

Strange Affairs

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ACT ISCENE 1

SETTING: 1920's. A small Victorian study.

AT RISE: A Victorian-style room, empty. A large, ornate fireplace sits to the right. On the fireplace mantel is a large bouquet of roses in a vase. In the middle, an old couch sits in front of a large window, glowing with the warmth of the sun. The door to the hallway is open at stage left, where fumbling footsteps are heard approaching.

WORKER #1

I told you, right over here! She said near the fireplace.

WORKER #2

She said *next to* the fireplace.

WORKER #3

Shut up and hurry, this thing's goddamn heavy!

Three workers enter stage left. Worker #1 and #2 are holding a large wooden crate about the size of a person. Worker #3 is helping guide them.

WORKER #2

Well, anyways--

(beat)

Y'know, I told her--told her I ain't lookin' to go all goofy and middle-aisle it with her...

WORKER #1

Right here is good.

The two workers carrying the box place it in front of the fireplace.

WORKER #3

You're a regular drugstore cowboy, you know that? How many dames' hearts have you broken, huh?

WORKER #2

The hell is in this thing? Feels like a goddamn statue or something!

WORKER #1

She didn't say. Just wanted it moved.

Worker #3 stands next to Worker #2, gesturing.

(CONTINUED)

WORKER #3

Or how about, how many women of yours had husbands?

WORKER #2

Hell, I never ask 'em--and they never tell me!

Worker #3 laughs.

WORKER #1

And you don't maybe feel ashamed that you're ruining marriages?

WORKER #2

I ain't sleepin' with the devil. *She* is. It's her damn skeletons in the closet. I'm just a fella tryin' to have a good time.

WORKER #1

You're a goddamn firestarter is what you are.

Worker #3 knocks on the crate.

WORKER #3

You sure it's fine here?

WORKER #1

It's where she said she wanted it.

(beat)

What, you want to move it again?

WORKER #2

No--it's fine. If she wants to use the fireplace, *she* can move it. Let's just go.

The three workers exit stage left.

SCENE 2

SETTING: House, night.

AT RISE: Victorian-styled room. The box sits in front of the fireplace as the window lets in the pale glow of moonlight. From stage left, the sounds of jazz and a raucous party sift into the room through a half-closed door. Edgar and Eliza, drunk, stumble into the room in each other's arms, laughing. The lights come up. Edgar is wearing a three-piece suit. Eliza, a simple dress. They fall onto the couch, kissing.

ELIZA

Oh, Eddy, not in here!

EDGAR

It's a party, dear! Relax!

(CONTINUED)

ELIZA

The party is *downstairs*, darling, let's be reasonable.

EDGAR

Jeez, you're more boring than I thought!

ELIZA

Oh, then shall we just invite the rest of the guests to join? It's just as well. After all, I'm sure they'd wonder where we ran off to.

Edgar stands from the couch,  
composing himself.

EDGAR

No, no--I understand well enough...

(noticing the crate)

So, *this* is the damn thing she's been on about! All she's talked about this whole night is some *unexpected package* she received.

Edgar walks to the crate, examining  
it. He seems to forget himself.

EDGAR

Quite the crate, though, isn't it?

ELIZA

Mm-hmm.

EDGAR

What do you suppose is in it?

ELIZA

No clue.

EDGAR

Hell, it looks like it could hold anything, really.

ELIZA

Knowing Justine, I wouldn't be surprised if it's a new husband.

EDGAR

So they're sending them in packages now, huh?

ELIZA

Ah, but she does know how to entertain, doesn't she?

Eliza stands from the couch and  
walks to Edgar.

EDGAR

True, she's quite the hostess...

(beat)

But I wish I could say the same for that damn Gregory!

Eliza stands next to Edgar at the  
crate, lightly grasping his waist.

ELIZA

He's such a brute. He always greets a person by calling  
them a bastard.

EDGAR

(turning from the crate)

You know, I've heard he's having an affair with Justine.

ELIZA

You don't say?

EDGAR

He sent flowers to her a few days ago.

ELIZA

And who told you?

EDGAR

His wife.

ELIZA

(beat)

What?

EDGAR

I spoke to Dorothy a few days ago--

Eliza backs up to the couch.

ELIZA

I never talk to Dorothy--or Greg.

EDGAR

Well, a man's gonna see another fella's wife every once in a  
while if he works with him.

ELIZA

And she told you about her husband sleeping around?

EDGAR

Well, she said she found flowers hidden in his closet. She  
thought it was a surprise, so she kept quiet. But what do  
you know, she never got 'em. Funny, ain't it?

(CONTINUED)

Oh, it's a riot.

ELIZA

Well, would you look at that!

EDGAR

Edgar motions towards the roses on the mantel.

EDGAR

Seems Greg's carrying a torch for Justine, eh? And he even attached a note!

Eliza begins inching towards the door.

ELIZA

And Dorothy told you this...?

EDGAR

Yeah.

(pause)

You know, I wonder if he sent this crate... Probably bought her a statue to show off, or something. No idea what Justine sees in that man; he's a damn flat tire.

Eliza holds onto the door frame, turning to Edgar.

ELIZA

Eddy, dear? The others are probably waiting for us.

EDGAR

Oh... Well, I suppose I *could* go for another drink.

Edgar walks to Eliza and wraps his arm around her shoulder as they exit.

The room dims, leaving only the moon and open door to light the room while the party is heard roaring downstairs. The sound of a glass breaking is heard. Footsteps run up the stairs and towards the room.

Dorothy enters in a dress with spilled rum on it, crying. She sits on the couch, Gregory following behind.

GREGORY

Dorothy--baby! It's only a little spill, calm down!

DOROTHY

I can't do this!

Dorothy sits on the couch, unable to compose herself.

GREGORY

I'll get you another dress--an even better one! How about that?

DOROTHY

It's not the damn stain, Gregory, it's you!

GREGORY

Oh, what, this again? I *told* you, I sent 'em to my Ma! She's gettin' old, I figured I'd do somethin' nice for her!

DOROTHY

Oh, shut *up*! You don't give one damn about your mother and you *certainly* never send her roses!

GREGORY

Babe, I've told you the truth! Now, *please*--let's go back downstairs and forget about the whole thing, okay?

DOROTHY

(raising her voice)

Who did you give them to, Gregory?! Some whore? Some dumb dora you met at one of your swanky clubs?

GREGORY

This is a fuckin' earful, Dorothy.

DOROTHY

*What did you just say?*

Edgar knocks on the door frame.

EDGAR

Ah, the clutz and the buffoon. How is the dress?

GREGORY

Ha--Edgar, you bastard! I was wonderin' where you were!

Gregory rushes to Edgar, clearly excited. He gives him a shove.

(CONTINUED)

EDGAR

Am I interrupting anything?

GREGORY

Oh, no, no! Just--trying to clean up! Actually, I was just about to head downstairs. Wanna share a drink with me?

EDGAR

You get them ready, I'll be right down.

GREGORY

Can do, boss! Dorothy, I'll see you downstairs, babe.

Gregory exits hurriedly. Edgar closes the door and sits next to Dorothy, who's clearly holding back sobs.

DOROTHY

He swears he sent the roses to his mother...

(pause)

"Never did nothin' with no loose bird," is what he told me.

EDGAR

I know, I know...

DOROTHY

He never sends anything to his mother. I haven't heard from her in years!

EDGAR

So you don't believe him?

DOROTHY

No...

(beat)

I just *want* to.

Dorothy begins crying again. Edgar holds her, rubbing her arm.

DOROTHY

(beat)

Ed--where's your wife?

EDGAR

She's downstairs.

Edgar moves in to kiss Dorothy.

DOROTHY

Ed--!

(CONTINUED)

Edgar stops, contemplating.

EDGAR

You don't--?

DOROTHY

Gregory is my husband, and your wife--

EDGAR

Greg is cheating on you, Dorothy!

DOROTHY

What are you--

EDGAR

Look, right over there! A bouquet of roses with a message attached. The same exact flowers you described!

Dorothy turns to look at the roses in silence. After a moment, she rises to grab the note, slowly.

EDGAR

He's a sap, he doesn't deserve you.

(pause)

I mean, you and I, we've been close...

Dorothy reads the note and turns to Edgar. She's welling up.

DOROTHY

How could he do this...?

Dorothy stumbles into the crate, holding herself up. Edgar springs up to help her.

EDGAR

It's okay.

Edgar helps Dorothy to the couch.

DOROTHY

He cheated on me with *Justine*? Of all the gold diggers to spot, she'd be the the easiest!

EDGAR

He's a rotten bastard.

DOROTHY

And all the nights I put up with him coming home, drunk! Why should I have to suffer?

(CONTINUED)

EDGAR

He's taking you for granted, dear. You're worth much more than that.

Dorothy notices the crate.

DOROTHY

I suppose he sent her something in that damn crate, too.

EDGAR

Maybe it's all the men's hearts she's stolen over the years.

Edgar moves closer to Dorothy as she laughs, her cheeks still wet with tears.

DOROTHY

And what, do tell, is actually inside it?

Edgar and Dorothy are face to face, now.

EDGAR

I don't know...

(beat)

Probably something beautiful.

Dorothy and Edgar both kiss as all lights but one above the crate goes out, which holds for several seconds. Blackout.

SCENE 3

SETTING: Victorian study, night.

AT RISE: The room sits empty. A watch sits on the edge of the couch, the light from the hallway partially illuminating the room from stage left. The sounds of the party have died down, but still persist. Gregory is heard from the hallway, shouting.

GREGORY

*Dooooorothyyyy--!*

Gregory stumbles into the room, walkings towards the couch. He is visibly drunk.

GREGORY

That damn woman...

(beat)

And that goes for both of 'em! Harpies, what they are. Bleedin' me goddamn dry...

(CONTINUED)

Gregory supports himself on the crate, examining the room.

GREGORY

Boy--damn thing's an eye catcher, ain't it?

(beat)

The hell's she got in here?

Gregory attempts to move the crate, yielding no results.

GREGORY

Money sure is easy to come by 'round here, eh? Buyin' heavy crates with god-knows-what in 'em...

Gregory hesitates near the crate. He opens a box of matches from the mantel, lights one, and throws it in the fireplace, which begins to catch.

GREGORY

Lucky broad... Gets a house *and* fortune along with her freedom...

*Justine enters the room, startling Gregory. She is wearing a partially revealing dress, clearly unabashed.*

JUSTINE

Gregory, darling! I've been looking for you!

GREGORY

Justine--!

JUSTINE

You've been with your bore of a wife all night! Never payin' any attention to *me*!

GREGORY

Babe--Justine, ya can't--she could hear us!

JUSTINE

Oh, please, like *Dorothy* would be anywhere the entertainment isnt. The woman's got no sense of adventure!

GREGORY

Listen, let's--hey, close the door, would ya?

JUSTINE

You know, I got the flowers ya sent me. It was awfully sweet of ya, Gregg.

(CONTINUED)

GREGORY

Yeah, yeah--I'm glad you love 'em baby. Nothin' but the best for my little mistress!

(beat)

I'm gonna close the door.

Gregory goes to shut the door, when Eliza stops him. The fireplace is fully ignited.

ELIZA

Greg...?

GREGORY

Ah, Eliza! I--what're ya doin' up here?

JUSTINE

Is that Lizzy?

ELIZA

(to Gregory)

Have you seen my husband?

JUSTINE

Lizzy, how has Eddy been these days?

GREGORY

He's...

(beat)

No clue where he is, actually. Nowhere in here, though!

ELIZA

Well, please do tell me if you find him.

Eliza exits. Before he can close the door, Justine grabs Gregory and pulls him to the crate.

GREGORY

Sweetheart, the door--

JUSTINE

Oh, calm down! A little pet didn't hurt anyone!

The two begin to kiss. Gregory is visibly nervous.

GREGORY

Lemme just shut it real quick, okay?

JUSTINE

You know, I love the roses almost as much as I love my other present.

(CONTINUED)

GREGORY

Other what, now?

JUSTINE

Playin' dumb's cute, Gregggy, really.

GREGORY

I don't--present?

JUSTINE

The rather large one sitting right next to us, dear.

GREGORY

You're talkin' crazy. I only bought roses--

Edgar is heard off stage.

EDGAR

I'll be quick about it, don't worry!

GREGORY

Well isn't this gettin' balled up real quick! Do somethin'! Hide!

JUSTINE

Ya want me to *hide*?

Edgar enters, startled.

EDGAR

Oh--Greg!

GREGORY

Ed! What brings you here?

JUSTINE

Well if it isn't Eddy!

Justine sits atop the crate.

EDGAR

Justine--! Quite a ritzy time I'm having, if I may say!

JUSTINE

Your wife came by lookin' for ya, Eddy. Don't worry--we didn't say nothin'.

GREGORY

What're you on about?

JUSTINE

Oh, I'm *sure* this isn't the first time little Lizzy's been searchin' for her loyal husband, right Eddy?

(CONTINUED)

EDGAR  
I came for my watch--

GREGORY  
Watch? Oh, sure, watch, yeah!

Gregory hands Edgar the watch from the sofa, still worried.

JUSTINE  
Greg, baby, where's that bluenose of a wife of yours?

EDGAR  
Now, listen here--!

GREGORY  
*Justine!* Ed, let's go downstairs, huh?

EDGAR  
What have the two of you been doing in here, anyways?

JUSTINE  
I'm sure nothin' ya haven't done yourself.

GREGORY  
What in the hell're ya talkin' about?

Dorothy enters.

JUSTINE  
Why *hello*, Dorothy!

GREGORY  
Dorothy--baby!

Gregory rushes over to Dorothy, who rejects him.

JUSTINE  
Would you like to know a secret, Gregory dear?

EDGAR  
*Pipe down!*

JUSTINE  
I went lookin' for ya earlier, Greggy, but I heard someone havin' an *awful* good time in here instead.

DOROTHY  
Shut up!

(CONTINUED)

JUSTINE

You sure been hoverin' around each other all night. They've got a crush big time! At least, maybe Eddy does for dear Dorothy, here.

EDGAR

And I suppose those roses and that crate are from a secret admirer? You and Greg are no better!

GREGORY

Don't you talk to her, you double-crossin' son of a bitch!

Gregory squares off with Edgar, trying to act tough.

JUSTINE

Greggy and I are just enjoyin' a good time! Wish I could say the same for you two.

DOROTHY

You bought her that crate, Gregory? How much did you *spend*?

GREGORY

I never bought any damn crate!

JUSTINE

What?

EDGAR

Where'd it come from then, Greg? You're nothing but a goddamn piker!

GREGORY

I don't know where it came from, but I sure as hell didn't send it, and I sure as hell ain't gonna sit here and take this from you!

Gregory attempts to storm off, but Dorothy blocks his path.

DOROTHY

You lied to me, Gregory! You lied to me, so I lied to you. It was only fair!

GREGORY

I didn't lie to nobody!

JUSTINE

Who sent the crate, then?

GREGORY

How should I know! I don't know who sent the crate, I don't know what's in it, and I want nothin' more to do with the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GREGORY (cont'd)

damn thing! Can't I enjoy my life without havin' to know what's in a damn crate and what isn't? But a dame clothes, jewels--somethin' to make her look pretty, but there's always gotta be more. Can't flowers be enough?

DOROTHY

You won't even apologize! You won't even *attempt* to hate me? What do I have to do to make you care at all?

JUSTINE

This is all just mixed up, isn't it, poor Dorothy?

EDGAR

What does it matter what he thinks? We have each other, Dorothy!

JUSTINE

You're wastin' your breath.

Dorothy grabs ahold of Gregory.

DOROTHY

Gregory, *please!* What do I have to do? I'm sorry! I believe you, I know you didn't send the crate!

EDGAR

He sent her roses!

JUSTINE

Not the crate, though.

GREGORY

Enough about the damn crate!

Gregory sits on the couch, drunk and fed up.

EDGAR

What's in it, then?

JUSTINE

How should I know? I haven't opened it.

Dorothy sits next to Gregory, trying to convince herself.

DOROTHY

We both did terrible things to each other, Gregory. Can't we just forget about everything and start from before? No roses or crates or anything!

(CONTINUED)

EDGAR

Dorothy, listen to yourself! You want me to prove he sent her the crate? I'll open it myself!

Edgar rushes to the crate, trying to rigorously pry it open. Justine steps down from the top.

DOROTHY

Stop! I believe Gregory, you're not going to prove anything! You're wasting your time on nothing!

(pause)

Will you *stop*?!

Dorothy grabs Edgar, trying to stop him from opening the crate.

JUSTINE

A *real* man would tear it open without even tryin', Eddy.

From the door, Eliza slowly comes into the room. She watches the proceedings until Justine notices her.

JUSTINE

Lizzy! Just in time for the show!

EDGAR

Eliza--!

Edgar and Dorothy scramble to compose themselves.

DOROTHY

We--I haven't done anything!

ELIZA

Fixed on that crate, aren't we?

EDGAR

This--we--it's, well, it's a simple explanation--

ELIZA

I already know the story, Eddy. It's one I've heard many times before, and I'm sure I'll hear many times after. Same as with Greg and Justine, and all the others.

Dorothy falls to her knees, burying her head in her hands.

(CONTINUED)

DOROTHY

I'm sorry, Eliza! I'm so sorry!

ELIZA

Here we are, alone in a room with a damn wooden box. No music, no drinks, just four fools trying to pry open a crate. And for what? What's inside that you think will make a difference? The party is quieting down, now. All the guests are going home, quiet and unashamed of their silent affairs. But none of you knew that. No, you were far too concerned with what was in that damn crate to enjoy what was happening right below you.

EDGAR

Eliza...

ELIZA

The party is over, Eddy. I'm tired. I want to sleep.

GREGORY

All I ever wanted was a drink...

Dorothy remembers her husband, and rushes to him.

DOROTHY

Gregory, dear... It's getting late. Let's go home, okay?

Dorothy takes Gregory's arm, cautiously. They rise and go to the door.

GREGORY

I suppose I could use some rest...

Dorothy and Gregory exit.

Edgar walks towards Eliza, who rebuffs him.

EDGAR

Dorothy, she... I-I never really...

ELIZA

What do you take me for, an idiot? It doesn't take walking in on you during the act to figure it out.

JUSTINE

Us women always know, don't we, Lizzy?

Eliza glares at Justine.

EDGAR

Then you've known about--

ELIZA

Things I've worked past.

(beat)

I'm worn out, Eddy.

Edgar stands next to his wife,  
unsure how to act.

JUSTINE

Yeah, I'm sure both of ya are.

EDGAR

I'm sorry, Eliza, for everything.

JUSTINE

Go on, scram! Party's over! Enough with the apologies and affairs and crates!

Eliza exits, and Edgar follows,  
leaving Justine alone, a fire  
roaring behind her.

Justine stands by the crate for a  
moment. She grips the top and  
attempts to pry it open for a brief  
moment. Unsuccessful, she throws  
the roses into the fire, closes the  
curtain, and goes to the door.

JUSTINE

Oh, but it was an enjoyable night, nonetheless.

Justine exits, closing the door  
behind her.

The only light remaining comes from  
the fire. A rose lying in front of  
the fireplace ignites. The flame  
slowly travels to the  
crate. Blackout.

**THE END**