

Tales of Forbidden Fruit
by Evie Dickson and John Schoneboom

CAST OF CHARACTERS
in order of appearance

Jonathan Spice:	Apple fanatic, TV salesman
Annie Elizabeth:	Model/Activist
Captain Kidd:	Earnest young lover
Bess Pool:	Dissatisfied wife
Eddie Pool:	Disinterested husband
Salesman:	Sells apples
Melinda Gilliflower:	TV saleswoman
Almata:	TV Producer
Production Assistant:	Production Assistant

SCENE 1: THE SACK OF APPLES

JONATHAN SPICE walks onto the train platform, wearing cycling gear and carrying a fold-away bike. He is alone.

He opens a newspaper and starts to read it, tutting with disapproval. He notices a sack on the ground to one side. Curiosity leads him to investigate and look in the seemingly abandoned sack.

Much to his relief the sack is full of apples. He rubs the apple eagerly and then stuffs it down his cycling trousers.

Pleased with himself, he repeats the action with another. After a few more apples he is disturbed by the noise of an oncoming train.

Quickly he pulls the apples out of his trousers and puts them back in the sack, leaving one apple in his trousers.

He puts the sack of apples on a bench and hurries off.

On the way he bumps into ANNIE ELIZABETH, carrying a pile of leaflets, rushing for the train. She notices the apple in his trousers; there is an awkward moment. She gives him a leaflet. He exits.

SCENE 2: HOW DO YOU DO?

Still at the train station. The train arrives. ANNIE ELIZABETH gets on the train and stands holding the central pole. She takes a book about palm reading out of her pocket to read.

CAPTAIN KIDD runs onto the platform and notices the sack of apples. He picks up the sack and jumps onto the train. Another passenger on the train, in passing, pushes Kidd into Annie Elizabeth.

SFX TRAIN DOOR CLOSING

TRAIN ANNOUNCER

Doors closing.

CAPTAIN KIDD

How do you do?

ANNIE

How do you do?

CAPTAIN KIDD

My name is...

ANNIE

How do you do?

CAPTAIN KIDD

How do you do?

ANNIE

My name is...

CAPTAIN KIDD

And how do you do again? *(Pause)* I was born in...

ANNIE

Oh... how interesting.

CAPTAIN KIDD

Yes.

ANNIE

I work at. I go to. I walk past.

That must be a bore. CAPTAIN KIDD

Yes. I'm a Libran. ANNIE

OK. I take out take back take on. Take from. CAPTAIN KIDD

I put on put over put across put in. Put in put in. ANNIE

Tiresome. CAPTAIN KIDD

Exhausting. ANNIE

I saw you getting on. I wanted to meet you. CAPTAIN KIDD

Well here we are. ANNIE

Now we know each other. CAPTAIN KIDD

Not really. ANNIE

SFX DOORS OPENING

Doors opening. ANNOUNCER

This is me. CAPTAIN KIDD

And how do you do again? ANNIE

I mean this is my stop. CAPTAIN KIDD

Holds out his hand. They shake hands. She cannot quite let go of his hand.

Kidd jumps off the train but then jumps back on to give Annie an apple. She in return gives him a leaflet. She is incredibly moved as she watches him disappear. She checks the apple for a phone number or clue to his identity.

She starts to circle round the train pole in a 'loved up' state. She begins to sing a beautiful song 'I Will Give My Love An Apple'.

SFX TRAIN DOOR CLOSING

ANNOUNCER

Doors closing.

Annie Elizabeth is jolted back into reality and is embarrassed. She smells the apple longingly. The train (somehow) moves on.

SCENE 3: APPLE SALESMAN PART 1

EDDIE and BESS POOL sit in their apartment, both of them reading. A bowl of apples sits on a table between them.

(A PAUSE)

BESS

It says here that reading silently can be a sign of deep hostility.

EDDIE

You should talk.

BESS

No, you should talk. That's the whole point.

EDDIE

We're both silent.

BESS

I think we both know who's more silent.

More silence. Eddie sighs and puts down his book.

EDDIE

I won't deny it. I was strangely hostile. I apologise.

BESS

My book says nothing about reading silently or what it means. It's a book about fish.

EDDIE

You needed some way to break the ice and you came up with something.

BESS

Yes.

EDDIE

You have nothing to apologise for.

There is a KNOCK at the door.

BESS

Who is it?

SALESMAN

Salesman!

Come on in. EDDIE

What are you selling? BESS

Apples! SALESMAN

Everyone looks at the bowl of apples.

They better be good. BESS

Oh they are, believe me. Let me ask you a question. Have you ever eaten an apple? SALESMAN

Yes. BESS

Many times. EDDIE

Wrong. Whoa, did I just say that? That's bad salesmanship, right? It's insane, am I right? Contradicting the customer? You've had apples probably a thousand times in your life! You know what they look like, you know the crunch they make when you bite them, you know that tart sensation when it hits your tongue. Am I right? I'm nuts and you know your apples. Come on, if I'm wrong, tell me, am I right? SALESMAN

Eddie and Bess look at each other, shrug, nod.

You're right. EDDIE

Wrong. Let me tell you something about apples you've probably never heard. Apple growers have standards, OK, international European standards, and that means their apples have to be a certain size, colour, and shape. They also have to have a certain freedom from skin blemishes. Are you with me? SALESMAN

Yes. BESS

Fantastic. So what's missing? SALESMAN

EDDIE

I don't follow you.

SALESMAN

Exactly.

EDDIE

What do you mean?

SALESMAN

Not a damn thing apart from smell and flavour. Arguably the two most important features of all. Not a single European standard. It's left entirely to the industry. How does that make you feel? Free-market happy? Vulnerable? Because technically they could sell you plastic apples legally. Size, colour, shape, blemishes? Bingo. Apple? Not so much. How do you know those apples are even real?

The salesman gestures at the bowl.

BESS

We've eaten some of them.

SALESMAN

Bingo. Let me ask you a question. Are smell and flavour important to you as an apple consumer?

BESS

Yes.

SALESMAN

You're damn right they are. Now I'll tell you something else. Two things: sugar and malic acid. Sweet and tart. It's all about the ratio and Jesus God in hell is there ever a range of possibilities. No offense. You're decent folks. You want to talk about acid? Acid will brown your fruit but do you know what you can do about it?

BESS

Lemon juice.

SALESMAN

Bingo. Vitamin C. Antioxidant, slows down the enzymes. Do you want to talk texture? I mean, can we talk about that? Let's talk about it! Is texture important to an apple?

EDDIE

I would say so.

SALESMAN

You're goddamn right it is, no offence. And did you know that the texture of apples depends on the way the plant tissue ruptures when the flesh is broken by eating? It's not nice to think of apples as having flesh, particularly if you're vegetarian, but it's just an industry term. I don't mean to throw a lot of jargon at you and I don't mean to offend you.

BESS

We're not offended. We're vegetarians, well, I am, although I eat bacon, and we don't believe in God.

SALESMAN

I'll be danged, that's good information. A salesman can't have too much information. No such thing. My father once told me that information is the lifeblood of sales. He didn't believe in God either. I do, I'm a believer. I'm devout as all hell. My father treated me rough, real rough. I'm glad we're on the same page. Where was I?

EDDIE

Flesh.

SALESMAN

Exactly. It's when you bite it, see, it's the chemistry of the cell walls of the flesh of the fruit. I'm going to say that again: the flesh of the fruit. I'm not here to talk about your sexuality, that's not the way I do business. But isn't there an erotic element to that phrase, the flesh of the fruit? I feel something when I say that, a kind of a tingle in my loins. Do you feel it? Either of you? Of course you do. The thing to understand is that the tissues that rupture across the cell wall, in other words causing cell breakage, well those are your crunchy apples. On the other hand when you get a rupture across the middle lamella, which is the pectin layer, the cement, if you will, holding adjoining cells together, well then you get a clean cell separation, which sounds nice, I mean isn't that exactly the very thing we dream about sometimes, a clean separation, am I right? But that's when you get your soft, mealy apple. Anybody here like soft mealy apples?

BESS

No!

EDDIE

Not !!

SALESMAN

I didn't think so. I didn't think so at all. Now, are you two ready to eat the most delicious apples you've ever had in your life? Magic planet apples from a happy daddy childhood that never existed? I'm not here to criticise the apples you already have, I don't cover that angle, see. Not out loud. I will however judge you silently for having them. I could tell you your apples were beautiful but I'd be doing you a disservice. If I do you a disservice I do me a disservice, that's the way I look at it and that's the way my father looked at it before me. Enlightened self-interest. Familiar with the term?

EDDIE

Yes.

SALESMAN

I know you are, I can see it in your eyes. We are on the same page and as a salesman I find that exciting. I'm excited and I'm tingling. I'm not talking about my loins any more, that's beyond the scope, that's no way to peel your egg. A man's got to sleep at night, that's job number one, am I right?

EDDIE

Yes.

SALESMAN

You bet it is. Now, what am I bid for these apples?

BESS

We don't actually need any apples.

SALESMAN

That's what you say now.

EDDIE

She's right though.

BESS

Really sorry.

SALESMAN

(cheerfully)

Think I need to sell things? I don't. That's the beauty of it. That's why I love being a salesman. Good day to you both.

The salesman leaves. There is a pause as the couple resumes their silent reading.

BESS

There's a greatness about that man and I wish we had bought his apples.

EDDIE

I know. Me too. It feels dismal here without him now.

BESS

It really does.

SCENE 4: THE BLOODY LEAFLET

BESS POOL leaves the house, with an apple in her bag that she has taken from the bowl in Scene Three. She puts in her 'Ipod' earphones and we hear news headlines (from actual day) from her radio. She switches stations, we hear more headlines. She turns to music channel. We hear tango music.

She happens upon ANNIE ELIZABETH handing out leaflets. She takes one with a smile. She reads the leaflet and is stopped in her tracks by the content. She is compelled to confront ANNIE.

BESS
(tapping ANNIE'S shoulder with the leaflet.)

Excuse me.

Bess freezes as Annie circles her, examining her closely. She speaks out loud her internal monologue.

ANNIE
Eyes... nice. Skin pale like burnt milk. Neat. Why so neat?

Annie smells the air.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
Educated. Not laid back, sits at the back, held back. Long and tall and drenched in sin.

She touches Bess's hand. Annie now freezes as Bess circles her.

BESS
Older now... up close. Hair shiny, black and gold. Black bird singing in the dead of night. Petunia oil. Cigarettes, I'd love a cigarette. And those eyes, my kingdom for those eyes. That mouth.

Annie returns to normal movement.

ANNIE
(Referring to leaflet)
I know, it's really something isn't it?

BESS
What? No, well yes it is... but what I'm trying to say is that it's just another utterly horrifying piece of information. I would not choose to know this.

Bess walks away.

ANNIE

You took the leaflet.

BESS

Excuse me? I took the leaflet?

ANNIE

Just a moment ago.

BESS

I know I took the bloody leaflet. I took it, what I'm saying is that if I had a warning...I only took it because I felt sorry for you.

ANNIE

You felt sorry for me?

BESS

I thought it might be a voucher for those fish that clean your feet.

ANNIE

Actually the extremely unnatural fish spa environment can be stressful for the fish you know. They rarely receive the correct diet and don't live long in these substandard conditions. Constant changing of water is not beneficial to them either they require a stable environment which includes the correct temperature range, light availability and filtration system.

Bess is totally baffled.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

You felt sorry for me? Just then, back then you said...

BESS

I wanted to help you by taking a leaflet that's all. And in return you pass on the horrendous burden of knowing to me. I was in a good mood ten minutes ago.

ANNIE

Look lady, I'm just trying to let people know what's going on in the world. What you do with that is down to you.

BESS

Up to me, I think you mean up to me.

ANNIE

You say tomato I say pătlăgea.

BESS

You're deluding yourself. This world, at best, only has a morbid fascination for this stuff. And you know what I think? I think you share that morbidity, why else would you do this? Dowse yourself, and anyone in arm's reach, in this.

ANNIE

What's your answer then? Maybe we should all sit on our backsides while ill-fated fish nibble at our heels.

BESS

I just want to be able to sleep at nights...and yes, if possible, with feet that do not have an excess of hard skin. Next you'll be telling me that I'm depriving parasites of the varied diet they need to live happily in my bed.

ANNIE

And do you pass on this 'Head In The Sand' philosophy on to your children?

Bess is obviously very disturbed by the mention of children.

BESS

I probably would have, I would have told her...

Bess gets ahold of herself.

BESS (CONT'D)

I have to go. Here.

She reaches into her bag and gives Annie an apple.

ANNIE

Why are you giving me this?

BESS

There's a cyanide compound in the pips apparently.

ANNIE

(As if speaking to the apple)

Wait. This is weird.

Bess turns around.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Are you a Gemini?

BESS

Seriously?

I'm a Libran.

ANNIE

*Bess walks away. A phone rings. Annie answers the
apple.*

ANNIE

Hello... Oh hi... T.A.R.O.T (*sees time*) I'm late got to go.

She flings all her leaflets high over her head.

**ALL PERFORMERS GATHER ON STAGE FOR
MUSIC/DANCE SET CHANGE.**

SCENE 5: TV APPLE SALES

MELINDA GILLIFLOWER and JONATHAN take up positions for cameras and put in ear pieces.

JONATHAN

Sorry I'm late Melinda old fruit. Missed the train. So what wonders are we practically giving away to the world this fine day?

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Ten seconds.

MELINDA

(Handing Jonathan the clipboard)

Here. Da daa.

Paranoid reaction from Jonathan. Everyone is still for three "Mississippi's."

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Two one and we're on.

MELINDA

Hello, hello and a warm, warm welcome to you all. You know I think I can already feel that lovely gorgeous positive energy of yours coming through the camera lens, I really do. Can you feel that Jonathan?

JONATHAN

(Unnerved)

Applesolutley Melinda.

(PAUSE)

ALMATA

Keep the bullshit flowing people.

MELINDA

Our producer up in the gallery there is telling me that she can sense something in the air too. So that's nice.

She smiles to the camera.

ALMATA

Where are they, our little angels?

MELINDA

Now maybe you're at home with your feet up, and why not? I bet you deserve it. Maybe you're enjoying a well-earned cup of tea. Perhaps you're selflessly doing the ironing and other essential household chores.

JONATHAN

Maybe you're...I don't know, my mind's gone blank.

ALMATA

Maybe it's trying to blend into your next pay check.

JONATHAN

A factory, maybe you're in a factor.

ALMATA

A factory?

MELINDA

Yes, well some factories have televisions don't they? Some of the more modern ones. I should think. Anyway wherever you are and whatever you do we are delighted to have you.

JONATHAN

Well, I'm on the edge of my seat Mel. What can we tempt our friends at home with today?

MELINDA

Well Jonathan, I give you (*produces an apple*) Is that not a thing of immeasurable beauty?

JONATHAN

Yes. Wow, just looking at it makes me feel, I don't know...better somehow.

MELINDA

Well I've been looking at it for about an hour now Jonathan and I have to say I feel fantastic. I really do.

JONATHAN

Wow, just looking at it makes me feel better somehow Mel.

MELINDA

It's no wonder poor old Eve couldn't resist, girls. This apple is pretty intoxicating.

ALMATA

What else?

JONATHAN

It's the most glamorous of all the fruits for sure. I mean I like a well timed pear as you know, Mel, but even the perfect pear can't top the glamour of an apple.

ALMATA

And for the men?

MELINDA

Yes and at the same time they can be quite masculine can't they? They are sort of dainty and masculine at the same time aren't they? Incredible really. You're getting a lot from this superior fruit.

JONATHAN

I can almost feel it dousing my troubled mind with appley goodness when I touch it. It's that good.

He picks up the apple.

MELINDA

And just looking at you there Jon, holding the apple like that, I'm thinking now there's a real man. Remember those ladies? A man you could trust. A man you could bite right into. A man you could just devour...

ALMATA

Who wants it?

JONATHAN

Maybe you've got a man or an aunt, cousin or sister even who needs a bite of the apple.

MELINDA

An old lover perhaps, a colleague you can't resist.

JONATHAN

Or just a good friend.

MELINDA

Maybe a good friend with benefits?

JONATHAN

Yes benefits or a pension or working tax credit even. If you've got a credit card and a pulse this multifunctional piece of phenomenal fruit could be yours.

ALMATA

What else?

MELINDA

Tell us some more about these beautiful apples Jonathan.

Jonathan picks up the clipboard.

JONATHAN

Well these particular apples Mel need a very specific set of let's say...circumstances to grow.

MELINDA

My goodness, so they really are special. For that someone special in your life perhaps? Maybe you just really need to say to someone I still want you. And what better way to say I still want you, Jonathan, than with an apple?

JONATHAN

Maybe you just want to be left alone...with the apples. Maybe you're sick of being split into a thousand insignificant pieces. And that's the wonderful thing about this apple; it demands nothing of you but gives you so much in return. Like me, these apples have come a long way with their character entirely untarnished Mel, practically unscathed.

MELINDA

Wow, no bruising, amazing.

JONATHAN

Imagine how many soiled hands have defiled the last common supermarket apple you trusted?

MELINDA

These ones are organic too aren't they? I read somewhere that thirty seven pesticide chemicals can be detected in non-organic apples.

ALMATA

They're not organic.

JONATHAN

These aren't technically organic Melinda, but that's quite a good thing, I mean if a fly's peed on it I don't want it in my mouth. You probably are drinking quite a lot of insect urine with the organic ones. Just a word of warning there.

MELINDA

Yes when you put it like that Jon, I'll take my chances with the thirty seven pesticides I think.

ALMATA

For the love of money move on.

MELINDA

Let's show you some more uses for these fabulous apples. Ladies in particular I'm thinking of you here.

ALMATA

Bring out the model.

MELINDA

First let's introduce you to Annie Elizabeth!

Annie Elizabeth walks on set.

MELINDA (CONT'D)

Now Annie Elizabeth is new today so let's give her a great big warm welcome.

Jonathan and Annie look at one another. They are both visibly shocked. Annie jumps back.

MELINDA

(To Annie)

Don't be nervous dear, he doesn't bite.

ALMATA

You rampant...

JONATHAN

No...I definitely don't bite.

MELINDA

(To Annie) I do, so be warned. *(Smiles to camera.)* Just a joke there. Now if we just watch little old Annie here, she's reaching into her bag to get her lipstick or blackberry or medication maybe, she pulls out her amazing apple and holds it somewhere, casually, and in view. She's saying look at me, I'm a busy woman/mum/W.I. member maybe, but crucially I'm a good, good person who keeps apples in my bag. Not chocolate or valium. Just life-affirming apples.

JONATHAN

Yes. Good, good. What else Mel?

Melinda looks at the apple lost for ideas.

ALMATA

Intangible benefits are the key to persuasion.

MELINDA

Well another incredible use for this apple, guys in particular I'm thinking of you here, is to carry it casually in your front pocket. Annie if you could just pop your apple in Jon's pocket.

Awkwardly Annie puts the apple in Jon's trouser pocket.

ALMATA

This is more awkward than the time I caught my dog licking jam off my granddad's carefully smeared genitals.

MELINDA

Walk up and down for us Jonathan. Go on. Show me the love. It gives a man a sort of gravitas if you like, a confidence, an edge. I'm here and you can't ignore me sort of confidence. And one can simply (*puts her hand in his pocket*) reach in and pull it out and in and out and in and no one ever has to know.

ALMATA

Now push the emotional hot button.

JONATHAN

Maybe you have a relative or a sick friend who needs to pull out an apple just in the nick of time.

MELINDA

Perhaps you're a mum at the school gates. Ahhh.

JONATHAN

Teachers will be assured that your child's appalling behaviour is not in any way down to you, you are apple cheeked and meek.

MELINDA

Perhaps you're a nurse (*applause*) or just a house wife. (*sound of crickets*)

JONATHAN

Then Mrs, have a bowl of apples in the hall to entice in any gentlemen who call.

ALMATA

Value equals price.

JONATHAN

This spectacular apple might cost significantly more than a common apple, plus postage and packing, but ask yourself this. Can I afford to miss out on this incredible multifunctional fruit?

ALMATA

Exclusivity and convenience.

MELINDA

That's right John, let's not forget that these are superior apples, you can't get these ones anywhere else, and they come right to your door.

JONATHAN

You don't even have to go out the door.

MELINDA

From our door to your door.

JONATHAN

Door to door.

MELINDA

Knock knock.

JONATHAN

On the ceiling three times if you want me

There is a series of 3 knocks from around the space.

MELINDA

Let me in Jon, let me in. Just a little joke there. A little improvisation if you like.

Both look at the apple lost for a new idea.

MELINDA (CONT'D)

So now well let's think...

ALMATA

10 seconds to break.

MELINDA

Oh we're being informed that our time's up ladies and gentlemen. And there are so many more things about this apple that we haven't covered. Maybe you've got some ideas of your own as to what we can do with this apple? Well put it in an email we'd love to hear your suggestions.

JONATHAN

And while an apple a day probably won't stop you getting cancer it will help to make you look good.

He salutes.

ALMATA

Wanker.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

And that's a rap. Well done everyone. Phones are ringing off the hook. Let's set up for the next show and take a shower.

Melinda takes out her ear piece.

MELINDA

Shall we go somewhere nice and you know 'quiet' for some quality time Jonathan?

JOHN

Quality time? Sorry old fart don't follow you.

MELINDA

You and me some alone time.

JONATHAN

Oh.... no no no no. Join the others there's a good old horse.

He pats her head, she exits.

ALMATA

(In Jonathan's ear)

Want to meet up at our special place Jon? I'll do that thing I can do.

Jonathan takes out his earpiece and throws it over his shoulder.

JONATHAN

You're not quite the gymnast that you think you are Almata darling.

Annie has fallen asleep on the beanbag chair and is left behind. The earpiece lands on her and she wakes up alone on set.

ALMATA

Are you there? Am I still in? Am I? Hello?

ANNIE

Hello?

SCENE 6: DEATH WITHOUT APPLES

ANNIE wanders uncertainly around the stage among suspicious looking sacks containing god knows what. CAPTAIN KIDD stands watching her, smiling.

Annie picks up one of the bags and dares to peek inside. She is repelled, and drops the bag. It lands with a squishy thud. She wanders more, finally peers into another bag. Again, she is horrified.

She ventures to look into a third bag, with the same result. She sits down, defeated, demoralized.

ANNIE

It's really nice to see you again.

CAPTAIN KIDD

You mean it?

ANNIE

Of course, we could have gone somewhere else.

CAPTAIN KIDD

Oh. You don't like it here?

ANNIE

Here in the Valley of Bags of Death?

CAPTAIN KIDD

Yeah.

ANNIE

I don't like it that much.

CAPTAIN KIDD

I'm such an idiot. Why did I bring you here?

Kidd has a look into one of the bags and cheers up immensely.

CAPTAIN KIDD (cont'd)

Hey! This one's not bad! Have a look!

With great trepidation, she agrees to have a peek. She is repelled, and shudders.

CAPTAIN KIDD (cont'd)

Not my lucky day, is it.

ANNIE

It doesn't matter.

CAPTAIN KIDD

I think it does matter. We should have just gone out to dinner like normal people. I'm kicking myself here. Valley of Bags of Death -- what was I thinking?

ANNIE

That's kind of sweet.

CAPTAIN KIDD

I guess I just thought, oh, I don't know.

ANNIE

What?

CAPTAIN KIDD

No, you'd think it was silly.

ANNIE

No, really, tell me.

CAPTAIN KIDD

It's just that, I've always been kind of skinny, and...

ANNIE

Yes?

CAPTAIN KIDD

I thought the Bags of Death would lend me some gravitas.

He hangs his head. The ANNIE goes up to him and puts her arm around him.

ANNIE

Oh, you big silly. You don't need any Bags of Death.

CAPTAIN KIDD

I don't?

ANNIE

Of course not. You have plenty of gravitas just the way you are.

CAPTAIN KIDD

No bags?

ANNIE

No bags.

CAPTAIN KIDD

You are one special lady. (*Pause.*) I guess you must think this is a pretty weird dream date.

She looks around at all the bags and shrugs.

ANNIE

I don't know. I guess it's not that bad once you get used to the idea.

CAPTAIN KIDD

The idea of...

ANNIE

The Bags.

CAPTAIN KIDD

Right. The Bags of...

ANNIE

The Bags of Death.

CAPTAIN KIDD

Right.

ANNIE

At least there aren't any goddamned apples!

SCENE 7: APPLE SALESMAN PART 2

EDDIE and BESS sit in their apartment, both of them reading in silence. A single apple sits on a table between them.

(AFTER A PAUSE)

BESS

So. What are you reading?

EDDIE

Oh, fascinating book. Fascinating.

BESS

Yeah? What's it about?

EDDIE

It's about how we all think of the country as a basically good representative democracy flawed by bureaucratic absurdities and a few bad apples when actually it's a ruthless wealth-siphoning network comprising elite financial interests, intelligence agencies, organised crime, and the military-industrial complex, and we never see it for what it is because we're constantly propagandised by the complicit self-censoring media. What we think of as the real world is totally fake, it's a smokescreen erected by people so much greedier and more ambitious than we are that we're unable even to believe they exist.

BESS

Uh huh. Know what I'm reading?

EDDIE

What?

BESS

Silence Is Golden.

EDDIE

Wow, that's so funny, I was just reading a whole section on the role of silence!

BESS

Let's try some, shall we?

EDDIE

Shall we?

BESS

Let's.

There is a KNOCK at the door.

Who is it?
EDDIE

Salesman!
SALESMAN

Come on in.
BESS

Enter the Salesman. Everyone looks at the lone apple on the table.

Apples?
EDDIE

You're darn tootin'. I hope I'm not intruding.
SALESMAN

Not at all.
BESS

We're actually kind of glad to see you.
EDDIE

Well that's good news, that's just what a salesman likes to hear. Have you been thinking about apples at all lately? I have. Of course that's not unusual for a man in my line of work. A fellow's got to think about his work if he wants to be good at it, he's got to ponder it at all hours. But don't get me wrong. Let me tell you folks a dirty little personal secret. Are you ready?
SALESMAN

Probably not. Go on.
BESS

I refuse to think about apples twenty four hours a day. Je refuse! Know why?
SALESMAN

Why?
BESS

Work-Life balance! Are you folks familiar with that term?
SALESMAN

Yes.
BESS

EDDIE

Very much so. We're on the same page there.

SALESMAN

That's what I like to hear. That is music to a salesman's ears. Now. Let's talk apples. Did you know that fresh apples float on water? Sure, they're twenty-five percent air. That's why you can play dunking for apples, you know, without drowning. In the old days, 1600s, a lot of superstitious people thought apples were witches' fruit because if you threw them in the water they'd float. Oh sure. They didn't like anything that floated in those days.

EDDIE

Is that a fact?

SALESMAN

Nope. Made it up. Apples will float though, that much is true. And for all I know some people might find it worrisome. You never know about people, do you? No, that was just a colourful little story for fun, not to be confused with telling a lie. I will never come in here and lie to you. You have my personal guarantee. Not the way I do business. Job number one is a fellow's got to sleep at night. Am I right?

BESS

I trust you.

EDDIE

I do too. And I'll tell you something else.

SALESMAN

Oh ho! Oh ho! All right, come on now, tell me, I want to hear this!

EDDIE

I loved that story about the witches' apples and I plan on repeating it.

SALESMAN

Oh ho! You do that! It won't do anybody any harm.

EDDIE

I even kind of believe it, still, even now!

SALESMAN

Mark of a good story!

BESS

Mark of a sap.

EDDIE

You should talk! You're the one who believes the world is real!

SALESMAN

Whoa ho here people, whoa ho! Do you know what I hear the beginnings of here? Go on, ask me. Ask me what I hear the beginnings of.

EDDIE

OK, OK, I'm asking.

SALESMAN

Two words. Domestic. Dispute. You follow me? Domestic dispute. Happens all the time. Do you think the missus and I never argue? Is that what you think? I'd like to tell you you were right but lord knows I'd be lying if I did. No, unfortunately even a trained salesman can be drawn into a common domestic dispute at times. We're trained to handle any kind of cognitive dissonance and that covers a lot of ground, believe you me. And even so, from time to time we look up and what are we? Go ahead, guess. What are we?

BESS

Embroided?

SALESMAN

Bingo. Embroided in a domestic dispute. So what do I do about it? I put it on my list. I study it. I guess I think I know a thing or two about it. Do you mind if I share some reflections?

EDDIE

Please.

SALESMAN

My reflections are based on observation. For example, I can observe right now a potential trouble spot in your relationship. It's none of my business, I can stop right now.

BESS

No no, go on.

SALESMAN

There's only one apple left here on this table. One apple. You see the problem, don't you? One apple, two people. You're going to be faced with an age-old dilemma, and odds are it's going to happen sooner rather than later. One or the other of you is going to want that apple, and you'll be torn between desires, torn between the desire to eat the apple and the desire to leave it for your beloved mate. It's a pretty terrible business. If I'm lying, strike me down, am I right?

The salesman picks up the apple. Smells it. Fondles it.

EDDIE

I would leave it for her.

BESS

I'd just eat it.

SALESMAN

As my dad would say that's just not geometry right there. Just because you've got four corners doesn't mean you're all squared up. You are staring down a path fraught with peril and bursting with potential regrets and resentments. I'm going to do you folks a favour.

The salesman takes a bite of the apple and then licks all around the rest of it before putting it back down.

EDDIE

Well, well, well.

BESS

Ewwwwwww.

SALESMAN

I'll take my leave now. Thank you both very kindly.

EDDIE

Hey! Not so fast, we need some more apples!

SALESMAN

No. No, not from me you don't. The moment has passed. The time is wrong. The mood is lost. Let us all take some time for reflection. I'll see you folks soon.

Exit the Salesman. A pause ensues.

EDDIE

There goes the greatest salesman who ever lived.

BESS

I have a feeling he'll be back.

EDDIE

Well, it's not just a feeling. He said he'd be back.

BESS

Let's be silent.

EDDIE

Fine.

The couple pick up their books and resume reading.

SCENE 8: APPLE MUSEUM

A room in a museum. An apple sits on a pedestal. JONATHAN and BESS enter. Jonathan is highly animated.

JONATHAN

Oh my god, there it is. I've been dying to show this to you, it's unbelievable.

BESS

That's it? An apple?

JONATHAN

It's not an apple! This is art, my dear, real art. This show is the talk of the city. We were so lucky to get tickets. Oh my god, it's unbelievable.

BESS

It sure looks like an apple.

JONATHAN

You're such a philistine. You don't even know when you're in the presence of something truly transcendent.

They approach the apple cautiously, Jonathan in a state of near rapture.

BESS

Maybe it's just because I'm hungry. Let's hit the gift shop real quick and go to the café.

JONATHAN

No! We need to savour this. We need to meditate on this.

BESS

I'd swear that was an apple.

JONATHAN

It's a representation of appleness, OK? It's about essence, form and meta-form. Colour, texture, space, lines, dimension, mass, value. Lights and darks. A unity of elements in three-dimensional space. As Ruskin said it's not producing the mere *aspect* of form, it's producing the *effect* of it.

Bess reaches out to touch the apple.

JONATHAN (cont'd)

No! Don't touch it! Are you insane?

BESS

Sorry. I thought I could touch it. It looks so much like an apple.

JONATHAN

Do you have any idea what that thing is worth?

BESS

50p?

JONATHAN

It happens to be valued at 4.3 million pounds.

BESS

For just the one?

JONATHAN

It's an original, for god's sake.

He puts his hands out at a respectful distance as if to sense the vibrations coming off the apple. He closes his eyes. Bess watches him.

BESS

Can I smell it?

Jonathan doesn't like the idea.

JONATHAN

Well. I don't know. Don't get too close to it. Do not let your nose touch it. If you were to get nasal oils or, Jesus God, a small fleck of dried...

BESS

Please! I just want a small sniff.

JONATHAN

Be careful. I'm begging you.

She leans in to smell it. Jonathan is terrified. He is beside himself with anxiety with every inch closer she gets, and when she finally audibly sniffs, he gasps out loud, which startles the woman.

BESS

Calm down! I nearly knocked into it! You want to give me a heart attack?

JONATHAN

I'm sorry! I'm sorry! Is it all right?

BESS

Is it all right? What about me?

JONATHAN

Yes, you, did you touch it?

BESS

No, I didn't touch it.

JONATHAN

Thank god.

BESS

You know what I think?

JONATHAN

What?

BESS

I think that's an apple. In fact I'd almost swear it was a Cox's Pippin from Waitrose.

JONATHAN

Blasphemy! This artist is one of the prime generative forces in modern art in the last half century. Don't you get it? He's rupturing traditions of art-making, radically innovating, invoking turmoil, alcoholism, violent passions. Do you see how this, this thing, this pinnacle of what it is to epitomise applehood, is daringly juxtaposed with its voluptuous Other in free space?

BESS

Where?

JONATHAN

Right here, right there, next to it, on the other side of the room, everywhere else that is not exactly there as reification of apple.

Bess nods, as if finally understanding, like the light bulb has gone on suddenly and she gets it.

BESS

So it's juxtaposed against everything that it is not.

JONATHAN

Precisely!

BESS

What everything else is, what we all are, in fact, in other words, is non-apple.

Jonathan is overjoyed and speechless. He embraces her. She hugs him back but rolls her eyes.

JONATHAN

My darling, yes, yes! It's the very subtext of non-appleness that a lesser artist's imagination would never dare to encounter never mind subvert!

BESS

I see it now, yes. I would say it had roots in surrealist automatism but with a Jungian influence...

JONATHAN

Yes, yes!

BESS

...and, call me crazy, but a touch of semi-figurative Navajo somehow.

Jonathan grabs her and kisses her; he can barely contain his passionate longing.

JONATHAN

We're going to that gift shop right now...

BESS

And the café?

JONATHAN

Yes yes all right and then we're going straight home and I'm going to bend you over my favourite chair and play a song on your bottom that you won't soon forget. Let's go!

He takes her by the hand to lead her out of the museum. She follows, but not before grabbing the apple, unbeknownst to him. Trailing behind him, she bites the apple, creating a loud crunching sound.

He stops dead in his tracks at the sound, horrified. He's afraid to look around. She looks out at the audience and shrugs.

Without looking at her, he points his finger as if to say "Go!" Bess exits in a huff.

TRANSITION: As Bess exits, Jonathan strips down to his trousers as stage hands (e.g. other actors) remove the museum apple, bring in a basketful of other apples, and do other set rearranging as necessary.

SCENE 9: THE SALESMAN'S FATHER

JONATHAN's home. He is alone on stage with a basketful of apples. He has no shirt on, only trousers, and he is stuffing apples into his pockets.

He walks around suggestively, making his trousers sway and roll with the weight of the apples inside. He rolls his hips around.

He is in a state of ecstasy, pure physical pleasure.

JONATHAN

Oh yes. Oh yes. Feel it, oh yeah, feel that. The dignity of man. The dignity of man!

He takes his trousers off and stands in his underpants only. He begins to stuff apples into his underpants, tilting his hips back and forward to make the apples roll around.

JONATHAN (cont'd)

Firm and fruity, rooty tooty! Oh yes! Oh yes!

The Salesman walks in unannounced. He is dressed as a little boy, e.g., shorts with suspenders. He stops short shocked, aghast. The elder Spice sees him and stops dead, absolutely mortified, frozen in his tracks.

SALESMAN

Dad!

Jonathan turns to look straight out at the audience, in shock.

SCENE 10: APPLE SALESMAN PART 3

EDDIE and BESS sit in their apartment. Bess is weeping as Eddie sits indifferently, gazing into a middle distance. There is an empty bowl on a table between them.

BESS
(Sobbing)

It's just, we never talk about it any more but it's always there, isn't it? And you've never cared, not the way I have. I never thought I'd be one of those women who had to have babies in order to feel fulfilled. I know it wasn't part of the deal. Part of our deal. It's not like I suddenly want to buy into the whole bourgeois middle class package but my god, I look in the mirror and I see nothing, I feel so empty. It's horrible, I feel so empty. Don't you? Don't you feel it, the nothingness? It's something I want, something I need. I want to have a baby. It's like this taboo subject, well I can't stand it any more, I'm breaking the taboo and I'm saying how I feel, I'm saying what I want, and what I want is a baby. And if it's not going to be with you then that's something we need to face right now.

EDDIE

Mm hm.

BESS

"Mm hm"?

EDDIE

Sorry? No, yeah, I agree, great, absolutely.

BESS

You didn't hear a word of it, did you?

EDDIE

Of course I did!

BESS

Yeah?

EDDIE

Of course.

BESS

All right. What did I say?

EDDIE

Oh please, I can't believe you'd even...

What did I say?
BESS

You were talking about how you feel.
EDDIE

How I feel.
BESS

Yes, which I think is totally valid. I'm a hundred percent behind you on that, all the way. And something about somebody's baby. Those people, our friends, the ones who had the baby? I can never remember their names. We still need to buy them a present, right?
EDDIE

OK.
BESS

Man, I would kill for an apple right now.
EDDIE

Me too. I would kill.
BESS

There is a knock at the door.

Who is it?
EDDIE

Salesman!
SALESMAN

Thank god for that.
BESS

Got any apples?
EDDIE

You know I do.
SALESMAN

Come on in! Come on in!
EDDIE

Enter the Salesman.

SALESMAN

Listen, are you familiar with the story of Adam and Eve? I mean stop me if you've heard this one.

EDDIE

I've heard it.

SALESMAN

Wrong. Tell me the story.

EDDIE

Eve gives Adam the apple, he eats it, they get kicked out of the Garden of Eden.

SALESMAN

Absolutely false and I resent it. It gives apples a bad rap. I don't need for there to be false reasons for potential customers to resent my apples. There are a thousand reasons not to buy something and only one reason to buy it: because you want it. Am I right? Anyhow the story is wrong.

EDDIE

Well, it's a story, I don't think it's supposed to be taken as literally true.

SALESMAN

That's a clarification. Thank you for that. That moves us forward. But that's not what I mean. Is there a Bible in the house by any chance?

BESS

No.

SALESMAN

You're damn right there isn't. You're atheists and I'm not selling Bibles. Find one someday for purely literary purposes. Look it up. No apple. Can you believe that?

EDDIE

Yeah?

SALESMAN

Let me tell you something, a man's reputation is all he really has apart from the feeling he carries around inside himself. Look at me. Go on. Look at me. Am I going to risk my livelihood going into people's houses and telling them lies about the Bible? Look it up yourself, don't take my word for it. Open up a Bible and as god is my witness it says fruit of the tree of knowledge. Does not specify what fruit. Why do we think it's an apple? Hugo Van Der Goes, that's why. 1470. I sympathise with his dilemma. He needed a real fruit. You can't paint an abstraction, not if you're a Flemish realist. Been an apple ever since.

BESS

So. You got any? We're all out. We're in the market.

EDDIE

We're so ready. Sell us some apples.

SALESMAN

Well, I've got some beauties. It's just...

EDDIE

What?

SALESMAN

I don't want to sell them.

BESS

Sell us the apples.

SALESMAN

Do I strike you as confident? Slick? Like nothing could touch me?

EDDIE

Yep.

SALESMAN

Wrong. I fall in love. I'm vulnerable. I have father issues. I've seen things that have ripped my heart out and made me puke.

BESS

Oh that is so sweet!

EDDIE

We're getting to know each other!

SALESMAN

Truth is I was wondering if I couldn't interest you in some peaches. World's oldest cultivated fruit. People will tell you all kinds of things are special and they're nothing but hucksters, am I right? I don't do that. Couldn't live with myself. If I tell you something it's because I believe it from the bottom of my heart. So when I tell you these peaches are special, man oh man are they ever. They're sensitive fruits, peaches, so sensitive to the atmosphere, to the soil. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that peaches are really too sensitive to live in our sad ravaged world. That's why it's so hard to find a good one these days. But if you want something rare and magical and did I mention erotic -- good god on earth peaches are an erotic fruit -- well, you're going to want to let your tongue loose on these bad boys.

EDDIE

Hmmm. They do sound pretty good, but I've just never really been a peach man.

BESS

I'm stuck on apples.

EDDIE

Yeah, apples for me as well I'm afraid.

SALESMAN

I also do have some plums you would swear were skillfully removed from the scrotal sac of a Kentucky Derby race horse.

BESS

Apples! Sell! Now!

SALESMAN

These people want apples, by god, and you know what, they're going to have them. I'm not going to lie to you, I was testing you. I'm going to come right out and admit that. I was giving you a little test and I'll tell you why. I don't want to sell you anything you don't really want. It's not good for you and it's not good for me.

EDDIE

Enlightened self interest.

SALESMAN

Bingo. Now sometimes people just take a personal shine to me, I'm not going to pretend they don't, and they'd buy just about anything only because it was me selling it, and I'll tell you, when I was a younger man I might just about have sealed a deal like that. But you know what I always say.

EDDIE

Not the way you do business.

BESS

A man's got to sleep at night. Am I right?

SALESMAN

Job number one.

The salesman produces two apples and tosses one to the woman, one to the man. Bess lustfully fondles hers and Eddie attacks his with a great big sloppy bite immediately and slurpily chews it all up. He then looks up as if he's had an epiphany.

EDDIE

Hey! I know! Let's have babies!

-- END --