

Connell and Coggs Exposed – a short play by Richard Kay

*Two dressing room tables are set at either side of the stage, backs to each other at a slight angle. A door USC represents the entrance to the dressing room but we see characters approach it from the corridor beyond. The mirrors for the dressing tables are imaginary – looking out to the audience – and the characters converse with each other through an imagined reflection.*

**Announcement: Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen and welcome to the New Theatre. This evening's performance of *Connell and Coggs Exposed* will go ahead as billed. The house is now open, the house is now open, Thank you.**

*Connell enters and sits facing SL, looking at his reflection in his dressing room mirror.*

**Announcement: Mr. Connell and Mr. Coggs this is your quarter of an hour call, you have fifteen minutes. Thank you.**

*During the following exchanges Connell is meticulously tying his tie. Not completely satisfied with the length, he keeps retrying. This is something of a ritual.*

*Lucy knocks and enters.*

Lucy: Any sign?

Connell: He'll be here.

Lucy: ...only that was the quarter.

Connell: Stop fretting Sophie...

Lucy: ...Lucy...

Connell: ...Lucy, this is nothing out of the ordinary. Besides, I've managed on my own before. Don't relish the prospect mind.

Lucy: Well if...when....he turns up...if you could...

Connell: I'll be sure to come running.

*Lucy exits. Connell continues with his tie. Coggs appears outside the dressing room door. He is tired and thoughtful. Takes a deep breath and forces a smile upon his face as he enters and positions himself at his dressing table.*

Coggs: *(cheerily)* Mr. Connell.

Connell: Coggs. *(pause)* You made it then.

Coggs: But of course. Show must go on, my dear, show must go on.

Connell: It doesn't need to.

Coggs: My dear boy, you know as well as I that while there is an adoring public we have a duty and that if we forego that duty the public will move elsewhere. Besides, the day I stop is the day they cart me off in a box.

Connell: I'm just saying. You'd be excused.

*Pause, Coggs gets items out of his bag whilst whistling to himself*

Connell: So...how was it?

Coggs: You know the problem with the British judicial system? The wigs are so 1680s. Perhaps if they took more of a panto-dame approach to their wigs and gowns people would manage to stay awake. Maybe John Paul Gaultier could design a new range; courtroom chic. "Objection overuled, but may I say I love the frills on your new gown!"

Connell: Save it for the show, Mr. Coggs, save it for the show.

*Lucy knocks and enters*

Lucy Ah Mr. Coggs. You're here.

Coggs: How very astute of you. And so are you I see, although the reason for you being so is eluding me.

Connell: This is our new asm, Sophie..

Lucy: ...Lucy...

Connell: ...Lucy. First day so be gentle.

Coggs: I've never been anything but. Is Elsa ill?

Lucy: She's no longer on the show I'm afraid.

Coggs: Why ever not? Wasn't she due to be bringing her niece in on work experience or something?

Lucy: She was, but...

Coggs: *(realising)*...but she saw the need to protect herself and her family from the evil advances of a sex pest.

*Awkward silence*

Lucy: I want you to know that I have no preconceived judgments or, or bias...

Coggs: How very big of you Lucy. *(resuming his natural charm)* Well, welcome aboard. As I always say to new members of the team, don't be put off by Mr. Connell. He may have the appearance of a grisly but inside he's just a teddy bear really.

Lucy: I'll be stage right if you need me.

*Lucy Exits*

Coggs: Why wasn't I told about Elsa?

Connell: I guess they figured you had enough on your plate. Did you want to talk about it?

Coggs: Don't start with compassion after 40 years dear boy. Next thing I know you'll be trying to get your own laughs, heaven forbid.

Connell: She said she just wants to move onto new challenges.

Coggs: Course she does. Course she does.

*Coggs goes into his ritualistic warm-up routine, starting with slumping with his head between his knees and moaning. He continues this through the following dialogue. Connell finally finishes his tie and proceeds to trim his beard, equally meticulously.*

Connell: So you have to stay at home then?

Coggs: Or at the address of a designated friend. Are you offering?

Connell: Just wondering if the tour dates will be doable.

Coggs: Where there's a will, dear boy. Just as well our international profile is on the wane – I've had to surrender my passport.

Connell: *(mock sarcasm)* Phew. *(Pause)* And what about the family?

Coggs: *(Stops warm-up)* What *about* the family?

Connell: Judy still being funny?

Coggs: No fear of that dear boy, she hasn't a funny bone in her body.

Connell: You know what I mean.

Coggs: *(Pause)* She's got her own career to worry about. If it helps to keep a distance from the old man for now then so be it.

Connell: And the kids?

Coggs: Honestly Mr. Connell, I'm not used to such pre-show banter, what's with this new-found foreplay? *(Pause)* She'll have to find alternative childcare for now. Suddenly I'm a danger to all minors including my own grandchildren.

Connell: You can still see them?

Coggs: *(cheerily)* Why yes. So long as I'm supervised. Now do you mind?

*Coggs continues with warm-up moans. Lucy knocks and enters with mail.*

Lucy: I've been asked to bring these up to you. Is everything alright Mr. Coggs?

Connell: Don't worry about him Sophie...

Lucy: ...Lucy...

Connell: ...Lucy. Creature of habit our Mr. Coggs. You'd have thought after 40 years he would have altered his warm up routine but no. You think the groaning is disconcerting; you wanna make yourself scarce for the lunging. Then we've got the letters, the heavy breathing, the head swivel then quickly into costume for the final flirt.

Lucy: Final flirt?

Connell: Oh Aye, trying out potential new material on some unsuspecting usherette or followspot operative. Been a bit watered down of late but the customary sequence is still there. The day it alters is the day I start to worry.

Lucy: I think it's good to prepare yourself. Do you not have a routine of your own?

Connell: Well, I have to humour him with the letters *(putting out his hand for Lucy to pass them)* thank you. Otherwise I haven't settled on a warm up routine of my own yet. Wouldn't want to peak too soon in my career.

Coggs: *(who is now lunging)* Oh come come Mr. Connell, you too have your anal retentiveness, it's just that yours focuses entirely on your appearance. You wouldn't know it to look at him Lucy, but this level of dishevelled oafishness before you takes a full hour of meticulous honing. And you thought "shabby chic" only applied to furniture.

Connell: Save it for the show, Coggs, save it for the sh – oh Christ the lunging has begun. Save yourself Sophie – *(as she starts to correct him)* Lucy Lucy Lucy, I know.

*Lucy smile and exits. The men continue their rituals in silence for a minute*

Coggs: I think just a couple of letters as we're pressed for time today Mr. Connell.

Connell: Can't we just give it a miss?

Coggs: And devalue our adoring public? Certainly not.

Connell: That's the thing though. It's not all adoration at the moment, is it?

Coggs: It's truth that hurts Mr. Connell. Malicious lies can be brushed off.

Connell: But it affects you, I've seen....

Coggs: You know the worst letter I ever wrote? "Dear Jim, Please could you fix it for me to go on *It's a Knockout*." Save it for the show Mr. Connell?

Connell: Just save it.

Coggs: The letters then if you please?

*Connell opens a letter with some trepidation. Relieved by its contents*

Connell: Ah, "Dear Connell and Coggs, I have been coming to see you for more years than I care to remember and I have always had a thoroughly enjoyable evening. To start with it was just me but these days I nearly have to hire a bus for the amount of people who ask to join me. I hope that we will be coming to your shows for years to come. Please could you give us a shout in the dress circle and we wish you all the best for another belter of a show. Sincerely, Mrs. Julie Bligh of Frome."

Coggs: You see, how would Mrs. Julie Bligh have felt had we not read her warmest wishes?

Connell: Fair enough. One more? This one's got a gift.

Coggs: You do the card Mr. Connell, I'll see to the gift. Hmm, well wrapped.

*Coggs starts to unpick the sellotape as Connell reads the card.*

Connell: Wait.

Coggs: What?

Connell: Let's do a different one.

*Connell tries to take back the present but Coggs doesn't let him*

Coggs: Read the card please Mr. Connell, I'll see to the gift.

Connell: (Reads) To the perverted fuck that is Peter Coggs. I hope you rot in hell for whatever you did to that girl. To Jeremy Connell, you suggest some guilt of your own by the fact that you are still prepared to stand by and perform with this monster. The pair of you make me physically sick. Don't believe me? Here's the proof.

*Both slowly look at the present*

Coggs: Maybe I'll leave the gift for now.

*Connell resumes his warm up exercises – now moving onto heavy breathing.*

Connell: We can still cancel

Coggs: Show must go on, my dear, show must go on.

*Connell watches him, wanting to say something, then returns to his dressing table and starts to check his teeth. Suddenly Coggs breaks the silence.*

Coggs: You know I didn't do it, don't you?

Connell: What?

Coggs: You know it's a pack of lies?

Connell: Since when has my opinion ever mattered?

Coggs: But you do know it's untrue?

Connell: After so many years of living in each other's pockets do you really think you need to ask?

Coggs: It's important to me.

Connell: I know but seriously...

Coggs: Just say it Jeremy, for Christ's sake, you know it's not true.

*Pause*

Connell: I know Peter. I know.

**Announcement: Mr. Connell and Mr. Coggs this is your five minute call, you have five minutes. Thank you.**

Coggs: (Cheerily) Right. Good.

*Connell turns to his mirror but watches Coggs. Coggs ponders his reflection in his mirror, takes a big breath and walks out of the door – a break from his routine that doesn't go unnoticed by Connell.*

Connell:        *(Out to audience)* It's hardly what you aspire to, this. A washed up act living off the fame of their heyday. But he's right, while there's an audience... I was never too good with the fame anyway. Not surprising when we flogged ourselves for every penny. Daytime, night time, prime time, we were on the whole bloody time, even I got sick of the sight of us. And now the fame returns, only this time it's even less welcome. How is he meant to remember what he got up to thirty years ago, he can barely remember last week. Sure he made the most of the perks of fame but....we were pretty well behaved. Only one time he went awol. Had to do the show on my own, I was livid. When he finally surfaced he had no recollection of the past twenty four hours. No recollection whatsoever *now.* *(Turning to talk to his own reflection)* The charges certainly came as a shock to him. I suppose the fact that I was going through a very public coming out ceremony at the time helps me to remember more vividly. *(Pause)* So, here we are. The end of the road.

*Screams off. Lucy comes running in.*

Lucy:            Mr. Connell, Mr. Connell, it's Mr. Coggs. He's...

Connell:        Dead. I know. Well, in truth he's died enough onstage it's perhaps only fitting that he should finally die backstage.

Lucy:            No, you don't understand, he's....

Connell:        I understand perfectly well Lucy. What is he, hanging? Thought I'd seen him eyeing up those beams in the green room. If you act fast you might save him but he wouldn't thank you for it.

Lucy:            But...

**Announcement: Mr. Connell and Mr. Coggs this is your act one beginners call please, your act one beginners call. Crew to the stage, thank you.**

Connell:        Listen Lucy there are things you will have to arrange. Firstly get some of the front of house staff to help get him down, let's preserve his dignity. No, second thoughts they may need to view the scene so call the police, keep it quiet for the moment and follow their instructions. I appreciate that this wasn't exactly what you bargained for on your first day but I'm sure you'll cope.

*One final look in the mirror and Connell heads for the door*

Lucy:           Where are you going?

Connell:       Show must go on, my dear, show must go on.

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