

"WHEN THE LILAC BLOOMS, MY LOVE"

A play by

Jane Huxley

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First presented in London at The Leicester Square Theatre, on 14th April 2010, with the following cast of characters:

NICKY	Polly Banwell
DARIUS	Steve Smith
MISS MACKENSIE	Judy Cornwell
MILTON	Aidan Stephenson
SIMONA Neville	Sally Farmiloe-

Directed by Simon Beyer

The action of the play takes place in cinematic scenes, with various different backdrops brought onto the stage, as required.

TIME - THE PRESENT

ACT I

SCENE ONE - A RAILWAY PLATFORM IN VICTORIA STATION, LONDON

SCENE TWO - THE HARRIS'S HOME IN BRIGHTON THE SAME AFTERNOON

SCENE THREE - LATER ON THAT EVENING.

SCENE FOUR - THE SAME, HALF AN HOUR LATER.

SCENE FIVE - THE HARRIS'S BACK YARD, A WEEK
LATER

SCENE SIX - A CORNER OF THE CONSTRUCTION SITE
WHERE MILTON WORKS.

SCENE SEVEN - NICKY'S BEDROOM, A WEEK LATER

ACT II

SCENE ONE - THE HARRIS'S LIVING ROOM, TWO WEEKS
LATER.

SCENE TWO - THE HARRIS'S LIVING ROOM -ALMOST
MIDNIGHT OF THE SAME DAY.

SCENE THREE - THE HARRIS'S BACK YARD, THE
FOLLOWING MORNING

SCENE FOUR - NICKY'S ROOM, TWENTY MINUTES
LATER

SCENE FIVE - THE HARRIS'S LIVING ROOM,
IMMEDIATELY AFTER

When the lilac blooms, my love

When the lilac blooms forever...

When our hope is here each day

When our hope is here forever...

Marguerite Duras
The Afternoon of Mr. Andesmas

ACT I

SCENE ONE - A RAILWAY PLATFORM IN VICTORIA STATION, LONDON.

A bench is facing the audience, where a young man is sitting, reading the paper. He is very handsome with thick dark hair, intense eyes and an athletic physique. Behind him, looking up and down the tracks, is a serious-faced young woman, beautiful dark hair, about four months pregnant.

NICKY

Trains! Just like people!
Always late. Unless...

She looks up and down anxiously.

NICKY (CONT'D)

Unless we're waiting in the
wrong platform.

DARIUS (READING)

It's not due until five
twenty.

NICKY (LOOKING AT HER
WATCH)

Oh!

She turns and walks towards Darius, gazes at him tenderly.

NICKY (CONT'D)

Hey!

DARIUS (READING)

Hey.

NICKY

What are you reading?

DARIUS

The Telegraph.

NICKY

What's happening in the world?

DARIUS

Same miserable stuff. Air strike in Afghanistan, an earthquake in China, a terrorist threat in New York.

NICKY

It's the world we live in... we're so used to it, we accept it as routine.

DARIUS

What's the alternative? Put a noose around your neck?

NICKY

Of course not. But we could use our brains, instead of bullets to solve the unrest in the world.

DARIUS

Easier to look the other way.

NICKY

I used to look the other way. But now...

She takes his hand and places it on her bump.

NICKY (CONT'D)

...it's different.

DARIUS

How are your parents going

to react?

NICKY

To what?

DARIUS

You! Arriving with a stranger... visibly pregnant... Won't your father be angry?

NICKY

Milton is not my father. He married my mother when I was two and has raised me as his own. (*Silence*). I think he will accept me... us...

DARIUS

With a sounding of trumpets?

NICKY

Maybe not, but... kindly.

DARIUS

What about your mother?

NICKY

She is... uh... Italian.

DARIUS

Meaning?

NICKY

She can be warm and generous... but, sometimes, she goes off like a volcano.

DARIUS

What did they say when you told them we were coming?

NICKY

I didn't tell them.

DARIUS

What if they can't take us?
What if they want us to turn around and go back?

NICKY

They won't.

DARIUS

What if there is no room in the house?

NICKY

There's a spare room that is usually rented to an old biddy with a pet. And there's my own room, which is kept ready for me.

DARIUS (CONCERNED)

Christ!

NICKY

Don't worry about it. It's going to be fine, Darius. I know it will.

DARIUS

I think you should call them.

NICKY

Now?

DARIUS

Yes. Now.

He hands her his cell phone.

DARIUS (CONT'D)

Call them, Nicky. Let them know we're coming.

She takes the phone and starts dialing.

DIM-OUT

SCENE TWO - THE HARRIS'S HOME IN BRIGHTON THE SAME AFTERNOON

The scene is a large, cheerful living room and dining area, furnished with rural simplicity. Large windows bring the greenness of willows and maples into the room. At rise of curtain, Miss Mackensie is seated left in one of the armchairs. She is a thin and frail, yet wiry, old lady in her seventies - cotton-white hair neatly piled on top of her head. She is knitting and addressing a birdcage perched on a side table. The birdcage contains a small yellow and green parakeet.

MISS MACKENSIE (TO THE PARAKEET)

...so you see, Pericles, it's as plain to you as it is to me that you can't walk into a rented room in the middle of a potato patch and expect to find a million white daisies at your doorstep... You can't get away with fifty pounds a week for bed and breakfast and expect a pot of English tea on your morning tray.

(Pause.) But, never mind about that. To go back to the heart of the matter... You do agree, don't you, that there is something a bit stingy about this landlord of ours... This Milton Harris... Of course we can only speculate, but he does strike me as a tightwad. Which may be understandable, if you think he is a builder and works very hard for what he earns. After all, you build a house one brick at a time, don't you?

(Pause.) But beggars can't be choosers... We are what we are and it's no use pretending that we're not... and you and I, Pericles... you and I are not exactly members of the affluent society. What I'm trying to say is...

She stops knitting and speaks warmly to the parakeet.

MISS MACKENSIE (CONT'D)

Mind that you don't spit out the seeds too noisily... or squawk... or beat your wings too loudly... unless you want us to go slumping back and forth from one rented room to another...

The telephone rings. Miss Mackensie hesitates, then picks it up.

MISS MACKENSIE

Harris residence. Miss Mackensie speaking.

(Pause.) They're not here at the moment.

(Ebullient.) Nicky! You must be their daughter.

(Subdued.) Oh, I see. Certainly, my dear. You're

arriving... when? *(Pause.)*
Oh, this afternoon? On the
train? With a friend?
(Mischievous.) A
boyfriend? *(Taken aback by
the response.)* Oh, of
course. I didn't mean to
pry. I will give them the
message. Have a good trip,
dear.

Milton's footsteps are heard on the porch.
Miss Mackensie springs up and spreads a bright
blue cloth over the birdcage so that the
parakeet is hidden from view. When the front
door opens, she has settled back in the
armchair and resumed her knitting.

MILTON (CALLING LOUDLY)

Simona! I'm home!

MISS MACKENSIE (BRIGHTLY)

Good afternoon, Mr. Harris.
Isn't it lovely out?

Milton comes in. He's a stout, squarely built
man in his fifties, dressed in worn corduroys
and an old jacket. Time and the outdoors have
carved deep lines on his face; yet, there is a
certain vigor in the rugged manner in which he
moves through life, as though it's not too late
to climb to the top of the hill.

MILTON

Where is my wife?

MISS MACKENSIE

Shopping.

MILTON (ALARMED)

Shopping! For what?

MISS MACKENSIE (NAUGHTY)

Nightclothes... A black
neglige, I believe she
said.

MILTON (EMBARRASSED)

And you, Miss Mackensie.
What have you been doing
with yourself all day?

MISS MACKENSIE (CHEERFUL)

I took a walk through the
fields to the end of the
road.. and back.

MILTON

How do you like having this
house all to yourself?

MISS MACKENSIE
(INGRATIATING)

Hope you don't mind my
being here. The living
premises upstairs are a bit
confining and..

MILTON

Crowding you, are we?

MISS MACKENSIE

...your wife, well, she
suggested that I bring my
knitting downstairs.. She
said the house was too big
for two people.

She gets up and starts gathering her knitting
and her wool.

MISS MACKENSIE (CONT'D)

Oh, dear! I almost forgot!
You just missed a call from
your daughter.

MILTON

Nicky!

MISS MACKENSIE

She called from a train
station in London.

MILTON (ANXIOUS)

Is she alright?

MISS MACKENSIE

Oh, yes. Very well indeed.
She'll be here in over an
hour.

MILTON

And you almost forgot!
Really, Miss Mackensie!

MISS MACKENSIE

My apologies. My memory is
not what it used to be.
(Pause.) Your daughter
said she's coming with a
friend.

MILTON

Did she say who?

MISS MACKENSIE (DISCREET)

She did not... and I was
hesitant to ask.

MILTON

I'm off to buy some Italian
wine. Please ask my wife
to prepare a *lasagne* for
dinner.

He goes out.

MISS MACKENSIE (TO THE
PARAKEET)

So, you see, Pericles.

Diplomacy is still the best approach. Being too demanding is not a good idea. Which brings me back to my original premise. I can handle our landlord without much trouble. All I need from you is a little cooperation... We all welcome the occasional twitter... but no squawking, you hear? No squawking at all.

DIM-OUT

SCENE THREE - LATER ON THAT EVENING.

Milton is setting the small dining table for four. He keeps looking anxiously at the front door. At last it opens and Simona comes in.

She is a strikingly beautiful woman in her forties. Her slim, voluptuous body boasts an abandoned sensuality. Her voice has a smile and throaty lilt. The warmth and youthful sensuality of her exotic looks provide a startling contrast to her husband's ordinariness.

MILTON

Where the hell have you been?

SIMONA

Shopping.

Dangling an elegant shopping bag before his eyes.

SIMONA (CONT'D)

You'll never guess what's
in here.

MILTON

A black negligee.

SIMONA (LAUGHING)

You may have guessed what
it is, but you won't
believe your eyes until you
see it.

She pulls out a thin black negligee and starts
to unbutton her blouse.

MILTON

Not now, Simona. We
haven't got much time.

SIMONA

Of course we do.

She keeps unbuttoning her blouse.

MILTON

What I'm trying to tell
you...

Simona peels off her blouse and dangles the
negligee seductively in front of him.

MILTON (ALMOST SHOUTING)

Nicky is coming!

SIMONA (SURPRISED)

Nicky?

MILTON

Yes!

SIMONA

When?

MILTON

Now! She should be here
any minute.

SIMONA

Why didn't you tell me?

MILTON

Why don't you listen?

SIMONA (PUTTING HER BLOUSE
BACK ON)

How do you know she's
coming?

MILTON

She called and left a
message with Miss
Mackensie.

SIMONA

I'm sure she's arriving
with a boyfriend... a creepy
one.

MILTON

Why do you say that?

SIMONA

Most of them are. She has
a talent for picking
strange guys.

MILTON

I wish you wouldn't keep
criticizing her. What you
don't understand is that
she means well. But she's
young. Young people make
mistakes. They screw up

their lives.

SIMONA

That's one thing you can trust them to do without fail.

MILTON

There's no point in anticipating disaster.

SIMONA

I'm not *anticipating* it. I'm saying that Nicky wouldn't be coming home if she didn't have a problem.

MILTON

That's the idea, isn't it? That's why children come home. (*Pause.*) Most important, we have to show we're happy to see her.

SIMONA (UNCERTAIN)

I'm happy.

MILTON

You have to *look* happy. You have to *sound* happy.

SIMONA

I'd better put a *lasagne* in the oven.

She walks toward the kitchen.

DIM-OUT

SCENE FOUR - THE SAME, HALF AN HOUR LATER.

MILTON (CROSSING OVER TO
THE WINDOW)

I thought they'd be here by
now. It's taking them
forever.

SIMONA

Remember the last guy Nicky
brought home?

MILTON

Which one?

SIMONA

The punk with spiky hair
and tattoos. The one who
said he would sell his soul
for twenty dollars.

MILTON

Remember what I told him?

SIMONA (SMILING)

You told him he couldn't
sell what he didn't have.

MILTON

Nicky was just a kid then.
She's very grown up now.

Looking out of the window.

MILTON (CONT'D)

How long does it take to
get here?

SIMONA

Seems to me she has done
nothing but get herself
into trouble ever since she
moved to London.

MILTON

Haven't we been through all this? Didn't we agree that she was old enough to leave home?

SIMONA

Some people are never old enough.

MILTON

She wanted to go, Simona. She won that scholarship so she could fulfill her dream and go to the London School of Economics.

SIMONA

So what is she coming home for?

MILTON

Maybe she's homesick.

SIMONA

All I know is what I read in the papers. Enough stuff in there to give you shivers.

Approaching footsteps are heard.

SIMONA

They're here.

She rushes to the door and jerks it open just as Nicky and Darius appear on the threshold.

SIMONA

Ciao, cara.

She hugs Nicky tightly. Darius comes in. He looks unhappy and uncomfortable.

NICKY (FREEING HERSELF FROM

THE EMBRACE)

Hi, Mom, this is...

MILTON (CROSSING TO THEM)

Hey, there, you gorgeous
girl.

NICKY

Hey, Milton... This is
Darius.

MILTON

Darius, huh? (*Sizing him
up.*) You must be from
Constantinople.

There is an awkward silence as Milton and
Simona become aware of Nicky's pregnancy.

SIMONA (SHOCKED)

Madonna!

MILTON (STARING AT NICKY'S
BUMP)

Aw, for Christ sake!
Pointing at Darius.

MILTON (CONT'D)

Is he responsible for that... uh...

DARIUS (FROSTY)

Obviously. She wasn't
flying solo.

MILTON (ANGRY)

Listen, kid. You may think
you are funny, but this
isn't the circus. This is
my house and there's the
door. Nobody is gonna stop
you if you want to get out.

DARIUS

I'm leaving.

NICKY

No! Wait! (*Appealing to her parents.*) Hey, let's calm down. Seems to me we've done nothing but get angry since we arrived. (*Pause.*) The reason why we are here... both of us... is because there is no one else we can go to... (*She smiles weakly.*) We were walking around campus and I suddenly thought, Why not go home? It's the logical thing to do. We can present them with the situation as we see it... no point in waiting any longer... or keeping them in the dark...

MILTON (POINTING AT NICKY
'S BUMP)

Would be a real cliffhanger if it weren't so obvious.

SIMONA

How far along are you?

NICKY

Sixteen weeks.

SIMONA

Too late to do anything about it.

NICKY (SHOCKED)

You mean too late to get

rid of it?

In a tone of determination

NICKY (CONT'D)

I don't want to get rid of it. We didn't plan it... but now that it's happened, we're very happy about it.

SIMONA (LOOKING CALMLY AT DARIUS)

Are you as happy as Nicky?

DARIUS (IN A SUBDUED, MATTER OF FACT TONE)

I suppose so.

There is an awkward silence.

Darius scowls and draws back from Nicky. For the first time his eyes drift toward Simona and his face reflects a profound astonishment. Whatever he expected when he walked into this room, it was not the youthful good looks of this woman who is Nicky's mother. Simona becomes aware of his eyes and looks at him with a smile.

SIMONA (TO ALL PRESENT)

Well, it is a difficult situation... No point in denying that... but we've been honest with each other. (*Pause.*) I suppose it would be pointless not to be.

NICKY (ANNOYED)

I have never heard anyone use the words 'point' and 'pointless' in one short sentence.

Having crossed that flimsy threshold, they now stand facing each other in silence.

MILTON

Where you from, Darius?

NICKY

Bournemouth.

MILTON (TO DARIUS)

What are you doing in
London?

NICKY

He goes to the London
School of Economics.
That's how we met.
(*Silence.*)

MILTON

Well, you must be tired.
Why don't you go upstairs
and get settled...

SIMONA

Come down when you're ready
and have some *lasagna* and a
glass of wine.

NICKY

Can we take my old room?

SIMONA

Yes. You'll find it
exactly as you left it.

Nicky and Darius go up the stairs. Halfway up
Nicky stops and turns around.

NICKY

Thanks, Milton... thanks,
Mom.

They continue up the stairs and exit.

MILTON

I think it's quite obvious.

SIMONA

What?

MILTON

That he raped her.

SIMONA

Think so? That was not my impression.

MILTON

What was your impression?

SIMONA

I don't know... that it might be the other way around.

MILTON (SHOCKED)

What do you mean?

SIMONA

He looked terribly uncomfortable... while Nicky seemed very pleased with herself.

MILTON

I think you're wrong. He strikes me as a vulture, while she's a harmless little pigeon.

SIMONA

What is it about fathers?
No guy is ever good enough
for his daughter.

The bedroom door opens upstairs and Miss
Mackensie starts slowly down the stairs.

MILTON (ANNOYED)

Now what?

MISS MACKENSIE

Hope I'm not disturbing
you, Mrs. Harris, but I
couldn't sleep. I was
awakened by the sound of
voices.

SIMONA

Sorry, Miss Mackensie. We
got carried away.

MISS MACKENSIE

I thought I would make
myself a cup of tea...
something warm to settle my
stomach... I wonder... could
you spare a drop of milk?
I've got a teabag and hot
water upstairs... all I need
is a little milk... just a
splash, really...

DIM-OUT