life-forms in between the floorboards and under the carpets have already experienced dynasties... But towns replace villages, cities

replace towns... paths become roads, become streets... The City kills flowers, birds, trees, and quite a lot of people... But most efficiently of all: the City kills houses.

Fade in background city noises to utter silence. Fade in ticking of clock. It ticks for a few seconds, stops abruptly.

Fade in cicadas as only background to part of the remainder of narrator's speech. Fade out cicadas on the word "drought".

NARRATOR: The big clock in the attic leans woodenly awry... across from the balding speaker of a dome-skulled radio — non-transistorised, its circuit quite unprintable. A few modest surprises, some inexplicable, occurred between and around them... this last slice of a century...

Children playing Gigli and early Glen Miller 78's... Small parties popping ginger-beers... Someone shadowy looking over parched-sounding letters from a leaky cabin-trunk... A crooked violin busting its remaining gut one hot still evening in the middle of a long drought...

And once, off a stuffed and stacked eland's head, a candy-striped blazer fell into a baroque stone basin, brimming it with dusty felt. Long live attics, they are... the part of a house that is closest to Heaven... But not this one... tomorrow: council workers, bulldozers and a fell purpose will start the wrecking...

Toppling a timbered world on its half acre lot... dead already... there being vertical space high and empty... overhead... waiting to be boxed and filled.

Fade in rapidly a crescendo of building sounds, bulldozers / pile-drivers / pneumatic drills / concrete mixers. Fade to:

A traffic jam. No movement. Engines going. The odd

hooting. Fade in the heavy truck's cab, its engine idling.

HIPPIE: Uh. I think I'll split, man. The main drag looks blocked forever.

DRIVER: Grief! I'm overdue at the Airport with this thing... I'll have to phone the Company... bloody traffic jam. Listen... could you sit behind the wheel while I phone... it'll only take ten minutes... there's no movement up ahead as far as I can see...

HIPPIE: Okay, man... but make it fast... there's a lot of fuzz around and I'm allergic to fuss... even traffic-fuzz.

DRIVER: Thanks a hell of a lot...

HIPPIE: Fast, man... make it fast...

Cab door opens, slams. Continue traffic jam and truck motor. Hippie audibly lights up — not immediate deep inhaling but short sips followed by deep inhaling.

COP: *(Pokes head through window)* Hey... you. What's that you're smoking?

Exclamation... cab door wrenched open and slammed... footsteps, running minor uproar, fading rapidly.

COP: *(Voices rapidly distanced)* Get him... Stop that man...

Fades. Continue traffic jam and truck's motor.

FOREMAN: Here's the truck. About bloody time... we've been held up over this plant for more'n a week.

WORKMAN: Engine still running...

FOREMAN: Yeah. *(Switches off truck's ignition)*... he went to call someone probably... couldn't park closer with this traffic jam... but it's close enough. Get Alf on the set... tell him to swing the main hoist over this way... we'll have this lot up before the lunch break... Tell him: extra careful with all these

cars... Never seen so many... I'll get the men... *(Fades).*

Fade in crackle of R/T set.

WORKMAN: *(Into radio)* 4 calling crane... 4 calling crane... 4 calling crane... over... *(Fades).*

The traffic jam slowly fades out.

Fade in normal, moving, heavy city traffic noises.

Two professors in a car. The driver is the German one who speaks good if slightly accented English which he loses when excited. His passenger is very English. They are both around fifty. They are played straight, unaware of the insane excursions into their own academic terrains. Constant gear changing for robots etc.

HELMUT: Well, Carstairs... a long time... It was a miracle I perceived you at the Registration Desk up at the College, hein...

CARSTAIRS: It was good to see you, too, Helmut and very good of you to offer me a lift... It has indeed been a long time... Let me see...

HELMUT: *(Triumphantly)* Baltimore. Baltimore in 196-

(Drowned out by angry impatient hooting) (Excitedly).

Did you see that *dompkopff*... He tries to commit suicide straight in front of...

CARSTAIRS: I don't know which is worse in this country, Helmut, the pestilential drivers or the benighted pedestrians... All this space and all this climate too... you'd think they'd come up with something new in Cities... not like ours.

HELMUT: *(Still agitated)* This a hire-car also... Now what to do if I accident...

CARSTAIRS: You here long, Helmut?... Or just for today's Conference?

HELMUT: The Conference only . . . I have a paper . . .
And you?

CARSTAIRS: Just the Conference . . . I saw you were
presenting a paper along with mine . . . I must say I
like the title they've found for us all: not one mention
of the word "Pollu . . ."

HELMUT: Sssch, sssch, sssch, Carstairs . . . it is *ver-*
boten to say it . . .

CARSTAIRS: My dear Helmut, I wouldn't dream of
saying it . . . What are they calling you these days —
there was such a crush at that Registration Desk . . .

HELMUT: (*Heavily accented irony*) Professor of
Natural Philosophy . . . And you?

CARSTAIRS: Professor of Environmental
Psychology . . .

HELMUT: Well, Professor . . .

CARSTAIRS: Well, Professor . . . (*Both laugh*).

HELMUT: And not one mention of the word "Pollu . . ."

CARSTAIRS: (*With agitation*) Please, my dear
Helmut, you wouldn't mention . . .

HELMUT: (*Laughs heartily*) No . . . No . . . "Environ-
mental Psychology" . . . that is *goot, goot* . . .

CARSTAIRS: (*A little miffed*) . . . "Natural
Philosophy" takes some beating, I would say . . .
(*Pause*) Hello . . . looks like a traffic-jam up ahead.
Damn. Just when we're almost there . . . And look . . .
(*Excitedly*) a parking . . .

HELMUT: (*Excitedly*) Where? Where?

CARSTAIRS: Here, Helmut, just in front of that red . . .

HELMUT: I see it . . . I see it . . .

CARSTAIRS: Watch it! That bloke in the yellow van
is . . .

HELMUT: (*Shouts out of car window*) No, no, no, *nein*.
I see it first . . . is mine, is mine . . .

CARSTAIRS: (*Shouting*) That's our parking, old chap,
we saw it . . .

*Hooting. Minor uproar. Fade to traffic noise. Helmut
parks. Car door slams . . . then the other. Coins inserted
in parking meter with appropriate sounds. Background
of busy street noises.*

CARSTAIRS: Well . . . that *was* lucky . . .

HELMUT: Lucky, Ja . . . That yellow van . . .

CARSTAIRS: Come along, Professor . . . we're in ex-
cellent time . . . almost an hour.

HELMUT: Okay, Professor . . . let's walk . . . and your
paper. Ja, I want to hear something about your
paper . . .

They walk along the pavement for few seconds.

CARSTAIRS: You, my dear Helmut, will be opening
with an attack . . . your old style . . .

HELMUT: (*Jovially*) *Nein!* I have a new style now . . .
the urban . . . how do you say . . . gorilla . . .

CARSTAIRS: Guerilla . . .

HELMUT: Ja, ja . . . gorilla . . . The urban gorilla of the
lecture platforms. I am the subtle now . . . I will *de-*
cidate . . . Ninny . . . Heeby-Schloss . . . Farcuse . . .
Panon . . .

CARSTAIRS: Not Panon!

HELMUT: Panon . . . ja . . . and . . . wait for it . . . Brecht.

CARSTAIRS: (*Aghast*) Brecht!

HELMUT: Ja. But without ever mentioning their
names . . .

CARSTAIRS: Without . . . But my dear Helmut . . . how
fantastic . . . I mean . . . but how . . .

HELMUT: Hah! I am the subtle now . . . I will be
leaning heavily on a line from the works of Purlieu-
Monty . . .

CARSTAIRS: Purlieu-Monty, yet! . . . Helmut . . . you astound me . . .

HELMUT: (*With satisfaction*) Ja . . . and (*Triumphantly*) I will not be mentioning his name either . . .

CARSTAIRS: How remarkable . . . I mean what fiendish tactics, my dear Helmut . . . it will be a *tour-de-force* . . .

HELMUT: You think so?

CARSTAIRS: I guarantee it without the slightest hesitation . . . (*Pause*) What is to be your theme, by the way . . . Is it . . . ?

HELMUT: Exactly — my main theme is (*Very slowly, spelling it out*) Colonialism is Conservation . . . Conservation is Colonialism.

CARSTAIRS: Heavens!

HELMUT: . . . But the subtle . . . even the ecology fits precisely inside now . . . (*Pause*) And you, dear Carstairs, your paper?

CARSTAIRS: I am flabbergasted . . . and *delighted* with you, Helmut . . . Colonialism: Conservation; Conservation: Col . . . (*Airily*) Oh, I will be using Sophocles as a pivot for mine.

HELMUT: But how wonderful . . . Sophocles . . . the — how do you say it — *novelty* of Sophocles . . .

Fade both.

Fade in the otherwise deserted office of an only partly occupied and very lofty floor of a very large new building: Stilton Towers. Mrs. Mop, about 55, is at work: Squeegie / Pail / Broom / dustpan / duster. At times her speech takes on the breathless syncopé heard when someone is polishing say a tabletop.

MRS MOP: (*Sings uninhibitedly flat . . . muttered exclamations — her own, as she knocks the pail or finds*

a particularly dirty spot.)

O Danny boy . . . The Hills are Calling Tum De Dum . . . O Danny Boy . . . Hmm hmm hmmm hmm hmm hmm . . . O Danny Boy . . . La la la la la la la la la . . . Disgusting! la la la la . . . la la la la la . . . Pigs! Just look at that now. Managing Directors are the worst . . . Ash all over the place . . . (*Imitates herself*) "Please sir . . . the only time I can get into your office . . . and three or four of the other locked rooms on these upper floors . . . is lunch-time when me whole cleaning staff of girls is off . . . According to the Labour Laws . . ." (*Imitates director*) "Well then, we'll just have to clean them ourselves, won't we Mrs. Mop". (*Normally*) Ha! . . . (*Cleaning noises*) O Danny Boy . . . The Hills . . . It's the wastepaper baskets are the worst . . . a dead giveaway . . . worse than honeymoon couples some of them . . . (*Hums cleaning around for a while*) . . . Ugh! They don't expect me to pick *that* up I hope! Men! And those young secretaries too, for that matter . . . bending over the filing cabinets with their little short . . . (*Hums, cleaning sounds*) Look here, Mrs Brown . . . Mrs Bloody Brown . . . No . . . see here, Mrs Beastly Brown, I've had quite enough of your asking my Herbert for advice about the lawyers . . . (*Cleaning sounds only*) . . . Herbert, what's all this running around to that young widow next door . . . Mrs Beautiful — I'm sure — Brown, every five minutes when me back is turned . . . I've had quite enough of it, I have . . . (*Cleaning sounds only. Silence*) . . . Or I'll pack me bags . . . I swear it . . . (*Cleaning sounds*) . . . No . . . don't turn on your empty-headed charm with me, me boy . . . It might work in *some* quarters but it won't work with me . . . (*Hums . . . cleans. Stops. Gathers up equipment . . . moves to lift. Presses button. Hums. Lift arrives. Stops. Doors open. Mrs. Mop with pails, brooms, enters. Lift door*

closes. She hums as lift ascends: A short hop . . . lift stops, doors open . . . she exits with equipment. Lift doors close . . . it descends and fades . . .

MRS MOP: Herbert, me old love, let's go out tonight . . . *(She moves, clanking, over to the boardroom door).* Hello . . . what's this? . . . a notice next to the Board Room door. *(Reads)* "Suck . . ." Suck? . . . Oh — S.U.C. the Society for Unlimited Conservation . . . *(Reading rapidly aloud to herself)* . . . Will delegates please note, due to the present state of unpreparedness of the Board Room, the venue . . . "venue"?! . . . is changed to the Gymnasium which is on the floor immediately below you . . ." *(Normally)* Hah, men . . . talk . . . talk . . . talk . . . always talking . . . and they talk about women! Stupid . . . this notice was for yesterday anyway . . .

(Crumples up notice. Pushes open door and enters the boardroom. The door bangs shut rapidly behind her . . . it has a powerful spring-loaded auto-closing device.)

Help! What a terrible spring there is on that door . . . *(Voice rises)* . . . there's no handle on this side . . . They've forgotten to put the handle on . . . *(Calmer)* . . . Now wait a minute, me lass. That door wasn't even on yesterday . . . they must have hung it this morning . . . it's lunchtime now . . . Somebody'll be along presently to finish the one lift. May as well do a bit of dusting until someone lets me out. Though where's the sense in dusting a room half open to the skies and half of one wall open . . . Men! *(She hums . . . slaps duster . . . sings)* O Danny Boy . . . Hmm hmm hmm . . . *(Pause)* Help! . . . that's the biggest packing case I ever did see . . . taller than me and so-o-o long. Must be the lift . . . or the machinery, though it looks big enough for an elephant . . . *(Hums. Slaps duster over packing case)* Herbert, me boyo, that young widow Brown . . . next door . . .

(A grunt issues from the packing case. Dead Silence.)
(Whispers) Help! . . . What was that? . . . somebody . . . something's in this packing case . . . *(Knocks on wood, calls)* Hello . . . anybody home . . .

(A flurry of grunts. A crash-kick and partial splintering of one of crate's planks. Heavy animal breathing. Another crash kick . . . the plank breaks.)

(Near hysteria) A foot . . . looks like . . . an elephant's foot . . . there's a wild elephant in that case . . . *(A note of wonderment in her voice — she is going out from shock)* . . . I'm locked in the Board Room . . . with a wild animal . . . and I can't get out . . . I think . . . I'm going to faint . . .

(She does, audibly. Silence.) Inside the boardroom all is quiet. No sound from crate or from Mrs Mop who sleeps peacefully unconscious beside it.

The door opens and the two engrossed professors enter oblivious of their surroundings. The door slams shut as:

HELMUT: . . . the equating of Hegel with Kant, Freud with Nietzsche — I follow, I follow, Carstairs . . . and their dismissal as mere personifications themselves of that crazy but true . . . so crazy, but so . . . how do you say . . . irrefutable Jungian-archetypes notion . . . you have done *goot* work . . . But I quarrel with the alleged superiority of cow's manure versus pig's manure as an organic enrichment . . . we in Germany have known for centuries . . .

CARSTAIRS: They haven't put the tables out properly . . . And the chairs are all stacked . . . Here, Helmut *(Lifts down two chairs)* . . . make yourself comfortable . . . we're over half an hour early . . . I'm sure somebody will be along presently to get the place in order . . . No, no . . . I will not be referring to the organic side of things there at all — but to the psychological, the metaphysical, the emotional, the

moral . . .

HELMUT: You don't say . . . ! Manures . . . !

CARSTAIRS: But yes. We enjoy a *rapport* with cattle: they are so unlike us. There is a wholeness . . . a complementary completion in the relationship, if I may borrow . . . the Socratic half-orange theory . . . look at milk . . . But with pigs, now, we suffer a more turgid relationship: they so resemble us . . . hair distribution, skin-texture, blood-sera . . . livers . . . hearts . . . the diseases we share only with them in the whole of the Animal Kingdom. Then there are the facial and psychological characteristics . . .

HELMUT: Aha . . . now I follow . . . Ja, I follow completely. But left is the metaphysical . . . ?

CARSTAIRS: Aha . . . my dear Helmut . . . the metaphysical . . . Well . . . in a word: the Gadarene Swine.

HELMUT: (*Excitedly, marvelling*) . . . Of course . . . dear Carstairs you are as brilliant as . . . as scintillating as ever. And so . . . by eating pigs . . .

CARSTAIRS: Or from eating food grown with the aid of pig manure . . .

HELMUT: We are committing metaphysical . . .

CARSTAIRS: Cannibalism, my dear Helmut . . .

HELMUT: (*Applauding*) Oh Bravo, Bravo, Bravo. Carstairs (*Claps*) . . . (*Pause*) And the Sophocles?

Fade Both . . . Fade in street and traffic noises. Two youngish suburban, socialite hostesses and wives — in that order, meet.

TRUDY: Hel-lo Jennifer . . .

JENNIFER: Trudy . . . Dar-ling . . .

TRUDY: How *are* you? What a lovely ensemble . . .

JENNIFER: Oh . . . this thing . . . How are you? I *love* your dress . . . that . . . mustard . . . goes so well with your auburn hair.

TRUDY: Really . . . where are you off to?

JENNIFER: Well . . . a little bird told me Julia Fechtwanger is having a Sale tomorrow . . . and I thought I'd wander in for a preview. She just might . . . I saw an absolutely divine navy and white . . .

TRUDY: I know the one . . . Of course she keeps the most awful junk as well . . .

JENNIFER: Of course dar-ling . . . but sometimes . . .

TRUDY: Oh, I know, I know . . .

JENNIFER: Wasn't that the most *ghastly* carry-on at the Clintovers last night . . . the food . . . so boring . . .

TRUDY: I just *knew* you'd agree . . . they're not *our* sort are they . . . But *who* was that man with the beard . . . ?

JENNIFER: Divine . . . I believe he's a famous potter . . . Spanish, I think . . .

TRUDY: French. Bernice Clintover was *all over* him . . .

JENNIFER: I saw it, I saw it. And wasn't Jonathan *livid* . . .

TRUDY: Was he? I would have thought he'd had too much to notice. What on earth was that peculiar garment Agatha Abernathy had on?

JENNIFER: Oh, it was *too* much . . . it's called a Tuftan, a sort of cross between a kaftan below and a bodice top. She says she saw it in the National Geographic of all places . . . Kurdish tribal slaves and all that sort of thing . . . Of course, with the right figure . . .

TRUDY: My dear . . . I know . . . (*Excitedly*) Quick! There's Mavis Scantelli . . . Oh, God! . . . let's go into this shop . . .

JENNIFER: No . . . it's a boutique . . . she's sure to come in. But you *are* avoiding her, *aren't* you . . . Quick darling . . . there's a coffee-bar somewhere down this arcade . . . It's brand new . . .

Clogged heels walking away quickly. Fade.

Fade traffic. Fade in heels, slower as they enter a bustling arcade. Mute but do not fade heels — with occasional pauses — to accompany.

JENNIFER: I must say . . . all this building . . .

TRUDY: Stilton Towers, it's called . . . it's amazing: a few years ago there was the most gorgeous little old wooden house here . . . so quaint . . . now: all these new shops . . . I see they've not all been taken, but the bank's open already.

JENNIFER: *They never waste any time . . .*

TRUDY: There's a 5-star hotel above for 20-something stories . . . then a health studio, saunas, restaurants, conference rooms right at the top — the lot . . .

JENNIFER: I believe it includes the whole carry-on . . . a cinema and a little theatre up there somewhere . . . It's not finished yet, is it?

TRUDY: The hotel part opens tomorrow . . . The Minister of Finance . . . I think it's just some of the top floors and one of the lifts . . .

JENNIFER: What's with you and Mavis Scantelli, young woman?

TRUDY: *Such* a long story, and *such* a bore . . . I got a little jersey, on appro, from the Purple Orange . . . you know that little shop on . . .

JENNIFER: Yes. The one run by those two young . . .

TRUDY: Yes . . . well, I kept it a while . . . and started to *hate* it . . . you know . . .

JENNIFER: Oh I know, darling . . . don't I know it . . .

TRUDY: Anyway, I was thinking of returning it when Mavis saw it . . . tried it on and said she'd simply *love* to have it . . . So she paid me exactly the same price for it. Well, the next day she phoned me up and told me Carlo was simply *furious* with her . . . you

know . . . about the jersey and the cost of living and all . . . Well I told her to return it to the Purple Orange . . . that I couldn't very well take it back now . . . and anyway, they wouldn't have anything to do with her . . . Told her she'd have to pay up and keep the jersey . . . it still had their label on it, mind you . . . It's all just too frightfully embarrassing and boring, my dear. I'll tell you over coffee if you want to hear more of the gory details . . . She — there's the hotel entrance with the lifts . . . O, God . . . there she is . . .

JENNIFER: Who? . . . Where?

TRUDY: Mavis Scantelli . . . she's just come in the street-side of the arcade . . .

JENNIFER: Oh, my poor darling . . . Quick . . . the lifts . . . God . . . Ten lifts . . . not that one — it's not working . . . There's one now . . .

Running clogged heels as lift doors open. They enter. Stop heels. Pause. Lift doors closing fade on arcade sounds and:

JENNIFER: Dar-ling . . .

Fade. Lift whines into silence.

Fade in busy street. A priest is walking reluctantly towards Stilton Towers. He suffers from claustrophobia about which he has complained often. His confessor has imposed a daily penance on him. He is about 45, a good man, a bit simple, quite ineffectual. He is accompanied by street noises during his monologue, which fade to pedestrians only in the arcade, and which end as the lift doors close on him.

PRIEST: *(To himself)* Hail, Mary, have mercy on me: a sinner and a weakling . . . Take from me this terrible cup . . . Let me find the divine gifts of charity, understanding and forgiveness within me . . . especially towards Father Joseph . . . forgiveness within my dark, human . . . but immortal soul . . . Father Joseph

(Imitates) "You say this claustrophobia of yours has troubled you since your seminary days. Claustrophobia is a mere vanity . . . It is a manifestation of the mental and physical weakness that does not become a good Catholic. Think of the Church. Think of the Saints. Think of your cell. Think of your grave . . . Steady, Father, steady. As a penance you will, every day, during your lunch hour, find the tallest buildings within walking distance. You will take a lift . . . yes, Father, an elevator . . . to the topmost floor . . . all the nearer to the Blessed Trinity — heh, heh, heh . . . you will say three Hail Marys and three Our Fathers. Then you will come down . . . By lift, Father . . . yes, by the elevator." *(Reverts to own voice)* I cannot stand it . . . and now this latest building . . . I'm not getting any better . . . I wonder if the Holy Father in Rome gets claustrophobia . . . Claustrophobia is *not* a vanity . . . It's an affliction like . . . like an ingrown toe-nail . . . or like Father Joseph's halitosis. Yes . . . well . . . how would *he* like it if I said *(Imitates)* "Father Joseph, you have halitosis and it is a mere vanity. Every day, in your lunch-hour, you will find the busiest dentist within walking distance, and make arrangements to gargle at his taps, at his sink, Father . . . In between, you will say 3 Hail Marys etc. Halitosis is a form of spiritual backsliding that does not become a Good Catholic. Think of the Saints, Father Joseph, and take plenty of opening medicine . . ."

His footsteps stop in an open lift. He presses the button, the door closes and the hum of the ascent starts. In his own voice: primly . . .

Yes . . . plenty of opening medicine . . .

The priest, until now, has been unaware that he was accompanied into the lift by a high camp interior decorator of about 25.

HCID: *(Nervously)* I beg your pardon . . . were you

addressing me?

PRIEST: No, no, my son . . . a reverie . . . a religious monologue. Did I make utterance aloud?

HCID: I *must* say, you people give me the creeps . . . creeping about like Zombies . . . muttering your Mumbo Jumbos . . . saying things suddenly out loud. It's enough to make a fellow jump out of his gear.

PRIEST: Peace, sir . . . I did not mean to alarm you . . . I just spoke inadvertently, aloud . . . and I see it has startled you. Pardon . . . pardon, I beg of you.

HCID: *(Ungraciously)* Oh, all right then.

Silence except for the ascending lift.

PRIEST: *(In quavering voice)* My son, would you mind very much if I held your arm?

HCID: *(Outraged)* If you what! Held my arm! Would I *mind!* You must be out of your mind! *Very* funny, I must say . . . Let me tell you: not only would I mind very much, I'd report you to the police! I am the Interior Consultant on all the decor and fittings of Stilton Towers . . . why, even this lift . . . that cerise padding and the chocolate ceiling . . . I'm a respectable citizen, I might inform you . . .

PRIEST: *(Very faint)* I am sorry: it is just that I needed some human contact and support . . . I have . . . very badly . . . very bad claustrophobia . . .

HCID: *(Now thoroughly alarmed)* You have *what?* You aren't infectious by any chance? God! Where's the emergency stop . . . Oh, we've stopped. *(Lift stops)* *(Doors open during:)* Let me out of here . . . There's the Board Room . . . Look here, you priest or person or whatever it is you call yourself . . . you catch that elevator straight down and get out of Stilton Towers . . . I'm not having people dying all over the place . . . when we're not even fully opened . . .

He rushes across the hall. Boardroom door opens and

slams shut.

PRIEST: *(Stumbles weakly out of lift . . . lift door shuts and it whines out of sound)*

Water . . . *(Gasps)* . . . I feel faint . . . has anyone . . . water . . . somebody help, . . . somebody . . . can't go on . . . Oh . . . Oh . . . Oh . . . *(Groans)*.

He clutches Boardroom door. It opens. He stumbles in. It slams shut.

Fade in the muted atmosphere of a bank in an arcade. Business is slack. It is lunchtime. A personable young man comes in and moves quietly up to a personable young lady busy at the enquiry desk. Both in their early 20's. She does not see him until:

JACK: Don't move, miss . . . This is a holdup.

JILL: *(Quick, faint scream)* Oh . . . Jack. *(Weakly)* Wow . . . but you gave me such a fright.

JACK: The itinerant Knight Errant Sir Jack gallops over the drawbridge and under the portcullis and into the courtyard of Castle Tedious bawling to the scattering churls: "To arms, to arms, I have come to rescue the Lady Jill from the clutches of her wicked uncle, the Branch Manager . . . Have at you, sir, . . . and at your, sir . . ." *(Lunges about. Stops)* Give us a kiss.

JILL: Not in the *Bank*, Jack . . . everyone'll see . . .

JACK: Place is almost empty . . . C'mon. — just a quick leetle one . . . Kiss-kiss-kiss-kiss-kiss?

JILL: *(Smiling)* Oh, Jack . . . *(Quick kiss)* . . . Did the Sub-Accountant see?

JACK: Not he, my love . . . too busy counting his ill-gotten stacks . . . When are you off, it's lunchtime.

JILL: In a few minutes . . . when Lorraine gets back.

JACK: I've found a new place . . .

JILL: Oh, darling . . . not that again . . .

JACK: See here, my love. You work: I work; right? We're consenting adults, right? You live at home: I live at home, right? You're going to marry me: I'm going to marry you . . . as soon as I can afford it . . . right?

JILL: Right . . .

JACK: Well then . . . who's going to blame us for trying to be alone in this bloody great hulking, overcrowded, grabby, soul-less City . . . for one hour . . . at lunch time?

JILL: Well . . . I'm not sure . . . it's . . . we can't be alone, Jack, not here, not in the coffee-bar or at home, nowhere. The Park's too far . . . and so is the beach . . .

JACK: My love . . . Jill . . . phooey to coffee-bars, phooey to parks . . . and nuts come from beeches. I've found a place right here . . .

JILL: Where?

JACK: *Here*, lass, *here*. A green and pleasant land. Absolutely private, not a soul to be seen; imaginary animals grazing peacefully; the sky above our heads, the wind in our tails . . .

JILL: *(Laughing)* You are an idiot . . . *where?*

JACK: Directly above us. We won't have it for long: it's the Stilton Towers Boardroom . . . it's not finished yet. There's a huge hole in one wall where they load machinery with the crane . . . you can see the scaffolding . . . and the roof's still partly open . . . probably for the same thing. The workmen knock off for lunch, which is now. It's all green baize and blue skies and quiet at the moment. I've been keeping a quiet check on it . . . found it last week. Yesterday they didn't have a door on. Just now — before I came to the Bank — I took a lift . . . shot all the way to the top, gazed out and lo . . . a door hath been installed . . . so I shot straight down again . . .

JILL: Oh, Jack . . . do you think we should . . . isn't it

trespassing or something?

JACK: Nonsense, darling. Building sites are enjoying an open season, at present. And *if* anyone comes, well, we were just looking, see...

JILL: It sounds marvellous... you promise to behave. I must get some sandwiches...

JACK: Cheese and tomato, already got... And one can of beer.

JILL: Oh, Jack... you are wonderful... and here's Lorraine now... (*Fade out*).

Fade back to the Boardroom. Back to our learned professors, deep in their discussions. Mrs Mop sleeps peacefully on, unnoticed alongside the crate.

CARSTAIRS: (*Smugly*) Ah, yes... the Sophocles. Well, that's the contemporary part... the whole socio-politico group-psycho vision — I have solved it at last... the Kreon-Antigone relationship, misinterpreted through the ages... rewritten by various Spanish —

HELMUT: French...

CARSTAIRS: Ah, yes! French... we English, too, of all people...

HELMUT: What of England these days...?

CARSTAIRS: The only answer, I'm afraid, is Revolution.

HELMUT: A revolution! Bloodless, I hope...

CARSTAIRS: Of course... we English are a bloodless people...

HELMUT: You keep your cool...

CARSTAIRS: Precisely.

HELMUT: ... And now... your socio-politico...

CARSTAIRS: Yes... the Sophocles... After dealing with the manure thing, I will proceed, quite naturally, with a certain cool ratiocinative and

flowing motion... if you will forgive me... into... politics... Not the abstract concept, like Satan... *there* for the angels to destroy... or at least attack. But politics as a code-name for savage group-survival instincts... cloaked or modified, if you like, by the image the group — or its more powerful individuals — wish to present of themselves... One man's meat is another man's Mumbo Jumbo, if you follow me...

HELMUT: (*Eagerly*) Ja, ja... I follow... I follow...

CARSTAIRS: Man is not so much a political animal, as an animal politically.

HELMUT: Ho-ho... that is very *goot*, dear Carstairs.

CARSTAIRS: Really!... Mercifully, different minds... and *here*, you may be sure, I will make the mark: all aspects of a Singular Mind — in Capital Letters — have, and will continue to make... contact with other compatible minds, to their mutual enrichment, delight and the spiritual nourishment of that perennially interesting curiosity-drive that motivates all explorations of personality... through set recognition of signals... Even if *one* drives a Rolls-Royce.

HELMUT: Or a Mercedes, *Ja*...

CARSTAIRS: Er... (*Hesitates*)... precisely... a car, and the *other* farms around a hut on a hillside.

HELMUT: That is clever... how do you say... diabolically clever... to introduce food at this point... the farming element... I was only waiting for it...

CARSTAIRS: Regrettably, it requires just one self-seeking, ruthless self-concerned group to form... then other groups are hastily formed as *their* group-survival-based reactions... All force produces its equivalent counterforce...

HELMUT: Hah!

CARSTAIRS: I beg your pardon . . .

HELMUT: Is nothing, nothing . . . I merely, . . . you know . . . "Hah" . . . a symbol of my eagerness and interest.

CARSTAIRS: I see . . . yes . . . a symbol. I was coming to that . . . or rather, to our dire lack and desperate need need for a symbol . . . But for the nonce we move on to Kreon's dilemma . . .

HELMUT: Hah! . . . Pardon . . .

CARSTAIRS: Granted . . . The more Antigone tries to perform . . . denying, subverting, confronting The Law, the more serious must be the measures Kreon is forced to take to neutralise her, to counter her influence and to contain its effects.

Out of sight, Mrs Mop groans.

CARSTAIRS: One, of course, fashionably condemns Kreon's very existence . . . for holding a position of such power. But in condemning it we recognise it . . . Kreon's power *is*, so it becomes, *a priori*: the background against which a *totally*-aware Antigone acts out her useless, hysterical and eventually fatal destiny . . .

Mrs Mop groans.

CARSTAIRS: If Antigone thought she could change things by her behaviour, she was being simple-minded . . .

Mrs Mop groans.

CARSTAIRS: . . . if she didn't, then it was immoral to have resorted to such knavish histrionics that did no more than ensure her own death . . .

HELMUT: And suicide is such . . . is such a private matter . . .

CARSTAIRS: Precisely . . . preferably made to look like an accident, if one has any breeding at all.

HELMUT: This is profound stuff, dear Carstairs . . .

you are . . . you are . . . Anti-Antigone . . . Ho-ho-ho . . .

Mrs Mop groans.

CARSTAIRS: Personally, and with all the judicious . . . *scientific* detachment I can muster, my dear Helmut . . . Helmut, did you groan?

HELMUT: Groan?

CARSTAIRS: (*Testily*) Yes, man, groan, or moan, or something.

HELMUT: *Nein* . . . me, never!

CARSTAIRS: Anyway . . . I regard her as the worst possible exemplar of mindless, over-emotional power-politics in history and drama.

HELMUT: Strong meat . . .

CARSTAIRS: She serves a certain salutary function as such . . . she is the ultimate Fascist . . . I have advocated her dismissal, as Heroine, for a decade. All she ever achieved was Kreon's further entrenchment . . . But popular sentiment is against me: up there she'll remain, hogging the footlights, screeching a welcome to her own doom, wringing a pseudo . . . identificatory, if I may . . . tear or three from the more impassioned female *hearts* — but not the *brains* — of the audience . . . until the children eventually all grow up. We do indeed need a new symbol . . . desperately.

HELMUT: Of an even *greater* strength — this symbol . . . of even *greater* innocence . . . Perhaps it already exists . . . is, has been lost . . .

CARSTAIRS: Alas . . . the Unicorn! (*Pause*).

HELMUT: Such a symbol . . . would it . . . *come* from this continent?

CARSTAIRS: My dear Helmut, such a symbol would have to *be* this continent . . . it's all that's left — chastening though *that* thought is . . . the direct line back from Academics . . . from Technology and

Commerce to the Agrarian... the whole Indigenous Ecosystem... the Interrelationships... the Bioclimate... the Human to Plant ratio... the Usurpation — look at Pop music — the Replacement... the *Exchange* of Roles... right back to the *Hunter-thing*... the line is shorter *here*... more compressed.

HELMUT: Oh-ho... the primitive blanket-anchor!

CARSTAIRS: Ah, yes... sheet-anchor... Man has to remain in contact with a pure... a more *innocent* past...

HELMUT: Such a symbol... would be... would *have* a terrible vulnerability... That's almost my Colonialist...

CARSTAIRS: Undoubtedly... by the time the writers and poets had finished with it...

HELMUT: ... It would have to be exported!

CARSTAIRS: Precisely... these things are better left to us — the Analysers...

HELMUT: (*Jovially*)... so there is something to be said for us... Reductionists... (*Both laugh... Pause*)

MRS MOP: Help me. Herbert...

Silence

CARSTAIRS: There is something decidedly odd about this Board Room... *most* peculiar. That wall is only half filled-in. The roof is only half-finished. Over there is quite the largest wooden crate I have ever seen, taking up much of that end of the room. I have heard moans and groans... And I have just heard... distinctly... a female voice call me Herbert.

HELMUT: Herbert...?

MRS MOP: (*Louder*) Help me Herbert... Where am I?

CARSTAIRS: Helmut!

HELMUT: Carstairs! There is a female personage in this room...

A loud crash as another plank of the crate is smashed. A few more violent kicks from within and loud gruntings. Silence.

MRS MOP: (*Wailing*) Help... get me out of this room... Help — there's a wild elephant in this room...

CARSTAIRS: Good gracious!

The two professors scramble from their chairs and hurry over to Mrs Mop's assistance, near the crate. Microphone takes a few seconds to catch up with them.

HELMUT: Goot lady... are you all right? Why are you on the floor?

MRS MOP: (*Panting*)... Oh,... Bless you, gentlemen... Thank you... Help me up will you... We must get out of here quickly... there's a huge wild animal in this here box, and it wants to get out...

CARSTAIRS: Calm yourself, my good woman... she appears to be unharmed... Helmut — you take her other arm... there's a chair over there, Madam...

MRS MOP: (*Still a bit breathless*) I don't want a bleeding chair, mister, we've got to get out of here, I tell you!

CARSTAIRS: I'll take her from here, Helmut... I see there's some German stencilling on that crate... perhaps, if you would be so good... it might cast some enlightenment on this strange business...

HELMUT: It says (*Reads*) "This side up"... "Destination: Frankfurt Zoo..." (*Normally*) It has a very powerful odour... Hah! I see the fractured planking on this side...

Grunting and few kicks commence from within crate.

CARSTAIRS: (*Calling*) Over here, my dear Helmut... I

implore you.

The beast within the crate, with apparent rage or gusto, smashes its way amidst the prolonged sound of shattering wooden planks, to stand breathing heavily in the shambles.

CARSTAIRS: *(Softly)* Good God... An Odd-Toed Ungulate...

HELMUT: *Diceros bicornis*, I think...

CARSTAIRS: *Diceros simus*...

MRS MOP: Oh God: a bleeding rhinoceros...

HELMUT: No, no... *Diceros bicornis*...

CARSTAIRS: Oh... *Diceros simus*, I'm sure of it... Look at that hump.

HELMUT: Forgive me... *Diceros bicornis*, I think — the prehensile upper lip...

CARSTAIRS: ... Forgive me, my dear Helmut... it is *definitely* the *simus*. To me, from here... that lip appears to be distinctly broad and flat — a grazer if ever I saw one...

MRS MOP: What are you gentlemen nattering about?

CARSTAIRS: My learned colleague here, a Professor of *Natural Philosophy* no less, is labouring under an illusion and believes that animal over there to be a *Black* rhinoceros... whereas —

HELMUT: My learned friend here... the Professor of *Environmental Psychology*, says it is a *White* rhinoceros. It is not; it is the *Black*.

MRS MOP: Black, White... Black, White... here we go: off into the colour question again! That bleeder over there is a dirty big *wild* rhinoceros the colour of mud... it's filthy... and it smells something awful. It's a *grey* rhinoceros... and we should all be thinking of getting out of here...

CARSTAIRS: What a splendid idea, my good lady...

(Going over to door. Distancing.)

MRS MOP: *(Drily)* There's no handle on this side of the door, Mr Professor Clever-Sticks... We'll have to wait until someone comes in, or get round that wild animal and yell for help through that hole... but it will charge and eat us all up long before then...

CARSTAIRS: *(Returning)* Calm yourself, my good woman. That animal is a strict vegetarian... and as it's a *white* rhino, it's a very docile creature and will not charge.

The rhino snorts with apparent anger and moves slightly.

MRS MOP: *(Let's out a screech)* Docile, my foot... he's getting ready to...

HELMUT: We must not excite it, dear lady... of course, it is the black. If we talk and move quietly... sssch... sssch... gently, so... perhaps *(Doubtfully)* it will not charge...

The rhino snorts again and moves slightly. Following uproar is very fast. Mrs Mop screams, Carstairs is heard saying "There, there". The door opens precipitately as Jennifer and Trudy dive in.

TRUDY: Mavis just *couldn't* find us here...

CARSTAIRS: *(Shouts urgently)* Don't let that door close!

Door slams. Action pace: Back to normal.

HELMUT: Too late!...

JENNIFER: My God... what's going on here...? What on earth is *that*?

CARSTAIRS: That, madam, is a *White* rhinoceros...

HELMUT: Black...

CARSTAIRS: Kindly do not alarm it.

TRUDY: Come, Jennifer, let's get out of here... This looks like a mad-house.

MRS MOP: *(With grim satisfaction)* You can't get out . . . There's no door handle this side . . . you'll just have to wait here until someone comes to let us out . . . or get eaten up, along with us . . .

CARSTAIRS: *(With exasperation)* My dear lady . . .
Rhino snorts and moves about. All the ladies scream. Uproar. Door bursts open. HCID dives in.

HCID: Outrageous . . . positively outrageous . . .

CARSTAIRS AND HELMUT: *(Shouting)* Don't close that door . . .!

Door slams.

MRS MOP: *(With grim satisfaction)* Too late . . . I think I'm beginning to enjoy this . . . Wish my Herbert was here to enjoy the show . . .

HCID: *(Near hysteria)* What's this . . . what's this . . . Why are you people all . . . HELP . . . what's *that!*?

MRS MOP: *(Quickly)* That's a grey rhino.

HELMUT: Please . . . not to make the loud noises, dear sir!

HCID: *(Hysterical)* Let me out of here . . . let me out of here!

Rhino grunts snorts, moves slightly. Uproar. Door bursts open, hitting HCID, who yelps.

All shout as Priest enters.

ALL: Don't close the . . .

Door slams.

PRIEST: *(Weakly)* . . . Water . . .

HCID: Oooo . . . if this isn't all *too* much . . . here's that perfectly odious priestly person who accosted me . . . accosted *ME* in the lift.

MRS MOP: The poor Reverend looks sick . . .

JENNIFER: *(Angrily)* What the hell did you let the door close for?

CARSTAIRS: Now, now, madam . . . that's hardly fair . . . calm, please everyone . . . My dear Helmut, a chair, if you would be so kind . . . for this ailing cleric . . . *(Chair passed and placed)* . . . There, sir . . .

PRIEST: *(Reviving)* Is that . . . is that . . .?

JENNIFER: Yes, it's a rhinoceros . . . and if you hadn't —

TRUDY: Jennifer, dear . . . don't be so mean . . . he's not at all well . . .

JENNIFER: Mean! I like that . . . if it weren't for your *dubious* financial transactions involving that poor Mavis Scan-

TRUDY: *Dubious?*

A general argument commences in which can be heard: "A complete madhouse" and "look at my floor" from HCID; "As for that dress you're wearing" and "as for your parties" from the two suburban ladies; "Black" from Prof. Helmut, "White" from Prof. Carstairs. The Priest prays aloud in Latin. Mrs Mop laughs heartily throughout, gasping "as bad as managing directors — the whole bleeding bunch".

The rhino becomes restive. It snorts, grunts, lumbers about smashing remaining pieces of packing crate. As it gets louder the people gradually become quieter until they are deadly quiet. The beast holds the floor.

HELMUT: *(Quietly but urgently)* Mein Gott! It is preparing the charge . . .

A very minor hubbub breaks out. Quickly stilled by:

CARSTAIRS: *(Urgently)* Quiet, ladies and gentlemen . . . I must insist that you be quiet . . . Helmut could be right . . . we will have to *quietly* — attempt to get this table onto its side . . . you, sir . . . and if you would mind . . .

(Quickly move about getting boardroom table on side), and we can drag it over here . . . Stack as many chairs

(Grunts; human) as we can in front of the table...
Splendid... splendid...

Throughout all this rhino sounds very fierce and loud.

HELMUT: *(Privately to Carstairs)* Not much of a hope... Carstairs, that beast is...

CARSTAIRS: *(Privately to Helmut)*... I know, Helmut... I know... It probably weighs over two tons, but we must prevent a panic...

Door opens. Jack and Jill race in.

JACK: Here we are...

CARSTAIRS: *(Shouts first word)* Don't *(Recollects himself)*... *(Finishes quietly, most urgently)* let the door...

Door slams.

ALL: *(Quietly groan.)*

CARSTAIRS: Please...

JACK: Damn... I thought... All these people... Hey!

JILL: *(Wonderment, no fear, softly)* Wow... a rhinoceros, Jack, isn't it beautiful?

The rhino calms down and becomes quiet. No more is heard from it.

CARSTAIRS: It is very much alive, miss, and most urgently I would suggest that you and your friend make no noise, and get down behind this barricade with us...

JACK: But why don't you just... Uh-huh... no door-handle this side...

HELMUT: Is angry and dangerous... Quickly...

JILL: Nonsense... it's unhappy. I'm not getting behind any table.

JENNIFER: *(Venomously)* What is that perfectly insane young woman waffling on about...

HCID: Oh... we're all going to get killed...

Minor uproar starts again, quietened by Carstairs.

MRS MOP: *(Calls)* Look, love, if I can get me old bones crouched down here, so can you... so come along now... it's a wild animal you know...

JACK: *(Urgently)* Jill!... Stop... come back here...

CARSTAIRS: *(Urgently)* Look out miss... don't go any closer... it is extremely dangerous...

JILL: *(Calmly)* *(Distancing)* Jack, please stay by the door... to catch it and hold it open when anyone comes in... No, no, I'm fine... really... there's nothing dangerous about this poor animal...

All become very quiet.

CARSTAIRS: *(Privately to Helmut)* This could be nasty, Helmut.

HELMUT: *(Privately to Carstairs)*... I don't think so...

CARSTAIRS: Absolutely fearless... she is going right up to it...

HELMUT: The beast remains perfectly calm...

JILL: *(Voice continues distancing)*... This poor animal is tired... and lost... and lonely... and very unhappy. It will not harm any of you... I'll stay with it until somebody comes...

JENNIFER: *Quite insane*...

TRUDY: I think she's a very brave girl...

JACK: *(Desperately)* Jill... Jill...

JILL: *(Voice distances)* No, Jack... please stay by the door... It's perfectly all right...

Turns to croon to the rhino, microphone and therefore voice close up... isn't it, you poor thing.

MRS MOP: Such a pretty little thing she is... *(Tenderly).*

PRIEST: So brave... so brave... *(Mutters a Latin blessing).*

HCID: (*Crossly*) She might be brave . . . or stupid, more like, but if that animal kills her while we're —

CARSTAIRS: (*Continuing quietly to Helmut*) . . . right up to it.

HELMUT: (*The same, to Carstairs*) . . . she is caressing its front horn . . .

CARSTAIRS: She is stroking its second . . .

HELMUT: . . . she is scratching its head . . .

CARSTAIRS: She has put her arms around its neck . . .

HELMUT: . . . it is standing so quietly and relaxed . . .
(*Pause*) . . . The Virgin.

CARSTAIRS: . . . and the Unicorn.

HELMUT: There's your symbol, dear Carstairs . . .

CARSTAIRS: . . . Just what I was thinking, my dear Helmut.

Silence.

JENNIFER: I suppose while that *silly* little bitch enjoys *her* crazy carry-on with that *bloody* rhinoceros, the rest of us will just have to wait until someone comes

(*As she speaks, the 'music of the veld' with which the play opens, is heard again, faintly at first, then swelling triumphantly to drown the sound of her voice.*)

END OF PLAY

RITUAL 2378

by
IAN FERGUSON

'The idea of finality leads back to the idea of fact, there is no longer any temptation to attempt an explanation of nature . . . it is very probable that the sacrifice of the male, or of a male, is absolutely necessary, and that it is a sexual rite.'

'Life is made out of life. Nothing lives save at the expense of life.'

Remy de Gourmont: ~
The Natural Philosophy of Love.