

Introduction

Force creates pressure and pressure creates counter-pressure. The result? A blowout.

The Pump Room is a drama about the intersection of the criminal and political worlds, the sexual and the ideological. It is a play about the South African reality of the late 1990s, but one which applies to many other societies that have experienced epochs in their history when, after a long period of oppression, a new period struggles to resolve the past and deal with fresh challenges.

The central event that drives the play is the murder of a 'postman' carrying drugs. Over several hours on a hot summer's night, the consequences of this action cause a number of inter-connected people to meet in the pump room of a public swimming pool in Cape Town. These disparate characters play out the tensions and contradictions of their pasts and presents, and a complex web of relationships emerges.

One of the key elements is the renewed confrontation between **Peter**, a middle-aged pump room worker (but one-time actor and political activist), with **Mike** and **Lombard**, former Apartheid agents who had previously detained and tortured him. This history dogs them, but the time of state terrorism and political activism is over - they are all now involved in an underworld of drug dealing [and taking] and are desperately, if paradoxically, trying to restore some balance to their lives.

Other characters are **Lewis**, Peter's pump room assistant who is both a dealer and an informer; **Elsie**, Lewis's girlfriend, a domestic worker; and **Mumsie**, also a domestic worker and occasional prostitute, who is connected to both Peter and Lombard, but in very different, conflicting ways. An off stage but integral character is **Sandra** [whose photograph in the form of a poster dominates the pump room], Peter's ex-comrade and lover. Sandra was a white woman from a privileged Afrikaner background who had joined an underground resistance group and was detained and tortured with him; her subsequent exile to Canada and success as an actress is a source of both pride and pain for Peter who has never stopped loving her and has never stopped condemning her for abandoning him.

In structural terms the first three acts introduce the characters and set out the outlines of the action; the last two clarify and explain their identities and relationships and provide a solution to the initial mystery: who 'robbed' the 'postman' and why?

In physical terms the set represents such strongly contrasted psychological states: the pump room itself is very sparse and dimly lit, a confined and smelly space [to parallel the prison cell in which Peter was once detained]; the outside section, a moon-lit promenade with railings facing the ocean is, though in stage terms even smaller than the pump room, a space that enables the characters to open their hearts and minds despite their conflict-ridden relationships. Throughout the play, the audial elements [the sound of filters in the

pump room, the ebb and flow of ocean waves] form counterpoints to the human noise of conversation and verbal challenge.

South African protest theatre has a rich history, but today's issues are in many ways more complex than those of the Apartheid period and their exploration requires a subtler, more poetic and sometimes humorous approach. I hope this play contributes to the evolution of a new style to deal with these changed circumstances.

Allan Kolski Horwitz

The first production of The Pump Room took place in July 2009 at the Windybrow Theatre, Johannesburg with the following cast:

PETER	A Coloured man in his forties	Shane de Kock
LEWIS	A Coloured man in his twenties	Decklan Palmer
MIKE	A White man in his thirties	Leeroy Duke
LOMBARD	A White man in his forties	Ben Horowitz
ELSIE	A Coloured woman in her twenties	Lecurtia Booyens
MUMSIE	A Coloured woman in her forties	Nicole Hendricks

A second production was staged in April 2011 at Theatre in the District, Cape Town with the following cast:

PETER	Peter Butler
LEWIS	Malcom Geertse
MIKE	Mathew Lewis
LOMBARD	Neels Coetzee
ELSIE	Kylie Booyens
MUMSIE	Vanessa Lee

Both productions were directed by Allan Kolski Horwitz

STAGE SETTING

The action takes place on a hot summers evening in the basement pump room of a public swimming pool in Sea Point, Cape Town, and in an outside area fronting onto the ocean.

The pump room floor covers three quarters of the stage. It is filled with a number of chairs and a table [on which are placed a bottle of wine and several glasses], a control panel and, at rear stage left, a sluice-wheel. A large poster of an intelligent and attractive woman [Sandra] is stuck prominently to the rear wall.

On one side of the pump room is a short ladder that leads up to a small platform. Leading off this platform is a single door through which all entrances and exits are made. This platform serves as both an entrance hall to the pump room and as an outside space - a section of the pool area running alongside the ocean. The platform rails thus also become the outside promenade rails.

A full moon illuminates the scenes that take place on the promenade. For these outside scenes a cloth drawing of a full moon can be draped over the door which leads onto the landing. Between scenes, during blackouts, either the crashing of waves or the hum/grinding of machinery is heard.

ACT 1	Ten o'clock at Night
ACT 11	Later that Night
ACT 111	Even Later
ACT 1V	Much Later
ACT V	Just Before Dawn

ACT I

Scene 1

The pump room. While the audience is taking their seats, they see PETER on stage. He is alone and is busy fixing machine parts, moving tools around and generally working quietly. At one point he stops to read the newspaper, and drinks wine. The hum of machinery is heard intermittently. Soon after the house lights dim, there is a knock at the door.

LEWIS: Piet! [PETER goes up onto the landing and unlocks the door.]

PETER: Ha, you're early. You're nice and fucking early. [LEWIS enters but remains on the landing; takes an overall out of a bag and starts putting it on over his pants. PETER walks back down into the pump room.] Where you been, Lewis? It's almost ten o'clock. Where the hell have you been? You know what we've got to do. [Slight pause.] And where's my screwdriver? The blue one. Where did you put it? [LEWIS ignores him, opens the door and leaves.] Go on, run. "Get thee to a nunnery . . ." Ja, run . . . He can never be straight. Bloody parasite. Where's my damn blue screwdriver? [Picks up the bottle of wine on the table, fills a glass, drinks; addresses the woman in the poster.] Day after day, what's new? Day after fucking day . . . These fools! They want everything, I hope they lose everything. That should be the law of the universe? But who's going to believe that? You fight a fight, you fight hard, you think you know where it's going . . . [The door swings open. LEWIS is holding a blue screwdriver in one hand.] Ah, at last! You always come right in the end, you don't completely disappoint. Here, pass it here. [LEWIS remains on the landing.] Come on down already. We got work, and the future, goddammit, is in your hands. Imagine, it's almost the turn of the century, no, a fucking new millenium, and it's in your bloody hands! That's a fine state of affairs, hey, my boy? And lock the door. There crazies out there.

LEWIS: Give me a break, man.

PETER: You one of them now, Lewis? Why you so late? You running away? Why you doing this? You know we got to start the pumps soon.

LEWIS: It's been a hell of a day.

PETER: Why you so late?

LEWIS: I had to sort something out, a family problem. [Slight pause.] Jesus, look at your eyes - you been suiping again?

PETER: Don't talk about my eyes. These eyes have seen more than you can imagine - enough to go blind.

LEWIS: Is that a fact, hey? [Descends into the pump room.]

PETER: And you? You're not messing around anymore, are you? No, Lewis's got a lekker plan to save his arse. Who you fooling? The day's not over. Remember that. [Leaves his chair and starts working on a switch on the control panel.] Talk, man, there's got to be trust. I'm getting soft on you. And after how many years of your nonsense?

LEWIS: [Walks up to PETER.] Listen, you still owe me. I need that five hundred.

PETER: Five?

LEWIS: That's right, my man. Five.

PETER: You'll get it. You'll get every last cent, Lewis.

LEWIS: I need it, man.

PETER: What's the rush? Go get the bucks from your other boss.

LEWIS: I can't do that, man. You know I want to get out.

PETER: You do, hey?

LEWIS: Ja.

PETER: What a pity.

LEWIS: Shut up! I need the bucks now.

PETER: Right now. Why?

LEWIS: You poegaai, bladdy . . .

PETER: Stop talking about my eyes and think about your backside while you still got something to sit on?

LEWIS: Piss off, man.

PETER: I don't like supporting fools.

LEWIS: I've done you more than a few.

PETER: What?

LEWIS: Favours.

PETER: Favours? You done me favours? Ha! *[Pause.]* I can't pay you now.

LEWIS: I need those bucks. I want to get out.

PETER: Who can believe you?

LEWIS: I've told them already.

PETER: And what did they say?

LEWIS: You know what they say.

PETER: So why all this nonsense?

LEWIS: Because I want to get out.

PETER: Then go.

LEWIS: I need my bucks.

PETER: Ok, tomorrow. Any particular way you'd like them - baked, stewed, boiled, fried . . .

LEWIS: I want them tonight.

PETER: I'm not running away, Lewis. I've been here a long time. Long before you rolled this way I was here minding my business.

LEWIS: Ja, that's no lie – you've been minding your business.

PETER: Hey, give me my screwdriver. There's a loose connection and we've got to empty the pools.

The sound of filters is heard.

LEWIS: These bladdy pools . . .

PETER: You told them you're pulling out so they said, "Go on, old chap. Walk away you're free, you're a free agent, Enjoy the rest of your life." Ja, enjoy it. *[Pause.]* Now tell me, where's George? Where is he? No one's seen him for days.

LEWIS: Why you worried about George? He can look after himself.

PETER: No one can look after himself.

LEWIS: You two can certainly look after yourselves.

PETER: When did you last see him?

LEWIS: Ag, vok George, man. *[Pause.]* Jesus, Piet . . . someone . . . they moered the postman. You hear me? Someone foking moered the postman!

PETER: Where's George?

LEWIS: They got him in the toilets by the station. There by Retreat, while he was waiting for a train. They steeked him and they got the bags.

PETER: Give me the screwdriver.

LEWIS: Didn't you hear me?

PETER: Pass the fucking screwdriver.

LEWIS: They got both bags. *[Pause.]* Shit, what can I do now?

PETER: You know what you got to do. We've got to empty the pools. That's what we've got to do. There's too much dirt, Lewis. It's a big job. The gemors is rising to the surface.

LEWIS: *[Holds the screwdriver to PETER's throat.]* What should I do?

PETER: *[Taking the screwdriver from LEWIS.]* You want my advice or an instruction?

LEWIS: *[Quietly.]* This was the last time. I'm not lying, Piet. I told them I'm getting out.

PETER: You go with people like that and now you complain.

LEWIS: I'm sick. My stomach, man . . . This was my last time. I told you. *[Pause.]* Elsie wants me out.

PETER: Elsie? Since when do you care what she thinks? *[Pause.]* That delivery boy was coming to you, so what will they do? *[He stabs at LEWIS with the screwdriver.]* They'll just sit back and say, "What a pity. We lost two bags. So what, we didn't really need them, did we?" If I was you, klonkie, I'd get out of here. And fast. *[Slight pause.]* Dammit! Where's George?

LEWIS: I'm not messing with anybody, man. But now they gonna think I was up to something.

PETER: They must have been surprised, hey - after all these years.

LEWIS: Jesus, Piet, he was taking the bags to Els's place. She's been waiting for him.

PETER: What! You using her in this business! If anyone gets to her that stupid girl will talk so fast they won't have to take off her panties to loosen her tongue. How long she been doing your business?

LEWIS: She does what I tell her.

PETER: Really?

LEWIS: And if she doesn't, she knows all about it.

PETER: And what if that's too late? Hey, but that's what you deserve.

LEWIS: What do I deserve? Who knows what I deserve?

PETER: A lekker sweet pudding, my friend. What's called a just dessert. *[Sharply.]* The cops been there yet?

LEWIS: How should I know?

PETER: What if they arrive at her little hokkie? What then, my friend?

LEWIS: What shit you talking? She wasn't at the station. She was waiting for him in her room.

PETER: So you want to take a chance? Go ahead my boy, go ahead.

LEWIS: *[Pause]* No wait, you're right. Why take a chance? I'm going to fetch her. Just for a few hours, let her stay here, just for a few hours while I sort this out.

PETER: Here! That stupid little girl doesn't come through that door, Lewis. That's my door.

LEWIS: Just in case. I've got to bring her here, man.

PETER: She doesn't come through that door. I don't want no cops here. I don't want no ex-cops here.

LEWIS: Let her stay while I sort something out.

PETER: No, Lewis! I've been in their hands before. You know that. Not again.

LEWIS: That was different, man. That was years ago. What they got to do with you now? *[Slight pause.]* They cut his throat in the fucking toilet. *[Pause.]* Whenever there's pressure you go over the top.

PETER: The only pressure I handle is in these pumps.

LEWIS: I got to find out who done this and get the bags before they get to Els.

PETER: Once I was prepared to take chances, big chances, but not for your nonsense.

There is a sharp knock on the door. There is a second sharp knock.

MIKE'S VOICE: Lewis!

PETER and LEWIS stand frozen. The buzzing of the filters is heard.

MIKE'S VOICE: Lewis! You there? Open up, man. Lewis! It's late!

PETER: Who's that?

MIKE'S VOICE: Open, my friend! You'll soon see.

LOMBARD'S VOICE: You forgotten so soon? What a pity.

PETER: I don't believe it!

LEWIS: I've got nothing to do with this. How can they know what's happened?

MIKE'S VOICE: Open up, Lewis!

PETER: They know nothing but they come looking. *[The door is kicked.]* Shit, now I'm going to teach you a lesson. Alright, let them in.

LOMBARD'S VOICE: Where you, dammit?

PETER: Go and fetch her and bring her here! At least for now we keep her away from trouble.

LOMBARD'S VOICE: You fucking deaf? *[The door is again kicked.]*

LEWIS: Hey, Piet . . .

PETER: Tell them you're going to get something, keep them quiet with a promise, I'll handle them now, you bloody fool, I know how to keep these stooges amused.

LEWIS: Hey, broer, I'll never forget this . . . *[He calls out.]* I'm coming.

LOMBARD'S VOICE: You're coming? Good, Lewis. That's good.

LEWIS: I'll never forget this.

MIKE'S VOICE: Hurry up already

LOMBARD'S VOICE: *[Kicking the door again.]* Maak oop, jou . . .

LEWIS: *[To PETER.]* I won't forget this, broer.

LEWIS walks to the ladder, begins climbing, unlocks the door.

MIKE and LOMBARD enter. They face LEWIS on the platform.

MIKE: Jesus, where've you been? We've been waiting since two o'clock. Why didn't you come? What happened? Where's our stuff?

LEWIS: I've been working on the pumps, man.

LOMBARD: Wait till we start working on you! Where you been? Why didn't you phone, you little shit!

LEWIS: I've been here all the time. Where else would I be?

LOMBARD: I can think of a lot of places, you rubbish.

MIKE: That's no lie.

LOMBARD: Ha! And look who's here.

PETER: Gentlemen, we believe in the welcoming hand, especially for old friends. Don't we, Lewis? Come down from on high, sit. [*Gestures to the chairs.*] Coffee? Something stronger?

PETER *lifts a bottle of brandy, pours two shots into cups as MIKE,*

LOMBARD *and LEWIS climb down into the pump room.*

LOMBARD: Ja, ja. Why not? Just for old time's sake. [*Picks up a cup, turns to MIKE.*] I suppose you don't want, hey? [*Quickly swallows then finishes the contents of the second cup as well.*] Ag, that was good. Loosen things up, hey? Just getting up in the morning is a big bladdy headache. You know, just here, just here, man. [*Touches his temple.*] This doctor tunes me I'm all tense. I just laughed. I'm just bladdy bored, man. [*Turns to LEWIS.*] So, you got what we came for?

LEWIS: [*To MIKE.*] We got to talk. Come outside.

LOMBARD: What? Talk here.

LEWIS: [*To MIKE.*] Come.

LOMBARD: Talk here, man.

LEWIS: [*To MIKE.*] It won't take long. Just you and me.

LOMBARD: What's the fucking secret? Talk here.

MIKE: [*To LOMBARD.*] Easy . . . Ill go out. I won't be long.

LOMBARD: Better not be. Sort out the little shit.

PETER: Another shot? [*Refills the cup.*]

LEWIS *and MIKE exit.*

LOMBARD: Well, well, Mister Big Shot Revolutionary - so here you are.

PETER: Lewis's been here with me the whole bladdy day. It's been too cosy for words. He hasn't had a chance to go out, but now he can fetch you something. He likes to oblige - just like his seniors, his betters.

LOMBARD: [*Walks up to the poster.*] Just like someone else I used to know. So she's still your number one. You're the faithful type, hey? How did you manage it in the first place? You need a lot of bucks to get near women like this. Very lekker. Good taste. But where's she now? Any idea?

PETER: Lewis doesn't have far to go. Ja, none of us have far to go.

LOMBARD: You didn't answer my question . . . and we don't have much time.

PETER: You've got time. You've always had plenty of time for me.

LOMBARD: For you, yes. But not for this hole. This place stinks, man. What gives? The chemicals? The other shit? I got no time for this fucking hole.

The sound of filters is heard

PETER: The chemicals are off site, my friend. Anyway, what's your problem? You usually land up inside the holes you like.

The landing door opens. MIKE and LEWIS re-enter. MIKE walks down the steps into the pump room. LEWIS remains on the landing.

LEWIS: I'm going, Piet. Just need to get something. [*To LOMBARD.*] Meneer, I'll see what I can do. But I can't promise.

LOMBARD: What you mean you can't promise?

PETER: Don't worry - you'll get what you need. [*Slight pause.*] Hey, Lewis, I thought these are your bosom pals. After all, they're here in terms of the Law for the Preservation of Neighbourly Relations.

LEWIS: [*Gesturing to MIKE.*] He'll tell you why.

LOMBARD: He will, will he?

MIKE: [*To LOMBARD.*] Relax. Everything's under control.

LOMBARD: You've never been able to control a fucking thing! Not even this bastard.

Not even him. [*To LEWIS.*] Go. Better get something fast.

LEWIS: Ok, I'm off. Check you later. [*Exits.*]

LOMBARD: You never could stop talking kak once you started.

PETER: I'm just doing my dance, man. I'm banging my drum.

LOMBARD: Go and bang something else for a change.

PETER Bang, bang . . . ah, that reminds me. I've got to fetch a hammer, there's a broken connection and there's an inspection tomorrow . . . you know, once the pools are empty.

I won't be long. [*Moves to the ladder.*]

LOMBARD: [*To PETER.*] No, wait! You just stay here and pomp.

MIKE: Easy, man. He's not going to disappear.

LOMBARD: Not half he won't.

MIKE: Lewis will be back in half an hour.

LOMBARD: Ok, go. But don't think you can take your time. And that pal of yours better be quick.

PETER: Come on, you've got me covered - as always. I'm just going to the storeroom, man. It's not far. There's no tv but check the dials. They flash lekker. Must say, it makes a change to walk out before you. I like this. I like walking out with the two of you still inside. [*Exits.*]

The sound of filters is heard.

LOMBARD: So this is what his fortress looks like. . . He's looking old, hey?

MIKE: Ja, he looks wiped.

LOMBARD: Still as cocky as ever.

MIKE: Looks like he's learnt nothing.

LOMBARD: He's got a fucking nerve sticking Sandra up like this.

MIKE: Must have been taken in their early days. It's a good shot. Intense but relaxed.

[*Pause.*] Shit, you went too far there. You went way too far, Mr Lombard.

LOMBARD: Don't Mister Lombard, me. What the hell did you do that was so alright? Don't lay it all on me.

MIKE: She's famous now.

LOMBARD: You didn't know how to handle her, hey. You just folded in front of those big tits. But where the goeters, man? Why doesn't he have it here?

MIKE: He said his connection didn't pitch, this 'postman', ek se.

LOMBARD: What do you mean he didn't pitch? We've never had a problem before.

Why now? I wonder who the hell is messing around? Who's in on this? Fucking coolies?

The Nigerians? Our friend playing games? I don't like this. I mean, as soon as we come in, he tries to slide out like a vuilgat.

MIKE: He's served his purpose over the years.

LOMBARD: But we're not finished with him yet. Not yet.

MIKE: Give him this chance.

LOMBARD: He's a dief, man.

MIKE: Just like someone else I know. [*Pause.*] How can you send people to me like that?

What have got in your head? When I'm at work, there are always people around. Do you want me to get kicked out of there as well?

LOMBARD: I thought I was doing you a favour, man. You're always complaining about not having enough money.

MIKE: But why send them when I'm on duty, when I'm running around? I'm busy there, man. I'm out in the open.

LOMBARD: Ok, then, ok. No more fucking favours from me. I'll tell them to los you. No one needs you that bad.

MIKE: And who needs you? [*Lifts the bottle to pour himself a drink.*]

LOMBARD: You'll be surprised. [*Pause.*] Shit, your hands are trembling.

MIKE: Fuck off. Ja, who's a thief? Your pal Combrinck, hes a thief ... How much does he give you for a handgun? He's more of a vark than our friend here, he robs you blind.

LOMBARD: I don't let Combrinck rob me. As for this Lewis, I'll sort him out tonight.

Filters vibrate.

MIKE: Sounds like a tidal wave.

LOMBARD: You going mal again, man. These hotnots starting to get you down?

[*Filters grind again.*] OK, Doctor Michael . . . sounds like a fucking tidal wave.

Blackout. The filters vibrate.

Scene 2

A section of railing running alongside a promenade facing the ocean. LEWIS and PETER are standing side by side under the full moon. The sound of waves is heard.

LEWIS: Sometimes you meet people at the right time. I mean, after you meet them, things go right with them, with others. But sometimes you meet people and you know that sooner or later, even if it seems ok, things are going to blow up. You know the stars aren't smiling. You know there's a skeef eye looking at whatever you're doing, checking how to trip you up, a skeef eye that doesn't move - even when the jokers hands are tight round your windpipe. I mean some dik and frisky hand round your neck but the moon doesn't drop a tear; it comes and goes together with that skeef eye that has no tears to spare.

PETER: You invited them, Lewis. After all this time you invited them to stop by - a little chat, a little business. You're mad, Lewis. You've broken the most important rule, the one that kept things going. Why, Lewis? Why now? And where's George? Where is he? Don't tell me about your postman. That's none of my business. [*LEWIS does not respond.*] Ok, I'll deal with them. I'll handle them. Just get that Lombard something. He's red in the eye and he's looking for excuses. Don't disappoint him, Lewis, because if you do, you'll have too much on your plate.

LEWIS: Who says the postman is none of your business? And George, why you going on about George? He's my blood, not yours. He's my blood!

Blackout. The sound of waves rises in volume.

Scene 3

The pump room. Sound of filters. The door opens; PETER enters, closes the door.

PETER: [*In a falsetto.*] How did you gentlemen get in here in the first place? To what do we owe the honour? [*Climbs down the ladder.*]

LOMBARD: Don't play dumb. That line didn't work too well last time either.

PETER: Really? But you can't be the best judge of that. Anyway, let's get closer to home. Lewis usually works outside. I'm still training him for the pumps. He does nightshift with me twice a week, but he won't learn. He just won't get down to it. [*Slight pause.*] In an hour or two we're going to empty the pools. And then, where's everyone going to swim? Some of us don't have quiet lagoons protected by breakwaters. And one day these sea walls won't be able to keep out the tide. Force creates pressure, and pressure creates counter-pressure. [*To MIKE.*] Now what do you know about pressure? Any signs of a blowout?

MIKE: I'm at a private clinic, it's been three years now. Got a lekker fat package from your new government so why not leave, hey?

PETER: Ja, you always looked more like an ambulance driver than a doctor. There, on the edge of the precipice, studying Theories of Stress - theories seasoned with vomit.

MIKE: The only downside is that I sometimes have to clean bedpans.

PETER: Mental or otherwise? You're a lucky man, Mr. Professor. And as always you're still dedicated to the sick and suffering - you don't mind getting your hands dirty if it's for a good cause.

LOMBARD: Ja, he really cares, man. He listens.

PETER: Even while were screaming, he takes notes.

LOMBARD: He gets inside. He gets to the bottom.

MIKE: It could have been worse, Peter. It could have been someone who had no feeling for you at all, a real animal. You know who else was around.

LOMBARD: [*Gesturing to the poster.*] She's the only killer here - your little actress. [*A cell phone rings. PETER makes no attempt to answer. It rings several times. The sound of the pumps is heard.*] Answer it or I will. Go on, talk!

PETER: [*Slowly taking the phone out of his pocket.*] I'm busy. [*Slight pause.*] Talk louder, There's too much noise. [*Slight pause.*] No, come. [*Pause.*] Come together, it's ok. [*Pause.*] Who's here? Only a few ouens who want to mix business with pleasure. [*Pause.*] See you soon . . . sweetheart.

LOMBARD: Oh . . . did I hear, sweetheart?

PETER: [*Puts the phone back in his pocket.*] Just a close friend.

LOMBARD: A close friend? Impossible.

MIKE: As close as us?

PETER: No more impossible than you coming here tonight.

MIKE: What if we'd come before? Let's say five years ago.

PETER: I know this phone is bugged. You've bugged every phone I've ever had.

MIKE: Ag, that's all history.

PETER: My phones have been bugged from the day I got out and who else would want to do that?

MIKE: We're also out. We've been out for almost as long as you've been here.

PETER: I've kept my side of things. I'm just living like a rat in a sewer . . .

LOMBARD: Ah, this is really a history lesson! Hey, tell me more about sweetheart. Remember your mistake? You've got to learn to WATCH your step. Then you've got to learn to KEEP IN STEP. And maybe then you won't fall over your piepie like you used to. And now there's more kak.

PETER: Ja, there's always something to test you. And in the end, there are just two types of people - those who survive . . . and those who don't.

Blackout. Sound of filters.

ACT II

Scene 1

The pump room. The stage is in darkness.

ELSIE'S VOICE: Jesus, man, I don't remember it being so far. And that's the first and last time I jump over the rails.

LEWIS'S VOICE: Lovey, your memory has always been shit. I bet you don't even remember the first time I pulled down your pants.

ELSIE'S VOICE: Where's your manners?

MUMSIE'S VOICE: Oh, tell us about it, Lewis! She never likes to talk about such things.

LEWIS'S VOICE: Not half she doesn't.

MUMSIE'S VOICE: She only likes to talk about boring things. Like how much money you take from her.

LEWIS'S VOICE: I bring her presents every week.

ELSIE'S VOICE: That's a good one.

LEWIS: [*Opens the door, enters and stands on the landing.*] Hey, why's the light off? Where have they gone?

MUMSIE'S VOICE: Stop talking to yourself, man. Hit the switch. This party's died on us.

LEWIS: Piet! Hey, Piet!

ELSIE'S VOICE: They're just sleeping it off, man. Put the lights on.

LEWIS: I don't like this.

MUMSIE'S VOICE: And what did you expect - fireworks? I know your friends. All talk and no action.

LEWIS: I don't like it.

ELSIE and MUMSIE enter; LEWIS is carrying a bag with bottles of wine. They stand beside LEWIS on the landing.

ELSIE: God, you're the limit. [*Fumbles for the light switch.*]

LEWIS: Wait, don't touch it yet.

ELSIE: Why you acting like somebody's running on your shadow?

SHE flicks the switch. The light goes on. The pump room is as it was, but LOMBARD is lying sprawled on the floor at the far end; he is partially hidden by the table.

MUMSIE: Look! Another one for the graveyard.

ELSIE: Yo, he looks bad.

LEWIS: What?

ELSIE: Man, there's someone out there on his ear!

MUMSIE: There! Behind that table.

LEWIS: Mike! *(Hands MUMSIE the bag, jumps down the stairs and runs to the prostrate figure. MUMSIE and ELSIE remain on the landing. LEWIS turns LOMBARD over.)* Ag, him! *(LOMBARD moans; opens his eyes.)*

ELSIE: Who did you expect?

LEWIS: *(To LOMBARD.)* What happened? Where are they?

MUMSIE: Give him a chance to wake up, man. Looks like he's had a rough evening.

LEWIS: Where've they gone?

LOMBARD: They pulled out on me.

LEWIS: Was anyone else here?

LOMBARD: What you talking about, man? We were waiting for you.

ELSIE: This one of your friends, Lewis? Why don't you make the introductions?

LEWIS: When did they leave?

LOMBARD: How would I know?

MUMSIE: Maybe they went for a swim. Your pal, Piet, he's not so big, hey Lewis? He can fit in the baby pool. *[She suddenly sees and recognizes LOMBARD, is visibly shocked and turns away. To ELSIE]* I knew this would be a waste of time. Maybe we should go, darling?

LEWIS: Shut up, already. Do you think I wanted to bring you along?

ELSIE: Leave her alone, man. Go calm down outside. Maybe you'll find your Piet laying on his backside dreaming of pension time.

MUMSIE: I'm going, give me the wine.

LEWIS: No stay. You can have the bag. *[To LOMBARD]* Hang on. I'm going to find Piet.

LOMBARD: Where the goeters? I can't wait forever. *[Sees the two women; looks drunkenly at MUMSIE.]* Aha . . . you have brought me something . . . what a surprise! What more can a man want?

LEWIS: Ja, you see . . . ag, don't worry, Ill sort you out, my man.

ELSIE: *[To MUMSIE.]* You know him?

MUMSIE: Are you mal? How would I know this wreck?

LOMBARD: So you don't know me? Are you sure, sweetie? Ok, be shy. *[To LEWIS.]* Hey, don't you have a little something on you?

LEWIS: *[Climbing onto the landing.]* I'm on my way to sort you out. *[To ELSIE and MUMSIE.]* Look after him. I won't be long. *[Kisses ELSIE.]*

ELSIE: What! You leaving us alone here?

MUMSIE: Aren't you going to give me a goodbye kiss, you bastard?

LEWIS: Lock it.

MUMSIE: You promised us a good time. And this is a fucking joke.

LEWIS: Keep your mouth shut. Go down already.

MUMSIE: Voetsek already.

LOMBARD: [*As LEWIS exits.*] Hey, watch out for werewolves! There's a full moon.

MUMSIE: Those are vampires, you moegoe.

ELSIE and MUMSIE climb down into the pump room. MUMSIE takes the bottles out of the bag, places them on the table, then opens one of them.

MUMSIE: [*To ELSIE*] Are there any more cups?

ELSIE: Ja, these look real dirty.

MUMSIE: [*Looking around.*] We should have brought some ourselves. These men can't be trusted with something as simple as this.

ELSIE: Wait! Here some. [*Picks up several polystyrene cups from next to the control panel.*] New ones too.

LOMBARD: You see, ladies. we're organized. There are no werewolves here.

MUMSIE: No, you're like vampires. And this one up here. I know about monsters. Vampires dress smart. [*Stands beside the poster and addresses it.*] They're rich. They live in enormous bladdy houses with cooks and drivers and garden boys. They always talk nice but in the end they suck you dry. But werewolves, they're ordinary mense, they look like you and me. You know, street-sweepers or people who work in a bank. And they're completely normal, except at full moon. Then they go hairy and everything.

LOMBARD: Don't knock the vampires. Some of them are poor ous. They just don't have enough bucks for booze at the end of the month.

ELSIE: I know someone who doesn't know when it's the start or the end of the month.

MUMSIE: Never mind him. What about your bladdy boss? He's always uitgesuij. Man, he's really something with that bladdy boep. One day he'll squash tjou on the kitchen table, nogal.

ELSIE: I'll skop him somewhere he'll never forget.

MUMSIE: Ja! This Lady takes kak from no-one - except from you-know-who.

LOMBARD: Let me work this out.

MUMSIE: I look after her. Who else do we have in the world? We're such poor girls.

LOMBARD: Ja, poor in pocket but lekker rich in personality. [*Looks suggestively at MUMSIE.*] You two are real women - not like this one, hey? [*Turning to the poster.*] Not a spoilt brat.

ELSIE: Who the hell is she?

LOMBARD: Don't you know?

ELSIE: Ag, I can't remember. [*To MUMSIE*] What did Piet tell us?

MUMSIE: Some bladdy actress . . .

LOMBARD: [*To ELSIE*] Don't worry about her now. I mean, you and Lewis look like a pair of regular lovebirds, but don't tell me you don't have other boy friends.

ELSIE: I got no time to run around.

LOMBARD: Liefling, you shouldn't let that Lewis tell you what you can do. You're a lekker stuk. There's lots of guys who'll jump at the chance.

ELSIE: Can't say I've noticed.

LOMBARD: Ag, don't be modest. And, Christ, who do you choose?

ELSIE: We get on ok.

MUMSIE: Dont listen to her. She talks different when were alone.

LOMBARD: You women, you stick up for your boyfriends even when they mess you around.

ELSIE: You got a girl?

LOMBARD: Ja. [*Smiles at MUMSIE.*] I got a girl.

MUMSIE: You talk so nice, who can refuse you. [*Gestures towards ELSIE.*] You like this one, hey. [*Pause.*] All God gave me was a big mouth.

LOMBARD: And you certainly make the most of it! It's good you like to please a man that way.

ELSIE: I don't like to hear rude stuff like that.

LOMBARD: You call that rude? Let me tell you something else then.

MUMSIE: Don't start, that's not what we came for. [*Pours herself a drink.*]

LOMBARD: Listen, I didn't mean to be rude.

ELSIE: What did you mean to be? Who do you think we are?

MUMSIE: [*Pours ELSIE a cup of wine.*] Here, take a sluk. Dont worry. He was only playing the fool.

LOMBARD: Ja, I was only playing the fool. You know, being a domkop. Like, I went to this kaffie at lunchtime for a sandwich. Toasted ham and cheese. Girl gives it to me. She writes the price on the packet. I take it to this Jihad ou at the till and he tunes me it's R10,50 when on the packet it's written R7,95.

MUMSIE: Ja, they rip you off all the time, if you give them a chance.

ELSIE: I don't trust a bladdy soul. I don't care who or what.

LOMBARD: Me, too, my darling. But then I'm paid not to trust anybody. I'm in the security business.

ELSIE: That's a good job. I keep telling Lewis he must go for something like that. This pump job's no good. The pays shit. He's been making the same fucking money for years now.

LOMBARD: Lewis makes enough in other ways.

ELSIE: Ja, maybe he does, but I don't see it. No, man, you all have your good time, but if there's any trouble afterwards, we don't hear from you so easy.

LOMBARD: Nonsense! When I came out the army, I was seeing this Malay chick for a while and when she got preggies, I even paid half the abortion. (*Winks at MUMSIE, then grabs ELSIE and tries to kiss her on the mouth; she turns away and he manages to just touch her cheek.*) Give me a kiss!

ELSIE: What do you think you're doing?

LOMBARD: Come on, man. What's a bit of a . . .

ELSIE: If Lewis walked in, he'd kill me. And you.

LOMBARD: Don't worry about him. He's still outside. They're all having a lekker skyf, they've forgotten about us. (*He tries to put his arm around her; she pushes him away.*)

ELSIE: Stop it! You'll spoil my dress.

LOMBARD: How long you been with Lewis?

ELSIE: Six years now.

LOMBARD: That's a long time.

ELSIE: I only walked out on him once.

MUMSIE: I don't give anyone a second chance.

LOMBARD: Yes, you do. You give them seconds and thirds and fourths, and then. . .

ELSIE: He just doesn't think. He doesn't know what it is to sit down and work something out. Ja, last time the cops got him he only did one year but next time hell get . . .

LOMBARD: Only one year! That's a bladdy joke.

ELSIE: Even ten minutes is too long, hey?

MUMSIE: Even one minute is too long.

ELSIE: You know the man didn't come today. We got nothing. Not that I mind that rubbish not coming round. They mos come at two, three o'clock in the morning, banging on my door. They piss against the walls. I told Lewis a thousand times I can't take it anymore, they must go get their boom somewhere else, but you think he listens?

LOMBARD: Yes, I know the bastard's got nothing. But he told us he can still organize something. He'd better not be lying.

MUMSIE: You told me he was going to leave that business.

ELSIE: He promised.

LOMBARD: He'd better not be lying.

MUMSIE: Ag, who can believe him? He needs a flame-thrower to get through his dik skull.

ELSIE: But it's a problem. He must have a way to make extra. He makes peanuts here, and he's got people to look after.

MUMSIE: Oh, come on, lovey! You don't believe he's sending money to Mossel Bay? He doesn't look after one sister, never mind four.

ELSIE: What you talking about? I met one of them two years ago. She came for New Year with her little boy. A beautiful little boy. He was very light-skinned.

MUMSIE: Ag, that was someone he met in the street and gave R5 to make a monkey out of you. I hope he doesn't think he can make a baboon out of me.

LOMBARD: [*Starts climbing the ladder.*] I've got to take a piss, ladies. I'll check you just now. Then we can go to my place. I've got plenty of brandy and coke. [*Opens the door.*] Think about it. [*Smiles at MUMSIE.*] Especially you, my sweetheart. [*Waves to ELSIE.*] Actually, maybe you the one, liefling. [*Exits.*]

MUMSIE: [*Pouring herself a shot.*] Yes, girl, you got yourself a new admirer.

ELSIE: No, he was checking you. Anyway, that dronkgat . . . fok him. He won't get it that easy.

MUMSIE: Don't you like him?

ELSIE: I'm not that hard up yet. He wants to take a drive up the mountain, he can do it alone.

MUMSIE: [*Slight pause.*] So . . . has George been coming round?

ELSIE: Sh . . .

MUMSIE: What do you see in that George? He's so quiet. He never says a word.

ELSIE: What I like about him is that he always takes it slow. Lewis mos grabs me whether I feel like it or not.

MUMSIE: Sometimes that's nice, though.

ELSIE: Maybe for you. He mustn't take me for granted.

MUMSIE: Anyway, sweetie, those quiet ones can be dangerous. You never know what they thinking.

LEWIS: [*From off-stage.*] Elsie! Els!

ELSIE: What does he want now? Typical. He can't come in and talk proper.

LEWIS: [*Opening the door.*] Elsie, come out, man! I'm waiting.

ELSIE: Don't scream. I'm coming.

LEWIS: Hurry up!

MUMSIE: [*To LEWIS.*] Leave the door open. It's so stale in here.

LEWIS: I can't find them. They got me worried.

ELSIE: Let's go take a walk on the beachfront.

LEWIS: You, the only place you're going from here is back to your hokkie. Ag, come on, Els. I need a favour, darling.

ELSIE: No! No favours.

LEWIS: Don't make me mad at you.

ELSIE: What you want?

LEWIS: Come outside.

ELSIE: Not till you tell me.

LEWIS: You've got one minute. I'll be at the end of the corridor. [*Shuts the door.*]

ELSIE: Shit, I feel like just leaving him and going back to Grabouw. I can't fight him anymore.

MUMSIE: What would you do back there? You going to live off your ma?

ELSIE: I'll go back to the apple factories. I was a sorter when I was a girl.

MUMSIE: Not for me, darling. I want to live in the BIG city.

ELSIE: You call this living? No, there's too much grief.

She climbs the ladder, reaches the landing.

MUMSIE: Come on, Els! Don't take it so serious. You know what he's like. So what if he's full of shit. You smaaak him and that's what counts. The Lord didn't think to make it easy for people to be happy.

ELSIE: Be happy! [*Gyrates her hips as she says this. Exits*]

MUMSIE: Bye, bye! (*She remains seated, drinks more wine, then, at first quite softly, almost mournfully, begins singing 'Strangers in the Night'. She rises, dances, sings several lines, stops in front of the poster of Sandra, stares at it.*) Damn you! Damn you!

Blackout. Filters vibrate.

Scene 2

At the promenade railing, facing the ocean. The sound of waves.

ELSIE'S VOICE: Jissus, it's good to get out of that bladdy pump room. How do you stand the smell? And it's so small!

LEWIS'S VOICE: Ag, you get used to anything. I mean, it's a job.

ELSIE and LEWIS walk into view. They are illuminated by the full moon.

They stand at the rails; LEWIS puts his arm around her.

ELSIE: It's nice out here. These waves an all. Hey . . . [*Pointing.*] What those lights over there?

LEWIS: Where?

ELSIE: There, man - past the island, that whole bunch of lights.

LEWIS: Those? Those are too big for a trawler, must be one of these moerse tankers. Plenty round here. They out there on the water for weeks, then they come in for refreshments.

ELSIE: Ja, very fresh - like chicken breyani and . . .

LEWIS: Come on, Els, don't be dof! They come for koeksusters and that Mumsie of yours.

ELSIE: [*Laughs.*] Hey, don't talk like that. Where do you think that ships going?

LEWIS: America.

ELSIE: Why America?

LEWIS: With so many lights can't be headed for some dorp over here. That ships big time, man.

ELSIE: Like you?

LEWIS: Ja, like me.

ELSIE: [*Turns away from him.*] Lewis, what's up with you tonight? You come drag me away from tv. Where's this party? Why bring me to see a drunk Boer laying on the floor?

LEWIS: Ag, don't take any notice of him. [*Slight pause.*] Ja, sorry, lovey. Things are a bietjie mal right now. I know I been . . .

ELSIE: Talk straight, man. Tell me what's going on.

LEWIS: What can I say . . .

ELSIE: Shit, say something, anything! After I lost that baby you also didn't say nothing, and you didn't help me. I just lay there by myself in hospital. And now it's the same thing.

LEWIS: That's a lie! I came to the hospital.

ELSIE: Ja, that's all you did. And you only came once.

LEWIS: Els, that was bladdy months ago.

ELSIE: Well, we got another chance.

LEWIS: What you mean?

ELSIE: We got another chance.

LEWIS: You got another kid!

ELSIE: Ja.

LEWIS: How long you known?

ELSIE: Three months.

LEWIS: Shit, why didn't you tell me straight away? You think I don't need to know this? Am I some kind of blind, deaf and dumb man?

ELSIE: I just couldn't talk to you, you been too far from me.

LEWIS: Nonsense.

ELSIE: I hope it's a girl. The doctor told me the dead one was a girl.

LEWIS: Maybe it was. I mean, who knows . . . it wasn't anything yet. Ag, forget it, Els. It wasn't your fault.

ELSIE: No, it wasn't my fault.

LEWIS: And it wasn't my fault either.

ELSIE: Specially not yours.

LEWIS: Lets just . . . hey, what's the fuss, that kids gone, Els.

ELSIE: You never wanted kids. You never wanted Basil.

LEWIS: That's a lie. I never said a wrong word against Basil. He's my boy as well. I never said a wrong word against him though you fucked him up.

ELSIE: While I fucked him up where were you? What did you do for him?

LEWIS: What do you mean? I fixed him up at my sister. I gave her bucks for chow. You didn't pay a bladdy cent for him.

ELSIE: No?

LEWIS: All you did was take him some fucking stale cake from your madam. Imagine, bladdy stale cake.

ELSIE: What? And the shirts, and the pants, and the . . . You know how much love I took him. Why do you pretend you did enough? Let me tell you, things got so bad with you never being around he used to call George 'daddy'.

LEWIS: What's wrong with that? Why shouldn't he? I asked George to check on him. Why shouldn't my brother check on him? He did a lot for Basil. *[Pause.]* I don't want to fight with you. You did your best and so did I. Anyway, right now I got no time for such things. There's . . .

ELSIE: No time, hey? Well, listen to this. Last night I had a dream. I'm out in the veld - there's just sand and dried out bossies. Standing next to me is an old woman whom I don't know but I have this feeling of respect for her. And this woman and me, we have these packs of dogs. Hers are tame and trained, but mine are wild. And these dogs start fighting. You know, biting and scratching each other. And I can't believe it - not one of her dogs is hurt. The fighting goes on and on, and mine are killed off, vrek, man - one by one. I can't believe it. How come her tame dogs moer mine? In the end I've got one last dog, and he's all covered with sores and things. But the old woman looks at him and tells me he must also die. She says all my wild dogs must be killed even the ones that look old and finished. Slag them all - you can't take a chance. But I check this old dog and I can't see why he must die. He's no danger to no one. And I reckon that if I can save him, he'll love me forever. But when I see her ready to strike him, I think, ja, she's right. No wild dog can ever be trusted. And then I think - if only I had the guts to do the job myself.

LEWIS: So she kills him?

ELSIE: Ja, I know she'll do it but I woke up before she does.

Blackout. Sound of waves rises in volume.

ACT III

Scene 1

MUMSIE is in the pump room. She stands to the side of the poster. Sound of waves merges into that of the filters.

MIKE'S VOICE: There's so much spray in the air. It'll be high tide soon.

PETER opens the door. He and MIKE enter and stand on the landing. They are both quite tipsy.

PETER: Let the waves build and clean out the tidal pools - the muck, the rubbish, the old and the new. The lot.

MIKE: You speak like the damned.

PETER: No, I'm trying to escape my damnation. I'm more like a drowning man. I mean, who can stay afloat when the tide keeps running against you? I did what I could.

MIKE: [*Produces a paper bag from his pocket, opens the bottle inside it, takes a sip, and passes it to PETER.*] Here, to keep you afloat.

PETER: Aha, a little bag with something for everyone. That's very social. Specially for those who've proven their re-lia-bi-li-ty. [*Takes a sip.*] This stuff's always thicker than water.

MIKE: A real boost for those who've shown they've got what it takes.

PETER: What about those who know how to give?

MIKE: Give? Give what? You only knew how to give what you shouldn't.

MUMSIE: [*Who has been standing quietly next to the poster watching them.*] Gentlemen, welcome. I was getting lonely. There's no music - just these farting machines.

MIKE: Ah, good evening! And how do you do? How could we have missed you? Are you also a star? [*Points at the poster.*] Now there's a mega-star in all her glory. Isn't that so, Mister Peter?

MUMSIE: [*To PETER.*] What do you say, darling? Isn't little me as hot as that madam?

MIKE: [*To PETER but gesturing towards MUMSIE.*] This your new lady?

PETER: I don't know her - at least, not all of her.

MIKE: You hear that? He doesn't know you - you don't feature in the fight against international imperialism.

MUMSIE: International what . . . ?

MIKE: Imperialism, my beauty. You know the bosses, the big ones. The ones who send armies and salesmen and priests all over the world to gobble it up. You know, the lahnies. Your Mister Peter, he's a hero in the struggle against these bastards. But he says you don't feature. Youse not po-li-ti-cal.

MUMSIE: I don't know about such things but I know you. Every time Piet talks to me, he talks about you. He's got such good memories of the old times. Now tell me, are you coming down or should I join you up there? There where the air is lekker sweet and pure.

MIKE: [*Jumps from the landing.*] I'm Michael. [*Takes her hand; kisses it.*]

MUMSIE: [*Putting on a different voice.*] I'm Elsie. [*Performs a mock curtsy; MIKE continues kissing her hand.*] No more, darling. [*Disengages from him.*] This old man taking care of you? Of course, he is. Then why doesn't he take care of me? I've had such a long wait. I'm all thirsty and hot and bothered.

MIKE: Who bothered you?

PETER: Who else but the ghosts of your ancestors . . .

MUMSIE: [*To PETER.*] Hey, come down. This party's begging to happen. [*PETER steps down, she takes his hand; they face MIKE.*] Peter and Elsie, till death us do part.

MIKE: Lovey, you'll go on forever but he's already fading.

MUMSIE: No! Not Piet. He's a real bladdy veteran.

PETER: Ja, a veteran of women's two faces.

MUMSIE: [*To PETER.*] Do you remember the last party we had? Remember, we sang a duet. [*Starts singing 'Strangers in the Night'; PETER joins in for a few bars.*]

MIKE: You aren't Elsie.

MUMSIE: You don't recognize me cause I changed my hairstyle yesterday.

MIKE: Maybe you changed your nose as well. But let me tell you, it wasn't a good idea.

MUMSIE: It's just that you don't like change - small change, any change. But what's wrong with a bit of a nose job? A bit of a shake up.

PETER: Change, by all means. Just don't change sides.

MIKE: And what would you know about that? [*To MUMSIE.*] You look the type who stays true no matter what. But you aren't Elsie. So who the hell are you?

MUMSIE: I'm an angel.

MIKE: [*Gestures towards the poster.*] No, that's the heavenly body. [*To PETER.*] Wasn't that her award-winning role? Special mention in the Hall of Fame. Now who was her leading man? Somehow slips my mind. I wonder why.

PETER: It's an old black and white drama you won't see again. [*To MUMSIE.*] Where's Lewis?

MUMSIE: Outside, man with Elsie. They're doing this. [*Screws up her lips as if kissing.*]

MIKE: I knew you weren't Elsie.

PETER: [*In a falsetto voice.*] I knows her better than master knows her. Don't I, liefling?

MUMSIE: Maybe you do, jou donder.

MIKE: Jesus, who the hell are you?

MUMSIE: Okay. . . I'm Mumsie, Elsie's bosom pal.

MIKE: Ah, I've heard about you. You work in the same block of flats. Your room is next to hers, and you've got a peephole.

MUMSIE: Peephole? Do I look like a spy?

MIKE: No, you've just got a peephole to keep up with the neighbours. You study her and Lewis and take notes. Afterwards you give advice on how to solve their problems. I can just see you squinting. I mean they're a passionate, caring couple! Just like you and your mister what's-his-name . . . You work for a government official, don't you, darling? A very high-up officer in a special service, an expert.

MUMSIE: Expert. That's for bladdy sure. He could have been one of your old bosses. At least his kids are grown up. No babysitting for me.

MIKE: So you can go joling.

MUMSIE: I'm young enough to have a good time.

PETER: Ja, but will you stay young enough to give a good time? God help us when God's servants get depressed. That's when things really start sinking. God doesn't like us answering back or asking too many questions and definitely not about the Order of Things. When we get a little swollen-headed, he shrinks us down to size with a bit of solitary confinement. You see, he likes us raucous, but not after-hours when he's taking a snooze. Hey, we really are slipping. Dammit, where's that blue screwdriver?

MUMSIE: There, under your eyes.

MIKE: Like everything else, my friend.

MUMSIE: [*Handing him the tool which has been lying on the table.*] Come on, Peter, that's how close it is.

MIKE: Too close for comfort?

MUMSIE: What's wrong with a bit of comfort, man? I like my madam's flat. You either get to work on time or you don't. You either do the job or they fire you. And then you either drink your bottle quietly or you smash it over some bastard's head.

There is a muffled knock at the door.

