

# Cloud Nine

by Caryl Churchill (from: Churchill Plays: 1)

## Act 1, Scene 2

An open space some distance from the house. **Mrs Saunders** alone, breathless. She is carrying a riding crop. **Clive** arrives.

**Clive** Why? Why?

**Mrs Saunders** Don't fuss, Clive, it makes you sweat.

**Clive** Why ride off now? Sweat, you would sweat if you were in love with somebody as disgustingly capricious as you are. You will be shot with poisoned arrows. You will miss the picnic. Somebody will notice I came after you.

**Mrs Saunders** I didn't want you to come after me. I wanted to be alone.

**Clive** You will be raped by cannibals.

**Mrs Saunders** I just wanted to get out of your house.

**Clive** My God, what women put us through. Cruel, cruel. I think you are the sort of woman who would enjoy whipping somebody. I've never met one before.

**Mrs Saunders** Can I tell you something, Clive?

**Clive** Let me tell you something first. Since you came to the house I have had an erection twenty-four hours a day except for ten minutes after the time we had intercourse.

263

**Mrs Saunders** I don't think that's physically possible.

**Clive** You are causing me appalling physical suffering. Is this the way to treat a benefactor?

**Mrs Saunders** Clive, when I came to your house the other night I came because I was afraid. The cook was going to let his whole tribe in through the window.

**Clive** I know that, my poor sweet. Amazing –

**Mrs Saunders** I came to you although you are not my nearest neighbour –

**Clive** Rather than to the old major of seventy-two.

**Mrs Saunders** Because the last time he came to visit me I had to defend myself with a shotgun and I thought you would take no for an answer.

**Clive** But you've already answered yes.

**Mrs Saunders** I answered yes once. Sometimes I want to say no.

**Clive** Women, my God. Look the picnic will start, I have to go to the picnic. Please Caroline –

**Mrs Saunders** I think I will have to go back to my own house.

**Clive** Caroline, if you were shot with poisoned arrows do you know what I'd do? I'd fuck your dead body and poison myself. Caroline, you smell amazing. You terrify me. You are dark like this continent. Mysterious. Treacherous. When you rode to me through the night. When you fainted in my arms. When I came to you in your bed, when I lifted the mosquito netting, when I said let me in, let me in. Oh don't shut me out, Caroline, let me in.

He has been caressing her feet and legs. He disappears completely under her skirt.

**Mrs Saunders** Please stop. I can't concentrate. I want to go home. I wish I didn't enjoy the sensation because I don't like you, Clive. I do like living in your house where there's plenty of guns. But I don't like you at all. But I do like the sensation. Well I'll have it then. I'll have it, I'll have it –

Voices are heard singing The First Noël.

---

Don't stop. Don't stop.

264

**Clive** comes out from under her skirt.

**Clive** The Christmas picnic. I came.

**Mrs Saunders** I didn't.

**Clive** I'm all sticky.

**Mrs Saunders** What about me? Wait.

**Clive** All right, are you? Come on. We mustn't be found.

**Mrs Saunders** Don't go now.

**Clive** Caroline, you are so voracious. Do let go. Tidy yourself up. There's a hair in my mouth.

**Clive** and **Mrs Saunders** go off. **Betty** and **Maud** come, with **Joshua** carrying hamper.

**Maud** I never would have thought a guinea fowl could taste so like a turkey.

**Betty** I had to explain to the cook three times.

**Maud** You did very well dear.

**Joshua** sits apart with gun. **Edward** and **Harry** with **Victoria** on his shoulder, singing The First Noël. **Maud** and **Betty** are unpacking the hamper. **Clive** arrives separately.

**Maud** This tablecloth was one of my mama's.

**Betty** Uncle Harry playing horsy.

**Edward** Crackers crackers.

**Betty** Not yet, Edward.

**Clive** And now the moment we have all been waiting for.

**Clive** opens champagne. General acclaim.

**Clive** Oh dear, stained my trousers, never mind.

**Edward** Can I have some?

**Maud** Oh no Edward, not for you.

**Clive** Give him half a glass.

**Maud** If your father says so.

**Clive** All rise please. To Her Majesty Queen Victoria, God bless her, and her husband and all her dear children.

**All** The Queen.

**Edward** Crackers crackers.

General cracker pulling, hats. **Clive** and **Harry** discuss champagne.

**Harry** Excellent, Clive, wherever did you get it?

**Clive** I know a chap in French Equatorial Africa.

265

**Edward** I won, I won mama.

**Ellen** arrives.

**Betty** Give a hat to Joshua, he'd like it.

**Edward** takes hat to **Joshua**. **Betty** takes a ball from the hamper and plays catch with **Ellen**. Murmurs of surprise and congratulations from the men whenever they catch the ball.

**Edward** Mama, don't play. You know you can't catch a ball.

**Betty** He's perfectly right. I can't throw either.

**Betty** sits down. **Ellen** has the ball.

**Edward** Ellen, don't you play either. You're no good. You spoil it.

**Edward** takes **Victoria** from **Harry** and gives her to **Ellen**. He takes the ball and throws it to **Harry**. **Harry**, **Clive** and **Edward** play ball.

**Betty** Ellen come and sit with me. We'll be spectators and clap.

**Edward** misses the ball.

**Clive** Butterfingers.

**Edward** I'm not.

**Harry** Throw straight now.

**Edward** I did, I did.

**Clive** Keep your eye on the ball.

**Edward** You can't throw.

**Clive** Don't be a baby.

**Edward** I'm not, throw a hard one, throw a hard one –

**Clive** Butterfingers. What will Uncle Harry think of you?

**Edward** It's your fault. You can't throw. I hate you.

He throws the ball wildly in the direction of **Joshua**.

**Clive** Now you've lost the ball. He's lost the ball.

**Edward** It's Joshua's fault. Joshua's butterfingers.

**Clive** I don't think I want to play any more. Joshua, find the ball will you?

**Edward** Yes, please play. I'll find the ball. Please play.

**Clive** You're so silly and you can't catch. You'll be no good at cricket.

**Maud** Why don't we play hide and seek?

**Edward** Because it's a baby game.

---

**Betty** You've hurt Edward's feelings.

266

**Clive** A boy has no business having feelings.

**Harry** Hide and seek. I'll be it. Everybody must hide. This is the base, you have to get home to base.

**Edward** Hide and seek, hide and seek.

**Harry** Can we persuade the ladies to join us?

**Maud** I'm playing. I love games.

**Betty** I always get found straight away.

**Ellen** Come on, Betty, do. Vicky wants to play.

**Edward** You won't find me ever.

They all go except **Clive, Harry, Joshua**.

**Harry** It is safe, I suppose?

**Clive** They won't go far. This is very much my territory and it's broad daylight. Joshua will keep an open eye.

**Harry** Well I must give them a hundred. You don't know what this means to me, Clive. A chap can only go on so long alone. I can climb mountains and go down rivers, but what's it for? For Christmas and England and games and women singing. This is the empire, Clive. It's not me putting a flag in new lands. It's you. The empire is one big family. I'm one of its black sheep, Clive. And I know you think my life is rather dashing. But I want you to know I admire you. This is the empire, Clive, and I serve it. With all my heart.

**Clive** I think that's about a hundred.

**Harry** Ready or not, here I come!

He goes.

**Clive** Harry Bagley is a fine man, Joshua. You should be proud to know him. He will be in history books.

**Joshua** Sir, while we are alone.

**Clive** Joshua of course, what is it? You always have my ear. Any time.

**Joshua** Sir, I have some information. The stable boys are not to be trusted. They whisper. They go out at night. They visit their people. Their people are not my people. I do not visit my people.

**Clive** Thank you, Joshua. They certainly look after Beauty. I'll be sorry to have to replace them.

**Joshua** They carry knives.

**Clive** Thank you, Joshua.

**Joshua** And, sir.

**Clive** I appreciate this, Joshua, very much.

**Joshua** Your wife.

**Clive** Ah, yes?

**Joshua** She also thinks Harry Bagley is a fine man.

**Clive** Thank you, Joshua.

**Joshua** Are you going to hide?

**Clive** Yes, yes I am. Thank you. Keep your eyes open Joshua.

**Joshua** I do, sir.

**Clive** goes. **Joshua** goes. **Harry** and **Betty** race back to base.

**Betty** I can't run, I can't run at all.

**Harry** There, I've caught you.

**Betty** Harry, what are we going to do?

**Harry** It's impossible, Betty.

**Betty** Shall we run away together?

**Maud** comes.

**Maud** I give up. Don't catch me. I have been stung.

**Harry** Nothing serious I hope.

**Maud** I have ointment in my bag. I always carry ointment. I shall just sit down and rest. I am too old for all this fun. Hadn't you better be seeking, Harry?

**Harry** goes. **Maud** and **Betty** are alone for some time. They don't speak. **Harry** and **Edward** race back.

**Edward** I won, I won, you didn't catch me.

**Harry** Yes I did.

**Edward** Mama, who was first?

**Betty** I wasn't watching. I think it was Harry.

**Edward** It wasn't Harry. You're no good at judging. I won, didn't I grandma?

**Maud** I expect so, since it's Christmas.

**Edward** I won, Uncle Harry. I'm better than you.

**Betty** Why don't you help Uncle Harry look for the others?

**Edward** Shall I?

**Harry** Yes, of course.

**Betty** Run along then. He's just coming.

**Edward** goes.

Harry, I shall scream.

---

**Harry** Ready or not, here I come.

268

**Harry** runs off.

**Betty** Why don't you go back to the house, mother, and rest your insect-bite?

**Maud** Betty, my duty is here. I don't like what I see. Clive wouldn't like it, Betty. I am your mother.

**Betty** Clive gives you a home because you are my mother.

**Harry** comes back.

**Harry** I can't find anyone else. I'm getting quite hot.

**Betty** Sit down a minute.

**Harry** I can't do that. I'm he. How's your sting?

**Maud** It seems to be swelling up.

**Betty** Why don't you go home and rest? Joshua will go with you. Joshua!

**Harry** I could take you back.

**Maud** That would be charming

**Betty** You can't go. You're he.

**Joshua** comes.

**Betty** Joshua, my mother wants to go back to the house. Will you go with her please.

**Joshua** Sir told me I have to keep an eye.

**Betty** I am telling you to go back to the house. Then you can come back here and keep an eye.

**Maud** Thank you Betty. I know we have our little differences, I always want what is best for you.

**Joshua** and **Maud** go.

**Harry** Don't give way. Keep calm.

**Betty** I shall kill myself.

**Harry** Betty, you are a star in my sky. Without you I would have no sense of direction. I need you, and I need you where you are, I need you to be Clive's wife. I need to go up rivers and know you are sitting here thinking of me.

**Betty** I want more than that. Is that wicked of me?

**Harry** Not wicked, Betty. Silly.

**Edward** calls in the distance.

**Edward** Uncle Harry, where are you?

**Betty** Can't we ever be alone?

**Harry** You are a mother. And a daughter. And a wife.

---

**Betty** I think I shall go and hide again.

269

**Betty** goes. **Harry** goes. **Clive** chases **Mrs Saunders** across the stage. **Edward** and **Harry** call in the distance.

**Edward** Uncle Harry!

**Harry** Edward!

**Edward** comes.

**Edward** Uncle Harry!

**Harry** comes.

There you are. I haven't found anyone have you?

**Harry** I wonder where they all are.

**Edward** Perhaps they're lost forever. Perhaps they're dead. There's trouble going on isn't there, and nobody says because of not frightening the women and children.

**Harry** Yes, that's right.

**Edward** Do you think we'll be killed in our beds?

**Harry** Not very likely.

**Edward** I can't sleep at night. Can you?

**Harry** I'm not used to sleeping in a house.

**Edward** If I'm awake at night can I come and see you? I won't wake you up. I'll only come in if you're awake.

**Harry** You should try to sleep.

**Edward** I don't mind being awake because I make up adventures. Once we were on a raft going down to the rapids. We've lost the paddles because we used them to fight off the crocodiles. A crocodile comes at me and I stab it again and again and the blood is everywhere and it tips up the raft and it has you by the leg and it's biting your leg right off and I take my knife and stab it in the throat and rip open its stomach and it lets go of you but it bites my hand but it's dead. And I drag you onto the river bank and I'm almost fainting with pain and we lie there in each other's arms.

**Harry** Have I lost my leg?

**Edward** I forgot about the leg by then.

**Harry** Hadn't we better look for the others?

**Edward** Wait. I've got something for you. It was in mama's box but she never wears it.

**Edward** gives **Harry** a necklace.

You don't have to wear it either but you might like it to look at.

---

**Harry** It's beautiful. But you'll have to put it back.

270

**Edward** I wanted to give it to you.

**Harry** You did. It can go back in the box. You still gave it to me. Come on now, we have to find the others.

**Edward** Harry, I love you.

**Harry** Yes I know. I love you too.

**Edward** You know what we did when you were here before. I want to do it again. I think about it all the time. I try to do it to myself but it's not as good. Don't you want to any more?

**Harry** I do, but it's a sin and a crime and it's also wrong.

**Edward** But we'll do it anyway won't we?

**Harry** Yes of course.

**Edward** I wish the others would all be killed. Take it out now and let me see it.

**Harry** No.

**Edward** Is it big now?

**Harry** Yes.

**Edward** Let me touch it.

**Harry** No.

**Edward** Just hold me.

**Harry** When you can't sleep.

**Edward** We'd better find the others then. Come on.

**Harry** Ready or not, here we come.

They go out with whoops and shouts. **Betty** and **Ellen** come.

**Betty** Ellen, I don't want to play any more.

**Ellen** Nor do I, Betty.

**Betty** Come and sit here with me. Oh Ellen, what will become of me?

**Ellen** Betty, are you crying? Are you laughing?



**Betty** Tell me what you think of Harry Bagley.

**Ellen** He's a very fine man.

**Betty** No, Ellen, what you really think.

**Ellen** I think you think he's very handsome.

**Betty** And don't you think he is? Oh Ellen, you're so good and I'm so wicked.

**Ellen** I'm not so good as you think.

**Edward** comes.

---

**Edward** I've found you.

271

**Ellen** We're not hiding Edward.

**Edward** But I found you.

**Ellen** We're not playing, Edward, now run along.

**Edward** Come on, Ellen, do play. Come on, mama.

**Ellen** Edward, don't pull your mama like that.

**Betty** Edward, you must do what your governess says. Go and play with Uncle Harry.

**Edward** Uncle Harry!

**Edward** goes.

**Betty** Ellen, can you keep a secret?

**Ellen** Oh yes, yes please.

**Betty** I love Harry Bagley. I want to go away with him. There, I've said it, it's true.

**Ellen** How do you know you love him?

**Betty** I kissed him.

**Ellen** Betty.

**Betty** He held my hand like this. Oh I want him to do it again. I want him to stroke my hair.

**Ellen** Your lovely hair. Like this, Betty?

**Betty** I want him to put his arm around my waist.

**Ellen** Like this, Betty?

**Betty** Yes, oh I want him to kiss me again.

**Ellen** Like this Betty?

**Ellen** kisses **Betty**.

**Betty** Ellen, whatever are you doing? It's not a joke.

**Ellen** I'm sorry, Betty. You're so pretty. Harry Bagley doesn't deserve you. You wouldn't really go away with him?

**Betty** Oh Ellen, you don't know what I suffer. You don't know what love is. Everyone will hate me, but it's worth it for Harry's love.

**Ellen** I don't hate you, Betty, I love you.

**Betty** Harry says we shouldn't go away. But he says he worships me.

**Ellen** I worship you Betty.

**Betty** Oh Ellen, you are my only friend.

They embrace. The others have all gathered together. **Maud** has rejoined the party, and **Joshua**.

---

**Clive** Come along everyone, you mustn't miss Harry's conjuring trick.

272

**Betty** and **Ellen** go to join the others.

**Maud** I didn't want to spoil the fun by not being here.

**Harry** What is it that flies all over the world and is up my sleeve?

**Harry** produces a union jack from up his sleeve. General acclaim.

**Clive** I think we should have some singing now. Ladies, I rely on you to lead the way.

**Ellen** We have a surprise for you. I have taught Joshua a Christmas carol. He has been singing it at the piano but I'm sure he can sing it unaccompanied, can't you, Joshua?

**Joshua** In the deep midwinter  
Frosty wind made moan,  
Earth stood hard as iron,  
Water like a stone.  
Snow had fallen snow on snow  
Snow on snow,  
In the deep midwinter  
Long long ago.

What can I give him  
Poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd  
I would bring a lamb.  
If I were a wise man  
I would do my part  
What I can I give him,  
Give my heart.

Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1985 by Caryl Churchill. Lyrics: Come Gather Sons of England copyright © 1902 by Anthony Wilkin; A Boy's Best Friend copyright © 1897 by Joseph D. Skelly; Cloud Nine copyright © 1979 by Caryl Churchill and Andy Roberts.

Enquire about performing rights at:

Casarotto Ramsay & Associates, Waverley House, 7-12 Noel Street, London W1F 8GQ [<http://www.casarotto.co.uk>]

All rights whatsoever in this play are strictly reserved and application for performance etc. should be made before rehearsals to the performance rights holder. No performance may be given unless a licence has been obtained. No rights in incidental music or songs contained in the Work are hereby granted and performance rights for any performance/presentation whatsoever must be obtained from the respective copyright owners.

All materials on this Website are the copyright of the publishers or are reproduced with permission from other copyright owners. All rights are reserved. The materials on this website may be accessed solely for personal use. No materials may otherwise be copied, modified, published, broadcast or otherwise distributed without prior written permission of the publisher.