

Champagne and Sky Juice

Basil Dawkins

Manchineel + Seagrape 4 • October 2024

Author Bio: Basil Dawkins is a Jamaican playwright and producer. He began his theatre career in the 1970s, while attending The University of the West Indies, Mona campus. He mounted his first play, *Flat Mate* at The Barn Theatre in 1980, which was followed by several popular and successful productions including *Champagne and Sky Juice*, *Same Song, Different Tune*, and *Which Way is Out?* He was awarded the Jamaica Order of Distinction in 2022.

Characters

GREG, Husband, JLP supporter

BEV, Wife, PNP supporter

Act 1

Scene 1

Dim light on stage – GREG ENTERS through a front door – turns on the light, looks across to the dining table – his place is set – takes off his shirt, throws it on one of the chairs – turns on the radio – a religious programme is in progress and he immediately switches the dial to another station where the disc jockey says, “Nightriders, it is 1:30 a.m. and time when we give you half hour of undiluted rockers” – pulsating reggae music plays – he turns up the volume – satisfied, he turns to the bedroom.

GREG: Come Bev, wake up. Food time. [*Still rocking to the music, he takes out his Star and jigs while he reads the headline and waits. Suddenly conscious that Bev has not responded, he calls out louder this time.*] Bev – come warm up the little food give a man nuh – you a go mek me dead fe hungry. [*Hears her stirring in the bedroom. He sits still reading The Star.*]

BEV ENTERS in a nightie – annoyed – it shows in her walk and the way she looks at him – goes to the kitchen.

GREG: You read the paper today? Mi never even did know say yuh Prime Minister make nationwide broadcast last night – election before the year is out. [*No response – he looks at her – notices the manner in which she is putting the things on the table.*] Wait – what happen baby – how you so touches tonight?

BEV: Ah tired of you coming in before day every night – you understand? Me tired.

GREG: So, what you going to do? Lef me? Lef me then nuh. [*She has finished the preparation and is ready to leave. He attempts to squeeze her breast – she brushes his hand away. He notices she is not joking at all.*] You going on as if you don’t know where I am and what ah doing.

BEV: Every night, Party work – what happen? Now that you turn labourite you have to prove that you a more JLP than the rest? Is what so?

GREG: Bev – is a cause – the last chance to save this country from the red blood stain hands of these vile communist – miss it this time and is no coming back for this country – you and me – a man must stand up and be counted.

BEV: Every night?

GREG: Well, if dat is what it going to take. Is sacrifice we talking bout – you hear me – **DELIVERANCE**.

BEV: Shh! Not so loud.

GREG: How you mean not so loud – mi no afraid – everybody pon de avenue turn labourite except you – **DELIVERANCE** – IMF a squeeze the socialist dem balls – dem waan cuss America capitalist – yet borrow dem money fe build up socialist communist state. Wey dem get dat from – squeeze dem balls – **DELIVERANCE**.

BEV: Ah say stop de noise man or else ah going in and leave you. But how im could call election so quick. Is only three years gone since de election. Is not time yet.

GREG: Is seven years too late – squeeze im balls me say – give him one more year and no more country no lef.

[BEV becomes very silent – turns off the radio – deep in thought – while he eats, he notices the silence.]

You still have time to join the Deliverance train.

BEV: Who you a talk? Master you do what you will, and I will do what I please – despite all what you talk dis country is still a free country – when de time come me alone a go mek dat X and vote dat time for who I please.

GREG: Ah just hope you see the light before it's too late. Join the rebuilders of this once blessed, peaceful country.

BEV: What I am I am – mi not changing fe please you nor nobody.

GREG: Emotions that you dealing with – so woman stay. Dem don't know how to separate serious business from joke and pleasure.

BEV: Like when you was a home guard – everybody know which home you use to guard down the avenue and everybody pon the avenue know about the night you had to run with you baton and go wake up the people over number 19 and borrow a pants.

GREG: Me – how you hear bout dat – mix dem mussa a mix mi up wid somebody else.

BEV: Eh eh.

GREG: People wicked eh man – is dem tings dem come tell you – den is what dem think that coulda mash we up – people dem lie man. Come you hear – mek we go a bed. For tonight this capitalist is going to you know what dis socialist

BEV: You don't even have any respect for me again, eh.

GREG: Bev – you can't take a joke? Why you a go on so edgy? Is sorry you sorry fe you Prime Minister? You know what – sleep time – we have work to go tomorrow.

BEV: You – not me.

GREG: Wha wrong? You sick?

BEV: No! Dem lay me off.

GREG: Dem do what?

BEV: Make mi redundant.

GREG: But dat not possible – management can't get laid off – dat is fe workers – you is a big supervisor of eleven years standing. How you mean – dem lay you off – when?

BEV: Today.

GREG: Just so?

BEV: When ah went to work this morning ah see all the people outside and the gate lock – nobody see Mr. Izan nor his son. Everybody wondering what happening – I call him house – the phone ring without answer. Soon after, a man drove up say him is Mr. Izan lawyer – Mr. Izan and him family migrated to Miami Saturday gone – the man run leave the place and the workers and not a word – made money like never before Christmas gone. Why im do a thing like dat – buy up de dollars – set up himself and just step?

GREG: From dem boys carry in union pon him ah know something would go wrong – mi no wrong him a backside – run yes – mek de union go give dem what dem want now – den, if

dem did get in one of de decent unions it wouldn't bad – no man – dem had to go for de baddest – de most communist of dem all – believe me, Izan know what im doing. First, it would be worker participation, den little after dat dem da want turn it inna co-operative – I know how dem communist work – before you know it dem tek over the whole thing and im work fe dem and dem tell him how much money im fe put inna im pocket a month time – mek me see wha dem gwine do now.

BEV: I in it to you know, Greg – what you talking about – who going tek way im factory? Is since the union come in dere that Mr. Izan really start mek money – let me tell you that – the union also put workers under manners – all the skylarking stop.

GREG: So communist stay man – no through dem plan fe tek over eventually.

[She stares at him in disbelief.]

Anyway – why worry – you have me to lean on till you get another job – furthermore – deliverance no soon come for us. Mi no sorry fe dem a backside. Christmas was too bright and nice. Something no mus go wrong?

BEV: What I going to do now?

GREG: Have a holiday. You deserve it.

BEV: Holiday – you take holiday when you have a job.

GREG: Be cool – I can manage – you know that.

BEV: But fi how long?

GREG: As long as you want.

BEV: Wey you trying to tell me – that my little money didn't make a difference.

GREG: Well – look on it this way – you mostly used to buy grocery and since the amount of food items on the shop shelf these days is next to nothing – den you really don't need all dat much to shop – I can give you that – come man, mek us go in to bed – come nuh.

BEV: Sit down.

GREG: What?

BEV: Ah want to have a talk with you.

GREG: Talk? Now? Woman you know is what time of de morning now?

BEV: A have to talk to you.

GREG: Den wi no talk tomorrow – come to bed ya woman. [*He starts to walk away.*] You just come give a man a little loving up ya “talk”.

BEV: Gregory – I am getting fed up – ah warning you – you have time fe everybody else except me – ah lose mi job and you don’t even express little understanding of how a feel – no little nutting – all I can hear is a good thing I have you, and deliverance is near – is like me no count. Ah know is late but that is not my fault – ah waiting fe you all evening. Come and sit down.

GREG: No, soon time fe go a work – you shoulda just go fix mi breakfast from now.

BEV: Ah been thinking – dis house is not ours and ah getting de little redundancy money – is not much but it suppose to can pay down on a house.

GREG: Eh eh – but not this though.

BEV: No, this not for sale – furthermore, I would want something a little nicer – you know like...

GREG: On the hills – nothing no wrong wid dat – I will settle for nothing less – like how I am a big engineer now – time fe we have wi house and it must be up – not here nor dung so.

BEV: About how much dis house would sell for?

GREG: Oh, bout 25-30 thousand.

BEV: So 50 to 60 thousand can give us a house twice as good.

GREG: Is swimming pool and tennis court you talking about – is dem kine a money dey you a get fe redundancy?

BEV: No monkey – but is the down payment me talking.

GREG: Oh – but don't forget the closing cost and legal fees.

BEV: What it can't do me credit union will cover – one little problem though and ah need your help – like how ah not working you think it wise to take all the money pay down on house?

GREG: Don't worry – I suppose to can pay the mortgage and look after you. After all, I am a big engineer now.

BEV: Gregory, me tired fe hear how you is a big engineer. You talk it so often now I think you start believe. Gregory you are a plumber, a good plumber – you occupy de post that rightly belong to an engineer but dat does not make you an engineer. If de trained men never lef de country all now you would still be an ordinary plumber.

GREG: Wha you a talk bout? Mi is an engineer – the hardest worker ever hold dung dat post – come up dey come ask anybody – wey you a talk say? Dem can't do without mi.

BEV: Alright – alright – I know you are a good and hard worker and dem can't do without you – so if that is the qualification fe turn a plumber into an engineer I won't fight you.

GREG: You always try to put me down.

BEV: Ah try to make you see reality – ah don't want you to believe you own propaganda. Know yourself. Is de same government wey you a cuss everyday make people like you wey no have no wey fe run go get an opportunity – mek good use of de opportunity – remember wey you coming from – memba how you get dere – a eyelash you dey pon.

GREG: How all of dat affect us buying a house?

BEV: Ah reaching you Greg? When ah talk you understand? You listen? Anyway, I was thinking that since the future is how it is – maybe – instead of go pay down pon a house wid de money, den fine later on we can't afford fe keep it fe one reason or another – maybe we should use de money an establish a little business first – den when it on sound footing den we pay down on a house.

GREG: So, what kind a business you thinking of going into?

BEV: Ah don't know yet – I hoping you can advise me.

GREG: You come to the right person – after all I am out dere.

BEV: Every night.

GREG: Let me see now – food must sell – good times or bad – everybody love ice cream, patty, and hamburger. You go in dem things – in a good location – overnight you rich – you count \$2.00 and \$10.00 a nighttime till you sick – millionaire business we a talk bout – what you say?

BEV: Sound alright – but tell me what you think about a little garment factory? [*She reads from the paper.*] Is what I know about and since I can get some of those machines at a reasonable price—

GREG: Mek me see dis— [*Taking the paper away from her – looks at it.*] Look at that eh – you mek you plans long time – so why you ask me wey me think for? Like it would mek any difference – wey man no know bigger than him fe true.

BEV: Is vex you getting vex Greg – because ah jot down some thoughts?

GREG: So, what you was seeking mi advice about?

BEV: Because ah want this to be our business –ah want you to be in it from the beginning – we can reason and agree to differ – argument sound reasonable?

GREG: You mek up you mind long time what you was going to do. All the house argument you just run dat pass me fe soften me up – but don't worry is your money – I really would like to help you, but I can't help wid a garment factory because I can't sew. If you did deal wid the ice cream and pastry place though you wouldn't have fe worry I would always be there – whenever you want – help you collect de money and count it off and carry it go bank fe you – but you no need mi again.

BEV: So, you vex?

GREG: Me waste mi time – look how long I could gone sleep – listen you right – I have a job to go to tomorrow. [*He gets up. EXITS.*]

[*BEV sits – starts packing up behind GREG. Then LIGHTS FADE.*]

Scene 2

SIX MONTHS LATER

August – evening – GREG is pacing the floor. He is dressed in shirt, underpants, socks – his shoes are there – he looks out – looks at his watch – goes to sit down – the door opens – BEV ENTERS with packet. GREG jumps up – looks at BEV – looks at his watch.

GREG: A wey you a come from this time of night?

BEV: Police station – the cutter boy nuh come back a the factory today – say him must get back him work.

GREG: Which cutter boy?

BEV: Look how me beg you fe come pick me up a nighttime from de boy threaten me, Greg.

GREG: What you was doing at the police station?

BEV: You listening?

GREG: Talk man – mi a listen.

BEV: De boy come back today with officer from the Ministry say him must get back him job – him was wrongfully dismissed – so I explained to the man from the Ministry how me fire the boy after me catch him a tief – the Ministry man said him only got one side of the story – tell de boy im should thank me dat das all ah do – if it was him im would be in jail all now.

GREG: So, is come him did come fe come harass you through him dam socialist Government is in power im want come compel you fe gi back de boy work – is fe him factory? Whey im did deh when we was rocking we brain fe set it up.

BEV: We?

GREG: How you mean – you know how many nights I never have de service of you as mi wife when you was setting up dat dam place.

BEV: Oh – ah get you – anyway de boy out a de road a tell people how him have im pickney and four baby madder dem to look bout and if im cyaan live, me naw live neither – wid one side of one big scissors inna him han.

GREG: Nuh the same apprentice boy you tek on because im never get redundancy?

BEV: Same one – ungrateful wretch – if you ever heard the things him tell me.

GREG: Renk him renk – dem mek dem start wear underpants from too early – dem no have no manners again.

BEV: Machine breakdown – mi had to be doubling up – it wasn't until closing down time dat I realize him was still out dere – me phone de police – dem say dem can't come since nobody no get killed – but if ah can sen a transport to de station de one who coming off duty will come. So, me phone for a taxi and pay him to go to the station. All now.

GREG: Damn scamp – tek the taxi gone home.

BEV: Night a come down – de boy still out there – no police can't come so me slip through de side door and go to the police station myself – dem say if him come back tomorrow dem will make sure him never come back.

GREG: Every day you come in wid so much worries from dat dey place – I don't know why you no just sell it out and come set up the ice cream palace uptown in a decent area.

BEV: Not a bit of that – despite everything, I am quite happy and proud of de little establishment, especially when I see de ladies dress up in a things we produce – me heart full with pride – things rough and times hard, but it coming to come – ah not making any big profit but ah meeting mi bills an ah can have a little something put away – an fe de age of de business dat is great – all I want is to be able to maintain de high standard of de work and make sure mi deliver my orders on time. It rough, rough, rough – raw material, workers, machine – but I give thanks.

GREG: If you doing so well now you can imagine how the business will rocket off – when my government at the controls – a government supportive of the role of the private sector. I don't know how you can be such a big capitalist and still support communist government. Gwaan till dem and de communist union come tek it wey from you. Anyway – you see Carl Stone polls dis evening – we gone clear – can't stop we again – therein lies you hope – wid your vote or not, deliverance must come.

BEV: Say all you want – is dem same nasty communist give me de confidence to even contemplate owning me own little business. First time, where you ever hear bout the likes of me a own garment factory – employ ten full time employees – is this government dat instill in us pride of people, pride of place.

GREG: None of dem tings cannot eat – fe dem business is fe mek sure people have food on the shelf fe eat instead of people have fe a war fe sugar and flour. Dat dem fe do.

BEV: The country still have problems yes – I don't deny that – but that is because of people like you – oonu spen time a fight down every single thing instead of doing oonu little part fe help mek de country develop.

GREG: Anyway – you gwaan with you fight at de local level – I spen enough time wid you already – my fight is at a higher level – I have the party business to attend to and right now that is the nation's business.

BEV: You hard eh man – you can't stay wid me this evening? [*Takes out her order books and starts doing some work.*]

GREG: Um um— [*Sees the parcel.*] Oh, you go cleaners – you know right – is a pants me deh ya a wait pon all evening. [*Goes towards the parcel, tears it open, takes out some dresses.*] Wha dis? Since when you start sen your clothes go cleaners eh? And how come you go pick up your things and don't pick up mi pants?

BEV: Listen nuh – just fold up de clothes and put dem right back where you find dem – those are my Christmas samples – ah taking them to show me banker before ah go to work in de morning.

[*GREG hisses his teeth – throws them down and proceeds to leave the room. HE EXITS then immediately RE-ENTERS through the door.*]

GREG: Fe wha? Eeh? Why you have fe show him – im no banker – him know nutting bout sewing?

BEV: Im no know nutting but at least him interested enough in de business and me progress – im want to know how ah getting on and dat is much more than the interest dat you show in mi and de business.

GREG: You sure is not you im interested in? Dem young boy deh dem bright you know – dem love big woman.

BEV: Stop you foolishness and just gwaan wey you going – you have no sense – mi fed up and mi just can't talk to you again.

GREG: Den is lie me a tell? You think im afraid fe come put question to you.

BEV: Gregory, de boy could be mi son.

GREG: Same damn thing dey now – Beverley – im is man and you is woman – is dat you must watch – is you innocence him gwine use against you – true you least suspect – by the time you realize wha a go on – you gone already.

BEV: A true you talking Gregory? Den – is not de business im interested in?

GREG: You know you problem – you too simple man – a simpleness gwine kill you – dis time don't say ah never did warn you.

BEV: Well, you know something Gregory? This is one time I willing to tek my chance – all de time I allow you fe full up my head wid all kind of foolishness when it suit you – is months now I dealing wid dis young man and I find him very decent – I think im is anxious to see mi business get settled – after all im did have fe trust me fe lend me de balance a money in de first place. Is eight different bankers turn me dung – every other one was asking me fe me life – fe set up business – if it wasn't for him I wouldn't reach so far. My time fe trust him now – furthermore – all de time when im come down de factory...

GREG: Say wha – im come down a de factory?

BEV: All the time.

GREG: Fe wha?

BEV: To see how wi getting on.

GREG: Don't tell mi ah dam fool – him lef im cool air condition uptown bank and come down a dat dey nasty M-16 ghetto street fe come see how you getting on – and you want tell me say im no want check you.

BEV: I don't know about that – what I know is a shame how much time im come compared to how much time you come who is mi husband and business partner. How much time you come down there?

GREG: Don't bother try turn off de argument – you think you smart.

BEV: Wait – is jealous you jealous? [*She laughs.*] It too late fe dat now – you might as well lef me to me own device – when I give you real reasons to jealous den you can go on, but listen – me and me banker have an arrangement...

GREG: Hear dey – a fe yuh banker – you own him – wha kine a arrangement dat?

BEV: Him is willing to increase my overdraft so dat me can buy two more machines and buy up material to fill my Christmas orders – provided I can prove to him that I have total orders dat cover more dan two times the size of mi overdraft and loan. Is a stiff order, but I can't blame him – I don't have no security – and im feel dat based on how I performed for de summer season him have every confidence in me reaching de target fe de Christmas.

GREG: But im is a mad man. How im a talk bout Christmas and August just finish?

BEV: Im know more bout de business dan you – dem clothes in de stores fe Christmas have fe dun make by October – an if you da just help me check off the orders a think a reach de target already – if im don't mine a double him up wid orders – das why im want to see the samples – him can't believe.

GREG: Wha – all dem things happening and I am right here and don't know nutting bout dat?

BEV: You naw look bout de nation's business? You no have no time fe dese little matters.

GREG: What you talking bout? Mi have a calculator. Me wi help you add up de orders dem nuh?

BEV: See dem here – mek mi go get a cup a tea before gas take me up.

[GREG goes for his calculator, starts to add while she pauses at the kitchen door exclaiming at his new interest. The more he adds the more he changes from confusion to disbelief to total amazement. He checks the calculator. Starts again.]

GREG: Bev – you sure these are not some old orders?

BEV: No monkey – couldn't be – but if you want, check the dates then nuh?

[GREG adds again frantically – then he begins to jig, then as he finishes he breaks out into a dance with the calculator.]

GREG: So much money, Bev – so much money! But we can buy de house now – an mi car – me can buy a new brand car, right now – eh Bev – and you coulda get the ole one fe drive – mi mean learn to drive rahtid. Ah so you sneaking man – you been doing things.

BEV: An mi three big customers don't send in dem orders yet.

GREG: What – den wi no gone clear.

BEV: These are orders Greg – in order to fill them many things have to happen first – das why I have to have a discussion with mi banker first thing tomorrow.

GREG: Den what happen – you can't discuss it with me – mi is your husband you know – and a principal director in de company. Tell me man – what are the problems – how can I help you?

BEV: Ah having serious problems wid transporting raw materials.

GREG: Um – can't help you – mi not transporting no raw cloth down deh.

BEV: You gwaan man – you want to get rich quick, but is me one must deal with the struggle.

GREG: Don't start dat – I naw struggle to? You think my struggle no hard? You sit dung here every night and think all I do is out there having a good time – well mek me tell you say you wrong – it bitter out deh – but is just because me no want frighten you and make you start panic – many nights I out dey I wish I was in mi bed instead – but somebody have fe dweet – somebody have fe help organize – you no see what a happen to de country? You no seet? If you naw say socialism – you non-patriotic – enemy of de state – who know de words of de red flag dem is de progressive – dem – de rabble-rousers – all they can do is demonstrate and you can't get jobs if dem no pass you and find you committed. Is dem we a go lef de country up to – ah want tell you after dem same one mash it up dem have them green card and de same America wey dem cuss every day is there dem run gone – mi an you no have

no way fe go Bev. Is a game fe dem – If dem win dem get de power and de glory – if dem lose, dem go a Miami. Is survival fe mi and you – so you gwan talk. What I doing, you benefit to – only you can't seet yet – but never mine in another few months from now you will be giving me de tanks for having the foresight – the intestinal fortitude and the stick-to-itiveness to see it through to the end. Ah might dead in de process but is a fight I believe in – Survival me and you dealing wid – you at dat level and me at dis level – just understand that.

BEV: You turn a real politician eh – alright massa – you know is one thing I never do is trouble you and you politics – you have to do what you think is right.

GREG: You mean dat, Bev?

BEV: Of course, ah mean it – ah ever stop you?

GREG: No – is just dat sometimes a wish you would seet my way and join me on de same side.

BEV: Dat is asking too much of me at dis stage – not wid de politics.

GREG: Mi sorry – for dere is something ah did want to ask you to do for mi – but –

BEV: What? Tell me.

GREG: Ben suppose to be touring de area Sunday – canvassing and meeting de people.

BEV: Who dat?

GREG: De candidate.

BEV: Oh.

GREG: Ah was wondering if you could do some cooking so he could eat with us.

BEV: Das all?

GREG: Das all.

BEV: Him is you friend?

GREG: Yes man – we get on fine.

BEV: Mi will do it – not as de candidate but as you fren – no problem.

GREG: Good girl and look how mi was fretting. [*At the door.*] About nine other people gwine be with him.

[*GREG EXITS*]

- **BLACKOUT** -

Scene 3

THREE MONTHS LATER

Lights on stage while music plays “Bands of victory, bells of freedom, bands of victory, deliverance is here”. BEV sits pensively – staring into space – her face is distant and sad. Beside her are the order books and a calculator – music still playing, softer now. GREG ENTERS singing “bands of victory”. He wears a three-piece suit and has a grocery bag under his arm. As the music fades, he continues humming – he is still jubilant and moves at a dancing pace. He looks at BEV and has to restrain himself from laughing out loud at her – he tries to conceal his pleasure. He begins to unpack the contents of the bag – doing everything exaggeratedly in order that BEV cannot help but notice the contents which include three packs of cornflakes, two tins of pears, one box of cheese, two apples and two tins of carbonated beverages – all imported items. He is most pleased with himself.

GREG: Yuh remember dem things ya? No more banana porridge a morning time fe me. Your worries are over now – DELIVERANCE – Supermarket no look like deserted dance hall again. De days when supermarket full up a voluntary price inspector a monitor empty shelf dun wid now – supermarket is supermarket again.

Deliverance fe flour – no more war

Deliverance fe oil – no more war

Deliverance fe sugar – no more war

Deliverance fe soap – no more war

All toilet paper come back wid its rightful texture and complexion – Deliverance – and all a day within a few days. A fe wi time now – you no see already how crime stop? Gun violence stop – we and America a big fren again, you no see dat? You see who the new President send for first – no lesser person than the wiz himself – and you see fe me wiz – only have fe squint one time and Cuban Ambassador have fe back back – *persona non grata* style – Deliverance – you want taste de cheese? You want a tin a drinks? Or you want – what you want?

Wait, so you stop talk to me altogether. You a malice me now? Well is time now for my house to get back to normal – after all, I am still a husband in dis place – and dere are things that must be forthcoming from a wife to a husband, and from election till now how much night pass and me no get nothing – caan work – dat no right – and me not putting up wid it – dis is where all joke stop – you tink is me one vote out you Prime Minister? You mussa a go malice the whole Jamaica.

[BEV gets up, rushes to the bedroom.]

Bev – Beverley – ah call you – come here – a talking to you Beverley – come here now.

[BEV reappears at the door.]

Listen man, me tired a dis foolishness – we is two big people – something happen? Plus, me no know how much longer me can wait, and you know me respect you too much fe go a street – wey yuh say?

BEV: Let me go man – you tink me no have a right fe vex wid you and it no have nuttin to do wid who win or who lose – a you me a talk bout – your behaviour.

GREG: A man jus a celebrate – dat’s all.

BEV: Yes, but how – you realize dat since election day till now is the nearest we come to hold a conversation?

GREG: Oh – so a miss you miss me then? Me think a because yuh party lose.

BEV: You and election is quite alright – me have more what matter to me now dan fe go spend time worry bout dat.

GREG: [*Hugs her up, starts to jig – she resists.*] Cho— [*Starts to sing “Bands of Victory, Bells of Freedom” etc.*]

BEV: Let me go man. Me can understand you coming in before day election night – me expect dat – but me never expect you woulda come in so drunk that you don’t know your mother from a bull frog.

GREG: Me? Drunk? A joke you a mek man – me had in a two – but me neva drunk.

BEV: Oh, yes? Den why you lef from wey you come from come urinate in mi fridge?

GREG: Me do dat?

BEV: Ask again – have fe dash wey whole fridgeful of things. Singing pon de top of yuh voice.

GREG: Me can sing, eh?

BEV: Not a little apology, no little excuse – no explanation – no nuttin.

GREG: Cho, forget dat Bev – all of dat is in the pass – is different time now – dis is my time – will have to get some more suits build. You know where ah go today? I went to witness the swearing in of my boy as Minister – me big now – with plenty of big friends in high places – ah work like bitch for it you know. You know how bad I feel up at Kings House this morning when I look and see that of all of Ben campaign organizers, I was the only one there without mi wife by mi side. Me shame you see man – cho – especially when Minister Ben part the crowd and come over to me with his family come ask me for you – shame bad man – me had to tell him that these things make you nervous and in the excitement of getting ready to come diarrhea take you but your heart is here. All me ask you – don’t open yuh mouth – to say anything prejudicial I mean – I will do all the talking.

BEV: I won’t embarrass you in front of yuh big friend, if that’s what you asking.

GREG: You must be very anxious for me – no wonder yuh face set so.

BEV: Stay for another year – it wouldn’t make a difference to me right now.

GREG: A joke you a mek man – ahm – wait – me get a promotion.

BEV: You get promotion?

GREG: Yes man and you can get the details while we celebrate.

BEV: Tell me about it.

GREG: My boss gone – I don't know if is the election results or what, but im resign with immediate effect – me don't have to tell you, me is the logical man for the job – just a matter of time now.

BEV: How you can talk these things with so much certainty? Mind disappointment you know, Gregory – mind.

GREG: Me is the logical – under your socialist government me would be the logical much less now wid my own government in power – worst how my Minister is aware of everything. That's why me give out the car to repair – so that me can start teach you to drive.

BEV: You – going to teach me to drive?

GREG: By next month is two cars we have – me one cyaan drive two car. As soon as it come back from the garage me put you round the wheel – brand new second-hand car for a brand new second-hand wife –ah mean for the nicest wife. Me not going to have any time after me take up the new post – how that sound – come then nuh – I shall help to build this country and we have to start from scratch – no foreign exchange – no oil – more power cut than power – unemployment – hunger and starvation – every damn thing gone to the dogs – but I want you to take out our election manifesto – monitor it daily on a monthly basis – it's the blueprint for rebuilding this country – read it – we mean business. Come – enough talking.

BEV: Cho man.

GREG: Listen, just get something straight – me not going another night.

BEV: Why you going on like that man.

GREG: I am very serious – not another night.

BEV: Is not night yet.

GREG: Later then.

BEV: Cho.

GREG: What happen – you feeling sick – is not time for...

BEV: No – this. [*Hands him a letter.*]

GREG: Oh – what – invitation to another Deliverance party again? Man by the time the victory celebrations over my body will be a distillery.

BEV: From McLeod.

GREG: All him having victory party – cho.

BEV: Him raise the rent.

GREG: A little increase is due yes – is years now it nuh increase. [*Opens letter.*]
\$280 to \$650 – Bev, McLeod triple the rent with immediate effect – im gone crazy – [*Looks at the letter again.*] “I am sure you understand the necessity for such a move at this time” – take me for a god damn fool – “I trust you will appreciate my reasonableness and moderation under the present prevailing conditions”—

BEV: Hmn! Aye sah.

GREG: The liquor still in him head. Every party I go since the election im is dere – stiff stone drunk – I could understand him doing this to im socialist tenants but not to me. Is goddamn opportunist like McLeod will give this government bad name. A stop will have to be put to this. Is people like him why communism cyaan dead. [*Looks at her.*] A gwine serve him a sauce you see Bev – when I finish with him, God smile – no way – I shall pre-emp his backside.

BEV: What you going to do?

GREG: Give him a notice.

BEV: What you say?

GREG: You write the notice and leave the rest to me – where is today’s newspaper?

BEV: What you have in mind?

GREG: Listen, just stop ask ask questions and do what ah tell you woman.

BEV: I want to know what is happening.

GREG: We are moving into our own home for Christmas.

BEV: How?

GREG: Write the notice.

BEV: I am not writing anything until I understand what is going on.

GREG: Is a blessing in disguise.

BEV: It disguise fe true.

GREG: We have been too complacent. Wey de newspaper – real estate section? Based on you sale projection at the factory come January when all the money come in, we pretty. One problem, is not January we need the money is now. That's where your banker come in. Based on your excellent relationship with him, im can give you a short-term loan of say \$10,000 till January – we use that to pay down on the house – you see it – problem solved – you going to write the notice now? You see is a blessing – is deliverance at work.

BEV: I get you – is de business suppose to do all of this.

GREG: Yes man – little did McLeod know I one step ahead of him – so me stay man – all the time just one step ahead – God bless that day we open that little business.

BEV: That plan cyaan work Gregory.

GREG: Just trust me.

BEV: Gregory, the business in trouble.

GREG: Trouble?

BEV: The very day after election the customers call in to cancel them orders.

GREG: Dem do what?

BEV: The very week everything was ready for delivery.

GREG: All of a sudden so?

BEV: Dem all had dem trailer on the wharf full of foreign things just waiting for the vote to finish count.

GREG: Them can't do that – is a contract. You never take deposit?

BEV: No Gregory – is not so this business go.

GREG: How you mean? Deliver the goods and sue them backside.

BEV: And when the judge tell them to pay me the cash or return the goods and they all return it – where that leave us?

GREG: Then nuh your fault – you nuh know nothing bout business – is trick them trick you.

BEV: True to form.

GREG: Backside – so what you telling me?

BEV: What I am telling you is, if I don't find business for the hundred of dozens of stock is bankruptcy staring us in the face. That is what I have been rocking my brains out me alone and God – while you out celebrating victory and stocking up with cornflakes. The only way out fe me is to start to try sell the things office to office during the week and flea market on Sundays.

GREG: Flea market – you decide to do that – turn higgler?

BEV: Yes Greg.

GREG: You making joke? Then how you think I will feel after I get my promotion for people to hear that my wife is a higgler.

BEV: Better than for them to hear that I in debtors' jail.

GREG: There must be a better way.

BEV: You should know – nuh your time now. One of my big customers order still in tack for delivery tomorrow. It won't solve my problem, but it will give me a little breathing space.

GREG: So how the hell you tell me you lose all your orders? You mustn't do dem things – mi brain nearly burn out the way it suddenly get hot. I better call up two of the real estate agencies.

BEV: If you know what I know, you call McLeod instead.

GREG: McLeod – for what?

BEV: Ask him for some time before the increase is put into effect or reason with him to reduce it.

GREG: Me – Go beg McLeod – Me? Death before dishonour. [*Looks through the newspaper.*] Hope Pastures, Mona Heights, Barbican – reasonable areas. [*Jots down the information, looks again.*] Meadowbrook, Havendale – I will settle for nothing less. [*He dials.*] Hello – yes, I would like to know the rental for some houses you advertised today... yes... Hope Pastures. Is not buy a buying you know sir... One thousand dollars per month for rent – what about the Mona... yes... a see what you mean. [*To BEV*]: What price range we looking?

BEV: Four hundred dollars a month.

GREG: Between \$250 and \$350 per month – only the small side of the house... Jesus Christ... sorry.

[*The phone rings, he refuses to answer – BEV answers.*]

BEV: Hello... yes, how are you... I spoke to him today, yes. I assured him I would be ready for delivery tomorrow... yes... no... what... you sure? [*She hangs up.*] Gregory – Brandon's cancel out. Lord have mercy – the bank – is an unsecured loan – the order was the security – this is it Lord. I hear you say there is the small side of a house available.

GREG: Who – me – Franklin Town?

BEV: What wrong with that – is what we can hardly afford.

GREG: Me – the sharing of the kitchen not so bad but me naw share no toilet – furthermore me will stifle to death.

BEV: Me nuh have no choice now but to close down the factory, but my workers – is Christmas – I can't face them.

GREG: I can't believe this woman – we don't have anywhere to live and hear what she worrying about – her workers. Bev, you talk to McLeod nuh. [*He dials.*] Mr. McLeod please – thank you. [*He hands the phone to Bev. She does not take it.*] Come talk nuh man – come nuh.

BEV: You talk.

GREG: Hello – Mr. McLeod – what happening Mack – G... Greg... Gregory... Gregory McFarlane... you passing up constituency office later... all we guys suppose to have a meeting – strategy... but I don't know how you don't know anything about it, and I personally suggested you to head that committee after everybody said David – I had to do a little foot works to convince them you were the right man... ah know election finish... meeting with Ben, up his house... I see then – ahm... we not likely to see you at headquarters again then... No, no... I suppose nothing is wrong with that... yes, the wife brought it to my attention. I was hoping to see you to talk about it... Well, you know I suppose to be getting a promotion very very soon... Yes man... So, I was thinking that since you know how things are you would agree to give me a little time till my promotion... The little reserves I had I gave to the wife just this week to help with some problems with the business – but come January everything will be on even keel again... Mr. McLeod after seven years of problem free tenancy – and look how close we work together in the field for the last nine months – ah took you for my brother... Okay sir, say howdy to your goodly wife. [*Hangs up.*]

Scavenger – him say fe him time of sacrifice is over – and im is going to make up with interest every cent he has lost over the past seven years. Well Bev if is so, is so – but is me now against him – open war – Minister Ben – Rent Board – Courthouse – no stones will be left unturned. Reasonableness is reasonableness and believe you me this time I think I am being very reasonable with im – but him prefer fe him way – him will have to get tractors and crane to get me out of here.

BEV: Gregory – instead of that – it nuh better we knock heads together and see if we can work out a way for the business to sell the stock.

GREG: You come back with your workers argument again.

BEV: You prefer to see me go to jail?

GREG: Alright – alright – calm yourself. As far as I see you need one stone that can kill two birds and kill them quick – let me see now – ahm – the place insure?

BEV: If it wasn't, you think the bank...

GREG: Alright – burn it down.

BEV: What?

GREG: You hear me – burn it down and collect de insurance money – pay off all your debts, pay down pon you house and mi buy mi new car – simple.

BEV: Gregory – you gone mad?

GREG: There is a man – me get the contacts – is fe him specialty dat – hear how it go now – we get in touch wid him and then one night im move out all the machine, equipment, furniture, finished goods and so on – everything of value – den him go back in one nex night and move in a set of machine, equipment and stuff wey bun up already, and set up de place exactly as it was before – de next ting we know is the report that de factory deh pon fire – everything burn out but at dat time im have the real tings put away somewhere – and you know what attractive bout dis man? Weh me like bout him – im no charge you one cent – is when you get the proceeds of the insurance you give him ten percent and im give you back de tings dem. So, if the insurance settlement is \$100,000 we give him \$10,000 and my big fren tell me sey dem experience in dese tings – dem know how fe set it up fe mek everything look legitimate, and him shoulda know because is so im get to move fe him business from downtown to uptown.

BEV: Dem is de kind a big fren you keep.

GREG: Is a first-class plan...

BEV: An spen de res a mi life inna General Penitentiary.

GREG: It not gwine need the slightest investigation. Plus, in our case is nuh no big ting – we nuh just start a rumour sey we suspect de bwoy wey you did fire – im no did threaten fe kill you? And the police no have a record of it – you see, no problem – a im first dem da look fa.

BEV: Gregory, you mek mi stomach sick –ah neva believe you could sink so low.

GREG: Is to prevent you from sink any lower.

BEV: Frame innocent people?

GREG: Which innocent people?

BEV: De cutter bwoy.

GREG: Him? Cho – put all like him away and you do the society a service. [*He goes to the phone. Starts dialling – she rushes and holds on to him.*] I take full responsibility. It clean and efficient and it will take you out of trouble now – what else can matter to you?

BEV: Gregory – God knows I did the best I could. I work hard – I resist temptation to be dishonest in business – this is the choice? This is mi reward?

GREG: Everything is for a good, Bev – and plenty uptown business people did the same thing – so no worry yourself. [*Begins to dial again – she holds on to him again.*]

BEV: No, Greg.

GREG: Jesus Christ!

- INTERMISSION -

ACT 2

Scene 1

Light comes up on stage, finds BEV with a large suitcase beside her and she is crying. She opens the suitcase, takes up one of the dresses, examines the label, then starts to cry – louder now. With a pair of scissors, she attempts to remove the label, but does not. Then she tosses herself to the couch, covers her face with the dress and continues crying. GREG who has been asleep rises.

GREG: Wha happen?

BEV: Me close down today.

GREG: Might as well.

BEV: You tink it easy, you tink so – you tink is a nice ting fe accept failure – instead of me a call mi workers to fix dem up wid dem pay and a big Christmas bonus, me have fe tell dem dat dem mus try find another job for dis one fail – you tink it nice?

GREG: You cook yet?

BEV: De gas finish from this morning...

GREG: Den you never bring home nutten?

BEV: I don't have any money. Nutten don't sell today.

GREG: Tell me something – them as good as the sample you showed me?

BEV: Go for you expert from anywhere in de world mek dem come test it and find one fault wid any a dem.

GREG: Then how come not even one piece sell then?

BEV: You want to know? All of a sudden everybody get foreign conscious again.

GREG: You be careful wey you a say.

BEV: I know what I talking bout – every office me go in is de same ting. De people dem come – dem love me things – dem try it on – it fit nice – no fault – den dem ask de price – dem surprise de price well reasonable – just as you tink you have a sale, dem eye ketch de label – Beverley’s – Made in Jamaica. No, they no so like it again. Same ting a de flea market – from it made in Jamaica, it condemn. Last year de same people da buy it and dem neva complain, but is different time now – everything no free up.

GREG: Don’t bother blame dis government because de people love dem foreign tings.

BEV: The illegally exported dollars dem a talk – no funds – everything from the colour TV to de video to de Volvo, de Benz, and de BMW – gift. By the way, Ah hear you Minister Ben have a brand new Benz too – you can just add a Z to him name now.

GREG: Big, big minister – you expect him fe still drive Honda – mi no wrong him – people just bad mind and grudgeful.

BEV: Gregory, yuh government don’t see what happening? Dem a go siddung and watch small people in dis country jus mash dung so?

GREG: Leave de government out a dis – is a strategy. De-regulation. What it mean, too much small people eena de system a cluster it up wid dem inefficiency – a mek pure inferior stuff and a sell dear – mek de poor consumer haffi pay fe dem inefficiency – dem must get efficient and be able to compete wid goods from anywhere. After all, if goods can lef from so far an come compete wid what mek ya – you no see something wrong? Get efficient or come outa de system – dat time is de whole country benefit – de consumer start get him goods of high quality fe cheaper price. You no seet?

BEV: In de meantime wha happen to small people like me?

GREG: Den we no soon come round to you man – we can’t do everybody one time you know.

BEV: And de workers who did have dem job and now fine dem is without now – de people who depend pon dem fe eat? How long dem fe wait?

GREG: Ah warn you bout your damn poor relief mentality. You siddung fret fe dem – dem good and all better off dan you right now. [*She burps.*] Same damn ting me a talk bout – but it no easy – pure shambles we come tek over you know – de country did mash up – you understand me. Mash up!

BEV: Wey so much money come from fe buy so much foreign tings all of a sudden?

GREG: [*Hisses his teeth, goes – turns on the radio – no electricity.*] Power cut again! A sea water dem did have a run de B6 unit you know? When you done you a talk bout never mash up – so what we going to eat now?

BEV: Go eat cornflakes.

GREG: You eat already?

BEV: I don't want anything – mi stomach knot up.

GREG: Siddung deh no eat nuttin mek gas full you up, den blame the government. Go fix up the cornflakes then nuh – By the way, nuh music a play next door?

BEV: Me no know, Gregory.

GREG: [*From the kitchen*] Madge, Madge – you have light ova deh? Power – electricity – [*RETURNS*] Dem disconnect we Bev. Eena de big big Christmas holiday.

BEV: Me no gi you de money fe pay – you never pay it?

GREG: No feget me feget man – you nuh have no money – me can go pay it first thing tomorrow.

BEV: What you do with the money me give you?

GREG: Me borrow it fe pay down pan the car repair.

BEV: Have mercy.

GREG: How we a go manage without light – me cyaan mek any a mi fren dem come look fe me and fine sey no light no deh ya. We haffi go park de car somewhere and lock up de house like we gone out.

BEV: You no suppose fe get pay already – you no can go pay up de light bill?

GREG: Dat – look from when dat done.

BEV: What you talking bout, Gregory?

GREG: Den how you tink me get back de car.

BEV: But no dat you tek de rent money and de light bill money and pay off?

GREG: Go look bout the little something let me eat no Bev. [*She does not respond.*] Me talk to McLeod and him give us notice – him put a proposal to me – im selling de house and im giving us first choice. Me have the letter somewhere.

BEV: But we can't buy house now – how much im a sell it fa?

GREG: Dat a de joke – \$160,000 – but im wi gi we fe \$130,000. Me just laugh to meself – because me know now sey im drink mad puss piss – for dis house don't worth \$30,000 good, im gone add on \$130,000 – im mad! – Me bet you say we gwine stay ya till it tumble dung pon wi. In a August a \$43,000 number 23 sell for – and dat a palace compared to dis.

BEV: A so you know – you still in touch eh.

GREG: If you did follow me advice from long ago, we woulda a tink bout we new house now – bout you a set up garment factory.

BEV: It use to pay de rent – de light bill – gas fe cook, gas fe car – telephone – and buy food put inna de house.

GREG: How long it last?

BEV: You be de judge of dat.

GREG: I used to be de provider – everything used to go nice till you come change de rules ... Me is still a good husband – so you no badda come gwaan like me is one a dem wutliss bwoy wey depend pon wife fe mine dem.

BEV: The rules change yes Gregory – you no see you pay can't even pay the rent – and the \$52,000 me owe the bank ...

GREG: Stop talk – how much you say you owe de bank?

BEV: \$52,000 plus interest.

GREG: Me belly.

BEV: And November and December instalment no pay yet – third month and is foreclosure de bank gwine foreclose.

GREG: \$52,000 Beverley – den it no mek sense – no house money dat.

BEV: First time.

GREG: You mek we go borrow \$52,000 – all de talk you a talk me tink is bout \$9,000 – me neva know sey you da brave nuff fe gawn borrow five figure money from bank – den de damn bank manager bwoy is such a damn fool fe gi you so much money. Bev – you sure say you and him no mixup – you a go a debtor’s jail to rahtid yes – but dat damn tiefing bank manager bwoy shoulda a serve a life sentence a General Penitentiary – im is a damn criminal.

BEV: A write me uncle and ask him fe len me some money fe pay de bank instalment – when a was going in business he encourage me – and im did sey that if ah have any problems I could call on him. He’ll be willing to help me.

GREG: Him – damn mean son of a bitch.

BEV: Im wi help me – im know sey you no have anything fe do wid it – an you jus lef me generation alone – you keep me wey from dem but you nah go turn mi mind from any a dem – plus im is de only one lef fe me turn to now.

GREG: Him no like me – me no like him – and me like dat.

BEV: De way tings a look wid dis house, we might haffi go live wid him.

GREG: Me? Death before dishonour.

BEV: We might have to go live at de factory – at least the lease pay up till next year.

GREG: You no tired fe mek joke – me – go live dung deh? A joke you a mek all de same.

BEV: Is not a joke – unless yuh promotion come through like now – how dat a go? Me no hear you a sey nutten bout dat – the way you used to talk, me tink by now you da did get it already – eh, Gregory?

GREG: A little delay reach it – but that is temporary – everything in place – is just that some foreign consultants doing a reorganization study of the place – as soon as dem finish the appointment will come through.

BEV: Foreign consultants – you worried about something though?

GREG: No.

BEV: Something wrong, Gregory – as ah mention the promotion you countenance change.

GREG: Alright, alright – Henry come back.

BEV: Mr. Henry come back – from foreign?

GREG: Yes.

BEV: So, what that have to do with you?

GREG: Mi engineering post, Bev – him come back and them give him my post – say all this time me was never confirmed – I was only acting – and how I am reverted to my substantive post.

BEV: Jesus Christ – when that happen?

GREG: Two weeks.

BEV: Look like him was on the wharf in a trailer waiting for the results too—

GREG: Then what hurt me is how as him step in you want hear how him a boss boss me round in front of everybody – me couldn't take it – Bev – from last week me nuh go back to work.

BEV: What! Then where you go every day?

GREG: Me never want you to panic.

BEV: Oh, I see now, so that explains it.

GREG: What?

BEV: Nothing.

GREG: Tell me man.

BEV: Me notice for a few nights well you seem reluctant to come to bed and when you come you turn you back and is not sleep you sleeping either. [*Picks up dress, starts picking off label.*]

GREG: Me – oh that – nuh through me see you under so much pressure man.

BEV: Oh, yes? Since when that made a difference to you – is 24 years I sleeping with you every night – I know what I am talking about – but – if you don't want to talk about it – I have more pressing matters myself.

GREG: Is true you talking, Bev – from the problem with mi work situation – it still in mi head, but every night I am there worrying about everything and hoping it will come back before you find out.

BEV: So, what you propose to do about it?

GREG: Me don't know, Bev. Me figure as soon as the work scene sort out everything will get back to normal.

BEV: Then where is Minister Benz – im know about all of this – you tell him?

GREG: Off the island from it happen – don't panic – him soon come back – mek Henry stay dey – I have a plan for them you see – walk back in the job like him did leave it with me to keep till him come back.

BEV: None so blind as them who will not see – I am in trouble, and now – you in worse trouble but you don't even seem to know. Panic!

GREG: So, what you saying?

BEV: No. Then there really is no other way out – me have to do it.

GREG: Do what? What you talking bout? No more of your smart ideas – you hear me.

BEV: You will love this one – it dishonest.

GREG: Is what?

BEV: From the first day I went to the flea market – the lady who have the stall beside mine and me was talking – she sell off – me don't sell a thing – she say – lady, let me tell you something – yuh things dem look good but none of them going to sell – not with those labels – you have to cut out those “Made in Jamaica” and put in foreign labels. Me tell her no, me could never do that – she say, she know how me feel but is the truth because more than half of the things she just finish sell is right here in Jamaica dem make but she cut out the local label and sew in foreign one. She give me the address of the place down Princess Street that sell the labels them – she say is that everybody do now to survive.

GREG: Then you a go do that?

BEV: Yes, Gregory.

GREG: Serious?

BEV: Then what else me going to do – you not working, me not working – me owe bank – no house – [*She starts to cry.*] God know I don't want to do it.

GREG: What – don't want to do it – you mad – you must be congratulated to rahtid, fe coming to yuh senses at last. Then you mean say you know about that from so long and never do anything about it.

BEV: Greg – mi principle couldn't...

GREG: Principle – principle Bev – it can eat – pay rent – big big Christmas week and we cyaan even put a pot pon fire and you a come tell me bout principle.

BEV: Well, ah change mi mind now Gregory – me just will have to do it.

GREG: But after so long – look how much suffering we gone through already – anyway come – me will help you – what you want me to do?

BEV: Alright – you go down to the factory and bring back as much clothes as you can – is plenty label we have to cut out.

GREG: No – not going down there – me one.

BEV: Merciful Father!

GREG: What about the labels – you have the address?

BEV: Is okay Gregory.

GREG: Dem expensive?

BEV: No, but me no have any money.

GREG: Me neither – no man come – is alright – I think I have a little smalls. Me will invest it.

BEV: Flea market running every day now till Christmas – so whatever we finish tonight we can sell tomorrow.

GREG: I personally coming to flea market to help you sell.

BEV: Come then – [*She burps.*] I cyaan believe is me this – a go do dat. Give me a piece of paper let me write it down.

GREG: Use this.

BEV: Thirty dozen “Made in USA” – 20 dozen “Product of Korea” – 20 dozen “Singapore” – wait Gregory – mek me phone first just to make sure.

GREG: That not necessary – more important that we reach before them lock up – come.

BEV: Mek we tell dem don’t lock up – we coming.

[*BEV picks up the phone.*]

GREG: Give me... Yes, sir we coming down there right now to buy some labels so don’t lock up... you have... [*Hurriedly indicates for the paper on which the order was written.*] Ahm... 30 dozen “Made in USA” – 20 dozen “Product of Korea” – what about Mexico – den how the backside you say you sell labels...

[*BEV grabs the phone from him.*]

BEV: Hello... Hello... Excuse me – you know where else we can get foreign labels to buy... ? That's West Street – alright – thank you very much. Come Gregory – you see is a good thing I called.

GREG: Two weeks to rahtid – you know bout this and tell me bout principle. Suppose them done.

- BLACKOUT -

Scene 2

FOLLOWING EVENING – 7:00 P.M.

BEV ENTERS, kicks off her shoes, and proceeds to lift, pull and push two boxes and one suitcase into the house – she is angry and tired. Sometime after, GREG ENTERS.

GREG: Beverley – where you was? Me look all over the flea market fe you and couldn't find you. [*No response.*] Who carry you home, Beverley? Is the man in the stall beside you? No bother go on like you dumb – from you land, me see im did out fe check you.

BEV: Gregory, where you was the whole day?

GREG: Don't bother change the argument now – you take me fe a damn fool nuh?

BEV: A low-down good fe nothing son of a bitch.

GREG: A who you a talk— [*Rushes up to her menacingly.*]

BEV: So, is that it come to now? Is lick you going lick me? Well, if you think you bad, just put you hand pon me and a swear to God a chop it off! [*He freezes.*] Yes, is him carry me home. It worry you? Good! You were supposed to be there, but no – you shame a me – nobody mustn't see you a flea market a sell – dat too low fe you – worse dem don't even to know me is yuh wife.

GREG: Me can sell? Me is an engineer – you really did expect me to come sell frock?

BEV: You never shame a twelve o'clock though, when you come fe yuh lunch money.

GREG: Den me did fe dead fe hungry?

BEV: But you couldn't come ask me decently – no not you – you is de boss – me working fe you – you only come collect the cash. "Come, come, come cash time – mek me check you off, when oonu keep it too long it always get oonu in trouble." My God, I've never been so humiliated in all my life.

GREG: Me did ask you quiet at first – is you go raise yuh voice – you cyaan give me \$20.00 in front of everybody – what you expect big man to do?

BEV: Well, you don't know how I am glad for today – it open my eyes – after 24 years Gregory – me don't deserve that. For years I shackle my life in your slavery – as from dis minute, it done.

GREG: You love run up you mouth eh, and you damn well know you can't do without me.

BEV: Oh, yes? Throughout the years you Gregory was useful in one sense – it was the only thing you had going fe you – you use it as your passport, your visa and you ticket with me and many others – well not even that left now.

GREG: Wey you a talk bout, say me done, den what bout you?

BEV: Eh, eh – take it curse me now. You don't have nothing to do wid me condition – me innocent – you come fool round me and get me pregnant – then when you trick me and tek me to the quack man and mek him mash up mi inside because you never ready to married and have children – now, take it cuss me! Thanks, Mr. Gregory! Right now, I am still functional. You are of no use to nobody.

GREG: You definitely getting mad! Anyway, before you get completely mad just settle off my investment – just pass over my money.

BEV: What money?

GREG: How you mean what money – after me invest so much a my time and money in a dis venture – abuse is all me a get – woman – gimme me money.

BEV: For what? After me stay up the whole a last night a cut out and sew in label while you fast asleep – me still have to get up ketch fire fe go make you breakfast – you park de car and walk gone lef me one fe lug with the boxes and suitcase and set up de stall – you still a talk bout you investment.

GREG: How you mean – just hand over mi money – is who mek the whole venture possible? Is who pay fe de foreign labels?

BEV: Me send the little boy come call you – just five minutes me want Gregory – just five minutes to go to the toilet – de crowd down on me – me on mi feet whole time – mi back tearing open – me hungry – and you who is supposed to be mi help missing, gone a bar and couldn't even spare me five minutes mek me go a toilet.

GREG: How all a dat affect mi investment!

BEV: Tell me how much a owe you for the labels, transport and you time, let me settle all mi debts wid you dat you don't take it curse me later on. How much is it? [*She takes out a plastic bag bulging with notes. He notices. He is shocked, and we can see his amazement.*]

GREG: Wonderful business you do down there today man.

BEV: How much I owe you Gregory? [*He does not respond but behaves rather like he would like to be friendly at this point – BEV ignores the gesture.*] Anyway, I am in no further argument wid you. [*She puts her hand into the bag, comes up with a wad of notes, places them on the table before him then leaves for the kitchen.*]

GREG: Then what time tomorrow we leaving out?

BEV: Is alright – ah won't need you again – I've made mi own arrangements.

GREG: Is the man nuh? Is him turn you against me – true you look like you have money.

BEV: Let me tell you something bout dat man – him help me pack up – him help me set up de stall – him watch me stall fe me when me go a toilet and is him go buy a little lunch fe me when him hear gas taking me up. Is this evening me know him name and me tell him mine.

GREG: Then you nuh see a look de damn higgler bwoy a look yuh Bev – you nuh see dat? You going to make the twenty-odd years and all we struggle against come to nothing because of a blasted higgler bwoy?

BEV: I am not looking anybody – and I don't know dat anybody looking me – but one thing I can tell you – as from today I am making myself very available because nobody else can treat me worse than you treat me. Goodnight. I have a hard day ahead of me. [*GREG is stupefied – she LEAVES for the bedroom, slams the door. Immediately after she RETURNS.*] And I would thank you not to put you foot back in this room.

- LIGHTS FADE -

Scene 3

THREE WEEKS AFTER – FRIDAY EVENING

GREG is on the telephone dressed only in underclothes – BEV appears immaculately dressed – no shoes yet – and putting the final touches of body lotion while she gets herself a drink of water – she again leaves for the bedroom then reappears with her shoes and handbag – she puts down the shoes, steps into them.

GREG: Then you going out tonight again?

BEV: Yes.

GREG: Business.

BEV: Yes.

GREG: I want to talk to you.

BEV: Talk nuh.

GREG: I don't love what is happening to us from the other day. Bev – [*pause*] we have had we quarrels over the years, but we nuh keep malice.

BEV: We have anything to talk about?

GREG: How you mean?

BEV: Well talk nuh – I am late for my meeting.

GREG: Bev, it is important we trash out the problem we have now, you know man, and get back to normal.

BEV: You mean forget that you hurt me and pretend as if everything is okay between us right.

GREG: Bev, you know how long me want talk to you, but you just cut me off so.

BEV: It bother you – don't you said I couldn't do without you.

GREG: Bev – Bev – nuh bother with that, man. Alright me sorry, right. Now let's get back to normal.

[She moves towards the door. He blocks the door.]

GREG: You not going anywhere tonight till ah talk to you. I am still the man of this house.

[BEV turns around and goes toward the back.]

BEV: Greg – Gregory – come here nuh quick – wey the back door?

GREG: Try a better one that that – you must be think me born big so, try again.

[She returns, sees him still guarding the door. With a smile he pulls out a key from his pocket and shows her.]

GREG: One step ahead always – remember – I decide long time I not making you leave me tonight again without I get to say what I have to say. Have it from morning.

[BEV goes toward the back. She reappears at the front door, he rushes out.]

GREG: Bev, dem tief off the door – I never see this from ah born.

BEV: Letter – from McLeod.

GREG: “This is to advise the occupants of Number 3 that the house has been sold and repairs will have to be carried out immediately. Although notice has expired for vacating same, I am not forcing you to leave as long as you do not mind the inconvenience. As you will notice the back door has been removed for such repair – tomorrow the workmen will come for the front door – kindly cooperate with them. [*He looks at the door then looks at BEV.*]

BEV: You will have to go lock this and go stand guard at dat one instead.

GREG: This is a serious matter – what we going to do now?

BEV: As the man of the house, you shouldn’t be asking me.

GREG: Me nuh know what to do in a case like this.

BEV: Some board round the back, hammer, and nail in the draw— [*Points to the kitchen.*]
Batten down the door.

GREG: I was thinking about the same thing myself – but...

BEV: You hoping I will go do it.

GREG: No, Bev – No – is not that – me a go do that – but that is short term – I was just wondering say – it look like you have not done so badly at the flea market – we coulda rent a house somewhere.

BEV: With what?

GREG: How you mean – then what you been doing with the plastic bag of money ah see you come in with every night.

BEV: Use it pay the bank so I could get back two of the machines.

GREG: Say you take all of that money go pay off the bank Beverley – before you make them gwaan with the old machine them – but up to now you still nuh know business eeh man – from them seize the machine you are finished with them – a so it go you know Bev. Jesus Christ I don’t believe this.

BEV: Anyway, it getting late for mi meeting – I am busy getting myself reorganized and I can't afford to make neither you – McLeod – or anybody prevent me.

GREG: Me not quarrelling Bev – is just that me want to talk to you.

BEV: Talk fast.

GREG: A lot of things have happened – I am going to say something to you now and it not easy, but is just that you are my wife and I love you why ah telling you this.

BEV: Huh huh.

GREG: Them lay me off Bev – make me redundant.

BEV: When?

GREG: Today them tell me.

BEV: Today? Then how come you pick up you letter and the redundancy cheque two weeks ago?

GREG: Dem tell you everything, eeh?

BEV: You not going to look a job?

GREG: You know that the foreign consultant dem recommend Henry for the Director post. Him take them to Negril go show them white sand beach and set up himself Bev – me is a man that love my work you know Bev – after 26 years is that them do to me – reorganize me out of mi job and reorganize in Henry with a promotion – not even mi old time job me can get back. I tell you bwoy. Me feel like – me can't tell you what me feel like you know man – and – and – in the middle of everything you not talking to me.

BEV: The same thing happened to me.

GREG: No, Bev. This different – this time is 15 of us them lay off out of the hundreds of workers – and them was known idlers.

BEV: Don't take it personal.

GREG: Is only now me can imagine how you must have felt that morning when you go and hear that you work of many years just cut away from under you feet so. Is a wicked thing you know man – nothing nuh sweet again – redundancy money sound like badword. Is you work you interested in – this nuh call fe a man to sharpen him machete and kill man – Is because a you, you know Bev – is just because of you – is how me see how you handle your trials – that’s why I just say “No Gregory don’t give up – see Bev there.”

BEV: So, what you going to do now?

GREG: Bev, ah don’t know. This is something me never imagine could happen to me.

BEV: Especially now eeh – then what you friend Minister Benz doing in all of this?

GREG: Can’t find him – ah go to the Ministry, I go Gordon House – ah go up a headquarters.

BEV: Take my foolish advice, stop depend on him – if him was willing to help you him would help you long time.

GREG: Me just hear say McLeod get contract.

BEV: McLeod?

GREG: Me frighten. The only thing me ever see him contract was cold.

BEV: Well, him did tell you.

GREG: Me hear sey mi name on a list – me ask mi friend fe check and make sure is my name him see – anyhow me know is it – Ben couldn’t let me go so.

- LIGHTS FADE -

Scene 4

FOLLOWING DAY

Lights on stage. BEV is packing, the place looks very bare – curtains, figurines, etc. have been removed. There is no front door. Two suitcases, a box and other things have been neatly packed away to one side of the stage. BEV hums a tune. A sound is heard from off stage. She stops humming and stares through the doorway – is apparently startled by what she sees. GREG enters slowly, his face contorted as he unsuccessfully tries to stop crying. He blows his nose into his handkerchief and sits with his cheeks nestled in both hands and blankly stares at the wall. BEV watches him.

BEV: What happen to you Gregory? Somebody trouble you? Gunman hold you up?

[GREG shakes his head.]

BEV: Then is what?

[GREG holds on to his neck. BEV rushes for a glass of water, gives it to him. Big lump at his throat – nothing will pass it now. He massages his neck.]

BEV: Is alright – drink it – take it easy –

[He holds the glass to his head for a long time, but after great difficulty swallowing he hands back the full glass to BEV.]

BEV: What happen?

GREG: Call me fellow – “Who that fellow out the gate – what him want?” – I go through the gate and say “Good morning, Mr. Minister” – him call to the guard – “If it’s one of the constituents tell him to make an appointment to see me at the office” – Ben – Benjy nuh know me.

BEV: Don’t take it so hard – him coulda forget.

GREG: Feget – feget – I spend more time with him all of last year than what I spend with you.

BEV: You sure him recognize you?

GREG: Him wife run go say something to him – him barely look back and walk fast go in the house.

BEV: I don't understand – is only you and she and him and the guard was up there and him go on so.

GREG: We three of the same colour – about six other people sit down in the yard and from what a could see Johnny Walker just a flow.

BEV: Johnny Walker?

GREG: Black!! – Where those people was last year Bev – when me a run up and down for months a campaign fe Benjy.

BEV: Miami – Toronto – and New York.

GREG: Me fight the war and them come reap the victory – call me fellow and a order guard to get me out of him yard – me cook food give him – damn people a look pon me like me have leprosy – is because of them why him ashamed of me now Bev?

BEV: I don't know – him finish with you now though.

GREG: As from today mi hex him out of fe mi book.

BEV: Gregory, him hex you out of fe him from election day.

GREG: How the place stay so?

BEV: You notice you never had to push any door come in.

GREG: [*Rushes inside the bedroom then out again.*] You start move already? We done fa now yes. [*Moves over to BEV.*] Bev – me fraid fe go live down there. Me born and grow up in a ghetto. My greatest accomplishment in life was to move out wid mi mother before she dead. You lef from country come live a Boulevard, Vineyard Town and now here – you nuh know nothing bout ghetto – is fantasy for you – is death fe me. Make me tell you – fe work down there a day time and live down there is two different business and it worst now for in my days nobody never know gun, much less M16.

BEV: This is the choice I have. It's the only way I see that I will get the breathing space to get on mi feet again. I don't have the thousand dollar a month to pay when I have a place that paid up to next year, but if you have somewhere else, tell me. I prefer move down there with a little dignity than wait till McLeod come fix the roof. You not working, me not working. What is you plan?

GREG: Bev – dat work there you was offering.

BEV: You not serious? Me take too much beating to go fool around.

GREG: Bev – this Miniser Ben thing teach me something – up to now is you one nuh turn totally against me – I just want you to know that I appreciate it.

BEV: You have to do more than talk, Gregory.

GREG: Bev – I want you to take this. [*Gives her an envelope.*] Is the first part of mi redundancy, take it as my contribution to your new business.

BEV: No, no Gregory – I not taking money from you for the business.

GREG: Beverley – give me a chance to prove say me serious nuh. Where you ever see me take my cheque come put in your hand from you know me.

BEV: So, what – you coming down the factory?

GREG: Then you was planning to go without me?

BEV: Yes – go pack yuh clothes – the van soon come back.

[*GREG gets up, notices a box with cloth and thread.*]

GREG: What these? [*Holds up a pattern.*]

BEV: That's to make some dresses with material ah had lef back to get some quick money to start up the new business. Ah secure some more foreign labels – after this me done though.

GREG: How you mean – you and foreign labels is the most successful combination up to now, so why change.

BEV: Can't get the labels again – furthermore, nowadays it better you trade than manufacture – less hassle, quicker turnover, more profit – me a go buy things abroad and sell.

GREG: You mean turn real higgler?

BEV: Yes.

GREG: Then you have visa?

BEV: Is not only America you can go.

GREG: Then is you one a go.

BEV: Mr. Wilson – the man at the flea market – him ask his wife to show me the ropes – we going to Panama.

GREG: Him going to?

BEV: No – Mrs. Wilson do the buying abroad and him deal with the selling here.

GREG: Then is sell you gwine want me to sell like wey him name.

BEV: Make up yuh mind – you either going to go up to buy, or stay here and sell.

GREG: Me nuh know, Bev.

BEV: You want to live at Payne Lane for the rest of your life? Is two house Mr. Wilson and him wife have – no mortgage – all of that them accomplished in two years. You coming in this business on my terms – if not – me alone will go down a Payne Lane. Mr. Wilson say as from next week you can come down with him – him is willing to guide you.

GREG: Him was always a higgler?

BEV: Him use to be a bus inspector but him get laid off.

GREG: Him friends them nuh look on him no way?

BEV: Greg, him build him own house and have one rent out – them must look pon him a certain way.

GREG: If him do all of that in such a short time – alright – set me up with him nuh.

BEV: Before ah can make the move, ah have to hustle some money for mi plane ticket.

GREG: Use the money me just give you nuh.

BEV: No Gregory – that is to buy some more dollars – is only \$4,000 me gone.

GREG: Four thousand U.S. dollars – you Bev?

BEV: Uh-huh – a want at least two more – and those... [*She holds up the pattern*] will do it, plus this of course. [*She looks at the envelope.*]

GREG: Then about when you going up?

BEV: As soon as me reach mi target – a want to have those ready by weekend.

GREG: You good – look where we going now, Bev – somewhere I wouldn't even drive – Payne Lane – ka-ka – the bottomless pit – I ready now for anything Bev – as long as you by me – we a go show them. God damn Bev, is like a whole weight just lif off mi shoulder – come. Me ready.

BEV: You serious fe true?

GREG: And, Bev – me kinda feel like me alright you know.

BEV: What you talking bout?

GREG: The same thing that make me had to turn mi back.

BEV: You sure?

GREG: Try me nuh.

[The horn is heard outside.]

BEV: Van come – you helping me with the things?

GREG: Then we can't do...

BEV: No sir, when we go down so we'll find out everything. Come.

Very sad, GREG looks around the room, picks up a suitcase, EXITS.

- LIGHTS FADE -

- THE END -