

# High Tea

*With His Excellency*

*A Play in Two Acts*  
*by Robert Joseph Ahola*

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*A Play in Three Acts  
by Robert Joseph Ahola*

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Pasts, Snappy Dialogue Stuffed with Innuendo,  
Genuine Denouement,  
Strong Spiritual Undertones,  
A Highly Poetic Cast of Characters  
who refuse to play with the cards life has dealt them,  
and more denouement than you ever bargained for...  
*HIGH TEA* has it all\*

\* **WARNING:** *It also contains unconditional love, personal transformation, ultimate redemption, and large doses of both humanity and humor – plus a couple of wonderfully corny solo songs accompanied by a flamenco clavichord.*

# High Tea

## With His Excellency

### *Synopsis*

What happens when one man's obsessions with the truth collide with the hidden fantasies of a room full of not-so-repressed women? The answer is *HIGH TEA/ With his Excellency*. And it's like no other high tea you will ever attended.

It is 1993. The setting is small city of Shropshire, Texas, sensitive to status and utterly insecure about everything it is not. In the midst of the local country club circle, emerges The Baron Raymond Emanuel Van Pelt. A dashing aristocrat in his sixties with impeccable manners and a pedigree he wears with unconcealed panache, "His Excellency" has, for years, charmed women of all ages in the local circle of "tea ladies" with his tales of elegant times and bygone eras. Every bit an atavism and something of a snob, The Baron is clearly a man out of time and certainly out of step with the rough edges of a small Texas town.

They are also a source of ridicule among the local "good old boys" from Texas oil who question both the Baron's credentials and his sexual proclivities. Principal among them is a billionaire cattle baron and oil tycoon named Ira "Candy" Cain who accompanied by his love-struck legal counsel Patrick, decides to lob emotional hand grenades into this thinly civilized affair,

Determined to create a dynamic that breaks the paradigms of propriety, Candy challenges the Baron and the tea ladies into a bout of "truth or dare." And soon *HIGH TEA* soon breaks down into a bawdy night of reveling and a bizarre turn of true confessions that are alternately hilarious, touching, and sexually provocative. Or are they merely the fragmented fantasies of women in a small Texas town? In answer, our highly original ensemble of characters take time to search their souls and the intricate tapestries that are woven when mythical creatures touch our lives, if only in scattered moments of time.

# The Cast

**The Baron. “His Excellency Raymond Emanuel Van Pelt.”** He is a gentleman, a scholar, and a total misfit, “drawn into this purgatory of a town, as if by the ordination of a karmic debt.” An elegant aristocrat his late sixties, The Baron reflects an era which by now few people either remember or care about. He also harbors dark secrets about his past that are certain to come out, especially when they are provoked to do so.

**Constance McClure.** A woman who clearly refuses to accept life as it is presented to her, Constance is a woman in her fifties who longs for the glories of a gentler time, and will do everything in her power to see that it is revisited as often as possible. A kind of innocent who earlier spent her youth as a married mans mistress, she acknowledges the drudgery of life but refuses to surrender to it.

**Élan.** Constance’s cousin. A beautiful young woman whom many suspect is still a virgin at thirty. She has an aesthetic soul and a certain need to revisit the poetry of life that her birth into this time and place has denied her. Taunted for being “the ice queen,” she harbors secrets and fantasies that cry out to be revealed, and will be – today at High Tea.

**Rhonda De La Roca.** A seemingly ageless femme fatale, she plays flamenco music on the harpsichord which she accompanies with a mongrelized Spanish that passes for lyrics while she reminiscences about her many ex-husbands that she uses to pepper the conversation. Candid about her romantic affairs, especially with the race driver “The Baron” Alfonso de Portago, she loves playing the agent provocateur to get others to “put your passion on display for all the world to see.”

**Ira “Candy” Cain.** Real name Ira Cohen, “Candy” is an oil tycoon, cattle baron, and nominated by the Baron as “the crudest white collar worker,” in America. He is also declared by his sister-in-law, “Connie” to be, “the most generous and compassionate man on this planet.” Ira Cain is also a man for whom truth is a citadel, and reality the only point of reference. It is a conviction he is willing to foist upon others, no matter how it roils them for him to do so.

**Patrick Dalton.** Candy Cain’s congenitally kind but inveterately tactless young legal counsel, Patrick, like Dostoyevsky’s *Idiot*, seems able speak only the truth, no matter what the cost of his doing so. His kindness is only exceeded by his flawless instinct for saying the wrong thing at precisely the right time. Both are surpassed by his undying affection for Élan, which he is inclined to share often and at his own expense.

**Aunt Noreen.** A cynical old dame who considers herself an aristocrat, she doesn’t like anybody very much. At 86, she doesn’t mind telling everyone what she thinks and doesn’t care much whoever she offends in the process. There is a sense of her that she will probably live forever and complain the whole time.

# Synopsis of Scenes

## **Act One**

**Scene 1** – Constance McClure’s living room.

**Scene 2** – The balcony, atrium, and garden

**Scene 3** – Constance McClure’s living room.

**Scene 4** – The balcony, atrium, and garden

## **Act Two**

**Scene 1** – Constance McClure’s living room.

**Scene 2** – The balcony, atrium, and garden

## **Act Three**

**Scene 1** – Constance McClure’s living room.

**Scene 2** – Constance McClure’s living room, one week later.

**Scene 3** – The balcony, atrium, and garden

# Production Considerations

**The Sets:** There are two sets for this play.

1. **Constance McClure's Living Room. Props:** The special requirements for props would include a breakfront (with a drop-leaf for a bar), and either a clavichord or a baby grand piano.
2. **The Balcony, Atrium and Garden.** This set may be presented fully, or played as an adjacent portion of the same single set. The garden and atrium may be fully presented or merely implied. As it is designed for the purposes of this play, the balcony is the focus of action for all the action on this set. (A fly-space could be ideal for this set, though not all houses have them.)
3. **About the Piano and Music.** In the opening of Act 2 and a part of Act 3, one of the characters (LaRonda De La Roca) plays the piano and sings a flamenco song (the famous *Venga Jaleo*). It is a classic public domain piece and is even better if she sings it off key. There are also simple tremolos that do not require great playing skill (or else can be pre-recorded). All the actress needs to pull this off is a sense of meter and a bit of good comic timing. So let's think outside the box here.
4. **The reason for three acts:** Some plays just pace better when broken up into three acts. This is one of them.

Approximate running time: 2 hours/ 15 minutes  
(And well worth the time spent!)



# High Tea

(With His Excellency)

## ACT 1

**Scene 1. Constance McClure's Living Room.** *It is simply but elegantly furnished with timeless antiques, a harpsichord, and omnipresent banks of flowers. Three women enter consecutively to fuss about the quarters. The first, Constance McClure, is in her late fifties. She is trim for her age, and in a dressy afternoon haute couture <as if she'd just come from a meeting that never really took place>. Joining her is a woman in flaming rusts and dangling fishhook earrings — LaRhonda De La Roca — a woman who could be fifty or seventy; but her soul is young, and she exudes sexual energy. Also joining them is their niece, ÉLAN, a gaminisque creature with delicate beauty and a spring dress in thin layers made to look like leaves that would fall away with the slightest gust of wind. The women rearrange the flowers, ÉLAN reflectively dusts the tabletops.*

**CONSTANCE**<sticking some fresh flowers in the arrangement> We have to hurry. You know what a stickler he is about punctuality. Four o'clock sharp.

**ÉLAN**<rearranges the table> It's a point of honor with him.

**LARHONDA**<busies about the room but really does nothing> My second husband, Mr. McGarity was that way. "A man who'll squander your time will squander your money," he used say. He was a regular Phileas Fogg.

**CONSTANCE** Was he the one who passed away?

**LARHONDA** No, he went to prison for embezzlement... But at least he was punctual!

**ÉLAN** Not something that's a problem for the Baron.

**LARHONDA** Punctuality?

**ÉLAN** No. Integrity. The man has such integrity.

**LARHONDA** Well, first you have to do something — anything! — to have your integrity tested. All His Excellency does is gad about and entertain people like us.

**ÉLAN** He's an aristocrat from the old school. They weren't allowed to work.

**LARHONDA** A 19th century notion as we approach the 21st. What's wrong with this picture?

**ÉLAN:** Nothing's wrong with it. It's just who he is.

**LARHONDA:** Aunt Noreen thinks he's bogus. Still makes him call her Mrs. Lancaster.

**CONSTANCE:** Aunt Noreen would ask Jesus Christ for his driver's license.

**LARHONDA:** Of course, she is coming. She wouldn't miss this afternoon — if for no other reason than to cast doubt on the Baron and aspersions on everyone else.

**CONSTANCE** Which he will always squelch with his gentlemanly reserve. He is, after all, for real.

**LARHONDA:** Although I do think the stuttering is a bit affected, at times.

**CONSTANCE:** Oh, nonsense LaRhonda! It's a trait of true nobility. Look at King Charles I of England. Terrible stutter. All the Romanovs stuttered, especially Nicholas III.

**LARHONDA:** And look at what happened to them.

**ÉLAN** He never stutters when he recites poetry, or recalls his past loves.

**LARHONDA:** Male and female. Or so I hear.

**ELAN:** Cynic.

**LARHONDA:** A realist, darling. The Baron's too old for you anyway. He's almost seventy. That would make him about forty years your senior.

**ÉLAN** *<dusting, ignores them both>* "The winds of wisdom, breathed when young, Return as passion to be sung." The Baron wrote that.

**CONSTANCE:** *<Continues arranging the flowers>* Élan always likes to bone up on her poetry when the Baron comes calling.

**LARHONDA:** Well, that's about the only bone she'll get up hanging around the old Baron.

**CONSTANCE:** *<finishes the flowers, rubs her fingers>* We simply have to cut the tongues from these Stargazers or they'll get red pollen all over everything. Élan, my sweet, would help me out with these? There are some scissors in the kitchen. Top right hand drawer.

**ÉLAN:** *<corrects her>* Stamen.

**CONSTANCE:** What?

**ÉLAN:** *<goes to leave>* They're not tongues. They're stamen. The male sex organ of the flower.

**LARHONDA:** We'll, you won't get much of either from His Excellency. I can tell you that.

*<Ignoring the comment, ÉLAN glides out of the room. Constance virtually turns on LaRhonda.>*

**CONSTANCE:** LaRhonda! Do try not to kill the poetry in everything.

**LARHONDA:** Darling, puh-lease! I live the poetry of life to my soul. But the girl does need to get a grip on it. She's thirty or thereabouts, and I'll wager she's still a virgin.

**CONSTANCE:** And who would blame her, given the assembly of ham hocks in this town.

**LARHONDA:** Ham is not all that bad. Ham can be very... filling. Besides, this absurd crush she has on the Baron is not the least bit healthy for her.

**CONSTANCE:** We all have a crush on The Baron. And we all flirt outrageously. My God, I thought you were going to strip for him the last time, we had him over.

**LARHONDA:** Well, one has to keep in practice — even if one's subject is asexual.

**CONSTANCE:** He is not asexual. He had a fiancé with whom he was hopelessly in love.

**LARHONDA:** That was another lifetime. As long as we've known him, his only personal involvement was living with sweet little Billy Williams, until he passed away. The kindest man I ever knew, but a little light in the loafers, as we all know!

**CONSTANCE:** I don't know that they were any more than just dear friends.

**LARHONDA:** Constance darling, find your center! Self-deception is totally unbecoming.

**CONSTANCE:** Just because someone doesn't find us sexually engaging. Unfortunately not many men do any more, unless they're nineteen or something. At nineteen, a man will hump a window mannequin.

**LARHONDA:** I know. Thank God!

**CONSTANCE:** LaRhonda, you wouldn't dare! *<She studies LaRhonda who beams guiltily.>* You would. You have! Oh, my God!

**LARHONDA:** Well, somebody has to break them in. I mean what use is it to remain a prisoner of your own idealism like poor ÉLAN? Sweet Jesus! All she's done since her mother died and left her all that money is sit around and read Keats and Shelly, pine away and read travel brochures. *<ÉLAN, with the scissors, has just reentered the room.>* Why I'll bet she's never even masturbated.

**ÉLAN:** Actually, I have. But mostly to Anais Nin and D.H. Lawrence. *<ÉLAN walks to the Stargazers and starts clipping the tongues, snipping almost maliciously. >*

**CONSTANCE:** Anyway that nice Patrick Dalton is coming over later to drop off some papers for Mr. Candy Cain.

**ÉLAN:** Mr. Cain isn't coming, is he? He is, isn't he? You know he and the Baron mix like oil and water.

**CONSTANCE:** He only does it once in a great while. And well, Candy Cain is my brother-in-law. He was a good husband to my sister, God rest her soul. He does wield some influence in these parts. And he doesn't dislike the Baron at all.

**ÉLAN:** Even if his singular form of personal recreation is taunting His Excellency.

**LARHONDA:** His Excellency! Isn't it just a little pretentious to still call him that after all these years? Has no one ever thought to call him as Raymond?

**CONSTANCE:** Well, no. Billy Williams used to. He was about the only person who dared to.

**LARHONDA:** We'll of course, he did. After all, they were... intimate.

**ÉLAN:** They were not. Not that way.

**LARHONDA:** That way or not, it's no excuse for everyone to suck up to him all the time.

**CONSTANCE:** Oh LaRhonda, please! We'll all suck up to the Baron when he comes. After all, it's not often you get someone to the manor born down here in Dogpatch.

**ÉLAN:** It would be refreshing if we just had a few people who were born with manners.

**LARHONDA:** Patrick Dalton has good manners.

**ÉLAN:** At least, he knows which fork to use.

**CONSTANCE:** And he's absolutely besotted with you. Smitten to his dying day.

**ÉLAN:** And blunt to the point of annoyance. If Cyrano de Bergerac were to write his lines for him, he would still find a way to screw it up. Besides, he's a dedicated meat-eater, by his own description. And he sweats.

**LARHONDA:** Only when he's around you, my dear. The lather of passion, I think.

**ÉLAN:** Oh LaRhonda! Every exudation is one of sexual interplay to you. A dog who froths at the mouth wouldn't be rabid. He would merely be craving affection.

**LARHONDA:** Well then... stroke the little puppy before you decide to put him away. Give him what he wants. Love is the salve that heals the world.

*<The doorbell rings. The women all look up.>*

**ÉLAN:** That couldn't be him.

**CONSTANCE:** The Baron? No, no, no. I told The Baron 4:00 and everyone else 3:30. You know what an entrance he likes to make. By the same token, he's old school and thinks it's rude to be late. So, we play the game of staggered arrivals.

*<The doorbell rings again, impatiently.>*

**ÉLAN:** It's Aunt Noreen.

**LARHONDA:** Early enough to cause a stir, but too late to help with the preparations. I'll get it. *<LaRhonda leaves the room to answer the bell.>*

**ÉLAN:** Does Aunt Noreen always have to come?

**CONSTANCE:** Now, darling. Whether Noreen will admit it or not, she lives for these little bi-monthly outings. .

**ÉLAN:** So, she can look down her gun-barrel nose at everything and every one, and fire at will.

**CONSTANCE:** When you're 84 you may fire off at anyone you like. Like you do at that poor Dalton boy.

**ÉLAN:** I'm very nice. I'm painfully nice. Besides, he's not a boy. He's 35 if he's a day.

**CONSTANCE:** And a bachelor. And a successful lawyer.

**ÉLAN:** Everyone's a successful lawyer, or a successful doctor – or a successful broker. Have you noticed? As if "success" were a part of the job description. *<Agitated, she turns her attention elsewhere,>* We forgot the aperitif glasses. We always have a sherry, a Port or a Cognac, if the tea goes late enough, which it invariably does.

*<Before they can move, Aunt Noreen bursts into the room. An attractive, eccentric in her eighties, she wears a hat that is flamboyant to the point of being ludicrous.>*

**CONSTANCE:** Why Auntie. You look like you're wearing a wedding cake.

**LARHONDA:** It's radical! I love it! The epitome of panache!

**AUNT NOREEN:** Well we have to do something to keep this little bi-monthly outing from getting predictable. I mean we already know that Baron will show up promptly at four and bring you a small red box of Godiva chocolates. And I bet you haven't even told him you're allergic.

**CONSTANCE:** Well, it never seemed appropriate...

**AUNT NOREEN** *<ignoring Constance, she interrupts>* Oh, my God! Don't tell me you're having high tea in here! On a beautiful spring day like this?! No, no, no! Outside in the garden. I mean really. This atrium and garden belong in Architectural Digest.

**CONSTANCE:** It's too hot outside.

**AUNT NOREEN:** Nonsense, my dear. Nonsense! *<She flings open the doors to the balcony.>* Ah, that's better! Hello, Élan. Nice outfit. Makes you look like Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Now, just look at those bougainvillea! That's what I mean. Outside. We really must do this outside!

**CONSTANCE:** Auntie, the garden in April is only for broasting! *< Aunt Noreen breezes by ÉLAN and seems, by force of will to drag the other women outside>. ÉLAN prepares the room. She senses someone at the door but doesn't turn.>*

**ÉLAN:** Hello, Patrick.

*<Patrick Dalton enters. Both handsome and tentative, he is dressed in a suit and tie. Reverential, he approaches ÉLAN as if she were a shrine.>*

**PATRICK:** I startled you. I didn't mean to. I can always tell when you get startled because your butt kind of puckers up. And your withers tighten like a mare's.

**ÉLAN:** Mr. Dalton... Do you always have to say the first thing that comes into your mind? It's like you suffer from Tourette's syndrome or something.

**PATRICK:** I'm not sure I understand.

**ÉLAN:** Of course, you don't.

**PATRICK:** I knocked but nobody came.

**ÉLAN:** Of course you did.

**PATRICK:** I've got a new Corvette. A convertible!

**ÉLAN:** Of course, you do.

**PATRICK:** I'd like to take you riding in it sometime. Top down.

**ÉLAN:** Of course, you would.

**PATRICK:** We're not going outside are we? It's too hot.

**ÉLAN:** *<finally turns>* It's just Aunt Noreen's usual power play. Always storms in and tries to change everything. But reason always prevails. They'll end up back in here.

**PATRICK:** You scare me sometimes. You're so bright. You anticipate everything. You're like an oracle.

**ÉLAN:** Patrick, you're embarrassing me.

*<Outside, the doorbell rings. ÉLAN straightens herself up, and quickly starts to make for the door.>*

It's The Baron! My goodness, he's early!

**PATRICK:** You really like him, don't you? I can tell. Your nipples always spike up whenever he comes into the room. *<The comment stops ÉLAN cold, but she doesn't turn.>*

**ÉLAN:** Mr. Dalton! It's one thing to make unembellished observations about the world around you. It's another to come off sounding like Hannibal Lechter Excuse me.

*<She hurriedly darts from the room, leaving Patrick alone to face his folly.>*

**PATRICK:** *<bangs his forehead as if to open his third eye>* Dumb! Dumb! Dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb!

*<The three older women come fussing back into the room.>*

**CONSTANCE:** Outside for three minutes and we're all sweating like a Turkish bath.

**AUNT NOREEN:** Nonsense! It's already getting cool.

**CONSTANCE:** We'll have it in here unless the Baron indicates otherwise.

**THE BARON:** And I say, thank God! T-Texas is noted for its state-of-the-art air-conditioning! *<The Baron enters with Élan. Ostensibly in his sixties, he has shocks of gray hair and aristocratic features. He is nattily attired in a suit, carries a cane and holds a small red gift box of chocolates. He nods in Élan's direction. >*

I was strolling along outside when I was engaged by this classically beautiful young goddess who asked me if-if I might come in for a nice cup of tea. Élan! Great Personal Style and grace. So, so aptly named! What an oasis of-of refinity you are in this-in this cultural wasteland.

**ÉLAN***< curtsies.>* Your Excellency is too kind. *<By now, the other women have descended upon him, except Aunt Noreen who deliberately holds back.>*

**THE BARON:** *<fusses over them>* Madame is so gracious to invite this unworthy tatterdemalion in for refreshments and-and sanctuary.

**CONSTANCE:** *<butchers the accent>* Oh, Baron. Tres distingué. Tres distingué.

**THE BARON:** Le suis enchanté, de vous revoir! Madame. Et vous, mademoiselle!

**LARHONDA***<better than Constance, but still lousy>:* Bienvenue au le petit chez moi.

*<The Baron takes elaborate note of Aunt Noreen.>*

**THE BARON:** *<takes Noreen's hand and kisses it>* And of course, Mrs. Lancaster! La grande dame.

**AUNT NOREEN:** None of that fancy French stuff for me, Baron. I'm a North Texas belle and proud of it.

**THE BARON:** And belle, you are. And what marvelous chapeaux. How very Lewis Carroll. *<He presents Constance with the chocolates>* A little token of my esteem.



**CONSTANCE:** Oh, Godiva! How grand! We'll save them for a special occasion. *<While LaRhonda leads The Baron away, Constance retreats to a breakfront, throws the doors open to reveal an entire sea of red boxes, tosses the box inside and shuts it.>*

**THE BARON :** *<regards Patrick with seeming affection>* And dear Mr. Dalton — The Young Lochinvar!

**PATRICK::** Lochinvar? That's classical. You're being classical... again.

**THE BARON:** The innocent, constant suitor in an age of affectation and cunning.

**PATRICK:** Like this one.

**THE BARON:** *<laughs>* Touché.

**PATRICK:** Touché. Mon petit... Whatever ya'll say. What's wrong with speaking English?

**THE BARON:** And what's wrong with not? You're a nice young man, Patrick. But all this Xenophobia... Don't be so threatened by strange flavors. We have to go outside the boundaries of who we are, or else-or else we never-never grow.

**PATRICK :** And is this? Is this growing? How many times has this ritual been repeated?

**THE BARON:** Consider it more like yet a classic rendition of Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup>, or another viewing of *Casa Blanca*. A classic! It is the classics in our lives that we revisit to give us a sense of ourselves.

**PATRICK:** I get no sense of myself from this. I get no sense of anything.

**AUNT NOREEN:** Oh, Patrick, do shut up and sit down! If you're going to be plain spoken, then go get a sense of humor somewhere! Or at least stuff it with a crumpet!

**THE BARON:** And speaking of scones... What a lovely, lovely layout we have today! *<He helps the women be seated. Patrick d remains standing but appears helpless to participate.>* And you're right, dear boy. This is a repetition. But a repetition- a repetition of splendor

**PATRICK:** I think it's sad.

**ÉLAN:** It's joy itself! A celebration of our own civilization — of life! Of one another! We're the last centurions to fend off the Barbarians at the Gate.

**AUNT NOREEN:** Speaking of barbarians... Why in God's name did you invite that cretin Ira Cain over for tea?! Just because he owns Shropshire, Texas.

**CONSTANCE:** Well, he is family.

**AUNT NOREEN:** Not to mention, the crudest white-collar worker in America. Besides, his last name's not Cain. It's Cohen. He's a Jew from a bunch of New York Jews. And if there's anything more offensive than a New York Jew, it's a cowboy Jew. And why is it they always change their last names, anyway?

**CONSTANCE:** He was born here in Shropshire. And he's got a heart almost as big as the hat he wears. My sister Marguerite adored him.

**AUNT NOREEN:** Marguerite, God rest her soul, loved everyone, particularly if they were filthy rich, which God only knows Ira "Candy" Cain is. And where did he get a nickname like Candy anyway? It certainly isn't his disposition.

**PATRICK:** We really shouldn't talk that way about Mr. Cain. He does so much good.

**AUNT NOREEN:** Well he's certainly been good to you, Patrick. Sent you through law school, became your biggest client by far, and managed to turn you into a toady in the process.

**CONSTANCE:** Auntie please! Ira was a devoted husband to my sister, God rest her. And he practically single-handedly built this town.

**AUNT NOREEN:** However crudely he went about it. And let's face it, he didn't care who he stomped on in the process.

**LARHONDA:** My third husband was a rather crude man. But effective. Crude people are often that way because they have no patience with life. They seem to be good at certain things but have no use for anything they don't consider useful.

**AUNT NOREEN:** And you Baron. Your silence condemns you. Surely, we know your position on the matter of Mr. Cain.

**THE BARON:** *<sipping his tea>* If you know it, madam, then I need not articulate it. We are in a never-ending mortal combat between the civilizing influences of our lives and those who would destroy them. And we are on—we are on the losing side, I think.

**LARHONDA:** *<fussing, serving>* A scone, Your Excellency?

**THE BARON:** Real scones. And so hot! So, so aromatic. Just a touch of butter and... and rough marmalade, *s'il vous plait!* *<LaRhonda hands him the plate with the scone, which he juggles uneasily on his knee>*. Such a delightful break in the day, high tea! Gives one pause to relax, refurbish, gain new perspectives before returning to the commerce of life.

**PATRICK :** First, you have to have some commerce to return to.

**ÉLAN:** Oh, Patrick please don't talk! Please don't say another thing. Just eat.

**THE BARON** *<risés, moving across the room>* I remember about ten years ago in Taipei, I was strolling through the mezzanine of the Grand Palace Hotel. And there in a large open salon was a score of young girls 12 and 13 years of age — Asian, English, others — all done up like Alice In Wonderland, all-all learning how to serve a proper cup of tea. And I thought to myself even then that, as long as we could continue to cultivate the tradition of high tea, civilization as we know it would survive. We would—we would prevail.

**PATRICK:** Seems pretentious, somehow.

**ÉLAN** *<chagrined, buries her head>* Oh, God.

**THE BARON:** Oh no. That's quite all right. Actually, High Tea was a working-class phenomenon. W-Workers in the mines and quarries would come off their jobs and plunge into a hardy cup of tea and some nosh. So, you see, it was a working class tradition picked up by-by the "swells" of English society.

**PATRICK:** But you're not English.

**THE BARON:** But educated there at- at Cambridge. My Abigail, my beautiful Abigail, used to say that I spoke better English than the royal family.

**CONSTANCE:** Tell us about her, Baron. About Abigail.

**LARHONDA:** Yes, please. Please do!

**THE BARON:** It's difficult for me to talk about, as you know. Perhaps, after a glass of sherry.

**LARHONDA:** Shall I pour you some sherry, Your Excellency?

**THE BARON:** How very kind of you to offer. But for now, I would rather sit and enjoy the tea. Ah! And a proper- proper cucumber sandwich! *<He bends over the finger sandwiches, picks one up in a grand gesture, and sits back down>* Made with Neufchatel, I see. How light and creamy! They have such a delicate flavor! Like communion wafers, really.

**PATRICK:** *<tastes one, makes a face>* Seems kind of bland to me.

**THE BARON:** It is a cultivated taste, of course. So many-many things in life are.

**PATRICK:** They'll never replace a good steak.

**ÉLAN:** If you like dead cow.

**PATRICK::** Well live ones are too expensive to keep as pets. I can tell you that for sure.

**ÉLAN:** Of course, we have to judge all things in life according to their utility. If they're not useful to us, we either throw them away or destroy them. How very Third Reich. The world as raw material.

**THE BARON:***<defusing the tension>* I've decided to make my world bloodless. I decided long-long ago that I wouldn't eat anything with an IQ. higher than my own. That precludes my consumption of all animals, and-and some plants.

**PATRICK:** That's very clever, Baron. But it's not what life shows us.

**ÉLAN:** His Excellency is a vegetarian, and so am I.

**PATRICK:** I've never understood that.

**AUNT NOREEN:** There's so little about life that you do understand, Patrick. Why in God's name do you come anyway?

**PATRICK:** Because... *<Blushing, he shrinks from the answer.>*

**AUNT NOREEN:***<rescues him>* Well I come because it's a damn site better than watching Oprah for the 5000th time. After all, life is a constant struggle against boredom. So, we grasp at these little moments, however infrequently they come...

**PATRICK :** *<unreflected>* As a postponement of our futility.

**ÉLAN:** Patrick! Couldn't you just leave your packet for Mr. Cain?

**PATRICK***<embarrassed>* : ÉLAN thinks I'm a social catastrophe.

**ÉLAN:** Merely the voice of an unspoken consensus.

**THE BARON:** No, the thought was quite profound, really. My Abigail used to say, "We spend our days searching in vain for the poetry of life, when it is who we are that creates the verse." She was so-so highly evolved.

**AUNT NOREEN:** You say you don't want to talk about her, Your Excellency. Then all you do is talk about her. You really should let the rest of us in on it, you know.

**CONSTANCE:** If it isn't too inconvenient.

LARHONDA: Please! Or I shall start talking about my ex-husbands.

AUNT NOREEN: Oh, God, we'll be here for days!

THE BARON *<Proudly reluctant, he articulates without a stutter.>*  
She was of course, a Lady. Her peerage was inherited, so-so she would be at least an acceptable match for me. But had she been a scullery maid, I would have loved her to the core of my soul. Oh Dear God, how I feel her loss every day of my life..." *<He grows emotional, then catches himself up>*

PATRICK: How'd she die?

*<Emotionally propelled out of his chair, The Baron recovers and pats his coat pocket.>*

THE BARON: If you will excuse me, I think I will retire to the garden to indulge this rather lamentable habit of mine called smoking. With your-with your permission?

CONSTANCE: Oh, Baron please! You are in your house.

THE BARON: Madame is too, too kind. *<He exits to the garden atrium>*

AUNT NOREEN: My, God, Patrick! Why didn't you just ask him to show you pictures of the body?

PATRICK: I'm sorry. I didn't know.

AUNT NOREEN: "Ignorance" is your nom de guerre. Which frankly is only excusable if you're learning impaired!

LARHONDA: She was killed, dear boy. An awful car crash in the south of England. The Baron's Bentley, leaving a gala late at night, was broadsided by a lorry.

PATRICK: Is that like a truck?

LARHONDA: Yes, like a truck...And Lady Hastingate was killed instantly.

CONSTANCE: Apparently, her family blamed the Baron for the condition of his driver. It was in all the papers at the time. Right around the time of the Profumo scandal, although there was no connection whatsoever... We don't think.

*<ÉLAN bolts up and follows The Baron. Others observe.>*

AUNT NOREEN: Well, where in the hell is she going?

LARHONDA: In pursuit of her obsession, I think.

**Scene 2. The Atrium and Garden.** *The small balcony overlooks a garden enclosed with flowers and shrubs. Reverential, The Baron steps out onto it, pulls out a cigarette holder, loads in a cigarette and strikes a match to it. He senses ÉLAN as she comes in behind him.>*

**THE BARON:** Whenever I go outdoors to-to smoke, I always feel as if I should extend my apologies to the flora for invading the sanctity of their environment.

**ÉLAN:** They need no apology. Unlike us, they are perfect in their silence.

**THE BARON:** In that, they are our superiors in every way. They uplift, illuminate, glory for a while and then fade with such quick and exquisite grace. Too few of us humans have the good taste to do so.

**ÉLAN:** Oh, Baron, I cannot apologize enough for the insensitivity of Patrick Dalton.

**THE BARON:** *<turning to regard her, he holds the cigarette away>* Oh no, dear girl. He's sweet really. Rather like Dostoyevsky's Prince Myshkin.

**ÉLAN:** The Idiot. How appropriate!

**THE BARON:** Gentle, foolish, princely, kind — like Le Idiôt, he hasn't a mean bone in his body.

**ÉLAN:** But he opens wounds like a ferret. He keeps poking around until he hurts someone. And I can't stand to see anyone bring you pain.

**THE BARON:** Remembering her is never painful... and never entirely without pain. I need no assistance in that regard.

**ÉLAN:** You must miss her terribly.

**THE BARON:** Dear-dear Mr. Williams used to say that, "We all spend most of our lives saying good-bye to one another, just as I said goodbye... to them both. You're very much like her you know.

**ÉLAN:** Lady Hastingate? Do you really think so?

**THE BARON:** The same gentle nature. The same ability to find the poetry in all of us. You have that ability, although I think you try to deny it at times. Especially with the young man. He-he adores you, you know.

**ÉLAN:** Isn't it always the case? Isn't that always life's final joke at our expense — that we are forever adored by those for whom we hold no passion?

**THE BARON:** I think we define ourselves by those we love, and those who love us. Sadly, there are those of us for whom the perfect love is a completion of the self. And having tasted that perfection we somehow come at odds with Heaven itself.

**ÉLAN:** The poet is always at odds with heaven. Your longing for perfection curses you at birth.

**THE BARON:** *<returns his attentions to her>* You know me. Too well, I think.

**ÉLAN:** I know you, and I care about... what happens to you.

**THE BARON:** It is music to my heart to know there are gentle beings like you who still walk this earth. You are a gift from the gods...  
*<He takes a drag then offers one to ÉLAN>*  
Oh dear, I have forgotten my manners. Do you-do you smoke?

**ÉLAN:** Occasionally, yes. Yes, thank you.

**THE BARON:** They're Galois. French. Black tobacco. B-Boiled. The only decent smoke, I feel.

*<She holds it clumsily as he lights it. Inhaling, she coughs.>*

**ÉLAN:** Oh, I agree.

**THE BARON:** *<pretends not to notice her difficulty>* It's not always a good idea to take on the vices of others. You usually end up exchanging both your identity and-and your virtue for someone else's folly.

**ÉLAN:** I have vices enough of my own, I can assure you.

**THE BARON:** But if they hurt no one else. And if you are an accomplice to them in the privacy of your own consciousness, then-then are they vices?

**ÉLAN:** Your vices are only committed with kindness.

**THE BARON:** You bring out the kindness in me... My Abigail used to say, that we must all strive to be, "Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not." Well, Shakespeare said it first..

**ÉLAN:** Like Mr. Cain. Does he qualify for "sounds and sweet airs."

**THE BARON:** Ah yes, The Plain Dealer. Well... after all this time, he's become an honest adversary. And I'll grant him this: At least he doesn't stab your back. Besides, what is noblesse oblige without the occasional test?

*<The doorbell rings. They both note the irony of it. >*

**ÉLAN:** A test that comes later rather than sooner. Thank God.

**THE BARON:** Part of Mr. Cain's panoply of rudeness is to always arrive late, which provides me ample opportunity to make an early departure, should I choose to do so.

**ÉLAN:** Please, I hope not. Stay the storm with me.

**THE BARON:** For you-For you, my dear girl, anything! For him? Nothing.

**ÉLAN:** But he comes mainly to see you.

**THE BARON:** *<shrugs it off>* Two old bull walruses barking-barking at the sea.

**Scene 3. Constance's Living Room.** *<By now Candy Cain has taken a seat. He is a large powerfully built man in his sixties, yet with a middle-aged softness that implies a lack of exercise. Larger than life, he is aware of the impact he makes. He notes Élan's return.>*

**CANDY:** E-lane, darlin'! Beautiful as ever. But, I swear to God, you still look as out of place here as a rose at a stinkweed convention. You need to go teach English or somethin' at one of those girl's boarding schools back east. Either that or grow a bee-hive hairdo and learn how to cook chicken fried steak.

**ÉLAN:** You have such a way with words, Mr. Cain.

**CANDY:** I have a way with the truth, darlin'. The truth bites like a mean dog. But if you know how to make it your friend, it's your friend for life.

**ÉLAN:** You can form the same bond with tact... and restraint.

**CANDY:** Well... restraint only works in cold climates, and we're in Texas. I suppose the Bairn is practicing restraint out there smoking those stinky French cigarettes.

**ÉLAN:** They're Galois.



**CANDY:** Whatever they are, they smell like dirty underwear in a hot water cycle.

**ÉLAN:** It's sophisticated. It's very European.

**CANDY:** Hells bells, E-lane! The Bairn could fart in an ashtray, and you'd call it chamber music.

**CONSTANCE:** Ira, if you please! There are certain vulgarities we do not tolerate in this house.

**CANDY:** Come on, Sister?! "Fart" is not a cuss word. Now, if I'd said, "shit!" That would be a cuss word. Anyway, don't worry about me. I just came over to grab these contracts from Patrick here, have a cup of this sissy ass tea and be on my way.

*<By now, The Baron enters and stands like a man in shadows, his personality already more combative.>*

**THE BARON:** I see Mr. Cain is flouting his vocabulary. Or-Or lack of it.

**CANDY:** Damn! That's what I like about you, Bairn. When you cut through all this parlor patter, you're downright nasty! I strongly suspect you're a warrior beneath it all!

*<The two shake hands, vigorously. Candy squeezes as if to test The Baron's strength, almost pleased that he has brought the issue to such a head. Finally pulling away, The Baron strolls over to the breakfront.>*

**LARHONDA:***<changing the subject>* Would anyone like a sherry? I think this calls for something more invigorating!

**CANDY:** Now LaRhonda darlin', we all know what happens when you break out the sherry. That means' there are more than two men in the room, and you're tryin' to get one of 'em drunk enough to jump into a big pile. And it won't matter who's on top of who, doin' what.

**ÉLAN:** *<corrects him with pleasure>* On top of whom!

**CANDY:** Whatever... Hell woman it's not even five o'clock yet.

**LARHONDA:** Well it's five o'clock somewhere! Besides, I can feel the rise in the pheromone level whenever you two come together. It's so... tantalizing!

**AUNT NOREEN:** God! All I need to do at my age is bear witness to yet another botched seduction!

**LARHONDA:** Au contraire, Auntie. There is no such thing as a botched seduction. Only one that requires more... practice.

**THE BARON:** Nonetheless, I do feel that perhaps an aperitif would somehow soften the elation I feel at having Mr. Cain join us-join us this afternoon.

**CANDY:** The Bairn is takin' the Mick out of me. Isn't that what they say over there when you're blowing smoke up somebody's ass? Takin' the Mick out them?

**THE BARON:** That might be an accurate if-if crass comparison.

**CANDY:** Well, sometimes, you have to be crude to be accurate there, Bairn.

**AUNT NOREEN:** No, Candy. You have to be crude to be accurate. Crudeness is not required of anyone. It is usually foisted upon others by someone too mean and insensitive to care. But you wear it like a badge of honor.

**CANDY:** Well, so as not to be crude. I think I'll just start out with cup of tea. I mean this is tea time, idn't it? I mean, idn't that what you all call it? High tea?

**PATRICK:** Started by the working classes in England.

**CANDY:** The working classes! Now that's something I can relate to. See, I may not be the best educated man in the world. But I have what they commonly call street smarts. And I always do my homework. Due diligence they call it — on everyone and everything. And this Internet, they're into... Hell you can just tap into the CIA website and they'll tell you anything about anyone you want to know. > — especially foreign countries. Our tax dollars at work! And you know what I found out just the other day? This country you're from, Bairn.

**THE BARON:** Königsbourg.

**CANDY:** Königsbourg! Yeah, Königsbourg! That little country near Lithuania, about the size of a diaper stain. Well, it seems about the only way they have of raising capital is by selling titles of nobility. Peerages, I guess you call 'em. Right? So the Prince there — Theobold, or whatever the hell his name is — the Prince has it worked out where they hand out baronies and dukedoms for what? About 50 million big ones?

**THE BARON:** For \$50 million, they would-would probably sell you the whole bloody country.

**ÉLAN:** Well, we're sorry to deflate your revelation, Mr. Cain. But titles in Europe have been bought and sold to wealthy-wealthy men as far back as the twelfth century. Pandering to the nouveau riche is as timeless as it is tasteless.

**CANDY:** So, cutting to the chase, it sounds I could go over to Königsbourg, and by a title?

**AUNT NOREEN:** Money...

**CONSTANCE:** *<chimes in>* Can buy...

**LARHONDA** *<finishes>* Anything!

**CANDY:** So, I could become the what? The Earl of Oil! How's that?

**THE BARON:** Come to think of it, it might take \$100 million. They do have their standards, however diminished they may be.

**CANDY:** Well, how diminished are your standards there, Baron. I mean a man of your position and means living here in Podunk, Texas? It seems to me, you ought to be back there in Europe hob nobbin' with Prince Charles and King Juan Carlos of Spain, and all them.

**LARHONDA:** *<plays it like high drama>* I once had a Baron for a lover — a devastatingly handsome man — the legendary Baron Alfonzo de Portago, race car driver extraordinaire. He was mad about me, couldn't keep his hands off me, begged me to run away with him. But I was married to my first husband, Mendoza, the famous impresario, and Fonzo was so young, so wildly passionate. "LaRhonda," he once told me, "I adore you! But I could never be faithful to any woman." Ah, but he was forever faithful to his Formula Ones!

**THE BARON:** The Baron de Portago. I actually knew him well. I was there at Le Mans when his Maserati flew off into the crowd. Killed-killed five people, including himself.

**CANDY:** That's exactly my point, there Baron! You've walked with kings and princes, and now you, "have the common touch." Well, idn't this just a little bit too much of a good thing.? I mean, here you are in good old Shropshire, Texas all these years.

**THE BARON:** I think you ask an academic question, Mr. Cain. You know I'm on a modest stipend from the Van Pelt's diminished family fortune. And I'm here in the charming-charming cottage that dear Mr. Williams so kindly left-left in my charge when he quit this life four years-four years ago. Of course, several years ago, they-they wrote and told me my stipend was to be terminated; that the Barony was bankrupt. But I wrote them back formally and most firmly advised them that this was not at all acceptable — that I must-that I must have my due. My needs after all were modest. And I had to continue looking after dear-dear Mr. Williams. His health was failing by then. And I had to attend him at all times. He was-he was so frail from the chemo.

**CANDY:** Well what about since little Billy kicked the can? I mean you could find gainful employment.

**CONSTANCE:** Oh Ira, really! And what would a Baron do in this age of high technology? Be a concierge? This is a man to the manner born. Not someone for the vulgarities of commerce.

**CANDY:** The “vulgarities of commerce” have treated you pretty well, young lady. Besides, I think you girls ought to let the Bairn here speak for his own self. I mean what do you say, Bairn? You could be an ambassador without portfolio. You could negotiate with all those Arabs we have to do business with all the time.

**THE BARON:** *<flustered, struggles with his own rage>* You forget, it was a Middle-easterner — a Persian of all people — who was driving, actually driving our Bentley the night Lady Hastingate was killed! I could never, never deal with these people again on any level!

**CANDY:** Yeah well... any excuse'll do, I guess. So instead, you hide out in the middle of nowhere and use these little teas and poetry readings to escape from reality — to pretend you live on lateral planes of existence — “The Good Old Days.” Is that it?

**ÉLAN:** *<leaps up to The Baron's defense>* Oh, please, Mr. Cain. Everyone spends most of their sad little lives creating pockets of time where they can escape from what the world throws at them. Escape? My God in Heaven, yes! When the world around you hums with manufactured emotions and plastic food, when your greatest thrill in the course of a year is to buy a different colored car, when we're all conditioned to be entirely desensitized to every bit of poetry in our lives — Yes! Escape to that safe harbor of sanity in our lives. Use any means necessary. But find it again! And once you do, never let it out of your sight.

**PATRICK:** *<bursts out of his seat involuntarily>* I love you!

**ÉLAN:** *<regards him pitifully>* Oh Patrick. You're a lawyer, for God's sake.

**PATRICK :** *<Still standing, he bends to pick up his attaché>* I'm really not comfortable here. All I do is say the wrong thing, when all I want to do is say the right thing. Now, Mr. Cain, if you will just sign these contracts you asked me to bring, sir. I'll be on my way.

*<Patrick reaches in to pull out his papers but Candy motions him to sit back down. Reluctantly he does so.>*

**CANDY:** Naw, come on, Patrick. Stay! Don't leave me alone with all these women. Hell, we're outnumbered as it is.

**THE BARON:** I caught the innuendo. Innuendo is-is the password of the coward.

**CANDY:** Aw... the Bairn's callin' me a coward. Are you callin' me a coward, Bairn?

**THE BARON:** Would you-would you be having the same conversation with a room full of whisky sodden cowboys? I think not. You would be tossed out the window if you did, and you know it. But I forget that over here you Yanks find the acceptable profane, and the-and the profane acceptable.

**AUNT NOREEN:** I'm beginning to find this entire exchange unacceptable and very one sided.

**THE BARON:** Point taken, madam. As with all the laws of human dynamics we are being dragged down to the lowest common denominator.

**CANDY:** Oh no problem with that, Bairn. See, I deal in reality! It is the world we live in! Harsh or sweet, I don't hide from it. Idn't that what you and little Billy Williams did? Just kind of pull up the covers and let the world pass you by? Shit Bairn! — Pardon me ladies — talk about running from the larger games of life!

**THE BARON:** What you call the larger games of life are mere illusion to some. Mr. Williams and I enjoyed the dearest of friendships. Close, fulfilling... innocent, in its way.

**CANDY:** But you never were anything more than just friends? You mean you never got into anything more intimate?

**ÉLAN:** His Excellency already expressed himself on that issue! Are we holding an inquisition here?

**THE BARON:** That's quite all right-all right, my dear. *<He goes over to the tray of liqueurs at the breakfront.>* It is possible for one man to love another in the purely Platonic sense. It's possible for two men to share higher thoughts, to embrace the brotherhood of one another, to search together the deeper meanings of life, to do no more than embrace the commonality of their manhood. This is the way of friendship.

**PATRICK:** Oscar Wilde!

**ÉLAN:** Oscar Wilde?

**PATRICK:** That was virtually the same apology Oscar Wilde offered during his sodomy trial for his affair with Lord Alfred Douglas... in a failed attempt to explain away his relationship.

**ÉLAN:** Oh God, Patrick! You are a lawyer!

**CANDY:** Yeah! That was it. Wasn't it? I mean you can't sell that "purely Platonic" crap here, Bairn. Ain't nobody buying..

**THE BARON:** I'm not selling-selling-selling anything! That's the way it was!

**CANDY:** You mean to stand there and tell us you lived with little prom-queen Billy Williams for ten years and never once played hide the weenie? Gobble the knob?

**AUNT NOREEN:** Ira Cain, you disgusting man!

**CANDY:** Oh, I don't know. Is getting to the truth disgusting? Hell the truth is the truth is the truth. Can't deny it. Can't hide it. It just is! Right, Bairn?!

**THE BARON:** *<sets his drink down firmly>* I'm sorry, but I do not squander my emotional currency conversing with fools. *<Again, he pats his coat pocket for his cigarette case.>* Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll retire to the garden where the only pollution I experience will be of my own-of my own creation!

*<Cane in hand, head high, The Baron exits toward the Garden Atrium. Upon his departure, the room falls into a deadly, if temporary silence. But Candy breaks the silence.>*

**CANDY:** Well, some people deal with the truth. And others run from it...

**ÉLAN:** *<gets up to take the Baron's place>* And others twist it! And pervert it! And make beautiful moments seem sordid and ugly! Is it the truth then? Or merely perversions of the facts? How can a man like you hide behind what you call the truth when you only want to use it to do hurt other people?!

*<Patrick too stands up from the arm of the chair, head bowed. Again, he reaches for his attaché>*

**PATRICK:** Mr. Cain, sir! No one has a higher regard for you than I do. But there are times when you take things too far, sir. Whatever your intentions toward the truth, there are times when you just leave it in a box in a corner of your life and hang a "Do Not Disturb" sign on it. And I don't think you're happy doing that sir. So, as your legal counsel, I would just like to get these papers signed and be on my way, before I say something I might regret.

**AUNT NOREEN:** Well, well, well — a lucid moment. I've seen it all.

**CANDY:** Oh, Patrick sit down and shut up! Hell, I'll go out and apologize if that'll make everyone feel better.

<Obediently, Patrick sits back down as Candy goes out to the Garden, and LaRhonda starts filling glasses from the tray of liqueurs.>

**ÉLAN:** <studying Patrick with mixed emotions> I thought for a moment...

**AUNT NOREEN:** You thought what?

**ÉLAN:** <looks away toward the garden> Never mind.

**LARHONDA:** <Drinks in hand, she breaks for the harpsichord.> Well, it is officially after five...

**CONSTANCE:** <dismayed at the turn of events> Come to think of it, it is.

<She motions to LaRhonda who runs a chord, then belts out a bawdy limerick>

**LARHONDA:** A randy  
Oil baron named Candy  
Had proved to be everyone's bane.  
'Til he buggared a totem  
And shredded his scrotum  
And now there's a pain in his Cain!

**ALL:** Olé!

**Scene 4. The Atrium and Garden.** *It is dusk.* The Baron has returned to the *small balcony overlooking the garden.* He pulls out a cigarette. Candy pulls alongside him and plucks a cigar from his pocket.

**CANDY:** Got a light?

**THE BARON:** <lights Candy's cigar.> Since I'm certain someone as blatantly self-sufficient as you would probably carry your own matches, I suspect you have—you have come out to make amends.

**CANDY:** See that's what I like about you, Bairn. When it comes down to it, you know how to speak the language of a man. Not all this tea time gushin' and flushin'. You major in small talk, but you don't like a moment of it.

**THE BARON:** Not so. I love every moment. Genteel people and sweet comments—however seemingly trite to you—nourish the soul. Pay these people, of whom I suspect you are fond, some consideration and quit buggaring up their afternoons!

**CANDY:** Oh, come on, Bairn! They're family! Besides, despite their complaining, I sense they look forward to me poppin' in on them once in while. I'll bet when I leave, they all explode with gossip about me and how awful I am.

**THE BARON:** Yes-yes in fact they do. I call it-I call it sweeping the room.

**CANDY:** Well, they're right about one thing. I do only come when you're here. See, Bairn, a man like you fascinates me.

**THE BARON:** I didn't think I still fascinated anyone.

**CANDY:** Well, let me finish my thought here. Because... See, you remind me of a thoroughbred racehorse I once had named Sir Galahad. One of the most beautiful animals I ever saw, but temperamental?! About the time you thought you had him figured out, he would bolt, kick down his stall and kick your ass! But race? God he could run! And he always outlasted the other horses, just flat wore 'em down. And he would always just barely win, finish by a nose. Then he got lame, and we had to stop racin' him. Well... since he was a gelding, he was no use as a stud. But I certainly wouldn't put him down. So, we just kept him in the greenest pasture I could find until he finally died. And it seemed like he lived forever — about 35 years! See I had to keep him goin', if for no other reason than because he kept the truth of what he was.

**THE BARON:** There is a compliment for me in there somewhere, I think.

**CANDY:** Oh absolutely! But also a challenge. See, I never could figure Sir Galahad out. And it just drives me crazy if I can't figure something out — or someone. So, I just have to keep studyin' them until I do. It's a...

**THE BARON:**<finishes the definition> Fetish.

**CANDY:** Whatever... See, I have to get to the core of things. Because that's the only way you get free in life. Get to the truth. Deal with it.

**THE BARON:** Like the- like the truth you were about to get to about dear Mr. Williams. Or-Or what you perceived as the truth.

**CANDY:** Well, Baron, sweet little Billy wasn't exactly a national secret around here. Hell when you live in a town with only 50,000 people, you hear about it when a man pisses sittin' down.

**THE BARON:** The fact that you worry about how man pisses says it all! Are we to be held accountable even for our youthful indiscretions, even though we only harmed ourselves?! What kind of truth is that?!



**CANDY:** Damn, Bairn, I liked little Billy! I like you too. See it just frustrates me that people go off hiding in these porcelain worlds when they could be tasting life!

**THE BARON:** Hah! I tasted... I tasted more life in my first thirty years than most men will know in a century. Certainly you can't expect me to go hob-knobbing with cattlemen and retailers, standing around drinking cheap whisky and talking in those disgusting drawls you people have affected.

**CANDY:** You know Bairn, I just figured out one thing about you. All this snobbery's kind of a sport with you isn't it? You can't even get your ticket punched overseas any more. But here you can pull your condescending blue-blood crap on everyone, and get your ass kissed in the process!. Damn! I get it at last!

**THE BARON:** You get nothing! I only wish to spend my days in sweet serenity. Alone if I must. With a few friends if I may. So just leave us alone!

**CANDY:** Nope. I'm hittin' onto something. I can smell it like a well comin' in! I'll tell you what, Bairn. You come on back in that room. And let's cut all the tea twitter and chit chat, and get down to it. Have a drink — like men!

**THE BARON:** I might remind you, there are-there are mostly women inside that room.

**CANDY:** Oh, bullshit, Bairn. This high tea crap is nothing but a masquerade. People only have these afternoons, because deep down inside, they're hoping like hell that someone like me will come along and blow the whole day apart! Slaughter the gods of sameness! I'll bet you right now that there's nothing those women in that room would like better than to drop cups and strap it on. Shee-ut! One word in the right direction and LaRhonda would flash some nipple from one of her triple Ds. And I bet if you so much as winked at young E-lane, she'd hike up that Tinkerbell tear-away she bought at Victoria's Secret and sit on your face. So, what the hell, Bairn! Let's give 'em what they want. Go back in there, have a good stiff one and get down to business! Let it all hang out! What do you say?

**THE BARON:** Mr.-Mr. Cain. You are without a doubt, the end of civilization!

**CANDY:** Not as long as you're here to hold up the standards. Right, Bairn!

**THE BARON:** I am determined to outlast you.

**CANDY:** And you might just do that, Bairn. You might just do that... Meanwhile. I'll make you a proposition. We go back into that room and announce to everyone that they have to — No, we all have to — tell one core truth about ourselves. A core truth. You and I can announce that we're going to do it —

announce that we're going to tell a secret about ourselves and let them follow suit — or not! But they will. I guarantee you they will. Trust me. I'm here to set you free.

**THE BARON:** You're not here for them. It's me you want. If you want to dig up the dirt on me, then why in the hell don't you just ask?

**CANDY:** Don't flatter yourself there, Bairn. You're only part of the puzzle. And I am a sonofabitch, I admit it. But it is my dedication to get to the bottom of things! To the Truth! That is if you dare the truth.

**THE BARON:** My God! Is this a bout of Truth or Dare you're trying to draw us all into?!

**CANDY:** The truth is always a dare, Bairn. Now you've got to respect that. That's what this is all about, idn't it, Bairn? Respect? I mean, it's about respect.

**THE BARON:** It's nothing about respect! It's about playing God — or more accurately, his shadow! You are — you are wagering on the dark side of human nature, that people will want to let it out. And I wager they will not.

**CANDY:** Then let's make it worthwhile. And bet something of value to both of us.

**THE BARON:** Not money, certainly. It would mean nothing to you, and would probably place a burden on me.

**CANDY:** Then bet something that would matter.

**THE BARON:** If I win, my condition is that you not come around and molest our little gathering for one full year — that you stay away and leave us to our civilized Thursday afternoons.

**CANDY:** Deal! And if I win...

**THE BARON...** That I tell you everything that you want to know about me — every dark little secret. But in my own way, and on my own time. Isn't that what this is all about?

**CANDY:** Damn, Bairn! You do know how to get to the core of things when it counts! Now, do we have a deal or don't we?

**THE BARON:** Why do I feel like I'm making pact with the Devil.

**CANDY:** Or an angel unaware... <Candy offers his hand. The Baron clasps it. It is a firm handshake, like two warriors taking measure of one another. The entire exercise amuses Candy.> Done!! Damn, Bairn! You're all right!

**END OF ACT I.**

*(To be continued...)*

If you wish to read the complete script, please contact the playwright directly:

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