

SCENE TWO

[Lights up with ELIOT and JACK in chairs with their legs propped up. They start the scene wearing robes, with large tissues holding apart their freshly pedicured toes, they have green face masks on, and they have slices of cucumber over both eyes.]

[Eliot is a young man, American but working hard on his English accent. On the surface he is charming, modest, and likable. At a deeper level he is arrogant, contemptuous, and sometimes cruel. Looking still deeper, we find a fearful man who believes that he is a sinner, a man who is constantly at war with his own thoughts and desires.]

[Jack is a young English man roughly Eliot's age. He is clean cut and meticulous in his dress and speech. He is cute in a puckish sort of way, rather than traditionally handsome. Jack is comfortable with the fact that he is gay, yet many people who know him are not aware of his sexual preferences simply because he doesn't consider it a big deal so it never came up. Eliot and Jack are friends and lovers.]

ELIOT

I say old chap, jolly good show we're having, bloody good time. Maybe we should go to a chippie shop later for some bloody good fish and chips. [Jack removes the cucumbers, looks at Eliot, replaces the cucumbers and lies back down.]

How was that, Jack? Did I sound like a proper Englishman? You didn't hear any American accent, did you? I think it was pretty good. I think I'm getting the hang of it.

JACK

[Sarcastically] Oh, it was just perfect, Tom. I couldn't have done better myself.

ELIOT

Reginald was helping me. He told me to pretend that I had a plum in my mouth while I was talking. So instead of saying, "the weather is nice" I'd say [exaggerated plum in mouth garble] "the weather is nice."

JACK

Tom, you don't need to sound like an Englishman. It's fine to just be yourself. What matters is that when you speak, you have something important to say.

And you do. People love hearing your poetry, and they love hearing you speak. You're going to be a famous poet, I'm convinced. You're a shoe-in for the Socrates poetry lecture series. No other poet even comes close.

ELIOT

Oh, I hope so Jack. I'm just so excited. My parents are three thousand miles away and for the first time in my life, I feel free! I can do whatever I want, say whatever I want, be whatever I want. Yesterday I had ice cream for dinner!

[Enter Prufrock. Lights down on Jack, who is frozen during the interchange between Eliot and Prufrock.]

PRUFROCK

The accent's not enough, you know.

ELIOT

Who are you?

PRUFROCK

J. Alfred Prufrock at your service. But you already knew that.

ELIOT

There is no J. Alfred Prufrock. I made him up. He's a fictional personality.

PRUFROCK

And yet... [a sweeping bow. Tosses Eliot a towel] Now, clean yourself up. You look ridiculous. [Eliot becomes aware of his foolish appearance, cleans up] What makes a proper English gentleman, someone accepted into English society, has little to do with the way a person speaks and everything to do with the way a person appears. Appearances are everything.

ELIOT

You mean my clothes? My hair?

PRUFROCK

I mean Jack.

ELIOT

What about Jack? Oh, yes, he does look a little ridiculous. Well, nothing that can't be cleaned up. Nothing that can't...

PRUFROCK

—I mean your relationship with Jack. Proper English gentlemen don't have romantic relationships with other men. It isn't proper, and it isn't done.

ELIOT

But we were just...

PRUFROCK

—You'll never be accepted in English society unless you get rid of Jack. And the Poetry Society will never select you for the Socrates lecture series unless you are accepted in English society. You know that what I'm saying is the truth. [Exit Prufrock]

[Lights up on Jack.]

JACK

Well Tsetse, this was fun but I've really got to run. I'll see you tonight for dinner. [Exit Jack]

ELIOT

English society would accept me for who I am. They wouldn't care about Jack, that's my private affair. [doubtful] Maybe they'd accept me. No, he's right. I'd need to give up Jack. I couldn't do that. So I'd need to give up on this stupid poetry career. Who cares about the Socrates Poetry lectures anyway. Why am I writing my poetry, for myself or for others? Real poets don't care about fame, about recognition. Their art is enough. But still...

[Song: I'll Take Both Please]

Soup or salad, slaw or fries
Choices make me agonize
Pick one, which one
Make up my mind

I'll take both please, and why not

Who's to say that I cannot
Who's to say that I can't have it all?
I refuse to pick just one
I don't choose to think that small
I'll take both
Don't think small
Take them all

Wake up early or sleep late
Am I crooked, am I straight
Pick one, which one
Make up my mind

I'll take both please, and why not
Who's to say that I cannot
Who's to say that I can't have it all?
I refuse to pick just one
I don't choose to think that small
I'll take both
Don't think small
Take them all

But can I really have Jack and still have a shot at the Socrates Poetry lectures?
Will they really accept me for who I am? Can I really accept me?

Loving Jack or Socrates
Having both should be a breeze
Why should I choose
Both ways I loose

I'll take both please, and why not
Who's to say that I cannot
Who's to say that I can't have it all?
I refuse to pick just one
I don't choose to think that small
I'll take both
Don't think small
Take them all

[Exit Eliot]

SCENE THREE

[Enter Vivienne and Reginald]

[Vivienne is a small, attractive young English woman. She is flirtatious, moody, and given to outbursts of anger or despair. She likes to wear bright colors and dramatic clothes. She enjoys painting, writes poetry, studied ballet, and is an accomplished ballroom dancer. She is addicted to ether, and mentally unstable. As the play progresses she becomes increasingly paranoid, often becoming hysterical over nothing, and fearful of her life from unknown pursuers.]

[Reginald, an older English gentleman, is a famous psychiatrist, philosopher, and university professor who has befriended Eliot and Vivienne. He is a bachelor, bisexual, and a good-natured sexual predator where the entire world is his prey.]

VIVIENNE

Did you tell him about me, Reginald? What did you say? What did he say? Does he want to meet me?

REGINALD

Yes, yes I told Tom about you. I told him that you were madly in love with him, that you worshipped him from afar, and that he could have you for passionate sex anytime he had an hour or so to spare.

VIVIENNE

Reginald, you were just supposed to tell him I wanted to meet him. [beat] But does he want to meet me somewhere for an hour or so?

REGINALD

I'm just kidding. I told him you were a wonderful girl, a devout fan of his poetry, and that I'd bring you by sometime so that the two of you could meet. But there's something about Tom you should know.

VIVIENNE

What?

REGINALD

Oh never mind. It's more fun this way.

VIVIENNE

Oh thank you Reginald! You're a dear! [Kisses him on the cheek.]

REGINALD

[Reginald starts to exit, then turns] Say, he's having dinner at Pierre's tonight. We'll stop by and I'll introduce you then. I'll pick you up at seven. And just remember, if you ever feel frustrated and you need a friend, even in the middle of the night, my door is always open.[Exit]

VIVIENNE

Tonight? Yes, why not tonight! He's not married, no girlfriend, handsome, famous...well, almost famous. In short, I'm perfect for him!

SONG

Tonight is My Chance

Tonight is my chance,
to make him love me.
Tonight is my chance
To create romance.
Some dinner, a dance
Our love will advance
From a glance, to a glow, to a flame
Tonight is my chance
My only chance
Is tonight.

Tonight is my chance
To make him love me,
A fraction as much
Just a fraction as much
As my love for him.
I don't ask for much
Just a fraction is all
Just a fraction so small
Of my love for him.

Tonight is my chance,
But am I good enough?
I should be good enough.
Tonight is my chance,
I could be good enough
A new dress plunging low
Some make-up that will show
Off my eyes and my lips and my glow
Tonight is my chance.
A special hairdo
Ordinary won't do

And perhaps some expensive perfume.
Tonight is my chance
For my pretty and sexy debut
Then I could be good enough
I would be good enough
To make my Prince Charming love me.
A fraction as much as I love him.

[Exit Vivienne]

SCENE FOUR

[Pierre's, a restaurant with dancing, that evening. Eliot is seated and writing. Other diners are eating and perhaps slow dancing. Enter Jack.]

JACK

Day dreaming again, wrapped up in that stupid poetry?

ELIOT

It's not stupid, and I wasn't day dreaming.

JACK

[Grabs the poem that Eliot was writing.]

[Reading]

"When I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
when I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
then how should I begin
to spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?"

Come off it, Tsetse. How can you sit there and claim that a poem can be any good if it doesn't make sense? Your poems don't make sense. You don't make sense.

ELIOT

Modern poetry is supposed to be difficult. Poets in our civilization must be difficult. The poet must become more comprehensive, allusive, indirect—in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning. My poetry will be recognized, Jack, by those who matter.

JACK

But that's just the problem with modern poetry. It's so difficult that it no longer has any true meaning, not to ordinary people.

ELIOT

Even so Jack, the best poetry has always had a bit of that in it. Look at Dante's Divine Comedy. [Reverently] Dante was the greatest poet, even better than Shakespeare. Dante understands deeper degrees of degradation and higher degrees of exaltation. He finds worlds for those feelings people can hardly feel, because they have no words. Places that cannot exist in ordinary reality. Dante taught me that genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood. The right way to read a truly great poem, a truly chaotic poem, is to allow the images to fall into one's memory successively without questioning the reasonableness of each at the moment it is created by the poet. In the end you're left with one intense impression, a glimpse through a door to a world that doesn't exist.

JACK

Or perhaps, one that is even more real than this one, the one that we think is real and solid.

ELIOT

Exactly!

JACK

So you want to go for this lecture series after all?

ELIOT

Not just a lecture series, Jack. The Socrates Poetry Lectures! If I'm selected it means I've made it as a poet. It means everything.

[Enter Prufrock, as a waiter. Eliot recognizes him but to Jack, he is just a waiter.]

PRUFROCK

[to Jack] Can I bring you something, Sir?

ELIOT

What are you doing here?

JACK

Who?

PRUFROCK

Perhaps a glass of wine?

ELIOT

Get out!

JACK

Tom, what's got into you? [to Prufrock] A red wine, please.

[Eliot and Prufrock converse while Jack and the other patrons are frozen, lights down]

ELIOT

Leave me alone. I'm going to have Jack and I'm going to have the Socrates Poetry Lectures too. I've made up my mind.

PRUFROCK

Exactly what I was going to suggest.

ELIOT

So you can forget about trying to talk me out of it. I don't want to hear...What did you say?

PRUFROCK

I was going to suggest that you should have Jack and also have the poetry lectures.

ELIOT

Well, then we're in agreement.

PRUFROCK

There is a way, and you must follow that path.

ELIOT

Exactly. <beat> What path?

PRUFROCK

You must hide your relationship with Jack. What society does not know, cannot bother society.

ELIOT

Hide my relationship? Hide my relationship. Yes, hide my relationship! That would solve everything!

PRUFROCK

Yes, completely hidden. Underground. [Starts to exit, then turns] Like a sewer. [exit Prufrock]

[Lights back up on Jack and other patrons, they are back with us again.]

JACK

Well, everyone says you're poetry is good enough. Strange, weird, bizarre...but good. I'll give you that. [Reaches for Eliot's hand.]

ELIOT

[Pulls back]

Jack, there's people here. They might see us.

JACK

So what? What's got into you, anyway?

ELIOT

Jack, we just need to be discrete in public, that's all.

JACK

Tsetse, what are you afraid of. Nobody cares about us. About what we do.

ELIOT

They will, Jack. It will become important—if we give them the opportunity. I can still see you, but to the rest of the world, I've got to be, well, normal.

JACK

We're already normal Tom. [pouting] I'm normal. Are you saying you think I'm not normal?

ELIOT

No, no. You know what I meant. I just need to blend in, be what they expect.

JACK

How far are you planning to carry this charade? Girlfriend? Wife? Children!!?

ELIOT

Children? Never! [Thinking out loud] But girlfriend? That might be just the trick. But I suppose she'd want to get married. Maybe wife. My parents would like that. She could keep the apartment clean, do the shopping, take care of the laundry. It could work.

JACK

Come off it, Tom. How are you going to find a girlfriend, much less a wife?

[enter Reginald and Vivienne]

REGINALD

Tom, Jack, just the people I was hoping to see. Tom, I came by to introduce you to that girl I was telling you about, Vivienne. Vivienne, meet Tom Eliot. Tom, meet one of your greatest fans, Vivienne.

VIVIENNE

Oh, it's such an honor to meet you Mr. Eliot. [Starts to walk over to him, trips, falls into his arms] Oh my. I'm so sorry. I'm just a bit nervous.

ELIOT

Quite all right, Vivienne, and please call me Tom or T.S.

JACK

Don't do it, Tom.

ELIOT

[To Vivienne] Would you like to join us? Or perhaps you're free tomorrow evening? [standing and moving Vivienne away from Jack] I have two tickets to the ballet.

JACK

Hey, one of those is...

ELIOT

It's a wonderful show, and I'd so love to see it with you on my arm.

REGINALD

[To Jack] That didn't work out the way I expected at all. Isn't Tom...

JACK

An ass.

[The following song is an ensemble dance number]

Song

I Think This is the Start of Something

VIVIENNE

I think this is the start of something

Something wonderful

He's so adorable

I think that things are going my way.

Tonight the café, in a day a ballet, and then soon I'll be his fiance'

I think this is the start of something

JACK

I think this is the start of something

Something horrible.

She's so deplorable

The self respect he's throwing away
 He won't be believed, people won't be deceived, but I'll still be the one who's
 aggrieved
 And yet
 I think this is the start of something

ELIOT

I think this is the start of something
 It's unavoidable.
 Yes unavoidable
 A businesslike ongoing display
 A girl as my bride, what a grand way to hide, I'll have her and have Jack on the
 side
 I think this is the start of something

Vivienne	Jack	Eliot
I think this is the start of something	Something horrible	A girl as my bride, what a grand way to hide, I'll have her and have Jack on the side
Something Wonderful	He won't be believed, people won't be deceived, but I'll still be one who's aggrieved	I think this is the start of something
Tonight the café, in a day a ballet, and then soon I'll be his fiance'	I think this is the start of something	It's unavoidable
I think this is the start of something	I think this is the start of something	I think this is the start of something

[Blackout, exit all]