

Cloud Nine

by Caryl Churchill (from: Churchill Plays: 1)

Act 1, Scene 1

Low bright sun. Verandah. Flagpole with union jack. The Family – **Clive, Betty, Edward, Victoria, Maud, Ellen, Joshua.**

All (sing.)

Come gather, sons of England, come gather in your pride.
Now meet the world united, now face it side by side;
Ye who the earth's wide corners, from veldt to prairie, roam.
From bush and jungle muster all who call old England 'home'.
Then gather round for England,
Rally to the flag,
From North and South and East and West
Come one and all for England!

Clive This is my family. Though far from home
We serve the Queen wherever we may roam
I am a father to the natives here,
And father to my family so dear.

He presents **Betty**. She is played by a man.

My wife is all I dreamt a wife should be,
And everything she is she owes to me.

Betty

I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life
Is to be what he looks for in a wife.
I am a man's creation as you see,
And what men want is what I want to be.

Clive presents **Joshua**. He is played by a white.

Clive

My boy's a jewel. Really has the knack.
You'd hardly notice that the fellow's black.

Joshua

My skin is black but oh my soul is white.
I hate my tribe. My master is my light.
I only live for him. As you can see,
What white men want is what I want to be.

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Clive presents **Edward**. He is played by a woman.

Clive

My son is young. I'm doing all I can
To teach him to grow up to be a man.

Edward

What father wants I'd dearly like to be.
I find it rather hard as you can see.

Clive presents **Victoria**, who is a dummy, **Maud**, and **Ellen**.

Clive

No need for any speeches by the rest.
My daughter, mother-in-law, and governess.

All (sing.)

O'er countless numbers she, our Queen,
Victoria reigns supreme;
O'er Afric's sunny plains, and o'er
Canadian frozen stream;
The forge of war shall weld the chains of brotherhood secure;
So to all time in ev'ry clime our Empire shall endure.
Then gather round for England,
Rally to the flag,
From North and South and East and West
Come one and all for England!

All go except **Betty**. **Clive** comes.

Betty Clive?

Clive Betty. Joshua!

Joshua comes with a drink for **Clive**.

Betty I thought you would never come. The day's so long without you.

Clive Long ride in the bush.

Betty Is anything wrong? I heard drums.

Clive Nothing serious. Beauty is a damned good mare. I must get some new boots sent from home. These ones have never been right. I have a blister.

Betty My poor dear foot.

Clive It's nothing.

Betty Oh but it's sore.

Clive We are not in this country to enjoy ourselves. Must have ridden fifty miles. Spoke to three different headmen who would all gladly chop off each other's heads and wear them round their waists.

Betty Clive!

Clive Don't be squeamish, Betty, let me have my joke. And what has my little dove done today?

Betty I've read a little.

Clive Good. Is it good?

Betty It's poetry.

Clive You're so delicate and sensitive.

Betty And I played the piano. Shall I send for the children?

Clive Yes, in a minute. I've a piece of news for you.

Betty Good news?

Clive You'll certainly think it's good. A visitor.

Betty From home?

Clive No. Well of course originally from home.

Betty Man or woman?

Clive Man.

Betty I can't imagine.

Clive Something of an explorer. Bit of a poet. Odd chap but brave as a lion. And a great admirer of yours.

Betty What do you mean? Whoever can it be?

Clive With an H and a B. And does conjuring tricks for little Edward.

Betty That sounds like Mr Bagley.

Clive Harry Bagley.

Betty He certainly doesn't admire me, Clive, what a thing to say. How could I possibly guess from that. He's hardly explored anything at all, he's just been up a river, he's done nothing at all compared to what you do. You should have said a heavy drinker and a bit of a bore.

Clive But you like him well enough. You don't mind him coming?

Betty Anyone at all to break the monotony.

Clive But you have your mother. You have Ellen.

Betty Ellen is a governess. My mother is my mother.

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Clive I hoped when she came to visit she would be company for you.

Betty I don't think mother is on a visit. I think she lives with us.

Clive I think she does.

Betty Clive you are so good.

Clive But are you bored my love?

Betty It's just that I miss you when you're away. We're not in this country to enjoy ourselves. If I lack society that is my form of service.

Clive That's a brave girl. So today has been all right? No fainting? No hysteria?

Betty I have been very tranquil.

Clive Ah what a haven of peace to come home to. The coolth, calm, the beauty.

Betty There is one thing, Clive, if you don't mind.

Clive What can I do for you, my dear?

Betty It's about Joshua.

Clive I wouldn't leave you alone here with a quiet mind if it weren't for Joshua.

Betty Joshua doesn't like me.

Clive Joshua has been my boy for eight years. He has saved my life. I have saved his life. He is devoted to me and to mine. I have said this before.

Betty He is rude to me. He doesn't do what I say. Speak to him.

Clive Tell me what happened.

Betty He said something improper.

Clive Well, what?

Betty I don't like to repeat it.

Clive I must insist.

Betty I had left my book inside on the piano. I was in the hammock. I asked him to fetch it.

Clive And did he not fetch it?

Betty Yes, he did eventually.

Clive And what did he say?

Betty Clive –

Clive Betty.

Betty He said Fetch it yourself. You've got legs under that dress.

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Clive Joshua!

Joshua comes.

Joshua, madam says you spoke impolitely to her this afternoon.

Joshua Sir?

Clive When she asked you to pass her book from the piano.

Joshua She has the book, sir.

Betty I have the book now, but when I told you –

Clive Betty, please, let me handle this. You didn't pass it at once?

Joshua No sir, I made a joke first.

Clive What was that?

Joshua I said my legs were tired, sir. That was funny because the book was very near, it would not make my legs tired to get it.

Betty That's not true.

Joshua Did madam hear me wrong?

Clive She heard something else.

Joshua What was that, madam?

Betty Never mind.

Clive Now Joshua, it won't do you know. Madam doesn't like that kind of joke. You must do what madam says, just do what she says and don't answer back. You know your place, Joshua. I don't have to say any more.

Joshua No sir.

Betty I expect an apology.

Joshua I apologise, madam.

Clive There now. It won't happen again, my dear. I'm very shocked Joshua, very shocked.

Clive winks at **Joshua**, unseen by **Betty**. **Joshua** goes.

Clive I think another drink, and send for the children, and isn't that Harry riding down the hill? Wave, wave. Just in time before dark. Cuts it fine, the blighter. Always a hothead, Harry.

Betty Can he see us?

Clive Stand further forward. He'll see your white dress. There, waved back.

Betty Do you think so? I wonder what he saw. Sometimes sunset is so terrifying I can't bear to look.

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Clive It makes me proud. Elsewhere in the empire the sun is rising.

Betty Harry looks so small on the hillside.

Ellen comes.

Ellen Shall I bring the children?

Betty Shall Ellen bring the children?

Clive Delightful.

Betty Yes, Ellen, make sure they're warm. The night air is deceptive. Victoria was looking pale yesterday.

Clive My love.

Maud comes from inside the house.

Maud Are you warm enough Betty?

Betty Perfectly.

Maud The night air is deceptive.

Betty I'm quite warm. I'm too warm.

Maud You're not getting a fever, I hope? She's not strong, you know, Clive. I don't know how long you'll keep her in this climate.

Clive I look after Her Majesty's domains. I think you can trust me to look after my wife.

Ellen comes carrying **Victoria**, age 2. **Edward**, aged 9, lags behind.

Betty Victoria, my pet, say good evening to papa.

Clive takes **Victoria** on his knee.

Clive There's my sweet little Vicky. What have we done today?

Betty She wore Ellen's hat.

Clive Did she wear Ellen's big hat like a lady? What a pretty.

Betty And Joshua gave her a piggy back. Tell papa. Horsy with Joshy?

Ellen She's tired.

Clive Nice Joshy played horsy. What a big strong Joshy. Did you have a gallop? Did you make him stop and go? Not very chatty tonight are we?

Betty Edward, say good evening to papa.

Clive Edward my boy. Have you done your lessons well?

Edward Yes papa.

Clive Did you go riding?

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Edward Yes papa.

Clive What's that you're holding?

Betty It's Victoria's doll. What are you doing with it, Edward?

Edward Minding her.

Betty Well I should give it to Ellen quickly. You don't want papa to see you with a doll.

Clive No, we had you with Victoria's doll once before, Edward.

Ellen He's minding it for Vicky. He's not playing with it.

Betty He's not playing with it, Clive. He's minding it for Vicky.

Clive Ellen minds Victoria, let Ellen mind the doll.

Ellen Come, give it to me.

Ellen takes the doll.

Edward Don't pull her about. Vicky's very fond of her. She likes me to have her.

Betty He's a very good brother.

Clive Yes, it's manly of you Edward, to take care of your little sister. We'll say no more about it. Tomorrow I'll take you riding with me and Harry Bagley. Would you like that?

Edward Is he here?

Clive He's just arrived. There Betty, take Victoria now. I must go and welcome Harry.

Clive tosses **Victoria** to **Betty**, who gives her to **Ellen**.

Edward Can I come, papa?

Betty Is he warm enough?

Edward Am I warm enough?

Clive Never mind the women, Ned. Come and meet Harry.

They go. The women are left. There is a silence.

Maud I daresay Mr Bagley will be out all day and we'll see nothing of him.

Betty He plays the piano. Surely he will sometimes stay at home with us.

Maud We can't expect it. The men have their duties and we have ours.

Betty He won't have seen a piano for a year. He lives a very rough life.

Ellen Will it be exciting for you, Betty?

Maud Whatever do you mean, Ellen?

Ellen We don't have very much society.

Betty Clive is my society.

Maud It's time Victoria went to bed.

Ellen She'd like to stay up and see Mr Bagley.

Maud Mr Bagley can see her tomorrow.

Ellen goes.

Maud You let that girl forget her place, Betty.

Betty Mother, she is governess to my son. I know what her place is. I think my friendship does her good. She is not very happy.

Maud Young women are never happy.

Betty Mother, what a thing to say.

Maud Then when they're older they look back and see that comparatively speaking they were ecstatic.

Betty I'm perfectly happy.

Maud You are looking very pretty tonight. You were such a success as a young girl. You have made a most fortunate marriage. I'm sure you will be an excellent hostess to Mr Bagley.

Betty I feel quite nervous at the thought of entertaining.

Maud I can always advise you if I'm asked.

Betty What a long time they're taking. I always seem to be waiting for the men.

Maud Betty you have to learn to be patient. I am patient. My mama was very patient.

Clive approaches, supporting **Caroline Saunders**.

Clive It is a pleasure. It is an honour. It is positively your duty to seek my help. I would be hurt, I would be insulted by any show of independence. Your husband would have been one of my dearest friends if he had lived. Betty, look who has come, Mrs Saunders. She

has ridden here all alone, amazing spirit. What will you have? Tea or something stronger?
Let her lie down, she is overcome. Betty, you will know what to do.

Mrs Saunders lies down.

Maud I knew it. I heard drums. We'll be killed in our beds.

Clive Now, please, calm yourself.

Maud I am perfectly calm. I am just outspoken. If it comes to being killed I shall take it as calmly as anyone.

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Clive There is no cause for alarm. Mrs Saunders has been alone since her husband died last year, amazing spirit. Not surprisingly, the strain has told. She has come to us as her nearest neighbours.

Maud What happened to make her come?

Clive This is not an easy country for a woman.

Maud Clive, I heard drums. We are not children.

Clive Of course you heard drums. The tribes are constantly at war, if the term is not too grand to grace their squabbles. Not unnaturally Mrs Saunders would like the company of white women. The piano. Poetry.

Betty We are not her nearest neighbours.

Clive We are among her nearest neighbours and I was a dear friend of her late husband. She knows that she will find a welcome here. She will not be disappointed. She will be cared for.

Maud Of course we will care for her.

Betty Victoria is in bed. I must go and say goodnight. Mother, please, you look after Mrs Saunders.

Clive Harry will be here at once.

Betty goes.

Maud How rash to go out after dark without a shawl.

Clive Amazing spirit. Drink this.

Mrs Saunders Where am I?

Maud You are quite safe.

Mrs Saunders Clive? Clive? Thank God. This is very kind. How do you do? I am sorry to be a nuisance. Charmed. Have you a gun? I have a gun.

Clive There is no need for guns I hope. We are all friends here.

Mrs Saunders I think I will lie down again.

Harry Bagley and **Edward** have approached.

Maud Ah, here is Mr Bagley.

Edward I gave his horse some water.

Clive You don't know Mrs Saunders, do you Harry? She has at present collapsed, but she is recovering thanks to the good offices of my wife's mother who I think you've met before. Betty will be along in a minute. Edward will go home to school shortly. He is quite a young man since you saw him.

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Harry I hardly knew him.

Maud What news have you for us, Mr Bagley?

Clive Do you know Mrs Saunders, Harry? Amazing spirit.

Edward Did you hardly know me?

Harry Of course I knew you. I mean you have grown.

Edward What do you expect?

Harry That's quite right, people don't get smaller.

Maud Edward. You should be in bed.

Edward No, I'm not tired, I'm not tired am I Uncle Harry?

Harry I don't think he's tired.

Clive He is overtired. It is past his bedtime. Say goodnight.

Edward Goodnight, sir.

Clive And to your grandmother.

Edward Goodnight, grandmother.

Edward goes.

Maud Shall I help Mrs Saunders indoors? I'm afraid she may get a chill.

Clive Shall I give her an arm?

Maud How kind of you Clive. I think I am strong enough.

Maud helps **Mrs Saunders** into the house.

Clive Not a word to alarm the women.

Harry Absolutely.

Clive I did some good today I think. Kept up some alliances. There's a lot of affection there.

Harry They're affectionate people. They can be very cruel of course.

Clive Well they are savages.

Harry Very beautiful people many of them.

Clive Joshua! (To **Harry**.) I think we should sleep with guns.

Harry I haven't slept in a house for six months. It seems extremely safe.

Joshua comes.

Clive Joshua, you will have gathered there's a spot of bother. Rumours of this and that. You should be armed I think.

Joshua There are many bad men, sir. I pray about it. Jesus will protect us.

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Clive He will indeed and I'll also get you a weapon. Betty, come and keep Harry company. Look in the barn, Joshua, every night.

Clive and **Joshua** go. **Betty** comes.

Harry I wondered where you were.

Betty I was singing lullabies.

Harry When I think of you I always think of you with Edward in your lap.

Betty Do you think of me sometimes then?

Harry You have been thought of where no white woman has ever been thought of before.

Betty It's one way of having adventures. I suppose I will never go in person.

Harry That's up to you.

Betty Of course it's not. I have duties.

Harry Are you happy, Betty?

Betty Where have you been?

Harry Built a raft and went up the river. Stayed with some people. The king is always very good to me. They have a lot of skulls around the place but not white men's I think. I made up a poem one night. If I should die in this forsaken spot, There is a loving heart without a blot, Where I will live – and so on.

Betty When I'm near you it's like going out into the jungle. It's like going up the river on a raft. It's like going out in the dark.

Harry And you are safety and light and peace and home.

Betty But I want to be dangerous.

Harry Clive is my friend.

Betty I am your friend.

Harry I don't like dangerous women.

Betty Is Mrs Saunders dangerous?

Harry Not to me. She's a bit of an old boot.

Joshua comes, unobserved.

Betty Am I dangerous?

Harry You are rather.

Betty Please like me.

Harry I worship you.

Betty Please want me.

Harry I don't want to want you. Of course I want you.

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Betty What are we going to do?

Harry I should have stayed on the river. The hell with it.

He goes to take her in his arms, she runs away into the house. **Harry** stays where he is. He becomes aware of **Joshua**.

Harry Who's there?

Joshua Only me sir.

Harry Got a gun now have you?

Joshua Yes sir.

Harry Where's Clive?

Joshua Going round the boundaries sir.

Harry Have you checked there's nobody in the barns?

Joshua Yes sir.

Harry Shall we go in a barn and fuck? It's not an order.

Joshua That's all right, yes.

They go off.

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