



THEATRICAL KNIGHTS

By Ben Henderson

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THEATRICAL KNIGHTS

A Play

By Ben Henderson



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A twisting comedy thriller

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One set over two acts

Act 1 – performance time approx. 57 minutes

Act 11- performance time approx. 53 minutes

The Characters

Sir Tom Seymour – A writer. Mid 60's, grey hair in ponytail, grey moustache, glasses. Short tempered, superiority complex.

Sir Anthony Randolph – A famous Hollywood actor. Early 60's, clean cut, London accent. Easy going, pleasant.

Lou Green – About 25, London accent.

Production notes:

Only use blood effects if within the capacity of the production.

There is **no requirement** for the stage to have a trap door. It may be delineated by tape in the second act reveal. Tony's unseen exit may be made via a hole in the back wall behind the sofa.

Producers please consider Kabalevsky's The Comedians (prelude) as introductory music.

On programmes for a production the following two characters should be credited:

Father Patrick O'Brian – IAN MALSO

Police sergeant – IVAN MASWELL

THEATRICAL KNIGHTS

ACT 1

A Saturday afternoon in December, 2015. It's the converted stable building behind a large, detached Victorian house in Primrose Hill, London. It's the den of the writer Sir Tom Seymour. There's a window in the back wall. A large cabinet with drawers on which are shelves full of books. The walls are covered with framed photographs and certificates. There are many props and memorabilia from plays and productions adorning the walls. There is a row of handguns on the back wall, a knife, some handcuffs and some masks. At stage-left rear are some shelves upon which are awards, including an Edgar. Under the shelves is a drinks cabinet with decanters and glasses upon it. There is a door stage-left to a kitchen area. Beside the door is a closed grate to a fireplace. A door upstage- right to a hall and entrance area. A door down stage-right to an adjoining room. There is a large sofa towards upstage left with an armchair downstage left. Down stage- right is a table upon which is a chess set. There's a stool on each side of the chess table. Down stage- left is a rocking chair. Sitting on it is a life-sized dummy, dressed in a 1940's style suit and trilby hat. On the desk is an old-fashioned typewriter, a telephone and an entry system with an intercom. Also, on the desk is a bust of George Bernard Shaw and a cd player. Beside the desk is a wastepaper basket full of screwed up pieces of paper. The window looks out onto the garden where there is a pond. The den is accessed by a path which runs along the side of the house where there is a security gate that can be unlocked from the intercom system on the desk. There's a coat stand by the entrance door. Under the coat stand is an old wooden mashie niblick golfclub.

Curtain up - Tom is sitting at the chess table with his back to the audience, he has a crepe bandage around his head. He's wearing a loose-fitting grey suit over a white tee shirt. He has a brightly coloured cravat around his neck. He has grey hair in a ponytail, a grey moustache and glasses. He holds a brandy glass.

Tom - Knight defends E 5 pawn.

(Tom stands, moves to other side of table and sits)

Good move.

(Phone rings. He ignores it. It keeps ringing, he's aggravated as he thinks. Walks to desk and answers without waiting to hear anyone speak)

I don't care if you're the BBC, Sky, Al Jazeera or the Lord God in Heaven, no comment, leave me alone... Oh, it's you, Tony. Leave me alone, anyway.... I discharged myself last night.... I've had two bloody newspapers ringing me already, how do they get the number?...well obviously, I'm here.... I've got a headache that would fell a rhinoceros

and a few bruises... I've lost my mobile.... I don't know, I'm alright, can't you go and make a film somewhere...preferably somewhere there's no signal... I don't know. It'll turn up. I've rung it three times, no answer.... for Christ's sake, you don't have to come around. Go and do something important, that's what you people do, isn't it?...don't come here faking concern unless you bring a very good brandy.... Too late, I've already opened the day's batting...If you don't want some, you may dab it on my brow for medicinal purposes. *(puts phone down)*

(Sits down on the other side of the chess table)

Unless I am very much mistaken, you are using the classic Ruy Lopez, the Spanish game, but will you go to the Morphy, Steinitz or Berlin defences. I will need to stay sharp and I will need to stay mobile. - Ah! mobile - mobile – mobile!

(Moves back to desk and dials number on phone)

Yes, hello. Thank god! – listen, my name's Tom, Sir Tom Seymour, actually, you seem to have my phone... Oh right, you're the cabby... Ok, look, I really need to get it back... I'm at 16 Digby.... that's where you were taking me... I'm sorry, I don't remember, I'd had a couple of drinks.... Yes, bit of concussion, nothing to worry about.... Yes, fine, after 3, that's fine, whatever. Don't get lost.

(puts phone down)

Don't get lost...

(Sits at typewriter, he types)

Don't Get Lost. A play. Act one. A wintry night in Suffolk, 1934, the snow is falling outside, the country house of, of.... of... Arrr!

(Repeatedly bangs the X key in frustration, then rips paper out and throws in basket. Puts a new sheet in. Sits with head in hands. He reaches out puts his hand on the bust of George Bernard Shaw)

Nobel Prize for Literature 1925, Academy Award 1938, essayist, journalist, novelist and

writer of over sixty plays, you never dried up. - George, I beseech you, galvanise me -
make me write...

(He closes his eyes, looks upwards and his hands hover over the keys of the typewriter)

Nope, nothing yet, George. Maybe tomorrow, eh!

(Takes a large gulp of brandy. The phone rings again, he answers it)

You're passing the shops, that's nice – no, Tony, if you're not bringing brandy don't bring anything...housekeepers left plenty in the fridge... I can't go out now anyway. the cabby from last night's got my phone.... he's bringing it back...No, I wouldn't know him from a bar of soap... what, our bet? ... bloody right I haven't forgotten. I thought you'd try to though.... Don't try and back pedal now, you shook hands on it.....If you're going to welch, I will have you publicly dishonoured, I will rip off your metaphorical epaulettes ... come on, I may even manage to feign some pleasure in seeing you if you agree the bet is on. I've got everything you need in the house. Give me some relief from the tedium of existence - Get your driver to drop you off at the front, I'll buzz you in - I'm in the den.

(Tom tops up his brandy glass at the drinks cabinet, goes to walk back to his chess table but noticing the dummy, he walks to it, kicks its legs, takes its hat off raps it on the head and replaces its hat)

I'm not answering the phone again, you get it - Tell them they can quote you.

(Tom sits back at chess table in chair facing audience, he takes a deep breath)

Tom - Oxygenate. OK, Seymour, you thought you'd try the Ruy Lopez. Tut, tut, tut, I really expected something less obvious from you. Never mind, you're committed to it now. - I don't think you were expecting this.

(Moves chess piece)

Yes, that's right, it's the Chigorin counterattack, back at you, sucker! What's that?.. you're right.... that's not really match play language. I withdraw the sucker comment.

(Door buzzer sounds. He walks to desk, on intercom)

It's open, Tony, come on through - If you must.

(Tom moves to the drinks cabinet and pours brandy from a decanter. After a few seconds, Tony enters)

Tony - You shouldn't be up, you should be taking it easy, and you certainly shouldn't be doing that.

Tom - Why did I answer that bloody phone to you? If you're going to start lecturing me about abstinence, don't even take your coat off. Your ugly, beige coat, I might add. Why is it so many men after 60 have this inescapable attraction to all things beige? It's like the colour draining from your life, becoming so devoid of style.

(Tony hangs his beige jacket on the stand)

Tony - It may be the maturity that comes with age. My leather jacket days are behind me. You know, dressing your age, nothing wrong with that. Acting your age, that can be attractive in men of your advanced years too. Can I invite you to try it? What happened last night?

Tom - Not sure, I'd been out, I was in a cab, some sort of accident, woke up in St Thomas' Hospital.

Tony - When I heard the news, I rang the hospital, they just read the press release to me.

Tom - You should have said who you were.

Tony - I just said I was Tony, an old friend, I don't expect to be treated any different to anyone else ringing a hospital asking about the welfare of a friend.

Tom - I will never understand why you accepted that knighthood when you plainly have no intention of using it, what a waste, someone deserving could have had it.

Tony - I will say to you again what I've said to many a punctilious interviewer, I do use it. I use it to show teenage oiks, poised on the edge of oblivion, teetering on the edge of

flushing their lives down the gaping toilet awaiting them, that people like them can make it. They're not necessarily pre-ordained to have misery filled lives, ending in squalor in a squat off the Kilburn High Road, wrapped in a body bag, with a dirty needle sticking out of their arm.

Tom - So worthy. Did you tell that to Her Majesty as she laid the sword upon your shoulder?

Tony - Do you think I should have? When she dubbed you, looking anxiously for a space without a chip on yours, did you tell her you were chomping at the bit to use yours at every self-serving opportunity, for every restaurant reservation, for every time you'd answer the phone? Did you tell her it was the summit of your middle-class aspirations? Did you mention you'd use it as a weapon of superiority against the world as you cocooned yourself from it?

Tom - Is that what they say about me?

Tony - The tragedy is they don't say anything about you anymore, other than the spit and spite you leave behind you. All you do, is get smashed and leave a trail of destruction in your wake. Fall out of a cab, insult someone who doesn't deserve it, or get snapped peeing on a London landmark. You are a tabloid editor's dream. At least the press this morning have treated you with fractionally more sympathy than usual.

(Reads from newspaper he's carrying)

'Sir Tom Seymour, 67'

Tom - 66, actually.

Tony - Sir Tom Seymour, 60 something, the former playwright and screenwriter. The one time favourite of the West End and creator of the once hugely popular TV series 'Man in The Black Bag', that started the careers of, yours truly, and later perennial British spy star, Sir Rodger Dawes, was involved in a road traffic accident last night. Sir Tom, who

has become something of a recluse in recent years, was taken unconscious to St Thomas' Hospital. A hospital spokesman said, 'Sir Tom Seymour has sustained a head injury that is not life threatening, he is being kept in for observation'. - Nothing vindictive in that, commendable, fact-based reporting.

Tom - You're denying me the wisdom of the comments page, thank you. That rag never maligns when celebs have a near death in case they croak. They've learnt it elicits less sympathy to the editorial if they were disrespectful at the moment of death. Gives them a free run later. What they wanted to say was, 'Sir Tom Nobody, the washed up has-been, the bane of everyone that now meets him, who once wrote with some success in the 70s and 80s. Who has written nothing in 5 years and nothing anyone would pay money to see in the preceding 10, cracked his head in a London taxi because he was far too self-important to wear a seat belt. And don't miss out the important titillation - when very drunk. Seymour survives on brandy and a cleverly negotiated merchandising deal from 'Man in the Black Bag'. Then there's the obligatory picture of me red faced, dishevelled, and sprawled on a receptive bit of London pavement.

Tony - You should write for them, you dolt. You could do a weekly article about your unhappy relationship with the modern world. It wouldn't stop them churning out copy on your regular pratfalls, but perhaps they'd let you choose slightly more flattering photos. When I'm out of the country why won't you just go to the old places that we can trust, with people that will look after you? Use my driver, Bob. Why can't you exercise a wincey bit more discretion? I've told you so many times, the tabloids have got eyes everywhere. Everyone's got a camera.

Tom - I'm never going out again if I embarrass you.

Tony - Do you really think I'm that easily embarrassed? For God's sake, I'm worried about

you, Tom. Rodge is, too.

Tom - Oh yes, I bet he is. That piece of sh..

Tony - Oi! He rang me last night when he heard about the accident.

Tom – Double-dyed, disloyal, turncoat, I'll not have his name mentioned in my house.

Tony - He rips it out of you, make no mistake, he does all of us. He's never taken any of it seriously, he hasn't changed. - You know he hasn't.

Tom - I'm not listening. La-la-la. There's just a symphony playing in my head.

Tony - He always asks after you, he also says, is he still sitting in that mausoleum, throwing pieces of paper with five words on them, chucking them in his little basket. He says he's got a friend of his in the business who's done a talking cartoon of you from the press pictures.

Tom - Wasted some of his less than well earned money.

Tony - There's not an ounce of forgiveness in you. Remember, an ounce of forgiveness is worth a ton of revenge - You two were inseparable at one time.

Tom - The best revenge is to be unlike him who performed the injury - Marcus Aurelius.

Tony - You're going to give me some Shaw gem next, aren't you?

Tom - Your prediction is as accurate as Shaw himself, when he said, 'Silence is the most perfect expression of scorn', and I am being very silent. - Besides, you can't forgive someone who isn't sorry, it's the base requirement for forgiveness. He blabbed to the press, when I got my OBE. Have you forgotten what he said? - I haven't.

Tony - He said, as a joke, you'd only got your gong because you were a Labour Party donor. It was 1997, it was a long time ago. Haven't you ever said anything you regretted?

Tom - Not to the press, I haven't, and not about my friends. What he actually said was, I got my OBE for my generous donations and so Tony Blair could be seen glad handing Tom

Seymour, who fancied himself as George Bernard Shaw, minus the beard and the genuine beliefs. He said I was the worst sort of fashionable, champagne socialist as I wasn't even a true socialist. - He said I was in a business where I thought I was supposed to be a socialist.

Tony - You're not a socialist, you joker. You're an Oxford educated, grammar school boy. The son of a doctor and a headmistress. For some reason Rodge and I never understood, you hate yourself for it. Rodge says if they cut you open; it would say Tory all the way through your body like a stick of rock.

Tom - O how I value your incisive analysis of my political pedigree.

Tony - What he said was essentially true.

Tom - Regardless of the truth, that's not the point.

Tony - Then what is the point? He always said it was funny that you were so ashamed of your roots. - You so wanted to have some working-class credentials like him and I.

Tom - He said it to the papers.

Tony - Let it go... What do you want him to do, the hair shirt and cilice?

Tom - If you keep talking about him, I'll put my headphones on and listen to some music.

Tony - Years ago we'd have all drunk too much and laughed at it. He's right, you've got to move on. If I'm out of the country, you just leave yourself open. You love the theatre and you haven't been for what, four years? Just come back to a little reality.

Tom - Six years, all told. - Why, would I?

Tony - Inspiration.

Tom - I thought it was me who had inspired others.

Tony - Pleasure, then.

Tom - Do you think I would take from it the rhapsody of someone else's success, or remind