

Quadrille

Four performers.

Andy – man, husband of Cassie, smart casual, wearing a jacket

Cassie – woman, wife of Andy, dressed up a little

Rich – man, boyfriend of Harriet, younger than Andy

Harriet – woman, girlfriend of Rich, younger than Cassie

Stage – one bench suitable for two people, or two adjacent chairs centre right. One bin, near-front left. People will have mobile phones. Black out briefly between scenes to indicate time passing.

SCENE ONE – ANDY AND CASSIE

[Bird song effect – late morning – siren goes past just as Andy sees his phone]

ANDY: [Fiddling with phone] Oh my god! Shit. [Frantically types and sends text] Receive it! Please receive it. Say you've received it. Oh shit... [Gets up and begin to think about walking off, throws coffee cup in bin, then turns back.]

CASSIE: [Arrives from side] Hey Andy. That was quick.

A: [Looks at phone again, then moves phone so Cassie can't see the screen] Oh thank god. Yeah, sorry. I was just taking a break anyway when I got your message. Only over there after all [points behind]. And coffee stall over there... [points ahead]... and it's a nice day and all that and...

C: [Looks slightly bemused] I can see why you come out here. It's nice. And yes, a very convenient coffee stall. You haven't got one yet?

A: No. Err. Realised I'd had two already so decided against it. Or might have one in a bit. Left my reusable cup in the... Or...

C: You OK, Andy? You seem rattled about something.

A: No, no. Work stuff. You know the sort of thing. What brings you here anyway?

C: What's the matter? Not happy your beloved wife drops in?

A: No. I mean yes. I mean, of course. Just surprised. Didn't you know were coming into London today.

C: Oh, bit of a spur of the moment thing. There's an exhibition at the National Gallery a few of the girls are going to so I thought I'd come along. Haven't seen them in ages.

A: That's... [glances at phone again] Oh. Good. Yes, that's good.

C: What's up? [Grabs phone from him and puts it under her leg]

- A: Oh, just work confirming something's worked – work working – err... so I don't need to dash back in quite yet. Look, anyway. You look nice. Yeah. You...
- C: OK. Whatever. Anyway, did you think any more about planning a holiday sometime? Keep realising we've not got anything booked. We've let it slide. Since the pandemic. Always have one booked – that's what I always say. And... well, it's been a while now. Seems a bit sad. Any ideas?
- A: What, after the last one?
- C: I doubt we'll have that much bad luck twice in a row.
- A: I'm still sorting out the credit card mess.
- C: Told you you should have more than one. Never know when you're going to be stranded somewhere. It was only two days. But that cocktail hour was awesome. I'm sure the manager wasn't charging for half of them. And you can't object to those amazing champagne things he made. What was it? Damn, begins with C. Chamboard? Something like that. I'm telling you, buy a gal some champagne cocktails and you can keep me captive on holiday for weeks.
- A: OK, there were good bits. I loved that room. You know, where they put on that evening. With those high white ceilings – you remember?
- C: Yeah. Although I'm fairly sure I got ill from that buffet first day. Not sure having the buffet in the central area directly underneath the windows is the best of plans.
- A: Didn't last too long.
- C: And we did get the extra days at the end to make up for it, albeit with your stupid payment problems.
- A: Sorry. Not my fault the credit card people are idiots and phoned the house to check if my spending on holiday was a fraud.
- C: But we met Harriet and Rich. Speaking of which we should have them over again sometime soon?
- A: [Looks at phone under C's leg nervously, reaches and grabs it back] Yeah. Maybe. Don't know. Holiday people and kind of other people. Dunno. Can I think about it?
- C: Andy, is something wrong?
- A: No. Of course not. I'm just... I dunno. I'm thinking a lot about the project I'm on, and it's not going so well, and that's probably got me distracted.

C: Suppose. Well, have a think about the holiday. Seeing as I've got people who will actually make conversation waiting for me, maybe I should run along.

A: Yeah. I mean. Yeah, OK. We'll talk about the holiday later, yeah?

C: OK. [Stands up]

A: [Looks up at her]

C: [Waves him to stand]

A: Oh, yeah. [Stands, leans in and kisses her briefly]

C: Right, you'd best get back to that project then before it turns you into a gibbering mess. See you later.

A: Yeah. Later.

[C walks off]

A: Shit. Shit shit shit. [Sits down and begins texting again] Shit.

SCENE TWO – ANDY AND HARRIET

A: [Phone beeps, continues texting]

HARRIET: [Arrives from other side of the stage, briefly checks herself in a mirror and sprays a hint of perfume] What was all that about?

A: Cassie nearly caught us!

H: Well if you will insist on meeting in a public place.

A: But she never comes to London. Well, almost never.

H: You work just back there. Someone's bound to have seen us.

A: Not doing anything.

H: Well you don't have make that sound romantic. You'll be saying "getting jiggy" next.

A: I wouldn't say that.

H: So, aren't you going to apologise to a girl after keeping her standing about?

A: Look, I...

H: Oh, that's not a good "look".

A: No. I mean, look...

H: There it is again.

- A: Can you let me speak?
- H: Sorry.
- A: I just had things flash in front of me, just now, when I thought for a second you wouldn't get my text, or you could have already been here, and what if she'd seen us kissing or something...?
- H: But she didn't.
- A: This time. But every time we roll the dice...
- H: Ah.
- A: Ah?
- H: Look, Andy. We were up-front at the start of this. We did the grown-up big-boy-pants thing of talking through what the parameters of all of this would be. We said either of us could end this at any time and we'd take a deep breath and walk away with whatever memories we'd made. If that's what you're saying, come out and say it.
- A: I'm just...
- H: ...not saying it? Or saying it? Or pussy-footing about not quite sure what to do. If you want to go to a little hotel somewhere, we can. If you want to repeat that frankly cringeworthy back-row-of-the-cinema thing we did a couple of months ago, also fine. If you want to stop, well... I guess that's fine too. But you need to say. What do you want, Andy?
- A: I guess I...
- H: Come on. Out with it.
- A: Yeah. I think it better if we stop this now. I mean, we've had fun, right? We've done some amazing things.
- H: That we have, Andy. That we have. Doubt I'd ever have gone to half the bars and restaurants in London if you hadn't been there. Rich isn't exactly one for the wining and dining. Or be made to feel like I was eighteen again. You remember being just round the corner from that pianist bloke, and he looked over and saw us! With your wife and... well... my boyfriend chatting away literally three metres away? And those cocktails? Chambord and champagne, wasn't it? Classic and didn't at all go straight to my head. Or that dinner at the top of the Shard, another pianist. That was a theme. Well apart from that ever-so-romantic Necropolis Railway showing me where the Victorian dead used to get carted away.
- A: Yeah, OK. That maybe wasn't the absolute pinnacle of date choices.

H: It was different. Like you. But we said. If it's run its course it's run its course.

A: Sorry.

H: Nothing to be sorry about. [Leans in and kisses him on the cheek.] Now, if you don't mind, I'm going to sit and stare into space for a few minutes on my own and forget the fact that I think I've just been dumped.

A: You haven't...

H: Joking! Go on, give me some space. And maybe in case Cassie decides to suggest we come over again sometime, maybe...

A: I'll find an excuse not to. Don't worry. At least for a bit.

H: I think maybe ever, Andy.

A: [Gets up, takes a few steps, sees H looking directly ahead, continues off stage]

H: For God's sake. Right, Harriet. What are you going to do now? At what point do you find someone you are simultaneously going out with and also kissing, rather than one of the two. Right. Come on, girl. Think. Decide. Now or never. [Begins thinking, takes her phone out and calls] I was checking if you're about? I'm sat here in Green Park smelling the complete absence of flowers. I was going to grab a coffee. I really need to speak to you. [Pause] Yes, it would be good. [Pause] Thanks. [Hangs up] Right, Harriet. Crunch time.

SCENE THREE – HARRIET AND RICH

RICH: [Arrives from side, pauses, then sits, coffee cup in hand] Hey Harriet. Whassup?

H: [Sighs] We need to talk.

R: That sounds ominous. Did I leave the toilet seat up again?

H: I'm serious. I'm not happy.

R: I'm sorry. Maybe a nice bath when you get home. I could grab a curry and some beers on the way home.

H: [Shuts her eyes, steeling herself] No. I don't want a curry.

R: Fish and chips then? It isn't Friday, but we could go mad.

H: Rich, shut up, OK.

R: OK.

- H: This isn't working. We're not working. I'm not happy because this isn't working. I feel like I'm sat inside a house staring out to a party going on outside and I can't make my way out to it. Everyone else is living lives, and I'm not.
- R: We could have a party if you want.
- H: [Turns and stares]
- R: We haven't had a party in ages. We could invite the gang over...
- H: [Continues staring]
- R: Bouncy castle! Didn't you always say you fancied a bouncy castle? Covered in balloons! Oh, epic. Imagine having a few beers and then...
- H: [Stare becomes harder]
- R: You know, Gaz and Paula and Chris and... oh, I wonder if anyone still has Groupie's number – he was a laugh. Do you remember the time when he got so drunk he passed out holding a candle... Although a candle on a bouncy castle... But we could get a DJ in and... god, Gaz is so awful at dancing, but it doesn't stop him. You remember when he found those deely-boppers from someone at that pub when there was a hen do going on and nicked them for ages...
- H: [Awkward so it actually hurts staring]
- R: Oh he was brilliant. Lost all our deposits from that house we shared. Absolutely everything had burn marks. And the drugs he used to do... [Finally notices she's staring]
- H: Please. Shut up.
- R: Or go on holiday again. There's a great all-inclusive thing I saw in the paper that looked...
- H: I said shut up.
- R: OK. Tetchy.
- H: [Shuts eyes, sighs, tries desperately not to punch R in the face] [To herself...] Right, girl. Big-boy-pants time. [Then to Rich] Rich, this is me breaking up with you. We're done. Finished. You've got that party thing coming up. I'll stay at the Travelodge tonight and grab my stuff as soon as I've worked out where I'm going.
- R: But Harriet. Harry. Come on. We can talk about this. You never said you were unhappy.
- H: I shouldn't have to. We don't do anything. We don't go anywhere.
- R: We went on that holiday!

- H: Which was actually only interesting because we got trapped in the country by a terrorist attack and met other people while trying to work out how to go about using the British Embassy. Not that they were any use in the end.
- R: You had fun. We met...
- H: Cassie and Andy. Yes. I know. How good is a holiday if the best part was meeting other people? What did we do? Together? Anything? Anything you can remember? Apart from that beer tasting afternoon where we got to taste from that microbrewery place and you just necked each one in turn? Including those wheat beers which were to die for, assuming you didn't die with them. Or the cocktails which I doubt you tasted, and I'll bet you any money you can't remember the ingredients of. Although at least I had a Bidget Jones with me to keep me company. But that doesn't matter. I want to do more.
- R: Then we can do more. Just say what you want to do.
- H: That's the whole sodding point, Rich. I shouldn't have to. We don't talk, we don't bounce ideas about, we don't find ourselves like most of my friends struggling to fit in all the things we desperately want to do.
- R: So tell me what they're thinking and I'll organise...
- H: God's sake, with every passing minute you make me more and more sure I'm making the right decision. I'm sorry, but I've had time to think. I've had glimpses of another world, another life I could be living, and I want to go and live it before it's too late. On my own if needs be, but I want to explore.
- R: Where?
- H: Life! I want to explore life. I want to... I don't know... swim with dolphins, abseil down a cliff, skinny-dip in Siberia, learn to fly a plane, watch the stars shimmer from an isolated beach sipping champagne. I don't know, but they're out there, and you and I aren't going to do it.
- R: But I didn't know...
- H: No, you didn't. And I don't think I did until I started seeing that world, that party outside the walls of my life. And it may be a terrible decision, but I know for certain that if I stick with you this is all there's ever going to be, and it'll kill me. I'm sorry. We've had some good times. Try to remember those, and not this. [Stands up]
- R: What? What now?

H: I'll text you or call you tomorrow. Let you know the logistics. Best to make it quick though.

R: So...?

H: So. [Turns away, shuts eyes and takes a deep breath] I'd best get going. [Walks off stage]

SCENE FOUR – RICH AND CASSIE

[Cassie walks in to see Rich on the bench]

C: I thought we were going to a bar or something.

R: I... I was here. You said you were close by. I don't feel like going anywhere.

C: What?

R: Well, not that I couldn't. I was sat here, and I realised I didn't want to. Thanks for coming.

C: We were meeting anyway. Just... err... not here. [Glances worriedly up at the buildings behind]

R: [Taps seat] Sit down.

C: So, what stuck you to the bench.

R: I've... decided to leave Harriet.

C: What?

R: We weren't working out. We wanted different things.

C: Sheesh. Sorry to hear that.

R: No, it's good.

C: Sorry, why?

R: Because we're – you know – you and I – we're now free to...

C: Oh please Rich, don't do this.

R: But we've been talking...

C: [Deep breath] We've been texting.

R: But you said...

C: Oh god, Rich, please don't say you've broken up with Harriet for me.

R: Not just that – we weren't working out.

C: And what do you expect me to do?

- R: I've got a room. Right now. We can finally...
- C: Oh no. No no no.
- R: But your texts...
- C: That was wrong. That was stupid. A bored wife after a few too many glasses of wine, fantasising late at night. It was never going to happen. It was a pipe dream. A stupid fantasy. Don't you think it means something that every time we came up with an actual venue it ended up not happening?
- R: But you're here today.
- C: To go to a bar! And even that was a stupid idea and I was probably going to cancel.
- R: But I've got the hotel room.
- C: Right now, I've got a phone with stupid text messages on it. We haven't actually done anything.
- R: Some pretty explicit text messages.
- C: Yes, true. Some very very stupid text messages.
- R: Involving blindfolds.
- C: Shut up, Rich. This is not going to happen. I've had some time to think, and I do genuinely thank you for the attention. And the option. Because you've made me realise what I actually want. And I'm sorry, but it's not you.
- R: But I've got...
- C: Don't say hotel room again. Get over yourself. I'm a married woman. And I might be able to hold onto my husband if I remember what I want... If I stop texting people late at night after too much wine. I don't actually want whatever sordid afternoon you had planned.
- [pause]
- C: I'm sorry, Rich. I don't mean to be harsh, but I need to be true, and I need to be clear. Nothing is going to happen between us. So now you are going to go and either make it up to Harriet or... I don't know. And it doesn't matter. I am married. I am going to remain married, and I am going to work things out. And you're not part of that.
- R: [Stares to front for a minute, mutters something which might be "bitch" under his breath, then stands up. [Throws coffee cup and misses bin. Leaves it. Turns to look at Cassie, then turns away and walks off without another word]

C: Deep breath. We can get through this, Cassie my girl. We can get through this. Forget it ever happened. [Picks up phone, goes and picks up coffee cup and places it in bin.]

SCENE FIVE – CASSIE AND ANDY

A: [Arrives from side] Back so soon?

C: Exhibition wasn't actually very interesting. I kind of lost interest.

A: And your friends?

C: Oh, not sticking around after all. Misunderstood.

A: OK, that's good. Hey, I had a dull meeting and had a bit of time to think about that holiday you were suggesting. Didn't we discuss kayaking in Scotland a while back. We could do that.

C: Yeah. What, in a group? Meet new people and all?

A: [Pauses] Maybe. But mostly just spending time as us. We haven't spent enough time just us for a while. Maybe spend a bit more time exploring. You remember when we missed that bus and ended up seeing those Neolithic ruins where they had that sculpture...

C: Oh, the one with the utterly enormous willy?

A: Well, yes, although I don't think you need to say it like that. Just thinking we could find somewhere interesting. And... y'know... Two of us.

C: OK. That sounds nice.

A: And... Well, I half-guessed from your message you'd not have anything more going on, so I... err... took the afternoon off. Do you fancy going to that martini bar?

C: Duke's?

A: Yeah. After all, look – I'm not wearing jeans for once. Granted that's because they're in the wash – but that means, dress code... we could get in. [Laughs] unlike... oh you remember our first date when we ended up begging them and they said we could have one drink, and then we ended up in Hyde Park with a bottle of wine.

C: Oh. Yeah. Oh, it got so cold so quickly. I'd thought we were only going for lunch.

A: Well we were. Things got a bit out of hand. Maybe there were two bottles of wine?

C: Plausibly. And then we went the wrong way round the park and couldn't find Paddington.

A: Oh, you were getting frozen.

C: And you gave me your jacket.

A: You look chilly now. Would you? [Takes off his jacket and offers it. She stands up and steps towards him]

C: Well, as long as the finest martini in London is still on offer. Got to warm a girl up somehow.

A: Could be a plan.

C: Sounds marvellous. Come here. [leans in and they kiss]

END