

STRANGE CASE

By
Steve Totland

This play is copyrighted.
The excerpt is for perusal purposes only.
For a copy of the complete play,
please contact the author.

Copyright © 1999
by Steve Totland
totlands@dogear.org

STRANGE CASE is meant to be performed by six men. Each performer is responsible for playing one of the major characters in the story: UTTERSON, JEKYLL, LANYON, ENFIELD, POOLE, and HYDE. Each performer (other than the performer who plays Hyde) also plays a number of the smaller characters. The performer cast as Hyde plays only this one role.

THE LITTLE GIRL, EMMA, MRS. CROFTON, DANVERS CAREW, CONNELLY, and A LITTLE BOY are represented by puppets.

ONE.

[A small pool of light surrounded by darkness.

THREE YOUNG BOYS play. Their play evolves into the aggressive posturing of adolescent roughhousing. The roughhousing subsides. THE BOYS (now grown into men) stand; they tuck in their shirts, straighten their collars, comb their hair. They stand still; no longer looking at one another, secure in the quiet assurance that comes from success.]

TWO

LANYON

You have to remember that we've know each other our entire lives. We grew up together, the three of us. Utterson's family lived right across the street and Jekyll's family lived just around the corner. We played together, went to school together. Utterson, Jekyll, and Lanyon. As close as the three of us are, and we are close, it's like they are my brothers, there is this sense-- ask either of them and they are going to deny this, but I know it's there, there is this sense that they are the two best-friends, and I am the third. When I was younger I used to worry about it, tried to figure out what I could do to be as close. As I got older--

About this whole business-- this strange-- this strange case, I guess you'd call it-- For me it was always religion. It seems odd to me now, especially when you consider the kind of rational-minded person I've become, but when I was younger I was-- I guess you could describe it as being easily ecstatic. I was very susceptible to being transported; transformed by the

I have this memory. The three of us are at the library; working on research papers. At one end of the room there's a big stained glass window; a kind of faux-Tiffany thing with a picture that resembles da Vinci's Annunciation. I looked up from my book and-- it's the silliest thing-- the sun illuminating the angel's face-- I started to cry.

Jekyll never saw. Jekyll puts his face in a book it takes an earthquake to pull it out. But Utterson saw. He looked right at me. He watched the entire time and didn't say a word. Didn't ask, Was I alright? Did I need anything? Could he do anything to help? Just watched with an expression that was a mixture of wonder and revulsion. And I sure as hell wasn't going to offer an explanation. What was I going to say, "I'm crying because I think my soul's going to heaven?"

This is going to sound silly, but it wasn't so much that I was embarrassed, Utterson seeing me cry. It was that I realized, for the first time, that there was a part of me that I couldn't, perhaps shouldn't, share with anyone else. A part of me that was mine alone.

THREE

[Jekyll's lab. Evening.]

JEKYLL enters, shuts and locks the door. He sets a package on his desk. He crosses to a cabinet, removes a chain with a key from around his neck. He unlocks a drawer, removes a journal and a small box, closes the drawer, re-fastens the lock, replaces the chain around his neck, crosses to his desk.

JEKYLL consults the journal, paces. He takes a graduated glass beaker and a brown-glass bottle out of the box. He opens the package. It contains a glass bottle full of white powder. He puts a measure of the powder into the glass beaker, adds a measure of liquid from the brown bottle. The liquid foams, changes color. He drinks the liquid, checks the time, makes an entry in his journal.

JEKYLL sits; still for the first time. Nothing. He reaches for a tape player, puts on headphones, presses play. Music, a bit too loud for comfort, blasts through the theatre. JEKYLL relaxes; closes his eyes.

Suddenly, JEKYLL's eyes open. Unbearable pain consumes his body. His limbs spasm. He cannot breathe. He screams, the sound masked by the music's volume.

Lights and sound out.

Lights up immediately to reveal a new-born infant (Hyde). THE INFANT wails, kicks his feet, flails his arms.]

FOUR

[The street. A warm autumn night.]

UTTERSON and ENFIELD walking.]

ENFIELD

. . . another thing I wanted to ask you about is this club; Silvia's its called. The food's great. High powered clientele. I'm thinking it's a good place to meet the right kind of people.

[UTTERSON is silent.]

ENFIELD

New in town, new on the job, looking to get ahead. I should join, shouldn't I?

[UTTERSON is silent.]

ENFIELD

You only live once, right? Uncle Gabe? What do you think?

UTTERSON

(Good natured.) I'm afraid I incline to Cain's heresy. I let every man go to the devil on his own. And in his own way.

ENFIELD

You're kidding.

UTTERSON

No.

ENFIELD

You want me to believe a lawyer; with your reputation, the great Gabriel Utterson-- and you don't care what people do?

UTTERSON

I didn't say I don't care. I care a great deal. I'm simply not so presumptuous as to get involved. I am not my brother's keeper.

ENFIELD

There's that door.

ENFIELD-2

(Entering. Echoing Enfield.) There's that door.

ENFIELD

That door where that freak.

ENFIELD-2

That door where that freak.

ENFIELD

Did I tell you that story?

[PERFORMERS enact Enfield's story. ENFIELD-2 standing in for Enfield]

ENFIELD

I was on my way home. I'd been out late. The cold air felt good. All of a sudden I see these two people. A little girl running down an alley. And a man, stumping along from the west. I could see what was going to happen. I tried to warn them.

[HYDE and THE LITTLE GIRL collide. THE LITTLE GIRL falls to the ground. HYDE walks on her; slowly and deliberately, then with increased excitement and abandonment as his enjoyment grows. ENFIELD-2 pulls Hyde off The Little Girl. ENFIELD-2 and HYDE stand face-to-face.]

ENFIELD

I could taste his breath on my lips. I thought I would puke.

Then her father shows up. A father's got to protect his kids. Especially a little girl.

[ENFIELD, ENFIELD-2, and THE FATHER begin to close in on Hyde.]

HYDE

(Pulling a wallet from his pocket.) How much do you want? Let's be reasonable. No one wants a scene. How much to make this right?

ENFIELD AND ENFIELD-2

Five.

HYDE

That much money? I'll need to go get it.

ENFIELD

He brings us here, tells us to wait, and goes inside. Five minutes later he's back with one-ninety-five in cash and a check for the rest. The check was signed by someone I think you know. One of your philanthropic friends: Henry Jekyll.

[UTTERSON remains silent.]

ENFIELD

So I tell him the whole business looks twisted and that I bet the check is forged.

HYDE

(To Enfield.) Relax. I'll stay until the bank opens. I'll cash the check myself.

[ENFIELD is dazzled by the power of Hyde's gaze. ENFIELD-2 makes a gesture that pulls Enfield back into the scene with Utterson.

ENFIELD, HYDE, and THE FATHER exit.]

ENFIELD

We waited in my apartment. We're at the bank as soon as it opens. Turns out the check is genuine. It must be some kind of blackmail. Why else would your friend pay this bastard's debts? He must have done something pretty awful. Blackmail House; that's what I call this place. I'm dying to see what's on the other side of that door.

UTTERSON

It's best not to know. I have a natural aversion to prying; it's too much like the day of judgment. Asking a question is like tossing a stone. You sit alone on the top of a quiet hill, the stone rolls away, it starts others. Before you know it some white-haired retiree, the last person on earth you'd ever suspect, is knocked on the head while he's staking his tomatoes. The whole family's forced to move; everyone assumes new identities.

[Utterson walks away.]

ENFIELD

I've been studying the place. It's hardly a house. That's the only door. Nobody goes in or out. Only every once in a while Mr. Hyde.

UTTERSON

(Without betraying recognition.) Hyde?

JEKYLL

(From Utterson's memory.) I've made a will.

UTTERSON

Did you say Hyde?

JEKYLL

(From Utterson's memory.) It's more a set of instructions.

ENFIELD

He told us his name was Edward Hyde. Sounds made up to me.

UTTERSON

Are you sure?

JEKYLLJEKYLL

(From Utterson's memory.) Can you turn that into a will?

ENFIELD

Excuse me?

UTTERSON

Are you sure he said Hyde?

ENFIELD

Yes.

UTTERSON

I do not mean to question your honesty. Will you give me your word that you will never speak about this incident again? Not to me, nor anyone else?

ENFIELD

If you think that's best.

UTTERSON

Will you also promise not to probe into the matter any further?

ENFIELD

If that's what you want.

UTTERSON

It is.

JEKYLL

(From Utterson's memory)] I've made a will.

UTTERSON

I follow a rule I suggest you adopt. The stranger it looks, the fewer questions I ask.

[UTTERSON exits, ENFIELD follows.]

JEKYLL

(No longer a part of Utterson's memory. Speaking into a tape recorder.) Thursday, October 12, seven-twenty p.m. Episode two. Should have made these notes earlier but fell right to sleep. Returned to myself nearly sixteen hours ago. Sleeping ever since. Woke feeling refreshed, singular; cleansed of my preoccupying demons. Passages back and forth less painful this time than those of the first. Perhaps this means I am adapting to stresses inflicted by the process. Question: really less painful? Could it be that my hunger for the calm I feel when I return from being remade numbs me to the pain and the dangers pain signal? [Looks at bottle of powder.] Took a larger dosage this time.

JEKYLL (CONT'D)

Based on current supply I should have enough for-- how many more-- [Calculates. Stops working, distracted by the thought of Tristan and Isolde.]

JEKYLL-2

(Enters with CD.) It's Wagner time.

JEKYLL

Not now. I'm working.

JEKYLL-2

I can see that. (Plays CD. Sings along, unselfconsciously, at the top of his lungs.) O ew'ge nacht,/süße Nacht!/Hehr erhabne/Liebesnacht!/Wen du umfängen,/wem du gelacht,/wie wär' ohne Bangen/aus dir er je erwacht?/Nun banne das Bangen,/holder Tod,/sehrend verlangter/Liebested!/In deinen Armen,/dir geweiht,/ur-heilig Erwarmen,/van Erwachens Not befreit!

JEKYLL

(Over the singing)] I need to finish this.

[JEKYLL-2 pumps up the volume.]

JEKYLL

Please. I can barely hear myself think. You must turn that down. Turn that off, for Christ's sake. How do you expect me to concentrate?

[DOORBELL.

The music out.]

JEKYLL

This is important.

JEKYLL-2

It's always important.

JEKYLL

Yes it is. I'm a doctor.

JEKYLL-2

Everything is always so absolutely important.

JEKYLL

You're not supposed to be here. Not so soon, anyway.

JEKYLL-2

Never any room for fun.

JEKYLL

Last time you stayed away for-- how long? [Consults journal.]

POOLE

(Fom outside the room.) It's Mr. Utterson.

[JEKYLL does not respond. HE stares at Jekyll-2.]

POOLE

He says you asked him to come over.

[JEKYLL maintains his silent gaze.]

POOLE

He seems to think it's a matter of some importance. I'll tell him you're out.

[JEKYLL-2 disappears.]

JEKYLL

No. It's all right. Will you show him to the den, please? I'll be right there.

[POOLE exits. JEKYLL crosses to the den.]

JEKYLL

Utterson! It's good to see you. Thanks for coming so quickly.

UTTERSON

No problem. You're looking well.

JEKYLL

I'm holding my own. And you?

UTTERSON

Very well. Sorry I'm so late. You would think that after all this time I'd be better able to schedule appointments, but no matter how much time I give myself I'm always behind by the end of the day.

JEKYLL

Don't worry. I was just finishing some work myself. Can I get you a drink?

UTTERSON

No thank you. I'm on my way to a function. Domestic-violence charity. Don't want to show up with liquor on my breath; not quite right for this sort of event.

JEKYLL

I'll get right to the point then. I've made a will--

[UTTERSON-2 enters. He carries a copy of Jekyll's will. He also carries a drink which he consumes as he paces the room.]

UTTERSON-2

A will?

JEKYLL

I'd like you to take a look at it.

UTTERSON-2

This is sudden.

UTTERSON

Of course. (Opens the will. Reads to himself; voicing the following phrases along with Utterson-2.) . . . Edward Hyde. . . . all my possessions to Hyde. . . . free from any burdens or obligations.

UTTERSON-2

(Reading.) In case of my decease I leave all my possessions to my friend and benefactor Edward Hyde. In case of my disappearance or unexplained absence for any period exceeding three months I leave all my possessions to Hyde. In either case, Edward shall assume my entire estate free from any burdens and or obligations.

JEKYLL

It's more of a letter; a set of instructions. I'm not sure about the language; what kind of wording it needs to be legal. I thought I would leave that up to you.

UTTERSON

The language seems fine.

JEKYLL

Good.

UTTERSON-2

These terms are extraordinary.

UTTERSON

Everything is all right?

JEKYLL

Yes.

UTTERSON-2

Who is this Hyde? Edward Hyde.

UTTERSON

Your health--

JEKYLL

Like an ox.

UTTERSON-2

He must be under some obligation, compelled by some bond--

UTTERSON

Finances?

JEKYLL

Sound.

UTTERSON

Anything I should know about?

UTTERSON-2

What is he hiding?

UTTERSON

As your lawyer--

UTTERSON-2

(To Utterson.) As his friend!

JEKYLL

No.

[JEKYLL and UTTERSON regard each other in silence.]

UTTERSON-2

(To Utterson, during the silence.) Do you feel it? In this silence--

UTTERSON

(Consults his watch.) Oh my--

UTTERSON-2

Listen to me! This is the beginning. Something is here now-- something between two friends that is not right.

UTTERSON

-- Tempus fugit.

UTTERSON-2

It will devour this friendship.

UTTERSON

I'm afraid I need to be going--

JEKYLL

Don't worry.

UTTERSON

I'm on the welcoming committee.

JEKYLL

It's okay.

UTTERSON-2

Ask him.

UTTERSON

If I'm late there'll be no one to hand out name tags.

UTTERSON-2

Later may be too late.

JEKYLL

You'll turn that into a will?

UTTERSON

Yes.

UTTERSON-2

Coward.

JEKYLL

Good. Can you come for dinner next Saturday?

UTTERSON

Of course.

JEKYLL

I'll invite Lanyon. It will be like old times. You can bring your nephew.

UTTERSON

I'll do that.

[DOORBELL.]

JEKYLL

Let me show you out.

[They exit.]

End of excerpt