PLAY
A play in one act by Samuel Beckett

Front centre, touching one another, three identical grey urns. From each a head protrudes, the neck held fast in the urn's mouth. The heads are those, from left to right as seen from auditorium, of w2, m and w1. They face undeviatingly front throughout the play. Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns. But no masks. Their speech is provoked by a spotlight projected on faces alone). The transfer of light from one face to another is immediate. No blackout, i.e. return to almost complete darkness of opening, except where indicated. The response to light is immediate. Faces impassive throughout. Voices toneless except where an expression is indicated. Rapid tempo throughout.

The curtain rises on a stage in almost complete darkness.
Urns just discernible. Five seconds.
Faint spots simultaneously on three faces. Three seconds. Voices faint, largely unintelligible.

(altogether)

W1: Yes strange darkness best and the darker the worse
W2: Yes perhaps a shade gone I suppose some might say
M: Yes peace one assumed all out all the pain

W1: till all dark then all well for the time but it will come
W2: poor thing a shade gone just a shade in the head
M: all as if never been it will come Hiccup. Pardon

W1: the time will come the thing is there you'll see it
W2: Laugh . . . just a shade but I doubt it
M: no sense in this oh I know none the less

W1: get off me keep off me all dark all still
W2: I doubt it not really I'm all right still all right
M: one assumed peace I mean not merely all over
W1: all over wiped out —
W2: do my best all I can —
M: but as if never been —

Blackout. Five seconds.
Spots on three faces. Three seconds.

(altogether)
W1: I said to him, Give her up —
W2: One Morning as I was sitting —
M: We were not long together—

Spot on W1
W1: I said to him, Give her up. I swore by all I held most sacred —

[Spot from W1 to W2.]
W2: One morning as I was sitting stitching by the open window she burst in and flew at me. Give him up, she screamed, he's mine. Her photographs were kind to her. Seeing her now for the first time full length in the flesh I understood why he preferred me.

[Spot from W2 to M.]
M: We were not long together when she smelled the rat. Give up that whore, she said, or I'll cut my throat — [Hiccup.] Pardon — so help me God. I knew she could have no proof. So I told her I did not know what she was talking about.

[Spot from M to W2.]

[Spot from W2 to W1.]
W1: Though I had him dogged for months by a first-rate man, no shadow of proof was forthcoming. And there was no denying that he continued as . . . assiduous as ever. This, and his horror of the merely Platonic thing, made me sometimes wonder if I were not accusing him unjustly. Yes.

[Spot from W1 to M.]
M: What have you to complain of? I said. Have I been neglecting you? How could we be together in the way we are if there were someone else? Loving her as I did, with all my heart, I could not but feel sorry for her.

[Spot from M to W2.]
W2: Fearing she was about to offer me violence I rang for Erskine and had her shown out. Her parting words, as he could testify, if he is still living,
and has not forgotten, coming and going on the earth, letting people in, showing people out, were to the effect that she would settle my hash. I confess this did alarm me a little, at the time.

[Spot from W2 to M.]
M: She was not convinced. I might have known. I smell her off you, she kept saying. There was no answer to this. So I took her in my arms and swore I could not live without her. I meant it, what is more. Yes, I am sure I did. She did not repulse me.

[Spot from M to W1.]
W1: Judge then of my astonishment when one fine morning, as I was sitting stricken in the morning room, he slunk in, fell on his knees before me, buried his face in my lap and... confessed.

[Spot from w1 to M.]
M: She put a bloodhound on me, but I had a little chat with him. He was glad of the extra money.

[Spot from M to W2.]
W2: Why don't you get out, I said, when he started moaning about his home life, there is obviously nothing between you any more. Or is there?

[Spot from w2 to w1.]
W1: I confess my first feeling was one of wonderment. What a male!

[Spot from w1 to M.]
M: He opens his mouth to speak –

[Spot from M to W2.]
W2: Anything between us, he said, what do you take me for, a something machine? And of course with him no danger of the... spiritual thing. Then why don't you get out? I said. I sometimes wondered if he was not living with her for her money.

[Spot from w2 to M.]
M: The next thing was the scene between them. I can't have her crashing in here, she said, threatening to take my life. I must have looked incredulous. Ask Erskine, she said, if you don't believe me. But she threatens to take her own, I said. Not yours? she said. No, I said, hers. We had fun trying to work this out.

[Spot from M to W1.]
W1: Then I forgave him. To what will love not stoop! I suggested a little jaunt to celebrate, to the Riviera or our darling Grand Canary. He was looking pale. Peaked. But this was not possible just then. Professional commitments.

[Spot from w1 to w2.]
W2: She came again. Just strolled in. All honey. Licking her lips. Poor thing. I was doing my nails, by the open window. He has told me all about it, she said. Who he, I said filing away, and what it? I know what torture you must be going through, she said, and I have dropped in to say I bear you no ill-feeling. I rang for Erskine.

[Spot from w2 to M.]
M: Then I got frightened and made a clean breast of it. She was looking more and more desperate. She had a razor in her vanity-bag. Adulterers, take warning, never admit.

[Spot from M to w1.]
W1: When I was satisfied it was all over I went to have a gloat. Just a common tart. What he could have found in her when he had me --

[Spot from w1 to w2.]
W2: When he came again we had it out. I felt like death. He went on about why he had to tell her. Too risky and so on. That meant he had gone back to her. Back to that!

[Spot from w2 to w1.]
W1: Pudding face, puffy, spots, blubber mouth, jowls, no neck, dug you could --

[Spot from w1 to w2.]
W2: He went on and on. I could hear a mower. An old hand mower. I stopped him and said that whatever I might feel I had no silly threats to offer--but not much stomach for her leavings either. He thought that over for a bit.

[Spot from w2 to w1.]
W1: Calves like a flunkey --

[Spot from w1 to M.]
M: When I saw her again she knew. She was looking -- [Hiccup.] --wretched. Pardon. Some fool was cutting grass. A little rush, then another. The problem was how to convince her that no . . . revival of intimacy was involved. I couldn't. I might have known. So I took her in my arms and said I could not go on living without her. I don't believe I could have.

[Spot from M to W2.]
W2: The only solution was to go away together. He swore we should as soon as he had put his affairs in order. In the meantime we were to carry on as before. By that he meant as best we could.

[Spot from w2 to w1.]
W1: So he was mine again. All mine. I was happy again. I went about singing. The world --
[Spot from w1 to M.]
M : At home all heart to heart, new leaf and bygones bygones. I ran into your ex-doxy, she said one night, on the pillow, you're well out of that. Rather uncalled for, I thought. I am indeed, sweetheart, I said, I am indeed. God what vermin women. Thanks to you, angel, I said.

[Spot from M to W1.]
W1 : Then I began to smell her off him again. Yes.

[Spot from w1 to w2.]
W2 : When he stopped coming I was prepared. More or less.

[Spot from w2 to M.]
M : Finally it was all too much. I simply could no longer --

[Spot from M to W1.]
W1 : Before I could do anything he disappeared. That meant she had won. That slut! I couldn’t credit it. I lay stricken for weeks. Then I drove over to her place. It was all bolted and barred. All grey with frozen dew. On the way back by Ash and Snodland --

[Spot from w1 to M.]
M : I simply could no longer--

[Spot from M to W2.]
W2: I made a bundle of his things and burnt them. It was November and the bonfire was going. All night I smelt them smouldering.

Spots half previous strength simultaneously on three faces. Three seconds.
Voices proportionately lower.]

Altogether
W 1 : Mercy, mercy --
W 2 : To say I am –
M : When first this change–

[Spots off. Blackout. Five seconds.
Spot on M.]

M : When first this change I actually thanked God. I thought, It is done, it is said, now all is going out –

[Spot from M to W1.]
W 1 : Mercy, mercy, tongue still hanging out for mercy. It will come. You haven't seen me. But you will. Then it will come.

[Spot from W1 to W2.]

W 2 : To say I am not disappointed, no, I am. I had anticipated something better. More restful.

[Spot from W2 to W1.]

W 1 : Or you will weary of me.

[Spot from W1 to M.]

M : Down, all going down, into the dark, peace is coming, I thought, after all, at last, I was right, after all, thank God, when first this change.

[Spot from M to W2.]

W 2 : Less confused. Less confusing. At the same time I prefer this to . . . the other thing. Definitely. There are endurable moments.

[Spot from W2 to M.]

M : I thought.

[Spot from M to W2.]

W 2 : When you go out -- and I go out. Some day you will tire of me and go out . . . for good.

[Spot from W2 to W1.]

W 1 : Hellish half-light.

[Spot from W1 to M.]

M : Peace, yes, I suppose, a kind of peace, and all that pain as if . . . never been.

[Spot from M to W2.]

W 2 : Give me up, as a bad job. Go away and start poking and pecking at someone else. On the other hand--

[Spot from W2 to W1.]

W 1 : Get off me! Get off me!

[Spot from W1 to M.]

M : It will come. Must come. There is no future in this.

[Spot from M to W2.]

W 2 : On the other hand things may disimprove, there is that danger.

[Spot from W2 to M.]

M : Oh of course I know now--

[Spot from M to W1.]

W 1 : Is it that I do not tell the truth, is that it, that some day somehow I may tell the truth at last and then no more light at last, for the truth?

[Spot from W1 to W2.]

W 2 : You might get angry and blaze me clean out of my wits. Mightn't you?
[Spot from W2 to M.]
M: I know now, all that was just . . . play. And all this? When will all this--
[Spot from M to W1.]
W 1: Is that it?
[Spot from W1 to W2.]
W 2: Mightn't you?
[Spot from W2 to M.]
M: All this, when will all this have been . . . just play?
[Spot from M to W1.]
W 1: I can do nothing . . . for anybody . . . any more . . . thank God. So it must be something I have to say. How the mind works still!
[Spot from W1 to W2.]
W 2: But I doubt it. It would not be like you somehow. And you must know I am doing my best. Or don't you?
[Spot from W2 to M.]
M: Perhaps they have become friends. Perhaps sorrow --
[Spot from M to W1.]
W 1: But I have said all I can. All you let me. All I --
[Spot from W1 to M.]
M: Perhaps sorrow has brought them together.
[Spot from M to W2.]
W 2: No doubt I make the same mistake as when it was the sun that shone, of looking for sense where possibly there is none.
[Spot from W2 to M.]
M: Perhaps they meet, and sit, over a cup of that green tea they both so loved, without milk or sugar not even a squeeze of lemon --
[Spot from M to W2.]
W 2: Are you listening to me? Is anyone looking at me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?
[Spot from W2 to M.]
M: Not even a squeeze of--
[Spot from M to W1.]
W 1: Is it something I should do with my face, other than utter? Weep?
[Spot from w1 to w2.]
W 2: Am I taboo, I wonder. Not necessarily, now that all danger is averted. That poor creature -- I can hear her -- that poor creature --
[Spot from w2 to w1.]
W 1: Bite off my tongue and swallow it? Spit it out? Would that placate you? How the mind works still to be sure!
M : Meet, and sit, now in the one dear place, now in the other, and sorrow together, and compare -- [Hiccup.] pardon -- happy memories.

W 1 : If only I could think. There is no sense in this . . . either, none whatsoever. I can't.

W 2 : That poor creature who tried to seduce you, what ever became of her, do you suppose? -- I can hear her. Poor thing.

M : Personally I always preferred Lipton's.

W 1 : And that all is falling, all fallen, from the beginning, on empty air. Nothing being asked at all. No one asking me for anything at all.

W 2 : They might even feel sorry for me, if they could see me. But never so sorry as I for them.

W 1 : I can't

W 2 : Kissing their sour kisses.

M : I pity them in any case, yes, compare my lot with theirs, however blessed, and--

W 1 : I can't. The mind won't have it. It would have to go. Yes.

M : Pity them.

W 2 : What do you do when you go out? Shift?

M : Am I hiding something? Have I lost--

W 1 : She had means, I fancy, though she lived like a pig.

W 2 : Like dragging a great roller, on a scorching day. The strain . . . to get it moving, momentum coming --

W 2 : Kill it and strain again.
[Spot from W2 to M.]
M : Have I lost . . . the thing you want? Why go out? Why go --
[Spot from M to W2.]
W 2 : And you perhaps pitying me, thinking. Poor thing, she needs a rest.
[Spot from W2 to W1.]
W 1 : Perhaps she has taken him away to live . . . somewhere in the sun.
[Spot from W1 to M.]
M : Why go down? Why not --
[Spot from M to W2.]
W 2 : I don't know.
[Spot from W2 to W1.]
W 1 : Perhaps she is sitting somewhere, by the open window, her hands folded in her lap, gazing down out over the olives --
[Spot from W1 to M.]
M : Why not keep on glaring at me without ceasing? I might start to rave and -- [Hiccup.] -- bring it up for you. Par --
[Spot from M to W2.]
W 2 : No.
[Spot from W2 to W1.]
W 1 : Gazing down out over the olives, then the sea, wondering what can be keeping him, growing cold. Shadow stealing over everything. Creeping. Yes.
[Spot from W1 to M.]
M : To think we were never together.
[Spot from M to W2.]
W 2 : Am I not perhaps a little unhinged already?
[Spot from W2 to W1.]
W 1 : Poor creature. Poor creatures.
[Spot from W1 to M.]
M : Never woke together, on a May morning, the first to wake to wake the other two. Then in a little dinghy--
[Spot from M to W1.]
W 1 : Penitence, yes, at a pinch, atonement, one was resigned, but no, that does not seem to be the point either.
[Spot from W1 to W2.]
[Spot from W2 to M.]
M: A little dinghy --

[Spot from M to W1.]

W1: Silence and darkness were all I craved. Well, I get a certain amount of both. They being one. Perhaps it is more wickedness to pray for more.

[Spot from W1 to M.]

M: A little dinghy, on the river, I resting on my oars, they lolling on air-pillows in the stern . . . sheets. Drifting. Such fantasies.

[Spot from M to W1.]

W1: Hellish half-light.

[Spot from W1 to W2.]


[Spot from W2 to M.]

M: We were not civilized.

[Spot from M to W1.]

W1: Dying for dark -- and the darker the worse. Strange.

[Spot from W1 to M.]

M: Such fantasies. Then. And now--

[Spot from M to W2.]

W2: I doubt it.

[Pause.]

W2: Peal of wild low laughter [cut short

[spot from W2 to W1.]

W1: Yes, and the whole thing there, all there, staring you in the face. You will see it. Get off me. Or weary.

[Spot from W1 to M.]

M: And now, that you are . . . mere eye. Just looking. At my face. On and off.

[Spot from M to W1.]

W1: Weary of playing with me. Get off me. Yes.

[Spot from W1 to M.]


[Spot from M to W2.]

W2: Laugh as before [cut short]

[Spot from W2 to M.]

M: Mere eye. No mind. Opening and shutting on me. Am I as much --


Spot on M.]

M: Am I much as . . . being seen?

[Spot off M. Blackout. Five seconds.]
Faint spots simultaneously on three faces. Three seconds. Voices faint largely unintelligible.

(altogether)

W1: Yes strange darkness best and the darker the worse
W2: Yes perhaps a shade gone I suppose some might say
M: Yes peace one assumed all out all the pain

W1: till all dark then all well for the time but it will come
W2: poor thing a shade gone just a shade in the head
M: all as if never been it will come Hiccup. Pardon

W1: the time will come the thing is there you'll see it
W2: Laugh . . . just a shade but I doubt it
M: no sense in this oh I know none the less

W1: get off me keep off me all dark all still
W2: I doubt it not really I'm all right still all right
M: one assumed peace I mean not merely all over

W1: all over wiped out --
W2: do my best all I can --
M: but as if never been --

Blackout. Five seconds.
Spots on three faces. Three seconds.

(altogether)
W1: I said to him, Give her up --
W2: One Morning as I was sitting --
M: We were not long together --
Spots off. Blackout. Five seconds.
Repeat Play.

M : [Closing repeat.] Am I as much as . . . being seen?
   [Spot off M. Blackout. Five seconds.
   Strong spots simultaneously on three faces. Three seconds.]

   [Altogether. Voices normal strength.]

W 1 I said to him. Give her up --
W 2 One morning as I was sitting --
M : We were not long together --

   [Spots off. Blackout. Five seconds.
   Spot on M.]

M : We were not long together --
   [Spot off M. Blackout. Five seconds.]

CURTAIN