

A Richer Dust

A one-act stage play

A Richer Dust is a short story by Noel Coward, adapted for the stage by Tim Luscombe

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www.timluscombe.com

A Richer Dust is represented by Alan Brodie

www.alanbrodie.com

Characters

Morgan

Lenore

Sid

Ruthie

Arch

Zenda

Opal

Nell

Singers & Actors in the movie *Jumbo RAF*

It's possible to perform the play with as few as 5 actors:

- Morgan
- Lenore
- Sid
- Ruthie / Zenda / Singer & Actor in *Jumbo RAF* / Opal / Nell
- Arch / Singer & Actor in *Jumbo RAF*

Other permutations are possible, and, if money allowed, it would be great to double less by using more actors.

The play was written to be performed alongside Noel Coward's One Act play *The Better Half* (also represented by Alan Brodie) as part of a double bill.

In which case, the through casting could be as follows:

- Alice from *The Better Half* would double with the Ruthie line from *A Richer Dust*
- Marion from *The Better Half* with Lenore from *A Richer Dust*
- David from *The Better Half* with the Arch line from *A Richer Dust*

Though, again, other arrangements are possible.

Scene One.

Los Angeles.

An evening in the summer of 1941.

From the terrace of his home in Beverly Hills, Morgan Kent (Around 30 years old – tall, lithe and dark) is looking out over the lights of downtown Santa Monica and the black sea beyond.

He's pensive – troubled.

Cicadas chirrup and buzz.

Lenore Fingal enters. She's a couple of years younger than Morgan – short, slim and pretty.

After gauging his mood, Lenore makes for the drinks trolley where she pours a healthy slug of rye, adding tomato juice and Worcestershire sauce. Then, after glancing again at Morgan, she applies more rye. Satisfied with the concoction, she knocks back a sizeable portion of it.

Morgan remains brooding; his back to her.

Lenore: (*To lighten things*) Um... Is there anything wrong with the sound?

Morgan grunts, unamused, and puts his cigarette out.

(*Wagging her glass*) Have one?

Morgan: Had one.

Lenore: Have another?

Morgan: If he doesn't arrive soon, it'll be too late to go to Beejie's.

Lenore: It's never too late to go to Beejie's. (*Going to make Morgan a drink*) An old-fashioned, then. It'll sooth your nerves. This harsh old world will seem so much cooler in a jiffy, my darling. Those damned lights on the hills softer and less sharp, I promise. Here.

He takes the glass, but doesn't drink.

I can't see why you're so downhearted. I'm enthralled.

Morgan: I bet you are.

Lenore: (*Lighting a cigarette*) Oh, Morgan, why create such a fuss?

Morgan: Why be so keen? No doubt he'll demand a personally conducted tour of the studios, followed by a glamorous lunch at the cafeteria – with no less than Betty Grable I expect.

Lenore: Well?

Morgan: Well, the social strain –

Lenore: Social strain, my ass. You're not ashamed of him, are you? A nice sailor brother? He's not especially unattractive, is he?

Morgan: No, I don't suppose he is.

Lenore: Thank Christ.

A klaxon is heard from the driveway on the far side of the house.

There, now.

Morgan downs the entire contents of his old-fashioned in one gulp.

I can't imagine why you're not longing to see him. Think of all the things that've happened to you in the last six years. All the things you'll have to say to each other. How can it be anything other than a dynamite reunion?

Morgan: Oh, do shut up, Lenore.

Sid: Hello, there!

Sid has entered. He's unlike Morgan in every conceivable way. Short, blond, open and ebullient, and currently dressed in the square rig of an ordinary British seaman.

Morgan valiantly affects a smile.

Sid runs enthusiastically towards his brother (whom he knows as 'Les') and flings his arms affectionately around him, banging him heartily on the back.

My God, Les, I've been looking forward to this for months!

Lenore giggles at the name.

Lenore: Why don't you introduce us, 'Les'?

Morgan: Sid – this is my wife, Lenore.

Lenore and Sid shake hands.

Sid: A right smasher if ever there was one! Holy mackerel, good old Les has married a dreamboat. Always knew he would.

Lenore: I've heard so many things about you.

Sid: Nothing horrible I hope.

Lenore: Well, I've grilled Morgan since we knew you were coming, and I've got the whole dope.

Sid: 'Morgan!' Don't s'pose I'll ever get used to that.

Lenore: Oh, but you've gotta call him Les, Sid. He'd love it. To make him think of the good old days.

Morgan: Have a drink?

Sid: Why not?

Lenore: Have a highball. Say, I'll make you a scotch highball to remind you of home.

Sid: We're from Southsea.

Lenore: And that isn't near Scotland? My geography's a bit crummy, I'm afraid.

Sid laughs.

Morgan: Cigarette?

Sid: Lucky Strikes – lovely. I've only got Players.

Morgan: Have the packet.

Sid: Hahaha! A swimming pool an' all. Corr, this place is a bit of alright. Thought I'd come to the wrong house when that bloke opened the door. Les has got a flipping butler! You've got the fatted calf up, and hung out the holly too? Well, all I want's a nice juicy stake, done medium, with chips.

Morgan: Ok, that'll be no trouble. And tomorrow I'll take you round the studios.

Sid: Really? Just the ticket. (*Having received his drink*) Cheerio. Any chance we might bump into Jeanette MacDonald?

Morgan: And Judy Garland and Loretta Young with a prevailing wind.

Sid: 'Struth.

Lenore: Now, tell us. Are you on a battleship, Sid?

Sid: A battleship? Nah, the Tagus is just a cruiser, worst luck.

Lenore: A cruiser? How heavenly. Where have you been on it?

Sid: Oh, all over. Ceylon, India –

Lenore: Ceylon? I remember I wore a lulu of a silk dress from Ceylon in *Altitude*. (*To Morgan*) Do you remember, darling? Sheer, knee-length, the sweetest Asian-blue colour.

Sid: We saw you in *Altitude*. You were a knockout.

Lenore: Why, thank you, Sid.

Sid: Les was corking too. (*To Morgan*) That bit near the end when you had to sacrifice yourself to save your fiancée and your best friend... Blimey, it was gut-wrenching. Mum couldn't watch.

Lenore: Variety said it was 'a dramatic climax hitherto unparalleled in the art of filmmaking'.

Sid: Yeah, it was really good.

Lenore: That's where we met, Sid. Morgan and I – on the set. A beautiful example of love at first sight, wasn't it, darling?

Morgan: Absolute and concrete. She went bonkers for me, poor little love.

Lenore: Are you kidding? Morgan in his fighter pilot costume – all silent and gallant and dashing. Irresistible. Before the shoot was half done, we'd flown to Mexico on a Saturday, got hitched on the Sunday and flown back to start work on Monday.

Sid: Serious?

Lenore: Jeez, you remember what a god-awful time I had with the accent on that picture, Morgan? I was a catastrophe.

Morgan: It was hard to know what accent to aim for when you're playing an English peeress who lives in a kind of Tudor tearoom on the Yorkshire Moors.

Lenore: Seriously, Sid, the studio's not let me play English ever since.

Morgan: Anyway, I daresay I'd have trouble mastering an American accent.

Sid: (*Without any side at all*) You've mastered posh alright.

Lenore: You mean that's not his normal accent?

Sid: You're joking. He used to talk like me.

Lenore: Oh, I can't really make out the difference.

Morgan: Sid can.

Sid: I thought you'd only do it in the films – when you were being Morgan Kent and not Lesley Booker. Here, Les, why'd you pick Kent of all names?

Morgan: I didn't. Sol Katsenberg did.

Sid: Coz I always thought Kent was pretty boring.

Morgan: It sounds different in America. Like fag, and fanny. In California, Kent's got a classy ring to it. Don't get too comfortable, Sid, my lad. We're taking you to a party.

Sid: Oh, I don't have time for a swim then?

Lenore: (*Gathering cigarettes etc*) Plenty of time tomorrow. It's just a little buffet dinner at Beejie Lemaire's.

Morgan: And we're already late, so knock back that highball –

Sid: The actress Beejie Lemaire?

Lenore: You'll love her. She's as right as rain. But you'll take my advice and not go outside with her after she's had more than three drinks.

Sid: Really?

Lenore: She's the biggest rip-snorting nympho between here and Palm Springs.

Morgan: Maybe Sid would like to have a few passes made at him. He's only got forty-eight hours leave.

Lenore: He's my brother-in-law, my baby brother-in-law, and, so help me God, I'm going to protect him from the evils of Hollywood if it kills me.

Morgan: The convertible will be alright?

Lenore: No, the Packard. I wanna drive.

Sid: You drive?

Lenore: (*Going*) Why? Shouldn't I? (*Exits*).

Morgan: Come on, Sid. (*Exits*).

Sid: Stone the crows, this is the life alright. (*Goes to exit*).

Lights change.

Ruthie enters to Sid.

Ruthie: Ahoy there.

Sid: (*Surprised*) Oh, hello.

There's no break into:

Scene Two.

At Beejie's.

Another – practically identical – swimming-pool terrace.

The sound of Beejie's party comes from the house, floating through the air.

Sid's had a great deal to drink.

Ruthie: Lost your ship?

Sid: Yeah. No. Lost a little glamour puss called Dolly, I think.

Ruthie: Doll Hartley?

Sid: An astounding popsy with a full set of everything.

Ruthie: That's the one. She was just heading home when I came out for some air.

Sid: Home? Ah, bugger it.

Ruthie: Say, don't go, Sid. Perhaps...Perhaps I'll do instead?

Sid: (*Laughing*) Corr, my kind of party, this is.

Ruthie: Cigarette?

Sid: (*Taking one*) Smashing.

Ruthie: Beejie always throws a killer party.

Sid: She does?

Ruthie: (*Lighting Sid*) Sure. Drink, debauchery, the occasional murder – you know.

Sid: Whoopee.

Ruthie: Our hostess is a pretty neat girl.

Sid: Yeah, I...er...spent a bit of time with her in her library.

Ruthie: Library? See any books?

Sid: I wasn't looking for books.

Ruthie: (*Sitting*) Course, she's not done much of anything since her big smash in *Honey Face*. Released a few mediocre films. Married a few mediocre husbands. This one's number five, I believe.

Sid: She's been divorced four times?

Ruthie: Three. She was annulled once. Number five removes gall bladders.

Sid: I think I made scrambled eggs with him – several hours ago.

Ruthie: And it seems turn his hand to setting bones. Pretty miserable, wasn't it? Peppo falling down the stairs like that. If he hadn't been carrying a plate of cheese appetisers, I don't suppose it would have been quite so hilarious. It's ever-so comfy here, Sid. Why don't you join me?

Sid: Don't mind if I do. (*Sits*).

Ruthie: Your brother mentioned to you, couple years back he had a brief, tempestuous affair with Beejie?

Sid: Hah! No. But nothing would surprise me about Les in that department.

Ruthie: Les...?

Sid: Always was a fast worker.

Ruthie: Sure. (*Catching up fast*) Yeah, Les has always had a reputation with the girls, hasn't he?

Sid: I should coco. Been the making of him, girls have. How he made it in the old acting lark in the first place.

Ruthie: That so?

**Thank you for reading the first pages of A Richer Dust by Tim Luscombe
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