

I and the QUEEN

a one-act

By Daniel Curzon

CHARACTERS: (2)

OLIVER, male, any age, any nationality, but with British pretensions

QUEEN, female, over sixty, wearing a crown, mumbles every line

SETTING: A restaurant table with two chairs, with a teapot and cups, two scones

NOTE: The Queen, after she arrives, sits with her back three-quarters or completely to the audience. We don't see her face or understand her mumbles

LIGHTS UP

OLIVER: (sitting at the restaurant table, facing the audience, looking at his watch) Crikey!
(Gets up and goes to side of the stage to see where the Queen is, can't see her) Double crikey!

(He impatiently returns to his chair at the table.)

(He pours himself more tea from a teapot, starts to eat a scone but instead throws it back on the table.)

OLIVER: I loathe scones! And don't get me started on clotted cream! (Picks up the scone, nibbles on it, tosses it back on the table.) I refuse to eat it!

(The Queen enters, elderly, wearing her crown with her everyday clothes.)

OLIVER: There you are at last! (Goes to assist her, helps get her seated, her back all of mostly to the audience.) There! Hmm. I'd hoped you wouldn't wear your crown today.

QUEEN: (mumbles something)

OLIVER: What? You're mumbling again!

QUEEN: (mumbles, still not audible)

OLIVER: I was hoping for some privacy at this delicate time.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Of course they'll know who you are. They're just too polite to say anything. But there *are* some unpleasant gawkers around. (Gestures toward the audience.)

2

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Let's not put this off with mere chatter. I asked you to meet me here today because I have something very important to say.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: I'll ignore that. Would you care for some tea?

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: I'll take that as a yes. (Pours her a cup, refreshes his own cup) How's the family? Your husband?

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: They are a handful indeed.

QUEEN: (mumbles, takes a sip of tea)

OLIVER: You're right. I said no chatter. So I'll get right to the point.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: No, it won't wait until dessert.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: I guess I should have done this at my flat. But too late for that now!

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: You're hungry? I don't think we have time to order. There's a scone there. I haven't touched it.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: No, I have not chewed on it. And since when did that bother you?!

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: The service here is terrible. Do I really have to get up and . . . (Gets up from the table.)

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: You're sure? I don't mind. (He does mind.) (Sits back down.) Now – about why I asked you to meet me here. You must be curious.

3

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: No it's not to borrow more money! And, yes, I will pay you back. What do you take me for?!

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: I know I've said that before, but this time I mean it. How much do I owe you anyway? I forget.

QUEEN: (immediately takes a folded piece of paper from her handbag, hands it to him.)

OLIVER: (not pleased) Well, thank you! (Looks it over.) That much?!

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: No, I'll pay you. I'm as good as my word, it goes without saying. (Puts away the note.) Are you prepared for what I wish to say to you?

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: No, I don't have a disease!

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: True, but that's all cleared up now. I'm sorry you got infected. But those things happen!

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Yes, you were very good about it. Practically a saint.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: I'm getting to it. I'm getting to it!

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: You want to go to the loo? Really? Now?

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Why aren't you wearing that . . . thing that you wear when you're out in public?

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Not that forgetful!

4

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: If I didn't know you better, I'd say that you are attempting to postpone the moment that is approaching.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Well, thank you postponing *that*. I won't take long.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: That joke is beneath you! You and I both know that I have been more than an adequate (whisper) lover.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: You're too kind, Your Majesty. Nevertheless, the moment has come for me to say what I have to say.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: You have a cramp? Where do you have this cramp?

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Do you want to stand up?

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Then stand up and walk on it.

(The Queen gets up from the table and walks around, trying to get rid of the cramp in her foot, always keeping her back to the audience.)

OLIVER: Is that any better?

QUEEN: (wincing) Oh! Oh! Oh! (Presses her foot down.)

OLIVER: Is that helping or hurting?

(The Queen returns to her chair at the table.)

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Oh, you and your cramps. I can put off what I want to say, if you like. I'm not a heartless boor.

5

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: All right then, let me say it. I don't think we should see each other anymore.

QUEEN: (stiffens but says nothing)

OLIVER: Have you nothing to mumble about that?

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: No, I didn't see it coming either. But then there it was! I couldn't ignore it any longer. It was dead. People should not ignore dead things. And you may quote me on that.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Of course it's not your fault, largely. The spark was, quite simply, gone by-by.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: And, yes, I appreciate that. But even wearing your crown to bed was not enough to fix us, ultimately. I finally realized, last Wednesday, that nothing could fix us.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: No, there's no possibility of us going forward. I hate to break your heart. However, I have decided to make the break as clean as I can.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Oh, you must have known! How many afternoon teas did I fail to show up for? You must at least have suspected.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: I hope you're not going to cry. Not here in public.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: You're right. I did arrange for this meeting between us to be in public because I thought you'd be less likely to become emotional when I told you. You're very good in public. That's one of the traits I most liked about you.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: (looking around) No, I don't think anyone has overheard us.

6

(Sounds of dogs barking, whining offstage.)

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: What's that? You haven't brought the Corgis, have you?!

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: But they're here, over there, and of course everyone will notice.

(More sounds of dogs barking, whining.)

OLIVER: They're trying to get to you. You haven't sicced your Corgis on me now, I trust!

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: You haven't? But you might? Is that what you said?

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Please!

(The Queen gets up, goes toward the dogs, goes offstage. The barking stops.)

(The Queen returns, sits.)

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Thank you for that.

QUEEN: (bows her head)

OLIVER: No, that's not all I have to say. But first is there anything you want to say to me?

QUEEN: (starts to mumble)

OLIVER: (interrupting the mumble) Oh, *don't!* Please! Please! Please! Don't remind me of the good times!

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: There were more than that. The regatta at Cowes. That dip in Lake Bassenthwaite. That night in the Maldives when your husband almost caught us. . . . Good times.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Yes, there were bad times, I suppose, over the years.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: True. That Motel 6 we stayed in one night, in Nebraska, was it? On your royal visit to America.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Yes, I suppose we were deliberately slumming, but were we ever happier? That ancient tea kettle that didn't work. That curly hair in the shower.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: I realize that. But the Motel 6 was your idea, our little escape from the pomp and circumstance. I just went along to please you.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Yes, and because the plumbing was better at the Motel 6 than at the palace.

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: Thank you. I *did*, didn't I?

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: I *was*, wasn't I? I will always be grateful for that night in Nebraska. Will you?

QUEEN: (mumbles)

OLIVER: I can see that you're on the brink of tears. Perhaps I should simply step away now, before it gets too heavy for you – for the both of us. (Gets up from the table.)

QUEEN: (mumbles passionately)

OLIVER: Yes, I'm going. (Puts down his napkin) Let's not hug goodbye. Let's not even say goodbye. Nothing maudlin Just let me make my exit, like a prince in a tragic play.

(He leaves, then stops a few steps away, looks back at the Queen over-dramatically.)

OLIVER: Farewell, my Queen! (Exits.)

(The Queen does not look at the man, but she hunches her shoulders, leans forward seems to weep for a moment.)

(But then we see that she is laughing, not weeping, as she raises both hands above her head into fists and shakes them in triumph that she is free of her lover at last.)

BLACKOUT / THE END