

Cloud Nine

by Caryl Churchill (from: Churchill Plays: 1)

Act 1, Scene 3

Inside the house. **Betty, Mrs Saunders, Maud** with **Victoria**. The blinds are down so the light isn't bright though it is day outside. **Clive** looks in.

Clive Everything all right? Nothing to be frightened of.

Clive goes. Silence.

Maud Clap hands, daddy comes, with his pockets full of plums. All for Vicky.

Silence.

Mrs Saunders Who actually does the flogging?

Maud I don't think we want to imagine.

Mrs Saunders I imagine Joshua.

Betty Yes I think it would be Joshua. Or would Clive do it himself?

Mrs Saunders Well we can ask them afterwards.

Maud I don't like the way you speak of it, Mrs Saunders.

Mrs Saunders How should I speak of it?

Maud The men will do it in the proper way, whatever it is. We have our own part to play.

Mrs Saunders Harry Bagley says they should just be sent away. I don't think he likes to see them beaten.

Betty Harry is so tender hearted. Perhaps he is right.

Maud Harry Bagley is not altogether – He has lived in this country a long time without any responsibilities. It is part of his charm but it hasn't improved his judgment. If the boys were just sent away they would go back to the village and make more trouble.

Mrs Saunders And what will they say about us in the village if they've been flogged?

Betty Perhaps Clive should keep them here.

Mrs Saunders That is never wise.

Betty Whatever shall we do?

Maud I don't think it is up to us to wonder. The men don't tell us what is going on among the tribes, so how can we possibly make a judgment?

Mrs Saunders I know a little of what is going on.

Betty Tell me what you know. Clive tells me nothing.

Maud You would not want to be told about it, Betty. It is enough for you that Clive knows what is happening. Clive will know what to do. Your father always knew what to do.

Betty Are you saying you would do something different, Caroline?

Mrs Saunders I would do what I did at my own home. I left. I can't see any way out except to leave. I will leave here. I will keep leaving everywhere I suppose.

Maud Luckily this household has a head. I am squeamish myself. But luckily Clive is not.

Betty You are leaving here then, Caroline?

Mrs Saunders Not immediately. I'm sorry.

Silence.

Mrs Saunders I wonder if it's over.

Edward comes in.

Betty Shouldn't you be with the men, Edward?

Edward I didn't want to see any more. They got what they deserved. Uncle Harry said I could come in.

Mrs Saunders I never allowed the servants to be beaten in my own house. I'm going to find out what's happening.

Mrs Saunders goes out.

Betty Will she go and look?

Maud Let Mrs Saunders be a warning to you, Betty. She is alone in the world. You are not, thank God. Since your father died, I know what it is to be unprotected. Vicky is such a pretty little girl. Clap hands, daddy comes, with his pockets full of plums. All for Vicky.

Edward, meanwhile, has found the doll and is playing clap hands with her.

Betty Edward, what have you got there?

Edward I'm minding her.

Betty Edward, I've told you before, dolls are for girls.

Maud Where is Ellen? She should be looking after Edward. (She goes to the door.) Ellen! Betty, why do you let that girl mope about in her own room? That's not what she's come to Africa for.

Betty You must never let the boys at school know you like dolls. Never, never. No one will talk to you, you won't be on the cricket team, you won't grow up to be a man like your papa.

Edward I don't want to be like papa. I hate papa.

Maud Edward! Edward!

Betty You're a horrid wicked boy and papa will beat you. Of course you don't hate him, you love him. Now give Victoria her doll at once.

Edward She's not Victoria's doll, she's my doll. She doesn't love Victoria and Victoria doesn't love her. Victoria never even plays with her.

Maud Victoria will learn to play with her.

Edward She's mine and she loves me and she won't be happy if you take her away, she'll cry, she'll cry, she'll cry.

Betty takes the doll away, slaps him, bursts into tears. **Ellen** comes in.

Betty Ellen, look what you've done. Edward's got the doll again. Now, Ellen, will you please do your job.

Ellen Edward, you are a wicked boy. I am going to lock you in the nursery until supper time. Now go upstairs this minute.

She slaps **Edward**, who bursts into tears and goes out.

I do try to do what you want. I'm so sorry.

Ellen bursts into tears and goes out.

Maud There now, Vicky's got her baby back. Where did Vicky's naughty baby go? Shall we smack her? Just a little smack (**Maud** smacks the doll hard.) There, now she's a good baby. Clap hands, daddy comes, with his pockets full of plums. All for Vicky's baby. When I was a child we honoured our parents. My mama was an angel.

Joshua comes in. He stands without speaking.

Betty Joshua?

Joshua Madam?

Betty Did you want something?

Joshua Sent to see the ladies are all right, madam.

Mrs Saunders comes in.

Mrs Saunders We're very well thank you, Joshua, and how are you?

Joshua Very well thank you, Mrs Saunders.

Mrs Saunders And the stable boys?

Joshua They have had justice, madam.

Mrs Saunders So I saw. And does your arm ache?

Maud This is not a proper conversation, Mrs Saunders.

Mrs Saunders You don't mind beating your own people?

Joshua Not my people, madam.

Mrs Saunders A different tribe?

Joshua Bad people.

Harry and **Clive** come in.

Clive Well this is all very gloomy and solemn. Can we have the shutters open? The heat of the day has gone, we could have some light, I think. And cool drinks on the verandah, Joshua. Have some lemonade yourself. It is most refreshing.

Sunlight floods in as the shutters are opened. **Edward** comes.

Edward Papa, papa, Ellen tried to lock me in the nursery. Mama is going to tell you of me. I'd rather tell you myself. I was playing with Vicky's doll again and I know it's very bad of me. And I said I didn't want to be like you and I said I hated you. And it's not true and I'm sorry, I'm sorry and please beat me and forgive me.

Clive Well there's a brave boy to own up. You should always respect and love me, Edward, not for myself, I may not deserve it, but as I respected and loved my own father, because he was my father. Through our father we love our Queen and our God, Edward. Do you understand? It is something men understand.

Edward Yes papa.

Clive Then I forgive you and shake you by the hand. You spend too much time with the women. You may spend more time with me and Uncle Harry, little man.

Edward I don't like women. I don't like dolls. I love you, papa, and I love you, Uncle Harry.

Clive There's a fine fellow. Let us go out onto the verandah.

They all start to go. **Edward** takes **Harry's** hand and goes with him. **Clive** draws **Betty** back. They embrace.

Betty Poor Clive.

Clive It was my duty to have them flogged. For you and Edward and Victoria, to keep you safe.

Betty It is terrible to feel betrayed.

277

Clive You can tame a wild animal only so far. They revert to their true nature and savage your hand. Sometimes I feel the natives are the enemy. I know that is wrong. I know I have a responsibility towards them, to care for them and bring them all to be like Joshua. But there is something dangerous. Implacable. This whole continent is my enemy. I am pitching my whole mind and will and reason and spirit against it to tame it, and I sometimes feel it will break over me and swallow me up.

Betty Clive, Clive, I am here. I have faith in you.

Clive Yes, I can show you my moments of weakness, Betty, because you are my wife and because I trust you. I trust you, Betty, and it would break my heart if you did not deserve that trust. Harry Bagley is my friend. It would break my heart if he did not deserve my trust.

Betty I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Forgive me. It is not Harry's fault, it is all mine. Harry is noble. He has rejected me. It is my wickedness, I get bored, I get restless, I imagine things. There is something so wicked in me, Clive.

Clive I have never thought of you having the weakness of your sex, only the good qualities.

Betty I am bad, bad, bad –

Clive You are thoughtless, Betty, that's all. Women can be treacherous and evil. They are darker and more dangerous than men. The family protects us from that, you protect me from that. You are not that sort of woman. You are not unfaithful to me, Betty. I can't believe you are. It would hurt me so much to cast you off. That would be my duty.

Betty No, no, no.

Clive Joshua has seen you kissing.

Betty Forgive me.

Clive But I don't want to know about it. I don't want to know I wonder of course, I wonder constantly. If Harry Bagley was not my friend I would shoot him. If I shot you every British man and woman would applaud me. But no. It was a moment of passion such as women are too weak to resist. But you must resist it, Betty, or it will destroy us. We must fight against it. We must resist this dark female lust, Betty, or it will swallow us up.

Betty I do, I do resist. Help me. Forgive me.

Clive Yes I do forgive you. But I can't feel the same about you as I did. You are still my wife and we still have duties to the household.

They go out arm in arm. As soon as they have gone **Edward** sneaks back to get the doll, which has been dropped on the floor. He picks it up and comforts it. **Joshua** comes through with a tray of drinks.

Joshua Baby. Sissy. Girly.

Joshua goes. **Betty** calls from off.

Betty Edward?

Betty comes in.

Betty There you are, my darling. Come, papa wants us all to be together. Uncle Harry is going to tell how he caught a crocodile. Mama's sorry she smacked you.

They embrace. **Joshua** comes in again, passing through.

Betty Joshua, fetch me some blue thread from my sewing box. It is on the piano.

Joshua You've got legs under that skirt.

Betty Joshua.

Joshua And more than legs.

Betty Edward, are you going to stand there and let a servant insult your mother?

Edward Joshua, get my mother's thread.

Joshua Oh little Eddy, playing at master. It's only a joke.

Edward Don't speak to my mother like that again.

Joshua Ladies have no sense of humour. You like a joke with Joshua.

Edward You fetch her sewing at once, do you hear me? You move when I speak to you, boy.

Joshua Yes sir, master Edward sir.

Joshua goes.

Betty Edward, you were wonderful.

She goes to embrace him but he moves away.

Edward Don't touch me.

SONG - A Boy's Best Friend - ALL

While plodding on our way, the toilsome road of life,

Not many will stand in trouble and in strife,
With counsel and affection ever sweet.
But there is one whose smile will ever on us beam,
Whose love is dearer far than any other;
And wherever we may turn
This lesson we will learn
A boy's best friend is his mother.

Then cherish her with care
And smooth her silv'ry hair,
When gone you will never get another.
And wherever we may turn
This lesson we shall learn,
A boy's best friend is his mother.

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