

The Audition
by Richard Macaulay

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(organised by NDFA)

The Audition

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a play in one act
by Richard Macaulay

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CHARACTERS

ADAM SPARROW
MRS TRUNDLE
TOM GROUT
HANNAH MOODY
DOCTOR SAMUEL JOHNSON
PEG WOFFINGTON
DAVID GARRICK

A bare stage at the Drury Lane Theatre in London, sometime in the late 1740s.

A BARE STAGE, WITH A CLUTTER OF SCENERY FLATS STACKED UNTIDILY IN THE BACKGROUND, ASSORTED PROPS AND FURNITURE, A PAIR OF WARDROBE BASKETS. FOOTLIGHTS DOWNSTAGE, AND A SOFT WARM CANDLE GLOW OVER THE WHOLE CENTRAL AREA, THE REST IN SHADOW.

(ADAM SPARROW ENTERS, HESITANTLY. HE IS A PERSONABLE YOUNG MAN IN A WHITE SHIRT AND BLACK BREECHES. HE STANDS CENTRE STAGE IN THE LIGHT POOL, REFERS TO A SLIP OF PAPER IN HIS HAND, THEN SPEAKS OUT INTO THE DARKNESS OF THE AUDITORIUM.)

ADAM: Sir... Number seven, sir. Adam Sparrow.

(AND WAITS IN VAIN FOR A REPLY)

I've appeared with Mr Hippisley's company, Bath and Bristol and roundabout. Support roles mostly, but they said I should throw my cap in the ring, so why not? (Nervous laugh) So here I am.

(HE WAITS. AGAIN NO REPLY)

Since it's to be Shakespeare I thought... Maybe a sonnet would be fitting?

(STILL NOTHING)

Shall I begin then...? Just stop me if... Well, anything really.

(HE STRIKES AN ACTORLY POSE, CHIN UP. GOOD VOICE, THE LINES SPOKEN WELL ENOUGH)

'When my love swears that she is made of truth,
I do believe her, though I know she lies;
That she might think me some untutor'd youth,
Unlearned in the world's...'

(BUT HE IS CHECKED AS MRS TRUNDLE ENTERS, A STOUT COMFORTABLE LADY OF WISE EXPERIENCE, DRESSED IN A WORKADAY BROWN DRESS AND WHITE CAP)

TRUNDLE: There now. Sorry, dearie. Just breathe soft a moment while I... (SHE TURNS TO PEER INTO THE DARKNESS) Mr G? It's concerning as regards Juliet's dress for the death scene. I've a soft pearl if you cares for it, or a virgin white, only a wine stain in the skirts as you'd never notice. Would it be pearl or virgin?

(SHE WAITS, BUT AGAIN THERE IS NO ANSWER. SHE TURNS TO ADAM, SPEAKING IN A RESONANT STAGE WHISPER)

One of his moods, dearie. He can be like that. Big night, black morning...

(OUT FRONT AGAIN) So we'll try the pearl then? It'll look well against your Romeo blue and gold... Yes? Then that's the righteous of it. Pearl it is.

(AND BACK TO ADAM) There you go now. But best speak up a bit, 'case he's nodded off.

(SHE STARTS TO LEAVE, THEN REMEMBERS. OUT FRONT AGAIN)

There's a girl come. I told her girls was yesterday, but she looked so sad and solitary I said I'd ask. (Waits, but only for a moment) Yes? Then I'll send her in after this young gentleman. Pretty thing. You never know, do you?

(AND SHE LEAVES)

ADAM: Umm... Yes... Should I start again, sir? (Raises his voice) Or carry on from where I left off?

(BUT ALREADY TOM GROUT HAS ARRIVED FROM THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE STAGE, LUGGING A HEAVY RECTANGULAR PLATFORM BEHIND HIM, WHICH HE DUMPS NOISILY ON THE FRINGES OF THE LIGHT. HE IS A LEAN SARDONIC MAN, HOVERING BETWEEN AGEING AND AGED, WITH A WELL-WORN LEATHER APRON OVER BLACK JACKET AND BREECHES. HE EASES THE ACHE IN HIS BACK, GESTURING TO ADAM AS HE DOES SO)

GROUT: Don't you mind me, lad. You carry on, like you said.

ADAM: Yes. Good. Thank you. Yes, I will.

(HE FACES FRONT AGAIN, ACTORLY STANCE RESUMED)

'...That she might think me some untutor'd youth...'

(BUT AGAIN HE IS INTERRUPTED)

GROUT: Mind you...

ADAM: Yes?

GROUT: I don't much see the point of it.

ADAM: You don't?

GROUT: He's not there.

ADAM: Not there? Are you sure?

GROUT: Slipped out five minutes back. I saw him go. Most likely it's the Grapes or Mill's coffee house. Breakfast's a sad repentance as you might say, when the mood takes him.

ADAM: But I thought...

GROUT: Oh, he'll be back, never you fret. It's just he's something of a martyr to hangover mornings... Do you want to see my tomb?

ADAM: Well, yes, if you...

GROUT: Juliet's tomb, rightly speaking. Course it needs painting, but the carpentry's the nub of it. That's me. Tom Grout, stage carpenter. Best in all London, it's been said. By me mostly, but there you go... Built all of them, too. (GESTURING UPSTAGE)

ADAM: Scenery, yes.

GROUT: (MOVING BACK TO HIS TOMB) For the likes of you. Look at this now! (THUMPS A FOOT ON IT) Stand a helephant on that, if'n you could get it to step up.

(ADAM CROSSES TO ADMIRE THE JOINERY, WHEREUPON HANNAH MOODY ENTERS, SEEMINGLY NERVOUS AS ADAM HAD BEEN, PEERING FIRST INTO THE AUDITORIUM, THEN AT THE TWO MEN. SHE WEARS A SIMPLE, BRIGHTLY COLOURED GOWN WITH A LACE COLLAR. YOUNG, LOVELY)

HANNAH: Excuse me, but... Have you finished?

ADAM: I'm sorry, no. (Gazing at her) No. That is... Half a dozen lines. He's gone to breakfast.

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HANNAH: But Mrs Trumble promised he'd hear me!

ADAM: (CROSSING TO JOIN HER) Trumble?

HANNAH: The dresser lady. She said to come on when you were finished.

ADAM: (GALLANTLY) I'm glad you did! I mean... Finished or not. Perfect!
(THEY SMILE, DIFFIDENTLY, AT ONE ANOTHER)

HANNAH: Should I... (GESTURES OFFSTAGE) Go back and wait?

ADAM: No! I mean... Not out there. I was just talking to... (WAVES VAGUELY
IN GROUT'S DIRECTION) He builds tombs for a living. Well, I
suppose for a dying would be better... Not better... Worse really I
suppose... If you need a tomb... (Drags himself out of his whirlpool)
You could go on ahead of me. When he gets back, I mean. I've got
all the time in the world. Truly.

GROUT: (SITTING ON HIS TOMB) Can you act, missy, or is it just the looks
you catch them with?

HANNAH: I don't know. That's what I came to find out.

GROUT: (ASIDE, WORLD WEARY) Came to find out... Lord save us...

HANNAH: (TO ADAM) Are you an actor?

ADAM: Oh, yes!

HANNAH: Yes, of course you are. One can tell, can't one? The voice... The
look... (MORE SHY SMILES) Are you to play Romeo?

GROUT: Hah!

HANNAH: Have I said something wrong?

GROUT: No, only best you don't let his high and mightiness hear you talking
like that! Give him blue fits, that will.

HANNAH: Why?

GROUT: Why? Because he's Romeo, that's for why! Owns the lease on all of
this. Manages the company. So takes the best parts, stands to
reason. Davy Garrick. Little Davy. Though mostly we just calls him
Sir. (SNIFFS) Full houses, except when there's riots. Pays my
wages. Can't grumble...

About the playwright

Richard Macaulay (1929-2005) enjoyed a life-long passion for, and knowledge of, both history and drama, which is evident in his plays. Based in Somerset, he took great pleasure in sharing this enthusiasm with many talented friends in various theatre companies and in numerous productions. He was delighted by the national recognition his award winning plays received.

The Audition

Adam Sparrow attends an audition for Garrick's Drury Lane company at the beginning of a new season. He meets two of the backstage staff, Mrs Trundle and Tom Grout, then Hannah Moody, also hoping for an audition, who immediately catches at his heart, and seemingly returns his feelings. Dr Johnson arrives. Finding Garrick is indisposed after too riotous an evening, he indulges himself by conducting his own audition, a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. But this brings ructions, first from Peg Woffington, one of the Lane's established actresses and Garrick's mistress, then from Garrick himself. Hannah, deserting Adam, succeeds in joining the company, but Adam loses both his new love and his chance of employment. Johnson sympathises but can do nothing. Only the sonnet that Adam brought with him as his audition piece can echo his feelings in the end.

The running time is estimated at 40 minutes. The set is an empty stage with a footlight row and stacked scenery flats in the background.

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