



DOING THE BOOK CLUB

By David Spicer

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The play takes place during an online meeting of the Felching Literary Circle's Book Club.

Before the show starts there is a sign on-screen reading:

Rebecca Comerford-Ryan invites you to join The Felching Literary Circle

BOOK CLUB MEETING

REBECCA appears in her window. She reads aloud from a loose-bound manuscript of her novel that she has printed off herself.

REBECCA Chapter Ten. "The day froze. The very air itself seemed to tremble; the world fell away and silence fell like a shroud across Norton Gardens as Sir Rufus Ruthaven stepped from the black shadows and held his open hand out towards the pale, trembling figure before him. Inviting and at the same time challenging her to join him: join *with* him and allow their souls to entwine across the cold century that lay between them. He fixed her with his haughty, aristocratically cruel stare, his dark eyes appearing to gleam red in the dusky gloaming, probing her very soul.

" 'Come With Me.'

JUDITH appears in her window and listens as REBECCA reads.

" His voice, noble and commanding, accustomed to being unquestionably obeyed and yet now, confronted by her, the precious object of his desperate desire, it sounded full of rare doubt and pleading.

" 'Please' he said. 'Come with me. We can fly through the years, live out the ages, your soul with my soul for all eternity. Come with me now and together we can defeat death itself.'

"Standing suddenly helpless before him. Sharon knew with every fibre of her being that she should resist him, fight the darkness in his soul: in her own soul. But she found her proud soul powerless to defy his soul and its beseeching command. Trembling she stretched out and took his hand, cold and white as alabaster, into her warm, sensuous, living clutch.

" 'Very well, my own true love' she whispered. 'But I only get 45 minutes for my lunch' "

REBECCA closes her manuscript and JUDITH claps.

JUDITH Rebecca! That was really good.

REBECCA (*Like she's noticing her for the first time*) Oh, Judith! Did you like it?

JUDITH Yes, really. It was really...really good.

REBECCA Thank you. What did you like about it?

JUDITH looks startled and slightly panicked about being asked her opinion.

JUDITH What did I like?

REBECCA Yes.

JUDITH Er...

REBECCA What was it that spoke to you?

JUDITH You spoke to me.

REBECCA (*Patiently*) Yes. But what was it about the piece that you thought was good?

JUDITH Really good.

REBECCA Yes.

Pause. JUDITH looks like she wished she hadn't said anything.

REBECCA What in particular. The language, the imagery...

JUDITH The...writing.

Pause.

JUDITH Was...really...good.

REBECCA realises she isn't going to get anything more from this.

REBECCA Good. Well, I'm very glad you liked it.

JUDITH Oh, I did. Are you going to put it forward for us all to read?

REBECCA (*Modestly*) Oh, I don't know.

JUDITH You should.

REBECCA You think?

JUDITH Absolutely. It was really good. So much better than *Great Expectations*.

She holds up her copy of Dickens' GREAT EXPECTATIONS.

JUDITH I couldn't finish it. It was shit.

She tosses it aside. Before REBECCA can remonstrate, TOM appears in his window.

TOM Hi Rebecca. Sorry I'm late.

REBECCA Hi Tom. It's okay you're not late.

TOM I had a bit of an important phone call. You know how it is.

REBECCA 'Course.

TOM I can't really talk about it. But I had to take it. You know what publishers are like.

JUDITH It was a publisher?

TOM I can't really talk about it, Judith.

REBECCA (*Stifling her jealous curiosity*) Well, we haven't actually started yet, Tom. You're actually a few minutes early and we're still waiting for...

TOM Yes. It was a publisher. Interested in some of my stuff. So I had to...you know how it is. But I can't talk about it.

REBECCA I completely understand that, Tom.

TOM Not yet, anyway.

JUDITH How exciting.

TOM Lots of loose ends to tie up. You know what these publishers are like, eh?

REBECCA waits patiently for him to finish.

TOM Contracts and whatnot. It'll be agents next. Sniffing around. You wait. You know what it's like. Eh? But I really can't talk about it.

Pause.

REBECCA Have you finished not talking about it, Tom?

TOM Oh, absolutely. Yes. Please. Let's just move on, eh?

EBON appears in his window.

EBON Hiya.

JUDITH Hi Ebon. Guess what. Tom's got a publisher.

REBECCA rolls her eyes.

EBON (*Astounded*) A publisher?

TOM Judith! Please. I said I couldn't talk about it. I can't talk about it, Ebon.

EBON *How* did you get a publisher?

TOM Oh, you know. He phoned me and...That's why I was late.

REBECCA You're not late, Tom.

JASON appears in his window.

JASON Hi everyone.

TOM Hello Jason. I was just telling everyone why I was late.

JASON (*Checking his watch, confused*) Were you late?

REBECCA No. He was early.

JASON Am *I* late?

REBECCA No, Jason, you're on time.

TOM It's just I had a bit of an important phone call.

JUDITH Which he can't talk about.

TOM With my publisher.

JASON (*Amazed and envious*) You've got a publisher!?

EBON I know.

TOM I had to take it. You know how it is.

JASON When did *you* get a publisher?

TOM I can't actually talk about it, Jason. You know how it is. I don't think they want word leaking out until it's announced.

EBON Until what's announced?

REBECCA Let me guess, Tom. You can't talk about it.

TOM 'Fraid not.

REBECCA Fair enough. Now, shall we get going?

TOM But seeing as we're all friends here, and strictly between ourselves, it's my Parsimonious Periwig.

JASON Your what?

TOM My historical detective. Parsimonious Periwig. Georgian Gentleman Investigator of High Crimes and Low Misdemeanours.

JASON He's Russian?

TOM No, Georgian England. End of the Napoleonic Wars. 1830s. Because as my publisher was saying on the phone just now, which is why I was late...

REBECCA You weren't late, Tom.

TOM ...he was saying Victoria's been done to death. To which, *I* said, to my publisher, 'Well, if Victoria had have been done to death, then it's a shame Parsimonious Periwig wasn't around because he would have found the bloke who'd done it in no time'. And how my publisher laughed!

TOM laugh.

TOM (*Laughing*) He laughed like this.

TOM carries on laughing but no one else does so he stops. TERRI appears in her window.

TERRI Hello everyone.

JUDITH Hi Terri.

REBECCA You're late.

TERRI (*Utterly unconcerned*) Am I?

TOM But we hadn't started because everyone was asking me about the publisher who's interested in my Parsimonious Periwig. He's a Georgian Gentleman Investigator. That's Parsimonious Periwig not my publisher. Master Periwig is a rake, master swordsman, man about town who's equally at ease in High Society at Court as he is amongst the desperadoes and cut purses of Cheapside and Limehouse.

TERRI Sorry, Tom, but I think you're getting me confused with someone who gives a shit.

TOM Oh. I see. Good. Well, I shouldn't really be talking about it anyway.

TERRI Then don't. Rebecca?

REBECCA Yes, Terri.

TERRI I just wanted to say, before we start, is there any way that we can choose us some better books to read?

REBECCA 'Better books'?

TERRI Yes. Because I know I'm new to the club...

TOM The Literary Circle.

TERRI Whatever. But can't help thinking that some of the things that you've picked for us have been...how shall I say?

REBECCA Challenging? Difficult? Deep? Complicated?

TERRI No. I was going to say, 'a bit shit'.

REBECCA I see.

TERRI Yes. I mean, this last one.

She holds up a copy of J.D. Salinger's THE CATCHER IN THE RYE.

TERRI Now, I admit I don't know the first thing about baseball, but frankly I didn't understand a bloody word of it.

JUDITH I tried but I couldn't finish it.

TERRI It was such some moany little twat hanging around New York, doing bugger all and whinging about everything.

REBECCA That's sort of what Salinger intended. It's like a classic critique on the superficiality of modern society.

TERRI (*Unimpressed*) If you say so. And then there was this one.

She holds up a copy of Robert M Persig's ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE.