

SCENE 1 - THE PROSCENIUM

The play takes place in Summer at Camp Obscura, located in the fictional regional town of Confidence, New South Wales. A stage curtain is drawn, revealing the disembodied head of the camp director, Montgomery Puce.

MONTGOMERY: Lugubrious guests! If I may I flatter?
Put down your phones and shush your chatter,
To at once attend this pressing matter,
Unclench your jaw, go on relax,
Entertainment has arrived, brought on a platter!

The time has come, it's nigh, it's near
It only happens once a year!

Prepare for scintillation, ostentation
A thrilling ride with much libation!
Where stars are born and fates are writ
The lineup's darling you must, admit.

Without ado, i do suppose,
Your offspring are anxious to strike their pose.
Fret not now, just one last stanza,
To thus commence the Extravaganza!

A word of warning, come close, don't fear:
Believe not all you see or hear.

It's done! Indeed, it's been dictated!
All is as anticipated.
Sit back, breathe out and then breathe in.
3,2,1 and let's... begin!

A bell tolls, children shriek delightedly backstage and a leg flops out from behind one curtain.

JEMIMA: Oh thank fuck, I was getting a cramp!

MONTGOMERY: Jemima. Please, language- we don't need a hundred children all singing profanities when their parents arrive tomorrow evening.

JEMIMA: Sorry. Cramp got my tongue.

MONTGOMERY: I assumed that when I hired a linguistics student, their vocabulary would be the least of my worries!

EVANGELINE: *(Interrupting, from offstage)* Half an hour for lunch everybody! That's thirty minutes not thirty-one, not-

Evangeline Snoops walks on in theatre blacks with a headset and clipboard.

EVANGELINE: Where have all my backup dancers gone?

JEMIMA: Oh Rudolph had a major leotard malfunction and all the girls ran off shrieking. Guess you could say his leotard dropped the ball-

MONTGOMERY: Evangeline, please cancel our afternoon Pétanque Championship and divert the counsellors to the costumerie. I'd prefer there are no on stage appearances of Rudy's... rudies tomorrow night.

EVANGELINE: Copy that. We are aiming for perfection, here! And please tell me you cleared your schedule for the post show interview tomorrow? I confirmed with the *The Legal Guardian* reporter this morning. This is going to be the year, Monty! I can feel it.

MONTGOMERY: It certainly seems to be shaping up that way.

JEMIMA: Evie? Lunch?

EVANGELINE: Right! (*Checks watch*) 28 minutes. We better hurry!

SCENE 2 - THE DINNER PARTY

A dimly lit dining quarters with an old world glamour. A knock. Montgomery opens the lodge's door.

MONTGOMERY: Bon soir, Jemima! What a day, hm? Brioche? They're warm.

JEMIMA: Umm, no thanks. So what is-

MONTGOMERY: I apologise for the rather romantic lighting, the electrical wiring in these lodges have been fritzing since '98. I hope you brought your appetite. I've been cooking with Julia tonight. Please! Sit down.

Jemima sits. Montgomery lays a napkin over her lap. Jemima examines the serving ware.

MONTGOMERY: That's a demitasse spoon. Quite a nice one, too. Between us, I actually filched it from a Cunard Cruise Liner many moons ago.

JEMIMA: Director Puce-

MONTGOMERY: Montgomery is fine, Jemima.

JEMIMA: Alright, Montgomery. Pardon my French, but what the fuck is all this?

MONTGOMERY: The cheek! I thought you might finally indulge me with some of your French prowess in a tête-à-tête!

JEMIMA: Please can we just talk normally?

MONTGOMERY: (pause) I know you find me unusual, Jemima.

JEMIMA: Am I that transparent?

MONTGOMERY: Spectre you are not, child. To tell truth, I have had my eye on you since I reviewed your very impressive CV. I almost didn't hire you due to your obvious over qualification.

JEMIMA: I'm flattered.

MONTGOMERY: I hesitate to discussing this with you, but our window of opportunity is narrowing.

The oven dings.

MONTGOMERY: Ah!

Montgomery leaves and Jemima is alone in the candelabra light. He returns carrying a dutch oven.

MONTGOMERY: Please, help yourself to some Coq au Vin. You sure you don't want the brioche? It's divine with the sauce.

JEMIMA: What do you mean *window of opportunity*?

MONTGOMERY: I'm in a bit of a predicament, my dear. Tomorrow, I will be called to urgent business which will mean I am no longer able to perform my role in the camp Extravaganza.

JEMIMA: Right. Has some prophecy has been foretold? No worries, just slide me your coat tails and top hat and I'll jump into the limelight.

MONTGOMERY: Putting aside the sarcasm for a moment, that is precisely why I invited you here tonight.

JEMIMA: *(Pause. Laughter)* Oh my god. *(laughter intensifies)* You actually got me. The old Montgomery Watusi!

MONTGOMERY: I'm not joking.

JEMIMA: Oh. *(pause)* Then I quit.

She goes to leave

MONTGOMERY: Please. The rewards I can offer you are substantial. A research position in the linguistics department of any university in the commonwealth. Or perhaps a position at an embassy of your choice would be more to your liking?

JEMIMA: ...how?

MONTGOMERY: I can assure you that my end of the bargain be fulfilled, should you assist me.

JEMIMA: Fine, I'll bite. Why me? Surely, Snoops or...

MONTGOMERY: Evangeline would never. She adores this place. She is an incredibly doting daughter and she believes it is my wish that the camp be renowned across the nation-

JEMIMA: Daughter!

MONTGOMERY: Yes, my daughter. You two have been thick as thieves all summer, she didn't tell you?

JEMIMA: She didn't tell me a thing.

MONTGOMERY: I'm sure it wasn't personal. She has really taken to you, Jemima... I should have been more careful about Camp Obscura's profile but I assumed no one would ever pay much attention to a holiday camp for shy children, no matter the showmanship. But since August started his new job at the radio station she's become obsessed with promoting both his and my career-

JEMIMA: Quelle horreur! Marketing! No offence, but you must be the worst businessman ever.

MONTGOMERY: I'm not a businessman at all, Jemima. In fact, Montgomery Puce is not even my real name. I am a captain. Well, was. Please would you take a brioche and sit back, I will explain what I can.

Jemima finally takes a brioche.

It began while I was sailing the SS Rubicon in the South China Sea. The event known in certain circles as *Operation Tuxedo Junction*...

SCENE 3 - THE PRESTIDIGITATION PAVILION