

House of Humours
By
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SETTING

Onstage and in various backstage locations of a theatre presenting a play titled WHO'S HYDE?

With the exception of a few full blackouts, the action of HOUSE OF HUMOURS is continuous. Sometimes, the view/perspective may be split (e.g. "backstage"/"onstage") and it may shift as we move in and out of scenes (e.g. "onstage" to "backstage/onstage." A divided stage does not have to be 50/50, can be on a diagonal, etc. The continuous action of scene shifts may have slight "time cuts" e.g. Bill walks offstage and straight into a dressing room.

Changing scene and perspective can be done via something as advanced as stage machinery/fly systems, and as simple as light shifts and/or moving a door on wheels.

Exactly how these shifts in scene and perspective happen is something that I leave up to the director and designers of each individual production. That being said, I support and encourage a creatively minimal approach; that's how I saw it as I wrote it.

Note: - This excerpt appears mid-play. Dr. Jekyll is giving Gina, a prostitute, an examination. When the play moves "Backstage," it should be known that Hank portrays Jekyll in the "onstage" scenes, Jessie portrays Gina, Bill portrays Poole (the butler/nurse). -- Bill and Louise are a long-divorced couple. Hank and Jessie have just broken up the night prior to the action of the play.

JEKYLL

Allright then. Miss Pottage, please come sit on the end of your divan.

(She does so.)

Sit straight and relax your neck and shoulders.

She sits straight, but is not particularly relaxed. JEKYLL gently, assuredly, presses two fingers to her upper spine.

GINA

Mmm.

(He presses another spot nearby.)

Ooh. Yuv got quite a touch there.

JEKYLL

Now. I'm going to examine the surface of your skull. But before I do, I'd like you to describe the symptoms that you've been feeling. When your head feels "balmy."

GINA

Well ... it feels like ... somethin's comin' up behind me. Somethin' catchin' up t' me. An' when it does, it'll be the end of me.

Beat.

JEKYLL

The end?

GINA

It's like it'll swallow me up, make me disappear. Worse than a wallopin', it is. Makes me want to turn around when I feel it, but when I turn, it's right behind me again. I turn and turn and I never see it but I know it's there. Wantin' to swallow me up. Makes me balmy. Very balmy.

Beat.

JEKYLL

What makes it go away?

GINA

Sleep. But once it comes on, it don't go easy.

JEKYLL

What makes it come on?

GINA

I don't know.

JEKYLL

Think.

Pause.

GINA

I don't know.

Pause.

JEKYLL

Allright then. We'll leave it alone for the moment.

(beat)

Now: I want you to keep your neck and shoulders relaxed ... that's good ... and I'm going to examine the surface of your skull. You must understand that the brain is divided up into thirty-seven organs, each of which determines the strength or weakness of a different aspect of your lower functions, higher functions, and personality.

GINA

So what's a lower function?

JEKYLL

Circulation, respiration ... ejaculation.

GINA

Mmm: I got ya' drift. And a higher?

JEKYLL

Mimicry ... memory ... idealism.

GINA

And personality?

JEKYLL

Personality is formed from an integration of higher and lower functions. Or, in some cases, a ... switching-off between the two. In any case, a bump or tumescence may appear upon the skull in the region of a particularly strong organ.

GINA

So ya' gonna feel bumps in me 'ead?

JEKYLL

Yes. Precisely.

GINA

I'm all yours.

JEKYLL begins to run his fingers gently along GINA's skull, stopping at times to apply pressure. He occasionally looks at the phreonomologist's bust as a point of reference.

JEKYLL

Mm -- a strong sense of Tune -- a gift for music.

GINA

Always could carry a tune.

JEKYLL

... Reverence: veneration of God and his creations.

He pauses, looking at her.

GINA

No surprise there.

(Beat. He goes back to examining her.)

Me, I can tell a lot about a bloke's character in my line a' work. If he's a right man or a bounder. His grunts. His siiiighs. If he slaps into ya' like a randy cocker spaniel or if he's like that first warm sip o' tea down the gullet on a winter's sunset. 'Ow he looks at me. Where he looks at me. If he looks me in the eye and what that look is like. Me, I can tell a lot.

JEKYLL

Well, not the most localized science, but an intriguing one.

GINA

Localized in me quim, for a right lot of 'em. Tells me a lot, the localized ones. Mostly bounders. Or Lonesome Lukes . Don't care much for the localized. Them that's buyin' more n' a cored-out-apple, they're the ones that can share a laugh, make it not so dreary. 'Cept a few that wants the whole kit n' cargo, look right through ya' and smile. A few like that's the biggest bounders of all.

JEKYLL

(Announcing his results from while she was speaking:)

Guile, Mimicry, and Hope.

GINA

Really now.

Charged silence as he continues to examine her.
She turns her head toward his, close to a kiss.

JEKYLL

Ejaculation.

(More examination, tension.
Then:)

Murderousness.

Beat. She kisses him passionately.

The door bursts open. (NURSE) POOLE stands in
the doorway. Melodramatically:

POOLE

Dr. Jekyll!!

BLACKOUT. MUSIC. As POOLE (Bill) exits, we
SHIFT TO:

MEN'S DRESSING ROOM. BILL discovers LOUISE
still there.

BILL

Still here?

LOUISE

Yup. I'm tired of the girls' dressing room. I've been in the
girls' dressing room for weeks.

BILL

I thought you'd be hiding in the boiler room.

LOUISE

Because you told me you were in love with me again?

BILL

I said I *thought* I *might* be falling in love with you again.

LOUISE

Actually, I stayed in here just to be spiteful. To show you
how little it meant.

BILL

That's okay. I realized I'm probably not in love with you
again.

LOUISE

You realized this just now, while you were onstage?

BILL

No, while I was backstage during the phrenology stuff. It
might have been *influenced* by what I was doing onstage.

But I realized it backstage, just for a second, I didn't dwell on it.

LOUISE

So it could probably rear its ugly head again.

BILL

Maybe, not probably. Anyway, I realized we really don't have very much in common.

LOUISE

Uh-huh.

BILL

Not that having things in common is so important.

LOUISE

At our age, it is actually.

BILL

Why -- cause it's not all run by sex?

LOUISE

Very good, Bill.

BILL

But at our age, we're more accepting of our differences.

LOUISE

No, men your age try to act accepting, but they're still resentful and feel compromised and feel they should be with other women unless their wives are sort of like being with another guy, but you can fuck her once in a while and not feel gay. So come back and try me again when you're, like, eighty, assuming your wife's had the good sense to dump you long before then.

BILL

And, and you know all of this about men my age because -- I mean, as far as I know, you haven't been involved with anyone in--

LOUISE

All you have to do is be awake. I mean, all you have to do is observe, it's pretty obvious, it's not brain surgery.

BILL

Yeah, well ... The one I really have a lot in common with is Jessie. But she's ... way too young.

Pause.

LOUISE

You're pathetic. You--

BILL

What--

LOUISE

You're pathetic and hopeless.

BILL

What are you, the thought police?

LOUISE

You have a wonderful wife at home.

BILL

And I come here to fantasize.

LOUISE

Save it for the stage, kiddo.

BILL

I'm wearing a dress onstage!

LOUISE

So, you're a character actor.

BILL

Exactly! And that's the ultimate fate of the character actor, the ultimate completion of the arc: cut his balls off and put him in a dress.

LOUISE

Marlon Brando's last role was a woman. An animation voiceover. They say he wore a dress when he recorded it.

BILL

Brando was *eighty* and weighed four-hundred pounds.

LOUISE

And so they should cut *his* balls off, but not *yours*? You're on the same *spectrum* as the ball-cutters, kiddo.

BILL

Is 'kiddo' the word of the day, now?

LOUISE

It's the word of this conversation.

BILL

What, we're back to you're the grownup and I'm the child again?

LOUISE

Uh-huh. Yeah.

BILL

That is so self-aggrandizing.

LOUISE

When you tell me that you're in love with me again--

BILL

I said, "I *think* I *might* be falling in love with you again--"

LOUISE

-- you are being a child.

BILL

You love it. You love hearing that I might be in love with you again. I'm not saying you'd like me in-your-life-again-in-love-with-you, but I know you love hearing it. So I say it because we're working together ... and it's my sacrifice to our craft.

LOUISE

Oh, oh, look at you, you can't even *begin* to keep a straight face when you say that.

BILL

(indeed, unable to hide
smile/laughter)

My supreme dedication ... To the success of this endeavor ...

They're both cracking up.

LOUISE

Oh god ... you are ...

BILL

My offering to the god Dionysus ...

LOUISE

You are so completely ridiculous!

BILL

See, now I'm falling in love with you again!

LOUISE

God dammit!

BILL

Shit!

WE HEAR APPLAUSE over the speaker.

STAGE MANAGER (O.S./SPEAKER)

Intermission. Ten minutes. "Who's Hyde?" Intermission.

BILL AND LOUISE

Thank you, Ten Minutes.

LIGHTS SHIFT TO BACKSTAGE/GREEN ROOM.

HANK (JEKYLL) and JESSIE (GINA) stand apart from each other, afraid to make contact, but not wanting to leave each other either.
Finally:

JESSIE

What do you think?

HANK

About tonight?

JESSIE

Yeah.

HANK

Them or us?

JESSIE

Either.

Beat.

HANK

They're alright. I think they want to have a good time. And sometimes they're getting frustrated. But I don't think we've lost them.

JESSIE

And us?

HANK

In and out. Maybe more in than out. I'm feeling pretty good in the monologues. Pretty connected. But the other stuff ... I dunno, part of me feels a little closed off .. or like I can't access ... what I want to access. But not always.

(beat)

I thought there was some decent stuff happening in our scenes.

JESSIE

Yeah. Yeah, I thought so too. Some new moments . I thought--

HANK

Don't tell me what they were--

JESSIE

No, I'm not--

HANK

It's not you, I just can get into my head so--

JESSIE

I know--

HANK

So easily --

JESSIE

I *know*, Hank, jeez, I was just going to say I thought Bill was having some fun out there too.

HANK

Oh. Yeah. Okay. Yeah, by the time you come on, Bill and I are just glad to be playing offa' somebody different.

(Pause)

But overall I think it's going alright.

Pause.

JESSIE

Well ... gotta touch up my makeup.

HANK

Yeah.

She begins to leave.

HANK (cont'd)

Oh, one thing.

JESSIE

What.

HANK

Just a very little thing, a line thing.

JESSIE

Oh -- what?

HANK

In the "Something's coming up behind me" section ... You said,

(very quickly, flatly)

"Somethingscomingupbehindme, somethingcatchinguptomeand when it does,

(slowing down)

--it'll be the *end* of me" ... and I think, I could be wrong, but in the script, I think it's, "It'll be the *death* of me."

JESSIE

Oh. Yeah. I think I *have* been saying "end." Yeah, I think, I think you're right, I think it *is* "death." Yeah, I can change that, not a problem.

HANK

Thanks, good.

Beat.

JESSIE

I think I've been saying "end" for about three weeks or so.

HANK

Yeah. Yeah, I think maybe you have.

JESSIE

If it was bothering you, why didn't you bring it up earlier?

HANK

Well, it wasn't really bothering me before.

JESSIE

And it's bothering you now, after three weeks?

HANK

No, that isn't it, it's like, I sensed that something was off all along, but I couldn't put my finger on it, so I looked at the script last night and I found it but I wasn't 100% sure if you were saying "end" or "death" because when you're out there, it's like you're hyper-aware --

JESSIE

I know what it's--

HANK

--but then afterwards you don't always --

JESSIE

I know what it's like out there--

HANK

--you don't always have total recall, y'know, so I thought I'd wait to see what happened tonight.

Beat.

JESSIE

Okay, I have to ask this:

HANK

Aw shit.

JESSIE

No, I have to: Something's been bothering you out there for three weeks, but you wait until the day after you break up with me to check and see if I'm doing something wrong? There's no connection there?

HANK

No. I'm not going there. Not now. I am at work. I'm at the office. You're at the office.

JESSIE

I'm talking about work. I'm talking about something that's affecting the work.

HANK

A tiny line thing?

JESSIE

No, we cleared up the line, I'm talking about why you asked about it *now*.

HANK

Which has nothing to do with the work. Except maybe now I have the *time* and the *energy* to concentrate on the work that I didn't have before --

JESSIE

Okay, stop.

HANK

--because I was spending more time talking about our relationship with you than I was spending living our lives. Which means we don't belong together.

JESSIE

Okay, stop, please. That hurts. That really hurts. You don't have to be hurtful.

HANK

You asked me a question and I answered it.

JESSIE

You could have answered it without being hurtful. I wonder ... I just wonder ... why you prefer "death" to "end."

HANK

Oh, come on, that's the way the guy wrote it--

JESSIE

And you never complained about the change before.

HANK

No, this is ridiculous, this is beneath you.

JESSIE

Okay. Okay. I just thought, maybe, --

HANK

Look, I'm sorry, but I really can't get into this now. I just ... I need my life to be compartmentalized. When the show and the private life bleed into each other, it's, it's unhealthy. I need to compartmentalize.

JESSIE

I think you're --

HANK

I mean, I started doing theatre to get away from my parents. And it was the only place I could be a human being. And --

JESSIE

I thought you couldn't get into this now.

HANK

No, wait, just lemme finish this -- see, I couldn't be a human being in their house, I mean, shit, you've met my parents --

JESSIE

Hank, you're gonna hate this--

HANK

Then don't say it now -- we're at work.

JESSIE

No, no, you're stronger than you think you are, this parent shit, it's very adolescent, you don't need that excuse--

HANK

It's not an excuse--

JESSIE

The parent shit --

HANK

It's not an excuse, it's an explanation. I, I just feel that I owe you the courtesy of an explanation.

Beat.

JESSIE

Allright. You're right. We shouldn't talk. Because the more you talk--

HANK

Stop. Stop right now. We're at the office. Leave it at the door.

JESSIE

You're right. You really are. I'll see you onstage.

She begins to leave.

HANK

Oh, and ... for what it's worth, I think you're having a great show.

JESSIE

(sincerely)

Oh. Thank you.

HANK

I mean, you're always good, but tonight ... well, I don't want to analyze it.

JESSIE

That's okay.

HANK

And, y'know, the audience obviously loves you.

JESSIE

Yeah, well, a lot of that's the part. You've got the tough part.

HANK

He's not a very likable guy.

JESSIE

It's not just that, he's ... well, I don't want to put you in your head.

HANK

No, I know, anyway, we've talked about--

JESSIE

Yeah, so I don't have to--

HANK

No.

JESSIE

Say, or --

HANK

Yeah.

(beat)

See you out there.

JESSIE

See you out there.

They both leave to go to their dressing rooms.