

FLAT SPIN by MARSALI TAYLOR

CHARACTERS

THE FLATMATES:

JILL - studying English
CATHY - also studying English
ALICE - studying Law
NANCY - studying Medicine
JAN - studying Music

THE VISITORS:

JACKIE
EMMA

If possible - an extra boy to play Dave would be desirable. There are no words for him and only a fleeting glimpse, but a willing body just for this would be an advantage - though it is do-able without.

This would make a good examination piece for GCSE. It lasts about twenty - twenty five minutes.

The parts of the five flatmates are each large enough for examination purposes. However, Emma and Jackie's roles are both small. I think a composite single role made out of the two would make the 'Visitor' examinable. This wouldn't require any alteration to the script.

The play then becomes an exam piece for 6 girls.

EXTRACT ONE

Dim light through curtains on the shared living room/ bedroom of a student flat. Two beds - Cathy's and Jill's - , a table, sundry chairs, a sofa, student clutter. A ten seconds pause, then an alarm clock goes off by Jill's bed and is quickly stifled. Sounds of dressing. Jill puts a torch on for the last layers of dressing. She is getting up to finish her essay. She fishes a thermos, a mug and a light bulb out of her bag, puts the light bulb in the desk light and switches it on. She turns the torch off and lays out her work on the table. It is at the final draft stage, so she has notes, a first draft, a couple of reference books, the text 'SirGawain and the Green Knight' and her laptop. She clambers into a sleeping bag and begins work.

Silence.

Slowly the lights come up through the windows. Jill rises to open the curtains, pours herself a coffee and continues to work. Light is now at normal indoor level.

There is the sound of a second alarm clock, followed by the sounds of someone thumping around. We hear a toilet flushing, the opening and closing of drawers, etc. Then someone begins to play scales on a musical

instrument.

Jill reaches into her bag for cotton-wool, puts it into her ears and continues to work.

A third alarm clock sounds, followed by opening and closing doors and the toilet flushing once more. Radio 4 is switched on. Drawers open and close and finally Alice enters in her dressing-gown. She goes into the kitchen. There is the sound of a kettle being filled and switched on and clinking plates, etc.

Jill continues to work throughout all the above and through the following dialogue, without looking up or around, even when she answers.

ALICE *off* For goodness' sake! There's not even one clean mug. [*She re-enters.*]
New life forms are evolving in there. Whose turn is it? [*She looks at the list on the door.*]

JILL Jan.

ALICE Jan. [*She calls into the hall.*] Jan, it's your turn to do the dishes. JAN!!

The scales stop.

JAN *off* What?

ALICE Dishes ... Your turn!

JAN Yeah, yeah.

The scales start again.

ALICE *to Jill* Can I take your cup?

JILL *puts her hand over it* No.

ALICE *reading over her shoulder* 'Discuss the way the stanza form and metre echo the temptation of Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.' [*She picks up the book.*] 'God moroun, Sir Gawayn' sayde pat gay lady, Ze ar a sleper unslyze, pat mon may slyde hider.'

JILL *taking the book back, still without looking up; in an old-fashioned accent* 'Good morn, Sir Gawain,' said that gay lady, 'Ye are a sleeper unslythe, that man may slide hither.'

ALICE What's that meant to be?

JILL Old English.

ALICE Did you remind Cathy about her share of the electricity bill?

JILL Yes.

ALICE *wandering away to check bucket* It's getting worse. Why don't you phone the landlord?

JILL Why don't you?

Alice wanders back into the kitchen. Sounds of washing cup and making coffee. Alice returns with cup of coffee, heads for the door and pauses.

ALICE Good party?

JILL Fine.

ALICE Was what's his name there?

JILL Yes.

ALICE Good. [*She exits.*]

JILL Yes, he was there.

ALICE *returns with candle* Why are there never any matches in the bathroom?

JILL They get wet, m'lud.

ALICE No shower then.

She exits to get dressed. Jill works on.

The fourth alarm clock sounds - Cathy's. A hand comes out from under the immobile lump of bedding and gropes it off. Jill works on.

Alarm clock 5 goes off. There are sounds of doors, etc. Radio 1 is turned on.

Enter Nancy in pyjamas. She goes into the kitchen and comes back out.

NANCY Why are there never any mugs?
JILL It's Jan's turn.
NANCY Can I have / ... [Your mug?]
JILL **hand over it** / No.
NANCY Shower. [**She exits and returns.**] Can I borrow your lightbulb?
JILL I'm using it.
NANCY It's the only one that works.
JILL This essay's due in by five.
NANCY What's it / on?
JILL / 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.'
NANCY **taking book** 'Pe chauntre of pe chapel cheued to an end.' -
JILL **taking book back** Old English.
NANCY How was the / party?
JILL / Fine.
NANCY Was whosit there?
JILL Yes.
NANCY Cath had a good time too then?
JILL Yes.
NANCY Look, please can I take your bulb? I won't be three minutes. It's light in here anyway.

Jill stops, takes cotton wool out of ears, lays down hands and looks up. She's obviously going to get no peace until Nancy's gone.

JILL What about the way water's dripping through the socket?
NANCY It's fine. My gran's had water in her sockets for years.
JILL Three minutes.
NANCY Thanks, Jill, you're a pal. [**She switches off the light, tries to unscrew the bulb.**] Ouch. [**She goes into the kitchen, gets a teatowel and unscrews it. On her way to the door, she looks in the bucket.**] It's still leaking then. You should phone the landlord. [**She exits.**]

EXTRACT TWO

An alarm goes off. Cathy slowly emerges. Definitely not awake - hair everywhere, last night's makeup and, as her shoulders emerge, last night's top as well. Spangly or bright lace. Cathy is one who dresses to be noticed. She gropes for the coffee, takes a sip from the wrong cup - this wakes her up pretty thoroughly. She sits herself up and finds the right cup.

CATHY Euuugh! [**The sort of noise that means 'my head hurts and what's going on?'**]
JILL He's coming for you at half past.
CATHY What? [**Another sip of coffee. Partial memory returns. Horror.**] Good grief!
JILL You've got fifteen minutes. No need to rush.
CATHY Shite. [**She puts the mug down, leaps up. Not a good idea. She wavers a bit.**] Erm - hang on - my god, I must have been pissed. What - where am I going in fifteen minutes? [**She reaches for her jeans and socks, starts pulling them on, without trying to stand again.**] |

mean - is it somewhere I want to go?

Jill shrugs. It is clear Cathy is not her favourite person this morning.

CATHY Aw, come on, Jill! ... Jan, stop that, will you?
JAN It's Bach. [**Or another composer.**]
CATHY It's awful... Jill?

Jan stops going through the music briefly, but soon resumes - slightly more under her breath. She is deeply absorbed.

JILL It's the opening of the new art gallery, very posh, very classy - the jeans won't do.
CATHY **tone of 'the opening of the what?'** Good grief! [**She stumbles to the door.**]
JACKIE **off** Lazarus has risen!
EMMA How's the head?
CATHY Not good.

She re-enters wearing a long skirt, followed by Jackie and Emma.

CATHY Opening of the new art gallery - new art gallery - hang on a second -
JACKIE Aha!
EMMA Memory has returned.
CATHY A bloke - beard - mixed weird cocktails - [**She sits down again.**]
NANCY **entering** Told you not to touch them.
CATHY There's a gang of road drillers dancing the fandango behind my eyebrows.
JACKIE That'll teach you.
CATHY Bloke - beard - no, hang on, it's coming back. It was the really nice-looking bloke, the dark one with the waistcoat.
EMMA Yes, I'm surprised you forgot the waistcoat.
CATHY I think my head didn't want to re-visualise it right now.

Cathy grabs another bright or sequined jacket from the chair, pulls it on. A quick glance in the mirror. She goes into the kitchen.

CATHY **off** Jan, honestly!

Sounds of water running into a glass. Drinking.

CATHY **from kitchen door** So he's coming in ten minutes to take me to this gallery opening?
JILL Seems so.
EMMA Should be really interesting.
JACKIE Pity you're missing it, Jill.
CATHY **intent on make-up** Yeah, you like all that stuff.
NANCY Not your scene at all.
CATHY Still, if I said I'd go ... and he was pretty cute.
JILL Yeah.
CATHY Come too?
JILL It's invitation only.
CATHY You could point me out this Dave you've mentioned every so often.
JACKIE Sort of thing he'd be right into, from the sound of it.
JILL Yeah, he'll be there.
CATHY Come on, then. Come too.
JILL Naah, I wouldn't want to gooseberry.

ALICE **head around the door** Cath, the electricity bill.
CATHY Yeah, yeah. You don't happen to remember his name do you?

Sudden silence, even from Jan. Everyone is watching Jill.

CATHY **brushing hair** The bloke in the waistcoat ...
JILL **pointedly going back to work** Dave.

CATHY ...the bloke I'm supposed to be going out with in ten minutes ...
[**Reaction. Her head goes up. She is now hair combed, make-up re-touched, ready to go, bright and eye-catching. Shock.**] Dave!
[**Horror.**] Dave! [**Realisation. She goes to put an arm round Jill.**] Oh, Jill, I hadn't a clue. I wasn't - oh, Jill, I wish you'd said.

JILL Didn't get the chance.
CATHY Oh, Jill, I'm sorry.
JILL Doesn't matter. [**But it does.**]

EXTRACT from Production Notes

PRODUCTION NOTES + TECHNICAL CUES etc.

INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTION.

Written in a naturalistic style, the play is partly a study of the dynamics of a group of students living together - the way they cope practically as 'home' sharers - allocation of responsibilities and so on. As one would expect, this sharing out of duties is not always successful - and the atmosphere of the flat should be typically messy and chaotic. This is emphasised by the constant moving in and out of the main room by the girls, the emphasis on noise - clashing radio programmes, alarm clocks set at different times, and so on.

The main action of the play centres around the fact that Cathy - bubbly, extrovert, fascinating - has 'got off' with Dave at last night's party, who is the boy that quiet, hard-working Jill has fallen for. This fact is cleverly woven into the scripting, so that it only gradually emerges. The resolution is heart-warming, as Cathy - far from being the uncaring, shallow person she at first seems - realises her error [made when she was too drunk for thought] and sets Jill up with Dave for that day, plus in her generous way also giving Jill a boost of much-needed confidence.

CHARACTERS all of whom will be 18/19 years old

JILL is studying English. From the outset, we are aware that there is some tension in her. She is in fact seething with hurt and resentment - which only becomes clear later in the play. However, knowing this, this feeling should be behind every word that she says from the beginning. Particularly sore points are mentions of the party and how she enjoyed herself, which each of the flatmates in turn ask her - without observing the way she answers. Presumably, this is a clue to her character. Jill bottles things up and lets them simmer inside her. She uses her work as a way of getting out her frustration. Next to the glamorous Cathy, Jill feels dowdy and unattractive. It is important that there is a real change in her - the first burst of pleasure in her own appearance - when she is dressed up by Cathy and sent out to meet Dave in the second half of the play. Jill is a quiet girl, studious, organised - far more so than the others in the flat. There is a quiet strength in her. We sense that she is very much the hub of the whole sharing arrangement - the still centre-point round which the others revolve and whose strength

they tap into.

Movement should be stiff - rather closed - back, as she sits at her essay, tense. Voice is clipped and terse for all the first half, only softening and becoming more 'girly' and excited as she goes to meet Dave.

CATHY also studies English. She remains a mystery character for the first third of the play - but still a potent one. Visually, the breathing lump in the bed, which is sleeping Cathy - is powerful and keeps her firmly in the forefront of the audience's awareness. When she first emerges - hung-over, scatty, noisy, excitable - and even in her tousled early-morning state, obviously attractive - the sort of person people gravitate towards, attracting girlfriends and male interest equally, we are supposed to see her as typically shallow, feckless. The first inclination, when we know that she ended up with Dave at the party, should be to condemn her for her actions. How could she be so thoughtless - not even realising that Dave was the one that Jill liked so much. But Cathy comes up trumps and when she does realise proves that she is a true friend. She lets actions speak louder than words and sets Jill up for the proposed date that day, making sure that she also feels attractive and good about herself. It is clear that Cathy is acting from entirely generous motives - but this turn-around will not work dramatically unless we see the scatty thoughtless Cathy first.

Voice should be warm and attractive - excitable - using a wide range. Movement is sensual, without it being self-conscious. This is a naturally sexy girl - though she is aware of the effect she has on men and it should be obvious that she is in seduction mode at the end of the play.

ALICE is studying law. The intellectual [Radio 4]. She is definite, fair - I'll do the dishes when you empty the bin - everything is negotiated; the would-be lawyer's mind! The way she speaks is terse, rather bossy. I think she may be the organising mind behind the flat rotas; she certainly spends a lot of time talking about who's turn it is to do things and trying to insist it is done. Don't play her as humourless, though. She is warm when encouraging Jill with the others at the end. Probably best to leaven the orders that she gives to the others to do things with a humorous tone, which will make them more palatable. Movement, quite deliberate and slower paced to act as a contrast to some of the others. Upright stance.

NANCY is studying medicine. She is out for a bit of fun and seems fairly light-weight in character [Radio 1 as opposed to Alice's Radio 4.] She is not bossy, like Alice, but rather tends to pass the buck of responsibility onto others - the lightbulb, the leak in the shower, waking Cathy. Despite studying medicine, she's very classically 'girly' - afraid of spiders and her language is young and teen-age in style. Her movement should be young and bouncy, a little bit scatty - large hand moves, dramatic gestures, etc. Voice perhaps rather high.

JAN is studying music. Endearingly clumsy and vague. She forgets things, drops things, is lost in a world of her own much of the time. When she 'surfaces' from being lost in her music, there should be a moment or two of complete vagueness before her eyes focus properly on her surroundings and her voice becomes clearer. Her scattiness should reflect particularly in the unfocused way she moves and the way she knocks into things and so on. When left with spare moments on stage when she is not speaking, she conducts hidden symphonies in her head - or is looking for lost items in the piles of stuff scattered round the room. Her voice should be quite soft and vague sounding too.

JACKIE & EMMA are not defined enough to be more than token nosey and rather bitchy friends. Since what they say seems fairly interchangeable, they would work fine as a single 'friend.' Their purpose is to reveal the awfulness of Cathy's actions at the party. They very much want to observe how Jill has taken the betrayal, so their questions are barbed. Some of the lines they say to wind Jill up are positively cruel and they would lean forward and enjoy the aftermath of their nasty, pretend-innocent comments.

I haven't indicated accents for the girls. The voices should vary - but regional accents would be quite acceptable. Less strong, I feel, in the case of Alice and possibly Nancy.

SETTING

The set is a single entity and, since the play is naturalistic, should be as full and detailed as possible...