

CHARACTERS

KEN – Kenneth Tynan, in his mid fifties
LULU - early 20's, exactly as seen in GW Pabst's film Pandora's Box
LOUISE - Louise Brooks, mid-seventies. She has long grey hair.

SETTING

The stage is divided into three areas. A black projection screen hangs above for slide and film projections.

Upstage right is Louise's room. A bed, a nightstand with telephone, and later, a kitchen chair. No real doors or windows. Very neat, but austere, with piles of books.

Upstage left, an elevated area where Lulu makes her appearances, with steps leading downstage.

Downstage left, a large ottoman draped in black satin, and a standing art deco ashtray. This is Ken's area, where he is often joined by Lulu.

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(Revised 2002)

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SAMPLE 1 - Opening Monologue

In blackout, a cigarette is lit. Spot up slowly on Ken, standing. He takes a drag and exhales, watching the smoke in the stage light. He has a slight stutter.

KEN: There is no piece of stage business more brilliant than this. Nothing more personal. Nothing more sexual. There is nothing more elegant, more indifferent, nothing that draws the eyes to the beautiful hand, the sensual mouth, the hypnotic gaze, the breath made manifest.

The lifting to one's lips, the element of fire, the suck, the burn, the glowing ember, the excruciating eternity before the pleasure, the climax, the sigh, the ashes.

(takes another drag to illustrate)

It is a kiss blown off the edge of the stage and out into the dark that says, fuck you, darlings. I know you're out there. But you are nothing to me. Look at you, watching me. At this moment, I am your entire world.

(and another, taking his time)

I'm creating the atmosphere.

(and another)

I'm making you *wait* for me.

How can you help but fall in love with the curl of smoke above my head? Soon it will reach out to you, a tender and illicit lover. Is it secretly touching you now? Is it stroking your face, your eyes, caressing the rim of your nostril? The wraith that haunts you now has been deep inside my body, inside my lungs. It was, for one breath, the air I breathed. My inspiration.

Inspire,*(he inhales)*

Expire. *(he exhales)*

Salvador Dali told me that his ideal erotic experience would involve two people whose sexual responses were so acute that they could stand at opposite ends of a huge baronial hall, dressed in shrouds with only slits for the eyes, and by looking at each other in a certain way achieve orgasm.

I suppose if one could get an actress to look at an audience like that, that would be *it*. But we still have *this* moment together - where I can touch you, without touching you.

End sample 1

Sample 2

KEN: Is she interested in the theatre?

LOUISE: No. She's interested in famous people.

KEN: I see.

LOUISE: She's never heard of you.

KEN: Well, that's fine.

LOUISE: I didn't tell her about your *Oh Calcutta*, or that you're the man who said "fuck" on live TV.

KEN: Yes. My epitaph. (*As he hands the book to her, his attention is caught by Louise's shoes. She notices Ken staring at them.*)

LOUISE: Is there a problem with my shoes?

KEN: I'm sorry.

LOUISE: Space shoes.

KEN: I'm sure they're very comfortable, darling.

LOUISE: (*Laughing*) Look at you. You should just see yourself. You just don't know what to think, do you, mister *enfant terrible*.

KEN: I haven't been that for thirty years. (*He offers her a cigarette and she takes it.*)

LOUISE: Adult *ordinare*. I'm just giving you a hard time. Have a light, darling?

KEN: Of course.

LOUISE: So. What do you want.

KEN: I'm interested in your life, your work. Your beginnings as a dancer, your time on Broadway with Ziegfield Follies, your Hollywood films, your work with Pabst in Berlin. Why you walked away from films at the height of your career.

LOUISE: Why do you think?

KEN: That's what I'm here to find out.

LOUISE: You tell me.

KEN: I think you had integrity.

LOUISE: Maybe I was just bored.

KEN: I've read your magazine pieces about film acting, and the corruption of the Hollywood system - I think they're fabulous.

LOUISE: You're bullshitting me, darling.

KEN: I'm not! You're a very talented writer.

LOUISE: You slay me. *(smiling)* You really want to sit here for three days and talk to a mean old bag about her utterly, utterly, miserable life? Hm? I know what you really want.

KEN: What do I want?

LOUISE: You want *her*.

LULU pops up over the headboard of the bed. She is wearing a corset and transparent striped Victorian bloomers. She sits on the headboard, her ankles crossed, inches away from Louise.

KEN: I don't know what you're talking about.

LOUISE: You do. She might live in your fantasy world, sweetheart, but believe me, you don't live in hers.

KEN: Nonsense, darling.

LOUISE: I've been trying to kill her off for fifty years, and everyone wants to bring her back to life.

KEN: Darling, you have to forgive people admiring you. They can't help it.

LOUISE: But they don't exist to me.

KEN: But you exist to them. The entire western world has a collective memory of your face - the face you see in your mind when you think of the twenties. You embody a time and place in history.

LOUISE: Yeah? Well, that's not *my* problem.

KEN: Some people wouldn't think of that as a problem

LOUISE: You, maybe.

KEN: Darling, I think it's an honour. You're an icon.

LOUISE: An icon.

KEN: Yes!

LOUISE: Imagine this. At this moment, somewhere in the world, someone you've never met, is obsessed with you. They're thinking about you right now. They're looking at a grimy old photograph of you that they ripped out of a library book and keep folded up at the bottom of the sock drawer. Their whole life revolves around meeting you. They think, if only - if only the two of you could meet, you would suddenly know, somehow, that this was *the* person you were destined to be with. It's fate! That kind of crap. Now, would you feel

good about that? Would you feel safe?

KEN: But surely, darling, that is what it means to be a celebrity.

LULU crawls off the bed to kneel at KEN's feet. She rubs up against his leg like a cat.

LOUISE: No thanks, darling. I don't want to be a celebrity. Somebody that other people project their sick and unwholesome fantasies on? She's a light on the screen for chrissake! Emulsion in a few cans of disintegrating film. She doesn't exist!

KEN: But you do.

LOUISE: Even if she was real, she's dead. I killed her. I drank, smoked, and fucked her into oblivion, pardon my french. But you know what really stuck the knife in her, darling? I got old.

KEN: Now...

LOUISE: I got old. Face it, this face is fifty years older than the one you had in mind when you were outside my door. True or False.

KEN: Let's not talk about *her* any more. Let's talk about you.

LULU, looks up at KEN, hurt, then exits.

KEN: You were born in Kansas, 1906.

LOUISE: Yeah. Like Dorothy.

KEN: Like Dorothy. *(pause)* A little girl plucked from the cornfields who, at the end of her trip to a magical world, finds that happiness was in her own backyard.

LOUISE: Not quite.

KEN: No?

LOUISE: I was thinking of a Dorothy who runs away from home at fourteen and lands in a goddamn magical world full of freaks who want to rob her. She is unable to worship those mighty men of power who she does not admire. And at the end of her usefulness to the cowards, the fools, and the heartless bastards, she limps into obscurity never to venture forth again.

KEN: I see.

LOUISE: Yes, I love that movie. Oh, you're disappointed.

KEN: I'm not disappointed.

LOUISE: You *are* disappointed. I should have said I like some deep movie. *Citizen Kane* or something.

KEN: Nonsense.

LOUISE: You are *such* a liar. I won't have it. If you want to talk to me I insist that you are absolutely truthful, or you can march right out that door. Do you understand?

KEN: Yes.

LOUISE: Good.

KEN: And now, "There's no place like home?"

LOUISE: Oh, please. That line nearly ruined it for me.

KEN: Let's talk about - your daily life.

LOUISE: Who'd want to know about that? I spend 80% of my time in bed.

KEN: So do I.

Lights change as title slide comes up.

TITLE SLIDE: Rosebud

KEN sitting, legs crossed, notebook on his knee. He has a drink and a cigarette in one hand, pen in the other. LULU is revealed upstage. Lights up on LULU. She is wearing a transparent version of Dorothy's gingham dress.

LULU: Whatcha doin'?

KEN: Work.

LULU: Play with me.

KEN: Not tonight, darling. I'm busy.

LULU: Too busy for me?

KEN: Too tired.

LULU: Tired of me?

KEN: Just tired.

LULU: Then it must be time for bed. (*Moving in to him*) I know what you need. You need a little pick-me-up. Hm? Then you'll feel more like your old self. (*whispering in his ear*) More like your old, *old* self.

KEN: Piss off.

LULU: Don't you love me any more? That's it. You don't love me anymore. You dislove me.

KEN: It's not that. Good heavens, what are you wearing?