

MODERN GIRLS

OR

THE ASCENT OF WOMAN

A Brand New and Original Feminist Operetta
based on the works of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan

by

Fraser Charlton

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Lord George ManorsBASS
Lady Phoebe Manors.....SOPRANO
Jennifer ManorsSOPRANO
Mrs Doings CONTRALTO
Lucy Doings MEZZO-SOPRANO
Nigel Smythe-Smythe TENOR
Albert Grimshaw BARITONE

Location - A Country House in Rural England

Scene - Middle class drawing room. Seating for at least four people. Table and other furniture.

Exits right, left and centre rear (via French windows).

Time - Between the Wars

**OPENING TRIO - GEORGE, PHOEBE
and MRS. DOINGS**

Music - "Then one of us will be a queen", The Gondoliers

- PHOEBE** From iv'ry towers in Cambridge town
Our daughters we await,
With mortar board
As just reward
From those who educate.
No longer undergraduate gown
For academic dress -
It's understood
They'll wear a hood
If wanting to impress!
- ALL** If you want the world to be your pearl,
And all it's joys unfurl,
You'll find your life's a social whirl -
Your life's a social whirl
As a newly-qualified graduate, graduate, graduate Girton girl!
- MRS. DOINGS** Who'd ever have thought a girl I'd bred
Would graduate in law,
But not just pass -
She got first class,
And with the highest score!
An M. A. (Cantab), it is said,
Is passport to success -
She'll soon have gold
In sums untold
And rank with the noblesse!
- ALL** If you want the world to be your pearl, etc.
- GEORGE** If all this is supposed to please
Then I must disagree -
I still abuse
These modern views
That preach equality.
When clever girls all get degrees,
And with us chaps compete,
Unless we fight
Those ladies might
Just make men obsolete!
- ALL** If you want the world to be your pearl, etc.
- GEORGE** Where is that blasted girl? I've waited in for her all morning when I could've
been out shouting at the labourers!
- PHOEBE** Oh, do be quiet, George! It's been three years since we last saw Jenny - I'm sure
that you can manage another few minutes.
- GEORGE** That's not the point, Phoebe - we were in damned India then. She's only a
hundred miles away now, so she's got no excuse. Always was a stubborn little...
- PHOEBE** George! I don't know, you've been driving me round the bend ever since you
retired from the army. You're always getting under my feet, following me about
the house like a toddler. And your language! You used to be so polite.
- GEORGE** I don't bloody well care. I'm sick of holding my tongue to set an example to my
men. Now, at last, I can swear as much as I bloody well like - and you can't stop
me. Damn, blast, damn, double damn, blast...
- PHOEBE** George - I won't tell you again! Mrs. Doings, will you go and see if Jenny's car's
here yet? She said that she'd be arriving with Lucy.

MRS. DO. Right you are, madam. You know, I can still hardly believe it - my Lucy a graduate of Cambridge University! And her best friend is the daughter of my mistress! Things are so different to what they were when I was a girl. (*Exit MRS. DOINGS*)

PHOEBE She's right, you know. When I was young you didn't stay on at school - let alone go to University and become a lawyer.

GEORGE If you ask me, it's all a lot of stuff and bloody nonsense! College is not the place for a young gal. Never should've allowed it. In my day men were men and women were women. It's getting these days so that can't tell the difference! If a few more young people got a damn good lashing the world would be a better place...

PHOEBE Oh George, you do go on so! Now I want you out of the house while the girls are settling in - you'll just make a lot of noise and get in the way.

GEORGE Not welcome in my own house - this is where women's emancipation gets you! Very well, my dear, I know when I'm not wanted. (*He proceeds to read the paper in a huff*)

PHOEBE (*Aside*) If only you did!

Enter MRS. DOINGS.

MRS. DO. The car's coming up the drive now, madam. I can't believe it's three years since I last saw my Lucy - she'll be a proper young lady now. Oh, if only my dear departed Henry was here to see her. Just think - if it hadn't had been for that scholarship she'd probably have been a servant like me. Don't times change?

GEORGE Too bloody fast, if you ask me.

PHOEBE Then it's just as well nobody did! Oh, look, here they come now!

MRS. DO. Oh my Lord! What's happened to them?

Over introduction enter JENNY and LUCY. Sensation. Both are dressed in (masculine) suits, JENNY's being brighter and with feminine accessories, while LUCY's attire is rather drab. They are both models of assertiveness and self confidence.

DUET - JENNY and LUCY

Music - "Although of native maids the cream", Utopia Limited

BOTH Away from home and family
At length reunited are we,
But three long years
Rebellion stirs,
And many things are new -

JENNY We've changed our clothes and changed our hair,
For jewellery we no longer care,
We look on marriage with despair -

LUCY And children we pooh-pooh!

At Girton we have found the light
Now feminism is our fight
We've found the key
To set us free,
And lose our ball and chain.

JENNY We spread the word, and to this end
Much time at meetings we must spend
Persuading people who attend
That we are not insane!

BOTH Oh, women of whate'er degree,
If you want life and liberty,
Just look at us and you will see
How all young ladies ought to be!

- JENNY** On social class we take a stand
Unpopular within this land -
It's our belief,
That King or thief,
We all have equal rights.
- LUCY** To prove our faith in this decree
My boyfriend's aristocracy -
- JENNY** A Yorkshireman I've found for me -
- LUCY** They are our neophytes!

We always keep the upper hand,
And make sure that they understand
That macho pride
Must be denied,
Or we'll be very cross.

So if you want enlightenment,
To see the female in ascent,
JENNY Don't listen to their discontent -
But show them who's the boss!
- BOTH** Oh, women of whate'er degree,
If you want life and liberty,
Just look at us and you will see
How all young ladies ought to be!
- PHOEBE** Oh, Jenny, just look at you. I left a little girl and I return to a beautiful young woman!
- JENNY** Not beautiful, mother - 'somewhat more than usually attractive with a bright and sparkling character'. I think that was what was agreed, wasn't it Lucy?
- LUCY** I'm sure of it. And I'm 'not classically beautiful, but attractive and sensuous'. We believe in honesty in all things. Those descriptions were fully ratified by committee.
- MRS. DO.** I don't know what 'ratified' means, but I do know that, with a bit of makeup, you'd be an highly presentable young woman. Come and give your mother a big hug!
- LUCY** Well, if I must! (*They embrace*)
- JENNY** Oh, mummy, daddy, you look so well! India must have done you good - I swear that you haven't aged a day!
- LUCY** Jenny!
- JENNY** (*To LUCY*) You're right. Must be honest, even with one's parents. (*To PHOEBE and GEORGE*) Mummy, you look so old! And how lined your face is! Gosh, daddy, how fat you are! You've really let yourself go to seed! (*To LUCY*) That better?
- LUCY** Much!
- MRS. DO.** What nonsense you're talking, girls! And look at your clothes - men's suits! Why don't you wear one of those lovely dresses I gave you?
- LUCY** We no longer have any interest in feminine clothing, mother. They are dishonest - designed to conceal and flatter, and for the express purpose of attracting men.
- PHOEBE** But don't you want to look nice?
- JENNY** Frankly, no. We must be judged on our personalities or not at all. To even out differences in appearances we dress as the lowest common denominator - men.
- GEORGE** Just a blasted minute, I don't like being described as a 'lowest common denominator'. Damn it all, in my day a woman dressed like you would've been arrested.

- LUCY** (Offhand) Oh, we *have* been arrested.
- GEORGE** What!
- JENNY** That's right. We led a protest against the segregation of men and women at the swimming baths.
- MRS. DO.** What's wrong with that? The idea of mixed bathing is quite disgusting.
- LUCY** It's the principle, mother. To be honest, I actually agree with you - who'd want to see a lot of silly young men in bathing costumes?
- PHOEBE** I would!
- GEORGE** What was that, Phoebe?
- PHOEBE** Err... Who would!
- JENNY** But don't fret, daddy. We only spent one night in the cells, and the policemen were terribly sweet about it.
- GEORGE** Damn, blast, double damn and blast! Jenny, I... I'm almost speechless. We leave you alone for three years and you start dressing like a man, your head's full of this bloody 'equality' nonsense and now you've become a hardened jailbird! If you were a bit younger, my girl, I'd give you a damned good hiding!
- JENNY** And it wouldn't make the slightest bit of difference.
- LUCY** Our eyes have seen the light of truth, and nothing can dim our vision. Especially not a male chauvinist like you, George.
- GEORGE** George? George? (To Phoebe) Did you hear her, Phoebe, she called me George!
- JENNY** Oh, come off it. Don't make such a fuss. After all, that is your name, isn't it, George.
- GEORGE** She did it! Phoebe, she did it too! My own daughter called me George!
- LUCY** I'm sorry, but as a symbol of our distaste for rank and social convention we've decided to call everyone by their first name. Equality in everything, you see. Cheer up, George, you'll soon get used to it!

**TRIO - JENNY, LUCY and GEORGE
with PHOEBE and MRS. DOINGS**

Music - "So please you, sir, we much regret", The Mikado

- JENNY & LUCY** We're sorry if you get upset
With our progressive etiquette –
Society will never change
If we reject all that seems strange.
- JENNY** Although you are traditional and
Cantankerous,
Cantankerous,
- LUCY** Just give it time and it will seem
Less rancorous,
Less rancorous -
Your attitude is cankerous!
Tra la la, etc.
- WOMEN** Although you are traditional, etc.
- GEORGE** It seems that we are past the stage
When youth was reverent to age.
I've always been an army man,
And so I'll fight it if I can.
I say with pride I'm cautious and
Cantankerous,
Cantankerous,
Such disrespect will always seem
Most rancorous,
Most rancorous -

Equality is cankerous!

Tra la la, etc.

ALL

You say with pride you're cautious, etc.

GEORGE

Damn and blast it, Phoebe! I'm going for a walk in the country to commune with nature. I want to find some simple, uncorrupted woodland creatures that haven't been touched by bloody progressive thinkers. Then I'll blast them to pieces. (*Walking off*) Mrs. Doings! Where's my flaming gun? (*Exit GEORGE*)

MRS. DO.

Oh dear, madam, I'd better go and find it for him. Oh, Lucy, it is so good to see you again. (*Going off*) Sir! I think you left it in the bathroom... (*Exit MRS. DOINGS*)

JENNY

Silly old George! Still, perhaps we came on a bit strong.

LUCY

Nonsense! Proper self confidence, nothing more. (*Producing cigarette case*) Care for a cigarette?

JENNY

Gosh, yes. That was a bit hard on the old nerves. (*Takes one. LUCY lights them*)

LUCY

Of course, I almost forgot - Phoebe?

PHOEBE

(*Shocked*) Certainly not! It's so unladylike! I wouldn't be seen... (*Recovering her composure*) My dears, forgive me, but I'm afraid that George isn't the only one reeling at the shock of the new. This is all a bit fast for me.

JENNY

I'm sorry, mummy, (*LUCY flashes a look*) Phoebe, but things must move fast. This movement shan't be overcome by inertia.

LUCY

And if men don't have the maturity to cope with it then we'll have to go forward without them.

JENNY

It's so fortunate that we've found such enlightened men for ourselves.

PHOEBE

Oh yes, I remember you writing to me about them. Your young man is called Albert, isn't he Jenny?

JENNY

Yes, Albert Grimshaw, a working class Yorkshireman. He's such a dear - all flat caps, whippets and 'honest graft'.

PHOEBE

(*To LUCY*) And I believe that your admirer is known as Nigel.

LUCY

That's right - Nigel Smythe-Smythe. He's from an incredibly wealthy background - all the right relatives, all the right schools - you know the type. But terribly sweet with it.

JENNY

So you see, we're both associating with men from radically different classes. It reflects our emancipation from social convention.

LUCY

We have totally equal, honest and open relationships - in complete contrast to you and George. Tell me, Lady Man... (*JENNY flashes a look*) Phoebe, how on earth have you managed to live so long with such an overbearing oaf as George?

PHOEBE

Jenny, Lucy - you are so young! You look upon men as the constant oppressor. Do you really believe that George dominates me?

JENNY

I'm afraid that I must be honest and say 'yes'. He's always run roughshod over your desires.

PHOEBE

That's only the way it seems. Us 'unenlightened women' are rather more clever than you think. You know, in the thirty years that we have been married, I have always got my own way. The thing is, George doesn't know it!

SONG - PHOEBE with JENNY and LUCY

Music - "Come bumpers - aye ever so many", The Grand Duke

I first met your father at twenty,

A soldier both handsome and brave.

Although I had suitors a-plenty

My heart to George Manors, George Manors I gave.

My role as a dutiful servant
Began with our pledging of troth -
On anything Georgie was fervent
His judgement would go for us both.
I never could question opinions,
I'd carry out every demand,
Lord Manors thus ruled his dominions, dominions,
And thought he had total command!
But a wheedle, a word said discretely,
A clearing of throat or a stare,
Can change his direction completely
While leaving him quite unaware!

ALL A wheedle, a word said discretely, etc.

If George had a brilliant idea,
While I had a different course,
I'd say to him 'Georgie, my dear
Your every whim, ev'ry whim I endorse,
I'm certain if tried you will rue it -
It's destined to fail in its aim -
But you're wiser than me, so we'll do it,
Providing that *you* take the blame.'
Then he'd huff and he'd puff with derision,
Smoke his pipe for an hour in bed,
Till he deigned to announce his decision, decision
That we would do *my* plan instead!
A wheedle, a word said discretely,
A clearing of throat or a stare,
Can change his direction completely
Without him being aware!

ALL A wheedle, a word said discretely, etc.

Exit PHOEBE.

- JENNY** I say, Lucy, I think we're too late. It looks like women already are in control!
- LUCY** Only in the home, Jenny, not in the positions of true power. This is one battle that must be fought openly.
- JENNY** Of course. A victory by deceit would indeed be hollow.
- LUCY** Speaking of deceit, when do you think Albert and Nigel will arrive?
- JENNY** Any minute, I'm afraid - their car wasn't far behind us. Bally rotten luck they found out when we were going. What shall we do with them when they arrive?
- LUCY** I'm not sure. You know, I've got a dreadful feeling that they're going to propose to us. Now, I'm not against marriage *per se*, providing that it's a meeting of equals. I'm just not entirely sure of Nigel's motives.
- JENNY** I get the same feelings about Albert. I've never been out with a working class person before.
- LUCY** And this is the first time *I've* dated an aristocrat. Now, I realise that social class differences don't matter to us...
- JENNY** Of course not! We're enlightened women!
- LUCY** Quite. But Nigel and Albert...
- JENNY** Are stick-in-the-mud, dark ages men!
- LUCY** Jenny! Don't be so hard on them - they can't help their sex. Still, I would like to be more certain...

FX: Car approaching on a gravel drive

- JENNY** Hear that! It must be them! What shall we do?

LUCY

Leave this room for a start. Come on, before they get here - I've got an idea...
(*Exeunt JENNY and LUCY*)

Over an extended introduction, NIGEL and ALBERT enter through the French windows carrying suitcases. NIGEL is an archetypal upper class twit - cravat, straw boater, tweed jacket, etc. ALBERT is a Yorkshireman, and fiercely proud of it. He wears a flat cap, collarless shirt, braces, donkey jacket etc. They enter in great excitement.

DUET - NIGEL and ALBERT

Music - "When I go out of door", Patience

ALBERT We're young men in our prime,
NIGEL With looks and minds sublime,
ALBERT We've driven for hours,
NIGEL Through sun and through showers,
ALBERT To make it here in time.
NIGEL We come from distant lands
ALBERT To seek the graduands,
NIGEL With joy never ending
ALBERT Our knees we'll be bending
BOTH To ask them for their hands.

We're amorous young men,
We're glamorous young men,
We're lovers-a-seeking and flowery speaking,
We're head-in-the-clouds young men!

NIGEL I'm very upper class,
I treat life like a farce,
I'm hasty and vapid,
My driving is rapid,
My intellect is sparse.

ALBERT I'm from the Yorkshire moor,
Politeness I abhor,
I'm brutal and frank,
I care nothing for rank,
And at parties I'm a bore.

BOTH Although we're both young men,
We're different class young men,
One's fish-in-the-batter, the other's regatta,
It's wonder we're friends young men!

NIGEL A Charterhouse young man,
An MCC young man,
A punting-and-skiing, a third class degreeing,
A drifting-through-life young man.

ALBERT A dour and drab young man,
A down-to-the-earth young man,
A grumbling-and-grating, pretentiousness hating,
A speaking-his-mind young man.

NIGEL A public school tie young man,
A you-know-my-father young man,
A bully-and-thuggery, ruggery-buggery,
Stuck up and crass young man.

ALBERT An honest and blunt young man,
A proud-of-me roots young man,
An hypocrite-finding, an effing-and-blinding,
A spade-is-a-spade young man.

- BOTH** Though different as can be,
 On one thing we agree,
 We're hurrying, harrying, hell-bent on marrying,
 Those that we're here to see!
- NIGEL** Hello! I say, hello! Girls, we're here! Yoo-hoo! (*No response*) I say, Albert, I wonder where they've gone?
- ALBERT** I don't bloody know, Nigel. By 'eck, it's a bit bloody bad manners inviting us down here and then not even having the common courtesy to welcome us. In Yorkshire you get given a cup of tea as soon as you're through the door, and if you don't drink it you get your head kicked in. Now *that's* hospitality.
- NIGEL** Triffic! I say, you don't think that we're not welcome here do you? After all, we only found out they were leaving by bribing their landlady.
- ALBERT** They're just playing hard to get. Treat 'em mean, keep 'em keen. By thunder, I like a woman with a bit of pluck.
- NIGEL** Gosh, me too! (*Looking around*) You know, Lucy never did tell me where she lived. It's rather quaint, isn't it?
- ALBERT** To be frank, I think it's bloody ugly.
- NIGEL** That's a bit strong.
- ALBERT** I won't apologise. I'm a Yorkshireman and I speak my mind.
- NIGEL** Jolly good! Look, hadn't we better have a look for the girls.
- ALBERT** Aye, Nigel, happen you're right. You'd best wait here - I'll go and check the grounds. I like to be outside - you're closer to the muck and dirt of good honest graft. Now *that's* true reality. (*Exits via French windows*)
- NIGEL** Ripping! I'll wait here then... (*Checking ALBERT has gone*) What a dreadful little oik. Still, he is terribly amusing at parties, and these cross-class meetings are very much the thing these days. Just like me and thingy... er, Lucy. Now where is the silly thing? Lucy? Lucy? (*He wanders around calling out 'Lucy?' looking in cupboards, under chairs, etc. He is looking under the table when JENNY enters*)
- JENNY** Nigel? (*He looks up and bangs his head on the table*) What on earth are you doing here?
- NIGEL** Jenny! I say, how spiffing! I've just come down with Albert to see you and what's her name.
- JENNY** Lucy.
- NIGEL** That's the fellow! Jolly dee! (*He looks uncomfortable*) Look, Albert's just gone off to search the grounds. Perhaps I'd better go and get him...
- JENNY** Oh, don't worry. He's old enough to look after himself. (*She sits*) Come here and tell me what's been happening lately. (*She pats the sofa next to her*)
- NIGEL** Um... right, cripes, yes, OK. (*He looks around nervously before sitting, obviously in a state of considerable excitement*)
- NIGEL** (*Together*) I say, Jenny...
- JENNY** Nigel, I wonder...
- NIGEL** Gosh, sorry. You first.
- JENNY** No you, I insist.
- NIGEL** No, it's not important. What were you going to say?
- JENNY** I was just wondering how you got on in your exams. What were you reading, again?
- NIGEL** Golly, I can't remember. Medicine or something. I can't say I was very interested.

- JENNY** Well, what sort of degree did you get?
- NIGEL** Not a trifficly good one I'm afraid, old fruit. I was awarded a.... a third.
- JENNY** Nigel! A two-two! That means...
- NIGEL** Yes, I know! I even spelt my name wrong on the question paper!
- JENNY** Oh, Nigel, you really are hopeless! I don't know how Lucy puts up with you. She's so bright and clever and you're so... well...
- NIGEL** Say it! Thick, stupid, dim, daft, dopey, half-witted and idiotic! The rest of the family tell me often enough. I really detest all this studying lark. Even reading makes my lips tired!
- JENNY** Does Lucy know this?
- NIGEL** I couldn't tell her! Oh, Jenny, I find her so dreadfully difficult to talk to. For a start she's frightfully brainy and secondly she's... Well, I try not to let it bother me but, dash it all, it's true - she's... she's bally working class!
- JENNY** (*Standing*) Nigel! What a shameful thing to say! You classist brute! How can you let such things affect you?
- NIGEL** I try, Jenny, honestly I do, but I simply can't relate to the working class world of sweat and toil. I've been brought up to see the fun in everything, to regard money as something to spend, not to save, to live for art, culture, refinement and loads of parties where I can get really squiffy! (*Taking JENNY's hands*) That's my world, Jenny. And that's your world, too.
- JENNY** Nigel! (*She shrinks from him*) How dare you include me in your profligate universe. I have risen above these desires!
- NIGEL** Oh no you haven't! I can see it in your eyes when you look at me. In your heart you know that we were made for each other. So what if I'm upper class? We all have our cross to bear!

DUET - NIGEL and JENNY

Music - "If the light of love's lingering ember", The Grand Duke

NIGEL Your reason rejects all the prizes
That rank can impart,
But none of your logic disguises
The voice of the heart.
You cannot deny your good breeding,
When faced with devotion exceeding,
There's one things that's never misleading -
The voice of the heart.

JENNY My mind and my wisdom is saying
That you should depart,
But nothing can stop me obeying
The voice of the heart.
My logic advises rejection,
To never return your affection,
But something still conquers objection -
The voice of the heart.

They draw close together.

(*Breaking away*) No! Rational decision
I always obey,
I treat with derision
The words that you say,
Emotion I'm scorning,
Despising your fawning,
I bid you good-morning,
I bid you good-day!

NIGEL Your heart is the master
You should not gainsay,
I forsee disaster
If you disobey.
I give you fair warning
Rejection and scorning
Will haunt you each morning,
Each night, and each day!

During the ensemble it becomes evident that JENNY is giving in to NIGEL's advances. They end in an embrace, just about to kiss.

GEORGE *(Offstage)* Jenny? Phoebe?

JENNY Oh my God, it's daddy - I mean George! *(JENNY and NIGEL spring apart)* He mustn't find us together. Quick, we'd better hide. *(NIGEL starts running between exits right and left)* No, not in the house - the patio!

NIGEL Jolly dee! *(JENNY grabs his hand and they rush out of the French windows)*

Enter GEORGE carrying a gun and something in a bag.

GEORGE Where the hell are is everybody? Phoebe? Jenny? Mrs. Doings? I'm back! I've shot something! Hello! Anybody there...

Enter MRS. DOINGS.

MRS. DO. What is all the noise about, sir? I'm just in the middle of preparing the dinner. My goodness! What on earth's that?

GEORGE What? Oh, this! I just shot it.

MRS. DO. *(Looks into the bag)* But it's a cat!

GEORGE Is it? I thought it was a pheasant. Oh well. Can you eat it?

MRS. DO. Well... I suppose so, although...

GEORGE Jolly good! We'll pluck it and have it for dinner. Here you are. *(He gives it to her)* Ah, Mrs. Doings, I just don't know what's happened to Jenny - three years at Girton have completely undone all our careful upbringing. I can't keep up with all this new thinking - I'm not built for change. Damn and blast it, what is the world coming to? What was so wrong with the old ways?

BALLAD – GEORGE and MRS. DOINGS

Music - "Sighing softly to the river", The Pirates of Penzance

Gone the days I used to treasure,
Fading with the years,
Life for duty not for pleasure,
Families not careers -

MRS. DO. Not careers.

GEORGE Husbands spoke, and wives but rarely,
Orders were obeyed,
Servants, governed firm but fairly,
Frequently were flayed.

MRS. DO. When the servants disobeyed
They were very roughly flayed.

GEORGE Happy days now gone forever,
Yearnings for the past must sever,
Fare thee well my days of youth -
Welcome to the modern 'truth'.

In my day you knew your function -
Husbands won the bread,
Opened doorways on compunction,
Sat at table head -

MRS. DO. Table head.
GEORGE Wives kept house, had no ambition,
Loyal, staunch and true.
Children, boarded for tuition,
Spoke when spoken to.

MRS. DO. Noisy children were taboo -
Only spoke when spoken to

GEORGE Happy days now gone forever,
Yearnings for the past must sever,
Fare thee well my days of youth -
Welcome to the modern 'truth'.

Exit GEORGE and MRS. DOINGS. JENNY carefully emerges, looks around and then beckons NIGEL on.

JENNY Looks like the coast is clear.

NIGEL Gosh! I say, that was a bit of a close shave. Now, (*approaching her*) where were we? I think that we (*they embrace*) were just about to... (*they are just about to kiss when...*)

ALBERT (*Offstage*) Jenny?

NIGEL Was that you?

JENNY Was what me?

ALBERT (*Offstage*) Jenny?

NIGEL That!

JENNY Oh no, it's Albert! Quick, back to the patio!

NIGEL But why can't we just stay and... urrh! (*He is dragged forcibly off by JENNY*)

Enter ALBERT.

ALBERT Jenny, where are you? Jenny? By eck, I don't mind a bit of a chase but this is going a bit bloody far. Jenny?

Enter LUCY.

LUCY Albert! Here already?

ALBERT Eh up, Lucy. Where the bloody hell is everybody? I don't mind saying that if you treated your friends like this in Yorkshire you'd get a broken bottle in your face - *and* you'd deserve it.

LUCY I'm sorry, Albert, but things have been rather hectic since we arrived. There's such a lot to catch up on after three years... But never mind that. I'm so glad that *you're* here. Are you alone?

ALBERT No, that daft bugger Nigel's with me. I left the big wet blanket poncing about in here ten minutes ago. He's probably got himself stuck in a cupboard somewhere. Here, where's Jenny?

LUCY She's out with her mother I think.

ALBERT Oh, right. So, happen we're... er... alone, then, eh?

LUCY (*Sitting*) It would certainly seem so.

ALBERT By thunder, Lucy, it's bloody good to be away from the upper classes for a change! I get really sick of the other students at Cambridge - those pampered aristocrats don't know what reality is. Never felt the sweet agony of boring, repetitive and relentless slavery to a bloated and uncaring ruling class. They're not proper people like us. We know what life's really about. You can never disguise your working class background, Lucy - nothing can hide the pain behind your eyes.

LUCY I'm not trying to hide it, Albert. I never lie about my roots. Saying that, I'm not quite as proud of them as you are. You're always shoving it down people's throats!

ALBERT And why shouldn't I? These blood-sucking parasites should see what degraded sort of lives those they exploit have to lead. It is my mission is to tear off their blinkers and let them see the rottenness that lies at the core of this society, the evil that they condone by their inactivity, and the misery and deprivation that results from the single-minded pursuit of wealth. And besides that, it provides enormous opportunities for being extremely rude in public!

DUET - ALBERT and LUCY

Music - "There is beauty in the bellow of the blast", *The Mikado*

ALBERT You must never be ashamed you're working class -
Speak your accent not with shame but with conceit!
Shout with pride that you're a prole,
And that your father's on the dole,
And that your mother takes in washing for the street!

LUCY 'Though my mother is a servant,
From now on I will be fervent,
That I'll never hide my background with deceit!

ALBERT You can make them guilty with your tales of woe -
Dirty clothing, outside toilet and no food.
But the greatest revelation
Is in casual conversation -
As a pleb' your language can be really rude!

LUCY 'Though good manners are the fashion,
I confess my secret passion -
I delight in language that is really crude!

BOTH So let's be coarse
And vocally vicious,
We'll very malicious-
Ly break their laws!
Let's fight with force
The horribly haughty,
And nobly naughty,
And say 'Up yours!'

LUCY If I took all your suggestions to my heart,
I would never have to be polite again!
Say goodbye to sham emotion,
No pretence of deep devotion,
To the people who are basically a pain!

ALBERT Don't flannel and don't flatter,
Other's feelings hardly matter,
Let the dragon of good manners now be slain.

LUCY I consign my social graces to the bin,
Never more to cringe and pander to a toff,
I will sneer at their conventions,
I will laugh at their pretensions,
At their 'ladylike' behaviour I shall scoff!

ALBERT If they give you aggravation,
Make this witty observation,
'If you don't like what I say then bugger off!'

BOTH So let's be coarse
And vocally vicious,
We'll very malicious-
Ly break their laws!
Let's fight with force
The horribly haughty,
And nobly naughty,
And say 'Up yours!'

They finish dancing in an embrace. Pause as they look at each other.

LUCY (*Breaking away*) No, Albert, we can't. I must remain faithful to Nigel - and what about you and Jenny? Does her love mean nothing to you?

ALBERT Damn bloody Nigel and damn bloody Jenny! We were made for each other, Lucy. We both know the agony and the ecstasy of being proletarian. You've got a good head on your shoulders, you're no respecter of class and you've got a cracking chest. Come 'ere and I'll give you a damn good snogging!

- LUCY** Oh, Albert! You mad, sweet-talking thing, you! How can a girl resist an offer like that? (*She rushes to him. They are about to kiss when...*)
- Enter NIGEL. He is speechless with anger. JENNY follows behind.*
- NIGEL** Albert, I say, you bloody rotter! That's my girl you've got there!
- ALBERT** Watch what you're saying, Nigel, you great girls blouse! Lucy's my girl now. If any one argues with me I'll knock 'em. Lucy is my past, my present and my... (*Sees JENNY*) Jenny? What the bloody Hell are you doing here?
- NIGEL** Jenny's with me, you peasant! She's decided to wash her hands of your grubby working-class morality and take up with a true gentleman!
- ALBERT** By crikey, that's fighting talk where I come from! Lucy, hold my coat... (*Taking it off*)
- NIGEL** It's about time you got what's coming to you! Come on, put your dukes up. (*He starts prancing about in a boxing pose*)
- ALBERT** Aye, you daft bugger, come on, then... etc.
- NIGEL** You vulgar little pleb, you deserve a good hiding... etc.
- LUCY & JENNY** Stop it!
- LUCY** What a pathetic display of masculine pride. You're such barbarians!
- JENNY** Haven't you learnt anything from Cambridge? Violence solves nothing, and well you know it.
- LUCY** (*Sitting ALBERT down stage left*) Calm down, sit down and talk it over like civilised people.
- JENNY** (*Sitting NIGEL down stage right*) After all, philosophical discourse can solve any problem!

QUARTET - LUCY, JENNY, NIGEL and ALBERT

Music - "In a contemplative fashion", The Gondoliers

- In a contemplative fashion,
And a tranquil frame of mind,
Free from every kind of passion,
Some solution let us find.
Let us grasp the situation,
Solve the complicated plot -
Quiet, calm deliberation
Disentangles every knot.
- LUCY** No dispute of love or honour
Should result in violence,
So don't act the prima donna
When you leap to our defence.
- JENNY** Though we know you love us dearly,
And you're jealous to a 'tee',
We must say to you quite clearly
'Please don't spill your blood for me!'
- NIGEL** My blue-blooded self-respect
Is now demanding that I fight,
But my Cambridge intellect
Is saying brawling isn't right.
- ALBERT** For most problems in my life
A peaceful answer I admire,
When unfaithfulness is rife
It's violent conflict I desire!
- NIGEL** Now I've claim on your devotion,
That young pleb you'll vilify.

JENNY Although my affection
 Has altered direction,
 My socialist feelings I'll never deny!

ALBERT If you're truly working class, then
 Women's libbers you'll abuse.

LUCY There is no occasion
 That male persuasion
 Can make me recant all my feminist views!

JENNY (To LUCY) Though you've altered your allegiance,
 Nigel still may hold you dear -

NIGEL (To JENNY) I vow that I'm true,
 That my love is for you,
 But if Albert returns for his safety I fear!
 Though you know I will be faithful
 What of Grimshaw?

ALBERT (To LUCY) This promise I make you,
 I'll never forsake you,
 And doubters will feel the back of my hand!

Over the mounting confusion during the ensemble, the men get more and more aggressive. They pause with their hands at each other's throats during the final two lines.

ALL Quiet, calm deliberation
 Disentangles every knot!

Enter GEORGE.

GEORGE What's all the blasted noise about? (*Sees NIGEL and ALBERT*) I say, who are you? Are you friends of the girls?

NIGEL Rather more than that I hope.

GEORGE Jolly good! Phoebe! Mrs. Doings! The girls' boyfriends are here! Jenny, why didn't you tell us you were expecting company?

JENNY We weren't sure that we were.

GEORGE So, a pleasant surprise, what? Ah, here are the girls. (*Enter PHOEBE and MRS. DOINGS*) Jenny, could you introduce us properly?

JENNY Phoebe, George, this is Nigel Smythe-Smythe. Nigel, meet my mother and father.

NIGEL Super to meet you, Lord and Lady Manors.

GEORGE Charmed!

PHOEBE Likewise. You're Lucy's young man aren't you?

NIGEL Well, I've got to say that there's been a slight change in that department...

LUCY Mother, allow me to introduce Albert Grimshaw. Albert, my mother.

ALBERT By crikey, madam, you're ugly. No offence - I'm a Yorkshireman, I speak my mind.

MRS. DO. I understand, dear. I've heard so much about you... but from *Jenny*...

ALBERT That's because there's been another change. Now, Mrs. Doings, I'll come straight to the point. I want to marry Lucy, all right?

MRS. DO. Goodness me, this is all so sudden. I hardly know you! Tell me, young man, are your intentions honourable?

ALBERT Absolutely not.

MRS. DO. Just like my dear Henry! Oh yes, of course you can!

- NIGEL** (*Aside*) Cripes! Now that Albert's gone and done it I suppose I'd better... (*To GEORGE*) Lord Manors, I won't beat about the bush but I'd like to ask if... you know... I could sort of do the same thing as him except not with Lucy but with Jenny. I say, I'd be most terribly grateful and happy and all that... I'm from a good family and I'm stinking rich and everything, so... is it OK with you?
- GEORGE** My dear boy, of course. Thank God she's got enough damn sense to get hitched to someone of her own class.
- PHOEBE** I've very pleased for both you and Jenny. You seem like a most charming young man.
- NIGEL** Jolly dee!
- GEORGE** A double wedding! Come on, everybody, I think that this calls for a celebration!
- GEORGE, PHOEBE, MRS. DOINGS, NIGEL *and* ALBERT *start to go off, congratulating each other.*
- LUCY** Just a minute!
- JENNY** You haven't asked us what *we* think.
- NIGEL** You're as happy as us, aren't you?
- LUCY** Not exactly...
- JENNY** Not precisely...
- LUCY** In fact, not at all. I'm sorry to prick your bubble of happiness, but I'm afraid to say that those little intimacies we just exchanged were... a joke.
- NIGEL & ALBERT** A joke?
- JENNY** That's right... a jape, a prank, a bit of fun. And you fell for it, hook, line and sinker.
- LUCY** You see, for some time we'd suspected that neither of you were able to cope with a relationship involving someone of a different class.
- JENNY** And, sad to say, we were right. We didn't have to scratch very deeply to reveal your true colours.
- GEORGE** Jenny, does this mean that the weddings are off?
- LUCY** They were never on in the first place, George. Jenny and I are leaving for London tomorrow - alone.
- JENNY** We've bought a Law office together in Knightsbridge. I shall start work as a solicitor the day after tomorrow.
- LUCY** And I'm going to train for the Bar. I regret to say it, but if men can't cope with enlightened relationships then I'm afraid we'll have to do without them.
- PHOEBE** Lucy! Jenny! My dear girls, I'm so proud of you. You *do* have the courage of your convictions. I'd never have had the nerve to do what you're doing at your age - though, God knows, I've often wished I had.
- GEORGE** Phoebe!
- MRS. DO.** My dears, I can't say I'm entirely sure what solicitors and barristers actually do, but it's got to be better than my life. Best of luck, girls.
- GEORGE** Just a damn and blasted minute! I don't call this much of a happy ending!
- LUCY** Time marches on, George. Welcome to the modern world!
- NIGEL** But Jenny, Lucy, you can't leave like this. What's to become of us?
- ALBERT** Where shall we go? What shall we do?
- JENNY** Frankly, my dears...
- LUCY** We don't *give* a damn!

FINALE

Music - *"The woman of the wisest wit", Princess Ida*

JENNY & LUCY It's time for women to advance,
 Their intellects to heighten, O!
Let dignity and pride enhance,
 Relationships enlighten, O!

NIGEL & ALBERT Although in theory we agree
 With what they are intending, O!
In practice, by their harsh decree,
 Our happiness is ending, O!
 - is ending, O!
 - is ending, O!
 Our happiness is ending, O!

ALL The future we can now foresee -
Equality - equality!
Proclaim the news throughout the land -
It's time for us to take a stand!
So even if you disagree -
You won't prevent equality!

**PHOEBE
& MRS. DOINGS** Our daughters have revised the rules,
 The times they are a-changing, O!
Now kitchen sink for office stools
 They're happily exchanging, O!

GEORGE This feminism will incite
 Immeasurable disaster, O!
Unless we men unite and fight,
 Then servant will be master, O!
 - be master, O!
 - be master, O!
 Then servant will be master, O!

ALL The future we can now foresee, etc.

CURTAIN

AUTHOR'S NOTE

After my failure to get people enthused about 'Robin Hood and his Merry Persons', I decided to have another go at writing another one act show that, unlike 'The Philanderer', could be paired with 'The Zoo'. I was reading quite a lot of George Bernard Shaw at the time and had a girlfriend who was an avowed feminist, so I thought I'd have a go at writing something that would feature 'Shavian' women, satirising issues of class and would be now be called 'gender politics'. It was also a sort of companion piece/response to 'The Philanderer', with the last line of that show being near the end of this one!

The title came quickly, unconsciously (I didn't notice for years!) being taken from a line from my favourite film, 'Gregory's Girl'. The older characters represented the traditional world, with the young women the coming of modernity, so it seemed right to set it around the 1930s. The young men, like other young men in love, echo the sentiments of the women, but don't really believe them. Nigel is an archetypal upper-class twit, while Albert is a Professional Northerner, inspired by a character in a Victoria Wood sketch (amongst other sources). George is a traditional old buffer with conservative (and Conservative) views, while Phoebe represents a more old-fashioned type of female emancipation. It sounds very 'right on' now, but I tried to aim satirical arrows at all parts of the political spectrum.

Emboldened by my more adventurous lyric writing in 'Robin Hood', there is almost no Gilbert left in the songs – I picked something for the right voice and with the right sort of music, and started from scratch. I still take great delight in the line 'bully-and-thuggery, ruggery-buggery'! The later time setting meant that I could use a wider vocabulary, and slip in some mild swearing – which is quite liberating in the context of G&S!

Once I had finished, the script met with far greater enthusiasm than 'Robin Hood' (thankfully!) and the show was first produced in 1991 (when I was sitting my Finals), paired with 'The Zoo' (as planned). To be honest, it didn't go down as well as I'd hoped, possibly because we didn't quite get the tone right (although the cast was generally excellent). When I directed it in 2007, it was much better, and was quite enthusiastically received. A more Shavian cast, perhaps?

Incidentally, in the original production, I felt it would be wrong to quote 'Gone with the Wind' at the end, as it was anachronistic, and replaced it with this:

ALBERT	Where shall we go? What shall we do?
JENNY	Oh, Nigel...
LUCY	Oh, Albert...
JENNY & LUCY	Who cares?

That was the last time that happened! I also tried to introduce Mr Doings as a character later on, to balance the voices, but it didn't seem necessary. Anyway, it makes a change to have more female than male principals!

30th May 2002