

Excerpts from:

RIVERS

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A Play in One Act

by

ENTER NAME

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

<u>MELKO:</u>	A man in his middle 20s.
<u>ANNABELLE:</u>	A woman in her 60s; MELKO & ANTHONY'S mother.
<u>ANTHONY:</u>	A man in his early 30s.
<u>MEREDITH:</u>	A woman in her 50s; Housekeeper/Nurse.
<u>RUTH:</u>	A woman in her early 20s.
<u>LETICIA:</u>	A woman in her late 60s; RUTH'S grandmother.
<u>CECILIA:</u>	A woman in her late 40s;
<u>FRANK:</u>	A man in his 50s; CECILIA'S husband.

## SCENE

A townhouse in northern England.

## TIME

The 1930s.

## OUTLINE

### Scene 1

CHARACTERS<sup>1</sup>: MELKO, MEREDITH, LETICIA, CECILIA, FRANK

LOCATION: The Dining Room

ACTION: MELKO arrives at his childhood home. He meets a strange woman named MEREDITH who we find out works at the house as housekeeper/nurse. Her speech is dramatic and secretive. She hints that there is something wrong with his mother. MELKO is taken aback when he finds out that the house has new inhabitants - an uncle FRANK, an aunt CECILIA, a distant grandmother named LETICIA, and her goddaughter RUTH. MELKO finds them unpleasant and is distrustful of their reason for being here. He becomes agitated when they evade his questions. His brother arrives and leads him away to talk.

### Scene 2

CHARACTERS: MELKO, ANTHONY, ANNABELLE, MEREDITH

LOCATION: The Father's Study

ACTION: There is tension between MELKO and ANTHONY as they make small talk. ANTHONY reveals that he is engaged to RUTH. We learn that MELKO went away five years ago to study medicine and hasn't been back since. A woman recently died during his shift, as medical student, at the hospital. MELKO inquires after his mother but ANTHONY tries to convince him she isn't really sick. The mother comes in. She thinks MELKO is a ghost come back to haunt her. We learn that their father is dead. He becomes very distressed and ANTHONY call for MEREDITH to take her away. They agree to speak in the morning.

### Scene 3

CHARACTERS: MELKO, ANTHONY, RUTH

LOCATION: The Dining Room

ACTION: In the morning, MELKO finds LETICIA, CECILIA, and FRANK in the Dining Room. FRANK is once again sitting on his father's chair. ANTHONY walks in. MELKO asks the others to leave so they can talk. He attempts to convince

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<sup>1</sup> Here and following I have only included characters with substantial role in said scenes. Characters with little to no dialogue have been omitted from this list.

his brother that their mother needs medical help. The tension between them returns as ANTHONY refuses his help. MELKO introduces a sensitive topic when he brings up their father. It appears that ANTHONY and ANNABELLE blame him for his death. Right when things get heated, RUTH arrives. ANTHONY leaves for work.

RUTH appears very kind and amiable as she talks to MELKO. She asks him what him and ANTHONY were fighting about. She cautiously delves into the topic of their father's death. She begins asking MELKO very personal questions about his involvement. She makes it clear that things in the house are fine and he shouldn't interfere. MELKO sees it as a threat.

#### Scene 4

CHARACTERS: ANNABELLE, MEREDITH

LOCATION: The Father's Study

ACTION: ANNABELLE has been drinking. She is talking to her dead husband, recalling a memories of their early days. She is conflicted about his death, doesn't understand why it happened. We learn that he drowned himself. MEREDITH enters. Instead of helping, she further indulges ANNABELLE's madness. They break all the liquor bottles and then MEREDITH takes ANNABELLE'S hands as they swirl in circles. MELKO comes and takes ANNABELLE who has fainted from exhaustion, away.

#### Scene 5

CHARACTERS: MELKO, ANNABELLE

LOCATION: The Washroom

ACTION: ANNABELLE is in the bathtub as MELKO takes out the glass shards from her feet and washes her. Despite her drowsy state, she realizes that he is really here. A soft, fantastical music plays (hear for example *Vale of Tears* by Jason Tai) A multitude of silver lights spin like a slow disco ball. She tells him how she missed him. She asks that he stays. MELKO promises to take her away and help her.

#### Scene 6

CHARACTERS: MELKO, RUTH, LETICIA, CECILIA, FRANK, ANTHONY

LOCATION: The Dining Room

ACTION: MELKO has gathered LETICIA, FRANK, CECILIA, and RUTH. He announces that he intends to talk to his brother and sell the house. He will use the money to get his mother help. CECILIA and FRANK voice their displeasure while LETICIA and RUTH remain silent. MELKO tells them that he and ANTHONY will provide them with help. LETICIA, CECILIA, and FRANK leave the room. MELKO finds it odd that RUTH hasn't protested. ANTHONY comes in and RUTH leaves. ANTHONY and MELKO fight when MELKO tells him his intentions. They inevitably circle back to the topic of their father's death. ANTHONY doesn't understand why MELKO can't forget about it. MELKO tells him that they have to talk to their mother about it and help her work through it. MELKO wants their forgiveness. ANTHONY refuses to forgive him because while their father was depressed, MELKO was too harsh with him and led him to kill himself. They part angrily.

#### Scene 7

CHARACTERS: RUTH, LETICIA, CECILIA, FRANK

LOCATION: The Dining Room

ACTION: RUTH has summoned CECILIA and FRANK. She hides her feelings behind her calm demeanor. MELKO presents a danger to her and she doesn't like his interference. She tells CECILIA and FRANK that they will have to get rid of him. She will convince ANTHONY that it is the right thing to do. CECILIA and FRANK are afraid of her and they cannot refuse because she will expose them to the police for committing fraud in the past. We find out that LETICIA is also afraid of her goddaughter but goes along with her plans because she's proud and likes to live comfortably.

#### Scene 8

CHARACTERS: RUTH, ANTHONY, MEREDITH

LOCATION: The Father's Study

ACTION: ANTHONY finds RUTH in the study. ANNABELLE is sleeping and RUTH is watching over her. She talks to ANTHONY about their lives and their upcoming marriage. She brings up MELKO and tells him how his presence disturbs everything. She knows that ANTHONY is angry with his brother for their father's death. She manipulates him, telling him that MELKO will make things worse just like he did for their father. She convinces him that it

would be better if we just went away (permanently). ANTHONY is nervous, angry, confused, upset. He reluctantly agrees.

#### Scene 9

CHARACTERS: MELKO, RUTH, CECILIA, FRANK, LETICIA

LOCATION: The Washroom

ACTION: MELKO is taking a bath. RUTH enters quietly. She walks over to where MELKO can see her. He is startled, tell her to leave. She puts on a sad face, tells him how unfortunate it was that his father drowned himself and now ANTHONY and ANNABELLE have to suffer for it. She tells him she will finally amend the situation. CECILIA and FRANK have come in quietly without shoes. They suddenly grab at him and push him underwater. RUTH walks to the edge of the tub and crouches, watches him struggle and become limp. CECILIA and FRANK leave. RUTH stands up. MEREDITH appears at the door. They stare at each other until BLACKOUT.

#### Scene 10

CHARACTERS: ANTHONY, RUTH, ANNABELLE, MEREDITH

LOCATION: The Dining Room

ACTION: MELKO's body lays covered on the dining table. ANTHONY is standing before it. He looks tired, disoriented. RUTH walks up to him, takes his hand, tells him how now he will take such good care of her and his mother, how it's all over. ANTHONY leaves hastily. MEREDITH enters. RUTH intimates how she will be making changes around here. MEREDITH laughs and tells her things around here never change. RUTH leaves. MEREDITH sits on the table, looks him over. She notices his bag on a chair and finds his cigarettes. She takes some but leaves him one. She lights up a cigarette as the mother walks unsteadily in her nightgown which is wet. She is looking for MELKO. Meredith leaves without a word and the mother sits next to the body. She strokes his hair. She thinks he is sleeping. She is excited to go away with him. A slow piano song plays. It is sad but hopeful (hear for example *Never Forget*, sung by Michelle Pfeiffer).

## Scene 1

SETTING:

Tucked away in the heart of Pleasance Street is a circle of houses named Tartar Low. When one turns inside Tartar Low, one is met with a quaint circular garden, a poplar standing in its centre. The garden stands in stark contrast to the buildings around it. Whereas the garden bears the touch of cool spring, the houses stand high, enclosed in an air of decay. Their brick exterior, once gray, has blackened unevenly so that darkness seems to grow like moss on the walls. No living person may be seen outside. From time to time, the compact windows reveal a wary face which, if spotted, quickly retreats into the shadows like a ghost. Any sound here dies away as soon as it is born.

AT RISE:

An overcast evening. MELKO walks up to the garden. He is wearing a cheap shirt and an oversized coat that sits awkwardly on his slim frame. He is carrying travel bags. MELKO pauses in front of the tree. Hesitantly, he walks halfway around, looking up at the house behind. Pressed between the buildings in the middle of Tartar Low is a four-storey house. It bears the same blackened façade as the other buildings but a light can be seen within. A dull red light glows from behind the thick curtains of the second-storey windows. MELKO stares into the smouldering eyes and retreats. Fumbling, he drops his sack on the ground and lights a cigarette.

(A woman appears from the shadows.)

MEREDITH

Light?

MELKO

(startled)

Pardon me?

(MEREDITH walks up to him. She holds out a cigarette, one arm crossed across her chest.)

MELKO

Oh, yes, of course.

(he lights it up for her.)

(They stand in silence. MELKO is struggling to avoid the woman's penetrating gaze. She wears red lipstick and an old, patched-up shawl. Her long red curls hang about her in disarray.)

MEREDITH

Are you a dead man?

MELKO

(too nervous to be amused)

I am standing in front of you.

MEREDITH

Only ghosts come here.

MELKO

Yeah, well I grew up here actually.

(he points the cigarette)

In that house, behind the poplar.

MEREDITH

But you've been away.

(she draws closer to him)

Now you're back. Something must be gnawing at you.



MELKO

(irritated)

Forgive me, but I don't know what you mean. I am here to visit my family.

MEREDITH

Your family. The Rivers you mean.

MELKO

You know my family. How?

MEREDITH

(nonchalantly)

I live there too. The elder Mr. Rivers hired me as housekeeper, and to help him with the old Mrs. Rivers whenever she falls into one of her reveries.

MELKO

Her reveries...Do you mean to say my mother is unwell?

(She gives him a disinterested look and moves away, gazes around at the houses as though in a trance. MELKO grounds his cigarette on the ground and walks up to her.)

Madam, you must tell me. Please.

MEREDITH

(still not looking at him)

You didn't go in.

MELKO

I didn't—, look, will you please—

MEREDITH

It is curious. No one in their right mind would go in, would they? One look at the black walls, the empty windows, the spiked fence that curls around the houses like a hellish serpent would have them running away lest they spot a spirit.

(she turns towards MELKO. Her voice is soft and excited.)

Yet it is not always so. We are here, you and I. Unable to stay away. Is it a weakness, do you think, that we cannot suffer to be parted from this graveyard?

(She draws close to him, too close for his liking. She briefly looks at the house and back at him.)

You've left something unburied and now you're back. For what, hoping to find some peace for yourself?

MELKO

No! I ask that-

MEREDITH

No? You have come seeking the past young man. Will you be able to walk away a second time? I cannot wait to find out.

(CECILIA walks out in a tempest, hands fisted at her sides. LETICIA walks calmly behind her, stands in the doorway supported by her cane. Her long neck is accentuated by her straight posture.)

CECILIA

Listen to me, you must speak to Ruth, I will not have that impudent woman playing me for a fool. I want her out of the house!

(She stops suddenly upon seeing MEREDITH)

There you are! Indolence. That is all you are good for. Standing around when you know we are waiting for you. And having a smoke on top of it.

(She sees the cigarettes and moves to grab them from MEREDITH)

Are those the cigarettes I sent you out for? How dare you take what **isn't yours**? Mr. Rivers will hear of it, I promise you that. Your days in this house are numbered.

(MEREDITH moves her face close to CECILIA'S. There is a pause. She lets out a bark and runs back inside, grinning. CECILIA's yelps.)

Ah, you wicked woman! How dare you-

MELKO

Excuse me.

(Scene continues)

SCENE 3

AT RISE:

The Dining Room. Next Morning. FRANK has once again taken the chair at the end of the table. He is reading cartoons in the newspaper and cracking peanuts on the table. LETICIA and CECILIA are sitting away from him. There is a magazine open between them. CECILIA is bent over the magazine, reading and smoking. LETICIA is sitting upright, adjusting her hair in her hand mirror. Breakfast leftovers can be seen around the table.

MELKO

(walks onstage, his face betrays how little sleep he's had, his shirt is creased. LETICIA, CECILIA, and FRANK eye him warily. He is too tired to care)

(Dialogue is cut out.  
Scene resumes with  
Anthony entering)

(CECILIA leaves the room speedily. Pause. ANTHONY walks into the room, well-dressed and in high-spirits. He spots MELKO.)

ANTHONY

Brother! Good morning.

MELKO

(animated)

We must talk. Are you occupied?

ANTHONY

(as he goes to pour some coffee)

I sense that it won't make any difference if I was, in which case, I'm all yours.

MELKO

(stands and walks over to his brother, looks back at the table)

Would you mind if we had some privacy?

(LETICIA looks at him through furrowed eyebrows, takes her cane and walks away slowly without a word. FRANK isn't paying attention. ANTHONY walks over to him and quietly tells him. FRANK looks displeased, takes the newspaper and leaves.)

MELKO

How long has she been like that?

ANTHONY

(looking through the pastries from breakfast)

Who has been what?

MELKO

Our mother, Anthony. How long has she been sick?

ANTHONY

Look Melko, last night, she is not always like that. Your appearance must have frightened her, which I think is understandable, you've been gone for years. She got excited is all. Really, don't wind yourself up over nothing.

MELKO

(calmly)

This isn't nothing Anthony. I have seen people exhibiting very similar symptoms. This—

ANTHONY

(jestingly)

Symptoms, ha! I see you have your vocabulary down.

MELKO

Anthony, please listen. I saw her last night. She's agitated, dissociative, compulsive, obs-. If these episodes persist they may very well become worse.

ANTHONY

(with a full mouth)

I thought you weren't that kind of doctor.

MELKO

No, I am not. But that doesn't mean-

ANTHONY

Why can't you accept that I have this taken care of. She is better off here, in her home, with the people who love her.

MELKO

(snickers)

Who, you mean those people?

(pointing towards the **table**)

Tell me you do not seriously think so. I cannot for the life of me understand why you have let those selfish vultures into the house.

ANTHONY

(facing his brother)

Melko!

MELKO

Mother needs proper help, at a proper institution. She is our responsibility. We have to take care of her.

ANTHONY

(standing closer to MELKO)

No Melko...

(pause, softly but strained)

No. She is my responsibility. Mine. Not yours. I alone took care of her all these years. I took care of father's work, I took care of the house, and I took care of mom. So you see, we don't need any help. We are doing fine.

(chuckles, pats Melko on the shoulder)

Go back to school, and don't worry about us. Okay?

(pause)

MELKO

Is this punishment?

(ANTHONY clenches his jaw, pause)

(indignant)  
She still blames me for father and so do you.

(ANTHONY is silent)

Nothing has changed, has it?

ANTHONY  
Don't be bleak Melko.

MELKO  
Father was gone Anthony. He was breathing but he wasn't living.

ANTHONY  
Stop.

MELKO  
(braving himself)  
I thought— I thought If I told him how things were, that he was losing us, that we wouldn't put up with it anymore—

ANTHONY  
That is enough.

MELKO  
Punish me all you want Anthony, but hear me when I say, if I leave, things will end just like they did with father.

(ANTHONY slams his coffee cup on the floor, long pause, a young **woman** walks onstage, she stands behind MELKO, her voice is light and **springy**)

(Scene continues)

Scene 4

Setting: The father's study. There is a large oriental carpet on the floor. An imposing wooden desk which is lost under piles of stuff gathering dust on its surface. Books, papers, letters, pens, boxes - an ocean of personal memorabilia. Above the fireplace there used to sit a portrait which has been removed. It's absence is difficult to ignore and leaves the room with a sense of melancholy and unease.

AT RISE: ANNABELLE is lying on the carpet. She is holding a framed orange butterfly. Liquor bottles litter the rug. She has been drinking.

ANNABELLE

(sits up, reaches behind her for her glass. She lifts it unsteadily, spilling some on the rug and drinks.)

I remember that one. I remember that one Matthew.

(she taps the glass of the frame with her drink)

I remember when it was alive.

(pause, she swallows the last of her drink)

Before we were married.

(she begins acting out the events she describes, her actions are drawn out)

I remember- Oh it was so hot that day. I remember how you burned your nose.

(giggles)

I remember, I was lying on the grass..

(she slides her hand across the rug)

I was so cross with you. I remember that. You'd gone off to look at the newts. I remember you showed me your drawing of them after.

(she goes to pour herself another glass)

I was cross, and I was tired, and the sun— the sun was pressing down on me.

(she becomes excited)

And then I saw it. The butterfly. It landed on my dress. My pretty white dress and this small flame resting on top of it.

(she leaves the glass, extends her hand into the air)

And I held my breath. I became still as a tree. And I watched it. I wondered how long it would stay. I made a bet with myself but then it was still there and so I made another bet and another, and I kept losing. And after a while I laid my head back.

(she bends her head towards the ceiling)

And I let the sun have me. But I wanted to take another look, a little peek. It was still there. Oh I felt silly.

(her voice becomes tense)

But I laughed and it left my dress. It went up in the air, fighting against the wind. And suddenly it plunged into shadow and there you were. You snatched it!

(she motions with her hand, closes her fist around nothing. Pause.)

I was so cross with you...

(she cries softly, her hands fall weakly at her sides)

Oh Matthew, I am so sorry Matthew, I never meant to be cross with you. I never really meant it. You knew that Matthew! I know you knew! You must have known. But you gave up on us Matthew! You gave up on us.

(she stands up shakily and turns to face his absent portrait)



You could have said something you know. You could have told me. Your wife. Maybe I should have seen it. I should've known you were gone. That I was living with a dead man.

(she begins laughing)

My dead husband. Now you are free and I—, I am rotting away in this sepulchre with dead butterflies for company.

(MEREDITH enters. She carries a tray over to a little table on the rug. ANNABELLE is startled, she backs up against the desk)

Get out of here!

MEREDITH

(casually)

Anthony insisted I bring you tea, says you need to take your medicine.

(she adjusts her shawl and for a moment takes the appearance of a bat)

ANNABELLE

I want nothing from you, you winged crone!

MEREDITH

(pays her words no mind, walks over to look at the stuff on the rug)

Were you lamenting to the dead again?

(she picks up one of the liquor bottles)

ANNABELLE

(walks up to grab it from her)

You leave that! That is my husband's liquor.

MEREDITH

Your dead husband's.

ANNABELLE

(laughs)

Yes. My dead husband's. You think I don't know he's dead? You all think so, I know. You think I'm a mad woman who dances with the dead.

MEREDITH

Do you not?

ANNABELLE

Oh I do. They want me to go away with them.

(They begin walking in circles  
around each other, never losing eye  
contact)

They say I should go with them because I was an awful wife who killed her husband.

MEREDITH

(grinning)

I thought he jumped into the river.

ANNABELLE

He did. He had to run away from me. And now the dead want me to pay for it.

MEREDITH

(suddenly grabs ANNABELLE'S hands)

To hell with them. Tell them to go away.

(ANNABELLE shakes her head)

Yes! Yes! To hell with them! They took away your husband. They took away your Matthew.

(ANNABELLE becomes increasing upset  
and agitated)

You should punish them for what they did.

ANNABELLE

(weakly)

No...

MEREDITH

Yes! Punish them! For Matthew!

ANNABELLE

(cries out and hurls the bottle on the ground. Pause. MEREDITH makes a devilish smile. ANNABELLE copies her. They both begin picking up and smashing bottles. There is glass all over the rug.)

Away! Away with all of you!

(they are laughing, ANNABELLE turns towards the absent portrait)

That's for leaving me!

(she hurls the last bottle at it. MEREDITH holds her hands and they swirl in circles)

MEREDITH

You scared them away! They're gone.

(ANNABELLE laughs overcome with emotion)

They can't touch you anymore!

(Footsteps are heard. CECILIA, FRANK, and LETICIA stand just outside the side wing, a look of shock on their faces.)

MELKO

(can be heard offstage)

Mother! Mother!

(he pushes past the others and stops to take in the scene.)

Meredith...

(ANNABELLE sways and MELKO catches her before she falls)

Mother!

(He tries to wake her but she only mutters. He shoots daggers at MEREDITH and carries ANNABELLE offstage. CECILIA, FRANK, and LETICIA look at MEREDITH who holds her shawl like a cape and resumes swirling around by herself)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

"Trojan, son of Anchises, sprung from the blood of the gods, it is easy to go down to the underworld. The door of black Dis stands open night and day. But to retrace your steps and escape to the upper air, that is the task, that is the labour."

Virgil, *The Aeneid*, VI.125-129