

Cloud Nine

by Caryl Churchill (from: Churchill Plays: 1)

Act 1, Scene 4

The verandah as in Scene One. Early morning. Nobody there. **Joshua** comes out of the house slowly and stands for some time doing nothing. **Edward** comes out.

Edward Tell me another bad story, Joshua. Nobody else is even awake yet.

Joshua First there was nothing and then there was the great goddess. She was very large and she had golden eyes and she made the stars and the sun and the earth. But soon she was miserable and lonely and she cried like a great waterfall and her tears made all the rivers in the world. So the great spirit sent a terrible monster, a tree with hundreds of eyes and a long green tongue, and it came chasing after her and she jumped into a lake and the tree jumped in after her, and she jumped right up into the sky. And the tree couldn't follow, he was stuck in the mud. So he picked up a big handful of mud and he threw it at her, up among the stars, and it hit her on the head. And she fell down onto the earth into his arms and the ball of mud is the moon in the sky. And then they had children which is all of us.

Edward It's not true, though.

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Joshua Of course it's not true. It's a bad story. Adam and Eve is true. God made man white like him and gave him the bad woman who liked the snake and gave us all this trouble.

Clive and **Harry** come out.

Clive Run along now, Edward. No, you may stay. You mustn't repeat anything you hear to your mother or your grandmother or Ellen.

Edward Or Mrs Saunders?

Clive Mrs Saunders is an unusual woman and does not require protection in the same way. Harry, there was trouble last night where we expected it. But it's all over now. Everything is under control but nobody should leave the house today I think.

Harry Casualties?

Clive No, none of the soldiers hurt thank God. We did a certain amount of damage, set a village on fire and so forth.

Harry Was that necessary?

Clive Obviously, it was necessary, Harry, or it wouldn't have happened. The army will come and visit, no doubt. You'll like that, eh, Joshua, to see the British army? And a treat for you, Edward, to see the soldiers. Would you like to be a soldier?

Edward I'd rather be an explorer.

Clive Ah, Harry, like you, you see. I didn't know an explorer at his age. Breakfast, I think, Joshua.

Clive and **Joshua** go in. **Harry** is following.

Edward Uncle.

Harry stops.

Edward Harry, why won't you talk to me?

Harry Of course I'll talk to you.

Edward If you won't be nice to me I'll tell father.

Harry Edward, no, not a word, never, not to your mother, nobody, please. Edward, do you understand? Please.

Edward I won't tell. I promise I'll never tell. I've cut my finger and sworn.

Harry There's no need to get so excited Edward. We can't be together all the time. I will have to leave soon anyway, and go back to the river.

Edward You can't, you can't go. Take me with you.

Ellen Edward!

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Harry I have my duty to the Empire.

Harry goes in. **Ellen** comes out.

Ellen Edward, breakfast time. Edward.

Edward I'm not hungry.

Ellen Betty, please come and speak to Edward.

Betty comes.

Betty Why what's the matter?

Ellen He won't come in for breakfast.

Betty Edward, I shall call your father.

Edward You can't make me eat.

He goes in. **Betty** is about to follow.

Ellen Betty.

Betty stops.

Ellen Betty, when Edward goes to school will I have to leave?

Betty Never mind, Ellen dear, you'll get another place. I'll give you an excellent reference.

Ellen I don't want another place, Betty. I want to stay with you forever.

Betty If you go back to England you might get married, Ellen. You're quite pretty, you shouldn't despair of getting a husband.

Ellen I don't want a husband. I want you.

Betty Children of your own, Ellen, think.

Ellen I don't want children, I don't like children. I just want to be alone with you, Betty, and sing for you and kiss you because I love you, Betty.

Betty I love you too, Ellen. But women have their duty as soldiers have. You must be a mother if you can.

Ellen Betty, Betty, I love you so much. I want to stay with you forever, my love for you is eternal, stronger than death. I'd rather die than leave you, Betty.

Betty No you wouldn't, Ellen, don't be silly. Come, don't cry. You don't feel what you think you do. It's the loneliness here and the climate is very confusing. Come and have breakfast, Ellen dear, and I'll forget all about it.

Ellen goes, **Clive** comes.

Betty Clive, please forgive me.

Clive Will you leave me alone?

Betty goes back into the house. **Harry** comes.

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Clive Women, Harry. I envy you going into the jungle, a man's life.

Harry I envy you.

Clive Harry, I know you do. I have spoken to Betty.

Harry I assure you, Clive –

Clive Please say nothing about it.

Harry My friendship for you –

Clive Absolutely. I know the friendship between us, Harry, is not something that could be spoiled by the weaker sex. Friendship between men is a fine thing. It is the noblest form of relationship.

Harry I agree with you.

Clive There is the necessity of reproduction. The family is all important. And there is the pleasure. But what we put ourselves through to get that pleasure, Harry. When I heard about our fine fellows last night fighting those savages to protect us I thought yes, that is what I aspire to. I tell you Harry, in confidence, I suddenly got out of Mrs Saunders' bed and came out here on the verandah and looked at the stars.

Harry I couldn't sleep last night either.

Clive There is something dark about women, that threatens what is best in us. Between men that light burns brightly.

Harry I didn't know you felt like that.

Clive Women are irrational, demanding, inconsistent, treacherous, lustful, and they smell different from us.

Harry Clive –

Clive Think of the comradeship of men, Harry, sharing adventures, sharing danger, risking their lives together.

Harry takes hold of **Clive**.

Clive What are you doing?

Harry Well, you said –

Clive I said what?

Harry Between men.

Clive is speechless.

I'm sorry, I misunderstood, I would never have dreamt, I thought –

Clive My God, Harry, how disgusting.

Harry You will not betray my confidence.

Clive I feel contaminated.

Harry I struggle against it. You cannot imagine the shame. I have tried everything to save myself.

Clive The most revolting perversion. Rome fell, Harry, and this sin can destroy an empire.

Harry It is not a sin, it is a disease.

Clive A disease more dangerous than diphtheria. Effeminacy is contagious. How I have been deceived. Your face does not look degenerate. Oh Harry, how did you sink to this?

Harry Clive, help me, what am I to do?

Clive You have been away from England too long.

Harry Where can I go except into the jungle to hide?

Clive You don't do it with the natives, Harry? My God, what a betrayal of the Queen.

Harry Clive, I am like a man born crippled. Please help me.

Clive You must repent.

Harry I have thought of killing myself.

Clive That is a sin too.

Harry There is no way out. Clive, I beg of you, do not betray my confidence.

Clive I cannot keep a secret like this. Rivers will be named after you, it's unthinkable. You must save yourself from depravity. You must get married. You are not unattractive to women. What a relief that you and Betty were not after all – good God, how disgusting. Now Mrs Saunders. She's a woman of spirit, she could go with you on your expeditions.

Harry I suppose getting married wouldn't be any worse than killing myself.

Clive Mrs Saunders! Mrs Saunders! Ask her now, Harry. Think of England.

Mrs Saunders comes. **Clive** withdraws. **Harry** goes up to **Mrs Saunders**.

Harry Mrs Saunders, will you marry me?

Mrs Saunders Why?

Harry We are both alone.

Mrs Saunders I choose to be alone, Mr Bagley. If I can look after myself, I'm sure you can. Clive, I have something important to tell you. I've just found Joshua putting earth on his head. He tells me his parents were killed last night by the British soldiers. I think you owe him an apology on behalf of the Queen.

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Clive Joshua! Joshua!

Mrs Saunders Mr Bagley, I could never be a wife again. There is only one thing about marriage that I like.

Clive comes.

Clive Joshua, I am horrified to hear what has happened. Good God!

Mrs Saunders His father was shot. His mother died in the blaze.

Mrs Saunders goes.

Clive Joshua, do you want a day off? Do you want to go to your people?

Joshua Not my people, sir.

Clive But you want to go to your parents' funeral?

Joshua No sir.

Clive Yes, Joshua, yes, your father and mother. I'm sure they were loyal to the crown. I'm sure it was all a terrible mistake.

Joshua My mother and father were bad people.

Clive Joshua, no.

Joshua You are my father and mother.

Clive Well really. I don't know what to say. That's very decent of you. Are you sure there's nothing I can do? You can have the day off you know.

Betty comes out followed by **Edward**.

Betty What's the matter? What's happening?

Clive Something terrible has happened. No, I mean some relatives of Joshua's met with an accident.

Joshua May I go sir?

Clive Yes, yes of course. Good God, what a terrible thing. Bring us a drink will you Joshua?

Joshua goes.

Edward What? What?

Betty Edward, go and do your lessons.

Edward What is it, Uncle Harry?

Harry Go and do your lessons.

Ellen Edward, come in here at once.

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Edward What's happened, Uncle Harry?

Harry has moved aside, **Edward** follows him. **Ellen** comes out.

Harry Go away. Go inside. Ellen!

Ellen Go inside, Edward. I shall tell your mother.

Betty Go inside, Edward at once. I shall tell your father.

Clive Go inside, Edward. And Betty you go inside too.

Betty, Edward and Ellen go. **Maud** comes out.

Clive Go inside. And Ellen, you come outside.

Ellen comes out.

Mr Bagley has something to say to you.

Harry Ellen. I don't suppose you would marry me?

Ellen What if I said yes?

Clive Run along now, you two want to be alone.

Harry and Ellen go out. **Joshua** brings **Clive** a drink.

Joshua The governess and your wife, sir.

Clive What's that, Joshua?

Joshua She talks of love to your wife, sir. I have seen them. Bad women.

Clive Joshua, you go too far. Get out of my sight.

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