

The Gay Century



1986: A Shot at the Future

A Chamber Opera in Two Acts

Music by Robert Ely

Libretto by Peter Scott-Presland

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Cast

- Beverley *[Mezzo]* Known as Bev. Early 30s. A brisk new barrister, a high flyer used to proving she's as good as, or better than, men. She keeps a large Alsatian, Sheba.
- Lucy *[Soprano]* Known as Lou. Late 30s. Bev's lover, and rather dominated by her. She is a writer, and given to living in a world of her own.
- Pericles *[Baritone]* Known as Perry. Early 30s. Lou's best friend, also a writer, but an only child, so rather stubborn and self-centred. From a Greek family long-time resident in Britain, he retains a certain Mediterranean volatility.
- Philip *[Tenor]* Known as Flip. Early 20s. Perry's boyfriend; this is his first serious relationship, and he's very committed to it. He values the security, having been badly treated during his childhood and rejected at his coming out. He is very handsome, and something of a trophy to Perry.

Setting

The play is set in the West Midlands. Flexible, multi-scene. A bed as part of it, which serves as both the boys' and the girls' bedrooms (different covers). There is a pram in a corner, in which a doll [the baby] is kept and brought out from as a prop.

Instrumentation

String Trio? Definitely needs a cello, I think

ACT ONE

Scene One

*[The four actors stand at the corners of the stage, unaware of each other.
This mirrors the set-up for 'Fishing']*

BEV: *[Definite]* A baby....

LOU: *[Dreamy]* A baby?

PERRY: *[Wondering]* A baby...

FLIP: *[Aghast]* A baby!

[BEV and LOU move into the scene, PERRY and exit]

DUET

LOU: I've always wanted a baby
I come from a Catholic family,
Outrageously fertile.
Seven siblings, ten nephews, eight nieces
I feel I'll let the side down
If I don't spawn

BEV: Don't joke about it
It's a serious matter
You know how hard I work
I'm exhausted as it is,
Running to stand still.
I'd never be able to work
At home in the evenings.
It would ruin your writing
The pram in the hall
The mortal enemy of art

LOU: I don't believe that.
I can look after a sprog
And write as well.
It will take after me -
Very independent.

Anyway, you can help -

BEV: I can help?
I'm out all day,
I earn the money
To keep us comfortable –
To keep you comfortable.
I can't do any more.

* * *

[She lights a cigarette]

LOU: *[At the cigarette]* Do you have to?

BEV: Yes

LOU: Outside perhaps?

BEV: I'm under a lot of stress.
Know what I think?
All this has happened
Since you started going down
To London, and to Sappho.

LOU: I've only been a few times.

BEV: Since you met Jackie Forster
And her pussy posse
You've been all broody.

LOU: Don't use that word!

BEV: Why not?
A lot of women go through this.
There were other women too
At the Sappho meetings
With children.

LOU: Fighting for custody of them!
Courts say lesbians are unfit mothers.
We'll prove them wrong.

BEV: You know what I think this is?
Competitive spirit.
If other women have them,
You must too

LOU: One, only one

BEV: I know you. You say that now,
But then it will be,
'Two are just as easy as one
And just as cheap to keep'.
Like they were dogs

LOU: Those other women aren't like us.
Their children are leftovers
From their marriages.
Don't you see, this will be our child
Not yours, but ours.

Think, Bev, love,
Someone we can mould and shape.
Who will follow us, our legacy,
Our shot at the future.

BEV: There's only one problem -
I don't have a maternal bone in my body

LOU: You'll come to love her,
I know you will.

BEV: Her? Are you sure?

LOU: I even know her name.
Billie, as in Holiday
Or Billie Jean King.
[intimate] Oh Bev, can't you see
It can only make us stronger
You and I together.
It will pull us closer -
Lately we have drifted

BEV: That's true

LOU: We can be a family.

[BEV has been smoking furiously. She stubs the cigarette out.]

LOU: You'll have to give those up.
Bad for baby's health.

BEV: You're so self-righteous
Since you gave them up yourself.
And where will we put it?

LOU: Her - I hope -

BEV: The baby – where? Where?

LOU: We'll find room. Or move.

BEV: Look, Lou, I know how you think.
"I'm thirty-eight
If I don't do it soon,
It will be too late."
In ten years' time
You'll have a surge of guilt

LOU: It's more than that

BEV: You will, you will
You'll know you can never be a mother
So you can't be a real woman.

LOU: Don't you want it too?
After all, now you know -

BEV: Know that I can't have children?
That's right. Spell it out.
Rub it in.

LOU: That's why you and Tom split up.

BEV: Oh no. That's why Tom split up.

I was glad to go my own way
And find myself.
[Takes LOU's hand] Look, love, I understand
How much you feel.
I went through much the same
When my mother died.
I wanted one so much.
I didn't know I couldn't –
Thank the Lord.

LOU: You're only saying that.
Why can't we have a child?

BEV: Because I live with you.
I like my life.
I like order
I like our flat
And I love you.
I won't let anything change that
Even for you

LOU: Nothing needs to change.

[Lights fade leaving LOU in a single spot. BEV steps away. It is LOU's imagination, so soft lights. LOU goes to the cot and brings it out to centre stage. There is a life-size baby doll in it. She takes it out, gently takes off its clothes, produces a sponge and gently soaps the doll.]

ARIA

LOU: Flesh of my flesh
You were an easy birth
I felt you slip from me
Slippery as a fish
Your little hands grasp my finger
A grip so strong
Soft and strong
Everything about you is so perfect
From the tiny nails
On your little toes
To the little tongue
Which you stick out

To catch more milk
From the nipples
Of my full breasts.

As I wash you
Your skin so soft
Your flesh so frail
Your bones so delicate
I can smell you, baby
Baby, baby
Nothing but baby everywhere
Milky and sweet

Even your baby poo is sweet
As I tenderly unwrap the nappy
Turn you over, take it out from under

[Does the action, turns the doll over]

There you go
Wipe your bottom
You look at me
With eyes so trusting
Mummy Lou is here for you
Mummy Lou will shelter you

[She takes a new nappy, puts powder on it. Does up the nappy.]

Billie, you are rare and precious
Best thing in my life
I hold you close
So close

* * *

[BEV comes into the scene, into the dream, puts her hand on LOU's shoulder.]

LOU: Even if I cannot have Bev to wife
Yet we are strong in love,
When one plus one makes three.

BEV/LOU: Lou and Bev will shelter you
Your two mummies

BEV: And no daddy

BEV/LOU: We will keep you safe from harm
We will clothe you
Keep you warm
You will always be
Cosy at the centre
Of our family.

[They exchange a look of love. LOU gets the clothes and they dress the baby together. They sing a vocalise lullaby to it. It is impossibly romantic. The lights fade as they lay the baby in the cot and return it to the corner.]

[Lights change. They are back in the scene. BEV is there again.]

BEV: Are you really so serious?

LOU: Darling, I am aching.

BEV: Are you sure you can cope?
It's a big step.

LOU: The biggest

BEV: And what about your work? Your writing?
Remember Cyril Connolly:
"There is no greater enemy of art
Than the pram in the hall."

LOU: That was just a cover-up
Because he couldn't hack it.
Preferred to socialise
Supported by his wife.

BEV: I support you

LOU: But I still work.

BEV: Will you still work?

LOU: I'll give myself maternity leave

BEV: I'll never get maternity leave.
My chambers don't know that I'm -
They can never know.

LOU: A baby will be very awkward
How do you explain it?

BEV: I won't have to.
I won't be the one who's pregnant

LOU: And later?

BEV: They won't need to know.

LOU: Are you ashamed of me?
Are you?

BEV: No. No.

LOU: That's why we've been having arguments.
I've put up with the burden of your shame
For the sake of your career -
But I'm damned if my baby will

BEV: Our baby –

LOU: Our? That's a change of tune.
Do you really mean that? Think...

BEV: If – I say if - we have the baby
I will tell my chambers
About her, about you.
I promise.
And I'll help the best I can.
But how on earth to manage?
You have a contract with your publisher
They want another Molly Miller story
Sometime next year -
You can't just stop.

There's the mortgage to pay,
It devours everything we earn,
Both of us.

LOU: There's always nurseries

BEV: More expense.
And what about a father?
Clinics cost money too
And it can take months
Years, even.

LOU: You know very well,
IVF is for married couples -
Heterosexual couples.
No wedding ring, no petri dish
No incubator

I was thinking – Perry

BEV: *[Horrified]* Perry?

LOU: I don't mean, doing it with him.
I thought he might donate his sperm.
I've known him all my life
Since we were both
In Coventry Grammar School.
He was the first person
I told that I was gay,
Then I found out
That he was gay as well.
He's sensible and stable,
He dotes upon that little niece of his.
Fatherhood would suit him.

[She turns, BEV leaves. PERRY comes in.]

Scene Two

[PERRY and LOU are walking in a park. Sounds of ducks and park noises.]

LOU: Fatherhood would suit you.

PERRY: A baby?

LOU: Why not?

PERRY: But why me?
 "Of all the penises
 In all the towns
 In all the world
 You walk into mine."

LOU: Eew!
 Not your penis
 You smug man.
 I'm certainly not walking
 Into your penis.
 I need your sperm.
 Your penis is a necessary means
 To a desired end

PERRY If a baby is desired
 Then a penis is required

LOU: It's your sperm that is desired
 If a baby would be sired

PERRY: My penis must be hired
 If some sperm should be acquired

[This is a little round and repeats – the sort of game they play together]

LOU: Hired? I'm not paying, you bastard.

PERRY: It was only for the rhyme.

LOU: Don't you see? You'd make a wonderful father.

PERRY: Really?

LOU: You're cute and funny

PERRY *[bashful]* Aw shucks

LOU: I'm serious.
You're bright and gentle,
And my best friend in all the world.
You have everything I want my child to have.
I want it to have the best.

PERRY: You sure know how to flatter a girl

LOU: With your intelligence, my talent

PERRY: Or my athletic skill, your looks –

[They look at each other.]

BOTH: No way!

PERRY: I don't know how to put this, but –

LOU: A sterilised bowl and a turkey baster.

PERRY: I don't have a turkey baster.
I'm a vegetarian

LOU: We buy a turkey baster, idiot.
They're two pounds in Woolworth's.

PERRY: That's not very sexy

LOU: That's hardly the point

PERRY: And what does Bev think about this?

LOU: She'll come round to it -
She's starting to come round already.
She'll want it because I want it.

PERRY: And you really want it?
LOU: Really, really.
PERRY: Really really really really really?
LOU: You betcha.
PERRY: And can I be a father? A real father?
LOU: Classic case of a new man.
Baby carrier wrap in front,
Talking with the mummies
Outside playgroup.

[Lights fade leaving PERRY in a single spot. We are in his fantasy of being a father. He is holding a larger doll – a toddler - who is staggering forward with his support.]

ARIA

PERRY: Hold on to daddy
Take daddy's hand
You can do it
What a strong boy!
One step – and again –
Yes! Aren't you clever!
Just like your Daddy

[He looks in the doll's eyes]

You got your daddy's eyes
And his chin, and his hair
Now walk with me -

[calls off] Hey, Flip! Come here!
Billy's walking –
My boy is walking
He's done three steps.
Flip!

* * *

[FLIP, PERRY's boyfriend, runs in.]

FLIP: Let me see!

[PERRY walks the doll forward.]

FLIP: Wow! That's amazing!

PERRY: Isn't it?

FLIP: To think he's only ten months old

PERRY: He's turning into quite the little man

FLIP : Like Daddy.

PERRY: You think so?

FLIP: Just like Daddy
He's going to be as cute as Daddy

BOTH: And you will be so lucky
Growing up with two Daddies
Of your very own.

[They embrace, holding the doll between them.]

FLIP: We'd better take Billy back to his Mummy.
Does Billy want to go back to his Mummy?
Yes, he does. Yes he does.

[To PERRY.]

I'll take him back to Lou.
You put the supper on.

[He exits with doll. PERRY turns back into the scene, lights change, LOU is there again.]

PERRY: A baby?
The idea grows on me.

What are you looking for?
A donor?
Wham, bam, thank-you Sam?
I'd find that hard -
I'd be too curious.
Are you expecting – even – love?

LOU: I'm not a man-hater
I wouldn't ask you if I was.
I would want you to be part of his life
You would want that, wouldn't you?

PERRY: I'd certainly be curious

LOU: Perry, don't you see?
It could be wonderful.
Two mothers and two fathers -
What better mentors could it have?
You'll take Billie for the weekend
And for holidays –
Maybe more if we both need a break.
No-one exhausted
Everyone with another life

PERRY: I'll take Billy to the zoo

LOU: Please, no zoos
Zoos are cruel

PERRY: OK, to the ecopark
We'll go fishing

LOU: Football in the winter
Cricket in the summer

PERRY: I hate cricket

LOU: OK, swimming, then.

PERRY: We can both do swimming

LOU: And I will do the tennis.

PERRY: A baby....
And we can have a dog too.

LOU: Yes!
Another dog like ours.

PERRY: I'll have an excuse
To go to all the Disney movies
"Pinocchio", "Dumbo",
"Lady and the Tramp"
And to see the new ones too –
"The Fox and the Hound"

LOU: Only think –
A whole young life takes shape
In front of you

PERRY: Yes...
To pass on all your knowledge
With your DNA
No-one wants to be forgotten
When they go.

LOU: Don't talk like that

ARIA

PERRY: We all must go.
Sometimes you wonder...
You imagine your own funeral;
You wonder if anyone
Will write your obituary,
And what it will read like.
If. Are you that important?
And then you start to ask:
Who will remember me? For what?
Flip will remember me, of course.
But even he won't last for ever

LOU: Nothing lasts forever. Not even a baby.

PERRY: But you've left something
Made a mark.
The river of your DNA flows on.
You've passed a torch -
I don't know, I can't explain.

* * *

LOU: Sometimes I see the babies
In pushchairs at the supermarket.
I know exactly why
Other women steal them.
My breasts get heavy with longing –
It is very physical.
My whole body is crying out
For a baby.

PERRY: Sounds like a classic case.

LOU: Funny how it gets some women
But not others.
Bev is just the opposite.

PERRY: Lucky Bev. Self-contained

LOU: She wouldn't be successful
If she wasn't self-contained.

PERRY: I could almost envy her

LOU: We're different, that's all
I was made to change nappies
From a very early age.
All those siblings.

PERRY: I could get into changing nappies

LOU: And make up lunch boxes

PERRY: And making lunch boxes

BOTH: And worry when it starts to get dark.

LOU: And Flip? Can we count on him?

BOTH: I wonder what Flip will say

[Lights fade on them. A very short instrumental break to allow time to change the cover on the bed, and maybe put up some marker of masculinity.]

Scene Three

[PERRY and FLIP's flat. Evening.]

FLIP: A baby?

PERRY: Yes, a baby.
I'm going to be a father.
Why not?

FLIP: Are you crazy?

PERRY: What's so terrible?

FLIP: You mean you're really going to screw her?

PERRY: Don't be crude. There are other ways

FLIP: You mean into a test tube?
Like some prize bull?

PERRY: What's wrong with that?
Hundreds do it every year...
I do believe you're jealous.

FLIP: It's inhuman, darling. Mechanical.

PERRY: And this from the boy
That I found in the Subway Club
In a gang-bang in the dark
With his trousers round his ankles.

FLIP: That's different.
That's sex, not *[sneering]* procreation

PERRY: You say that it's inhuman.
It *will* be human, that's the point.
It's Lou, my oldest friend.
I feel honoured that she's chosen me.
We've talked a lot,
We've got it all worked out.
We'll share responsibility

And the expense.

FLIP: And the time. Don't forget the time.
Babies take an awful lot of time
I'll never see you on your own.
Every time we want some sex,
That squalling brat will put a stop to it.
Why don't you marry her,
While you're about it?

PERRY: Don't be crass.
You have a nasty streak
Of misogyny.
I never realised before.

FLIP: Can I be honest?

PERRY: Of course.

FLIP: Cards on the table?

PERRY: Try me.

FLIP: I don't want the responsibility.

PERRY: Ok, it's my responsibility,
Not yours.

FLIP: Just how do you propose
To separate the two things out,
Fatherhood and – er – loverhood?
If it comes to stay,
What am I meant to do?
Move out for the weekend?

PERRY: I'll look after it.
You can help look after it.

FLIP: And what if I don't want to
Look after it?
It won't choose who to wake
When it cries out in the night.

Once you're out cold
You could sleep through a rape alarm.
Use your brain.
What do we do at the weekend?
We go out, right?
We go to pictures,
We eat in restaurants,
We dance at discos.
Sometimes we get laid.

PERRY: We can manage both

FLIP: The sprog can tag along? Ha!
I don't think that a baby sling
Will match your skimpy spandex shorts

[The lights fade down and PERRY goes to lie on the bed. Single spot on him. We are in FLIP's fantasy. FLIP joins him. The DOLL/CHILD is up against the wall, just out of sight. It looks at them. The next section is mainly action. FLIP and PERRY start making out. FLIP is very stilted, aware of the child. After a while, PERRY stops, protests:]

PERRY: What's the matter?
What's eating you?

FLIP: Billy's watching me, I know he is.

PERRY: All he'll see is two loving men
He won't know anything else.
He should get used to it.

FLIP: I don't like it.

[He gets up, takes the doll, turns it to the wall.]

FLIP: Now, go to sleep
And no peeping.
This is not for little boys.

[He goes back to PERRY. They start again, and PERRY's love-making becomes more excited and noisy. FLIP starts feeling inhibited again.]

PERRY: What now?

FLIP: He'll hear us. He'll hear you.

PERRY: No he won't

FLIP: The walls are paper thin.

PERRY: What's wrong with the sound of love?

FLIP: The noise you make, he'll think I'm hurting you.

PERRY: I should be so lucky.

FLIP: Will you be serious?
Do you realise what you sound like?
A bull in pain.

PERRY: You said you liked the noise I make -
You said it turned you on.

FLIP: Not with Billy listening.

PERRY: How do you know he's listening?
He's probably fast asleep.

FLIP: Do you want to wake him up?

PERRY: No

FLIP: Then – quietly –

[They start to make out again. PERRY automatically calls out, FLIP puts a hand over his mouth. This time PERRY stops and pushes off.]

PERRY: It's no use. I've lost it.

[He gets up, puts his clothes on.]

PERRY: I'm going to sleep on the sofa
In the living room.

[He exits. FLIP still has an erection – he is a healthy, randy young man. He tries to turn over and go to sleep but it is very uncomfortable. He turns on his back, and starts to masturbate, as the lights fade to blackout. When they come up again, PERRY is dressed and back in the present, putting on his coat. Calls to FLIP.]

PERRY: Hurry up, we'll miss the start of the film.

FLIP: I'm coming.

PERRY: It's got some gorgeous boys in it -
Rupert Everett, Colin Firth

FLIP: Never heard of them.

PERRY: Take my word for it.

FLIP: *[appearing fully dressed]* Alright, already.
We won't be able to go out like this
After we get the baby

PERRY: Lou and Bev can babysit.

FLIP: If it's our turn to have him?

PERRY: We can take him with us.

FLIP: To *Another Country*?
Certificate fifteen?
How do you think he'd pass?
Put a moustache on him
In his carrycot?
You're off your head

PERRY: Well, maybe not...
We'll play with him, then.
The films will wait.
But not this one... Come on.

[He tries to take FLIP's hand, but FLIP is abstracted and doesn't take it.]

[FADE to BLACK. A short instrumental break to feminise the bedroom]

Scene Four

[BEV and LOU in bed. BEV has her glasses on, looking severe and lawyerly. She is reading a brief. LOU is writing her novel in a notebook.]

BEV: Lou?

LOU: Mmm...?

BEV: *[Louder]* Lou!

LOU: What?

BEV: Sorry to interrupt your concentration.

LOU: I was on a roll.

BEV: Would you scratch my back, please?

LOU: *[Putting book down, resigned]* Sure. *[She does so.]*
What are you working on?

BEV: You'll be interested. It's a suit for defamation.
The Evening Telegraph is saying
The council leader's gay.
And in election year!

LOU: Well - Isn't he?

BEV: That's not the point.
To call someone gay publicly
Is defamatory.

LOU: Only if you think being gay
Is inferior.

BEV: The law does,
The judges and the courts do
It's a character defect, or weakness.

LOU: I thank the Lord
For my character defect,

Which I hope I will pass on to my child.

BEV: Are you serious?
The children of most lesbians turn out straight.
Just wait: she'll bring her boyfriends
Home to meet her mummies.

LOU: Are you serious?

BEV: Are you?
If you're doing this to make a little dyke
Forget it.

LOU: Repeat to self:
A child is not an extension of me
It will be an independent person.

BEV: You're still set on it?

LOU: Never more serious -
And Perry's up for it too.

BEV: Perry is a fantasist.
You're two small children
Playing at mummies and daddies.
It will get real soon enough,
When you're exhausted from lack of sleep,
And your nipples are raw
From the constant suck

[During this last speech, LOU slips out of bed and puts the doll near the bed in the cot. Scatters some of BEV's papers on the floor. Exits. Lights change. This is now BEV's fantasy. BEV trying to concentrate. A child's cry.]

BEV: *[calling]* Lou! *[Child cries more]* Lou! Can you deal with this?

[Sees the papers on the floor]

ARIA

Oh, Billie, look what you've done.

[Gets out of bed and starts scrabbling amongst them.]

How am I going to find anything ever again?

[Child starts crying again. BEV holds the doll quite roughly.]

Shut up! Shut up!
Don't you know I'm in court tomorrow?

No, of course you don't.
You're just a machine to eat, piss and shit.

[A fart]

And fart. *[Waves it away]* Oh, God.

I haven't had a decent sleep in months.
I'm run ragged.
I have to work twice as hard
As male barristers,
Just to get a level hearing.
And you – you –
You don't care, do you?
As long as you get your Heinz baby food -
Which you then vomit over my clean blouse.

You want to know the bottom line, Billie?
I don't like you. I can't stand you.

Some days I could strangle you.
Many days –
Every day I could strangle you.

When am I going to have
Some space to concentrate?
When am I going to get some peace?

[She looks at the assorted papers in bewilderment. Pulls herself together]

You are woman, you are strong.

* * *

[Baby starts crying again]

Barristers don't have babies
Barristers have nannies!

Lou! Lou!

[Lights fade to BLACKOUT]

Scene Five

[FLIP and BEV looking in the window of Mothercare.]

FLIP: Are you going to have to get all this stuff?

BEV: That's what Lou is saying.
Not all of it, just a bit of it.
Some clothes, some toys, a pram

FLIP: Look at the prices of the prams!
Two hundred and fifty pounds!

BEV: She thinks I can afford it.
I subsidise her writing
I'll subsidise her baby.
That's the way her scatty logic goes
"The briefs are coming in.
She can afford it".
That's the way she thinks.
But there's the overdraft
From all the early years
And the mortgage.
She doesn't think of that.
The average child
Costs seventy-five thousand pounds
To raise to age eighteen.
And that's before University!

FLIP: Have you told her that?

BEV: She knows that they're expensive.

FLIP: You could always get second hand

BEV: A second hand child?!.

FLIP: A second hand pram.

BEV: She'd never have that -
Nothing but the best for her.
And then there's status.

I'm not having other mums
Looking down their noses at Billie
Because he's badly dressed
Or in a battered old pram.
Having lesbian parents is hard enough
Without that awful mumsy snobbery.

FLIP: Look at those cute blue romper suits!

BEV: Glad to see you breaking down
The gender stereotypes.
None of this 'blue for a boy' nonsense.

FLIP: What do you mean?
Blue *is* for a boy.
Perry told me his name is Billy!

BEV: Oh, no. *Her* name is Billie.
B-I-L-L-I-E. As in Holiday.

FLIP: What makes you think
It's going to be a girl?

BEV: Lou's convinced it will be

FLIP: How can she know?

BEV: She's set her heart on it.
She only ever talks of her.

FLIP: *[Trying to keep a note of triumph out of his voice]*
You know the chances of having a girl
Are about four to one against?

BEV: What rubbish you talk! It has to be 50-50.
Where did you get that from?

FLIP: I read it somewhere. Or someone told me.
I can't remember which.

BEV: *[Sarcastic]* Well that makes it gospel truth!

FLIP: Don't you see it in the playgroups?
Haven't you been with lesbian mothers?
Most of them have boys.
It's what happens with AID.
When you have a normal fuck
To try and have a baby,
Your semen bursts with male sperm.
On their way to the egg
More of the boys drop out,
Because we're weaker

BEV: Brother, you said it.

FLIP: Leaving a fifty-fifty ratio.
But when the end of the turkey baster
Goes up against the cervix
Straight to the fallopian tube –
Little wriggly boy sperm everywhere.

[This is said with a kind of triumph. BEV is stunned, beginning to be convinced.]

BEV: How come you know this, and I don't?

FLIP: I thought you would.
I'm surprised you don't.
Haven't you talked it over with Lou?
"What if it's a boy"?

BEV: No... we never really did.
Her broodiness overrode
Any other thoughts.

FLIP: How can a women-only house
Have a male child?

BEV: You really don't want this child, do you?

FLIP: Do you?

BEV: No. I'm scared of losing Lou
And I'm jealous

FLIP: I'm scared of losing Perry.

BOTH: We really have to stop it.

FADE TO BLACKOUT

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Scene Six:

[LOU and PERRY in the Park again.]

LOU: Are you getting second thoughts?

PERRY: It's not that, exactly,
But suddenly it all seems very difficult
At first it seemed like fun
Now it looks a lot more like hard work.

LOU: A lot of it is hard work.

PERRY: And Flip is being difficult

LOU: He'll come round. Bev is coming round.

PERRY: I know so little about it.
I'm reading books
The Pregnancy Service pamphlets
Such a strange and alien world.

LOU: "Mothers from Mars" – the movie.
Look, I'm sure all parents feel like that
The first time.

PERRY: I know so little about women's bodies.
I don't know that much about my own!

LOU: You don't need to.
The clinic will take care of it
Tell you what you need to know.

PERRY: Which clinic?

LOU: The Pregnancy Advice Service
The one in Upper Hill Street

PERRY: Oh, you mean the one
Where Right-to-Lifers give you

Leaflets saying you're a murderer
And spit as you go by.

LOU: I'll protect you

PERRY: Don't joke. They could make you miscarry.

LOU: I'm still going. I've set my mind on it.
Besides there's the antenatal classes

PERRY: Do you have to go to classes?
Will I be allowed to go to classes?

LOU: Why not? You're the father

PERRY: The gay father –

LOU: Everyone will know that anyway!
No straight father would go to
To antenatal classes. It's too girly.
And I'm the gay mother
They're used to it.
You must get used to it as well.

PERRY: You know the thought I can't get from my head?

LOU: What?

PERRY: How will I explain this to my mother?
I spent twenty years getting her used
To the idea I was gay.
And now she'll jump to the conclusion
I'm heterosexual after all.

LOU: Gays have children too

PERRY: I know
But that's one step beyond her comprehension.
She's going to ask me all about you –
What you do, how old you are –
And then she'll say you're too old for me
And you must have trapped me into it

But still she'll demand
I make an honest woman of you.

Then she'll start asking about her grandchild
Whether it's a boy or girl
And knitting baby clothes.

LOU: Then don't tell her.

PERRY: How can I avoid it?
You're lucky both your folks are dead
You don't have to tell them.

LOU: Don't say that –
My mother died in excruciating pain
Of cancer

PERRY: I'm sorry. I forgot. I wasn't thinking.
Hey, won't you need tests, or something?
Some of those things are hereditary.
And what about our blood groups?
Maybe we won't be compatible.
Won't I need tests too?

LOU: Relax. We'll do the tests together.
We're in this for the long haul, right?

PERRY: Right

LOU: Right.

BLACKOUT

Scene Seven:

[A knock at PERRY and FLIP's front door. PERRY goes to it. It is BEV.]

BEV: Is Flip in?

PERRY: He's at Presto, doing the weekly shop.

BEV: I need to talk to you alone.

PERRY: Sure. Come in. Sit on the bed, please...

[She does so, very serious.]

PERRY: Coffee? *[Bev shakes her head.]* Gin?

BEV: *[A strained smile]* A bit early for me.

PERRY: Me too.

BEV: I'll come straight to the point.
Have you thought of testing?

PERRY: I talked it over with Lou.
Of course we'll have the usual tests
That would-be parents have.

BEV: What tests?

PERRY: Oh, I don't know.
The usual tests, I suppose.
Blood groups, things like that.

BEV: Are you being tested
For this new disease?
This gay plague that the papers talk about.
LAV or ARV or HTLV-Three
So many different names.
There's a test – an ELISA test –
You should take it.

PERRY: Me?

BEV: Just to be safe.

PERRY: You don't know what you're asking.
What's the point of a test
That isn't even accurate
And tells you you're infected
With something that hasn't got a cure –
Or even a treatment?

Besides we've been together, Flip and me,
Since nineteen-eighty one.

BEV: And never been with anybody else?

PERRY: Well, sure, from time to time,
Adventure here and there –
But never with Americans.

How many cases have there been
Up here in the Midlands?
A handful.
There's less than a hundred deaths
In the whole country.

BEV: At the moment.

PERRY: And what if I did have it?
Think of all the prejudice around.
I could easily lose my job.
If I'm going to have a death sentence
I'd rather not know.
Or I could go blind –
I heard of someone,
Kissed his lover on the ear
On a flight to Texas
And the ear fell off.

BEV: If it's going to happen
Then it's going to happen
Whether or not you know.
Are you seriously saying

You would risk infecting your best friend
And possibly your baby?

PERRY: No, of course not.

BEV: Then you must do it.
Take a test. Take two.
And Flip must go as well.

PERRY: Hey! Wait a minute!
I can't speak for him.

BEV: It's that, or nothing doing.

PERRY: How can you dictate what Lou decides?
Does she agree with you?

BEV: She always agrees with me.
She'd be a fool if she didn't.

Agreed? Agreed?

PERRY: You're pushing me to do this
Without discussing it with her?

BEV: I have to. Cos it's her baby.

PERRY: Our baby

BEV: No, Perry. Her baby.
I'm the lawyer, trust me.
You can have all the dreams you want
But in law the baby's Lou's.

PERRY: That can't be right.
I want to be a proper father.

BEV: The Children and Young Person's Act
Nineteen thirty two.
The biological father has no rights at all.
It will help if you are named
On the birth certificate

To indicate an interest
But are you getting married? No.
Are you going to live together?
Over my dead body.

PERRY: But we've agreed.

BEV: And if Lou changes her mind?
What if you have a serious falling-out?
What if she never wants to see you again?

PERRY: She won't be like that.

BEV: What if she dies?
The child will go into care
Court of Protection.
Will a judge want your baby
Brought up by two queers?
Or by a lesbian? No, don't look at me.
You two are children
Babes in the Wood
Surrounded by thickets of regulation
You don't even know
Let alone understand.

PERRY: You say, Talk to Flip –
And you haven't even talked to Lou
About all this.

BEV: I will. I will.
I know I have to.
But I don't want to be the villain,
The one who's blamed for putting her off.
If I *must* talk to Lou
You *must* talk to Flip.
Deal?

PERRY: Deal.

BLACKOUT

If that's what floats your boat

PERRY: He doesn't want anything to do with it.
The thought of heterosexual conception
Makes him physically nauseous

BEV: That's absurd. All that happens is
He holds you close and talks dirty
While you come into the petri dish.
Talking dirty is entirely homo
You've done it a million times before

PERRY: Not into a Petri dish

BEV: The destination of your sperm
Is no concern of yours

PERRY: *[protests]* Pardon me?

BEV: Now, I'll be waiting with the turkey baster
When you've finished,
Bring the petri dish to the door
And I'll take it from you.
Quick as you can, please.

PERRY: This clinical approach
Doesn't really help
To create an atmosphere

BEV: I don't mean come as quick as you can
I meant give me the dish after you've come
As quickly as you can
So it's still warm
While I insert it

PERRY: You make it sound like a vet
Inseminating a cow

BEV: No... no!! It will be an act of love
Believe me it will be an act of love.

[Confidential] Listen,

You know I think it's crazy.
If there was any way to stop it
Or to change her mind, I would.
But this is what Lou wants.
She wants it more than she wants me, I think.
So I must want what she wants
Or I could lose her.

OK, I'll leave you to it.
I'll go and feed the dog.

[She exits. Leaving PERRY sitting on the bed, looking around.]

PERRY: This is so weird.
 A strange room -
 A strange women's room
 Smelling of talc and Givenchy.

[He wanders round the room, curious. Looks at the wardrobe.]

Good god, girl! When did you buy that?!
Who's is it? Fake fur? Yuk!
Those shoulder pads must be Bev.

[Looks at books on the table.]

"You can negotiate anything". That will be Bev.
"Mrs Gaskell" – Lou.

[Pulls himself together]

Come on, you're putting this off.
Should I take my clothes off,
Or just undo my flies?
Trousers round the ankles
You haven't done that
Since that toilet in the Isle of Wight –
1974, that would have been.
I was nineteen, and lonely.

No, clothes off I think.

[He takes his clothes off, and sits on the bed, back to the audience. Takes the petri dish in hand.]

Gosh, it's cold in here.
Bev and Lou are hardy outdoor types.

Come here, you gorgeous petri dish.
Je t'aime, mon petit boîte de petri.

No. Concentrate. Oh, Flip, I wish you were here.

[He starts wanking conscientiously as the lights fade.]

Scene Nine

[PERRY and FLIP, both semi-naked on the bed. FLIP laughs.]

FLIP: You couldn't do it?

PERRY: It's no joke.
Two hours I tried,
Couldn't even get it up?
And Bev didn't help
Coming in every twenty minutes –
"Haven't you done it yet?"
You'd think she didn't want it happen.
I tried everything.
I touched myself up all over
I thought of you doing it to me.
I thought of Nick Kamen doing it to me.
Limp as a wilted lettuce.

FLIP: You poor baby. I'll soon put you right

[Gently takes him and kisses him. He looks down at PERRY]

FLIP: See? Nothing wrong with you.

[He starts to get horny with PERRY]

PERRY: No, we shouldn't.
I've promised to go back to Lou
To try again later.
I ought to save myself.

FLIP: "Save yourself!"
You sound like a girl from a sixties beach movie.
Annette Funicello or Sandra Dee.
Semen isn't finite, you know
You're not using up your allowance.
Come here, Sandra...

PERRY: Won't you come to Lou's with me,
Next time? Please...

FLIP: It's more likely to make me soft
Than to make you hard.

PERRY: You don't have to be hard
Just make me hard.

FLIP: No! I couldn't sit there, in their house
Doing that.
I took the test for you – twice.
What more do you want?

PERRY: You were negative

FLIP: *[Long pause]* Actually –
The second time, I was positive.
The first time, it was negative
I didn't tell you about the second.

PERRY: How could you do that?
This changes everything
We can't go through with it.

FLIP: That's such a shame. But you are right.

PERRY: Are you sure you have the virus?

FLIP: Would I lie about a thing like that?

PERRY: Show me the result

FLIP: I threw it away

PERRY: Have another test

FLIP: No. Two is quite enough.

PERRY: I can't believe it.
You wouldn't do this to me.

FLIP: To you? I'm the one
Who's dealing with a death sentence.

PERRY: It's not just you, it's me and Lou

FLIP: Sometimes I think you love her more than me.

PERRY: Of course I don't.
I really wanted that baby.

FLIP: We could just stop having sex
Never have sex ever again.
Then you could have your precious baby

PERRY: Yes... we could do that...

FLIP: Are you serious?
[getting up] OK, I'm leaving

PERRY: What are you talking about?

FLIP: If you want that baby so much,
And a leper's in your way
The leper will go roam the world.
Unclean! Unclean!

PERRY: Don't be so absurd.

FLIP: Nothing absurd about it.
Wait three months, have another test.
If you're clear, then you and Lou can do it.
I won't be in your way.

PERRY: I don't know. I love you.
I can't imagine life without you
I want you – I want the baby -
I can't think straight.

FLIP: Or we could keep things exactly as they are.

[Goes to put his arms round PERRY.]

PERRY: *[Shouts]* Get off of me!

BLACKOUT

Scene Ten: LOU and BEV's flat.

[LOU is lying on the bed, under the duvet. BEV comes in, turkey baster and petri dish in hand.]

LOU: Did it work?

BEV: Well, there's something in the dish
And I don't think it's egg yolk.

LOU: Third time lucky.

BEV: Part one accomplished.
Now for part two.

[BEV is leaning over LOU. The turkey baster and the Petri dish to hand. She looks at an alarm clock. She kisses LOU very tenderly. Prolongs it. LOU breaks off.]

LOU: Shouldn't we get on with it?
How long will that sperm survive?

BEV: We have ages. Come here.

[Kisses her again. A thought.]

BEV: I have to check if Perry's okay.
I just rushed in here and left him.

LOU: And with good reason

BEV: Don't worry, I know what I am doing.
I'll tell him to make himself some tea
And have some biscuits
Like the blood donors do.

[Exits. LOU looks in the petri dish dubiously. Sniffs it. BEV comes back]

BEV: He's fine. He wants to stay
And see how it worked out.

LOU: We'd better get a move on then

Come here.

ARIA

BEV: *[Holding her]* Don't be so cold
This is really special
I feel so close to you now.
This is the most intimate thing
That we have ever done.

Here, let me spread you like a flower
I can feel you opening
Underneath my hand

[LOU arches her back to accommodate BEV]

I can never say how much I love you
You are my heart, my life, my everything
I never feel alive without you
My pulse beats to the beat of your heart
I feel it now in my blood
My heart answers
When I am away, my focus is on you
I wonder what you're doing
Where you are, what you're thinking
Who you're with, how you're feeling.

[She has been working LOU up with her fingers]

LOU: We must do the business -

BEV: I love it when you're wet
And now I feel you dripping
Underneath my fingers

Come for me, my Lou, my love
I want to feel you coming
Your contractions round my hand
So soft, yet strong

LOU: Please – Perry's –

BEV: Soon it will come, will come
 The spirit that will give you
 Your blessed golden child.

* * *

[She takes the turkey baster and inserts it.

BEV: Can you feel that?

LOU: Yes, oh yes.

BEV: I'm stroking your clit, darling
 I love your clit so much
 It leaps to my touch

LOU: No – yes –
 Give me the sperm

BEV: I'm going to -
 Yes –

LOU: Yes. I am ready
 My walls are red with blood
 And aching for it
 Oh – oh - oh

[She comes. Lies back exhausted. The alarm clock goes off. LOU looks at it.]

LOU: What the - ? What was that?

BEV: It's time, darling. The time is now.

[Smiles with satisfaction. BEV squeezes the turkey baster. LOU quivers.]

Scene Eleven:

[BEV and LOU's flat. PERRY rings. BEV makes him stand in the door.]

BEV: Oh Perry, I'm so sorry.
I heard about Flip.

PERRY: How did you know?

BEV: He told me.

PERRY: He told you, but not me?

BEV: He was concerned about Lou.
He thought she should know
Straight away.

PERRY: And I shouldn't? This makes no sense.

BEV: He wanted me to break it to her gently.

PERRY: Can I see her?

BEV: She doesn't want to see you.
As far as she's concerned,
You've trashed her dream
Your sperm has poisoned her.

PERRY: Let her tell me that herself

BEV: No way. She's too fragile.
Besides, she's asleep.

PERRY: When can I see her?

BEV: I'll let you know.

PERRY: I don't trust you.
There's something going on.
[Calls] Lou! Lou!

BEV: You'd better go.

PERRY: Lou!

BEV: I'll set the dog on you.

PERRY: You wouldn't.

BEV: Sheba! Sheba! *[An answering bark offstage]*

PERRY *[Going]* I'll be back. *[Gets increasingly agitated.]*

BEV: Yeah! You and Arnold Schwarzenegger.

PERRY: This is kidnapping

BEV: You can't kidnap your own wife.

PERRY: And you can't hold her prisoner.

BLACKOUT

Scene Twelve: The park again

[LOU and PERRY, with a pram.]

LOU: Isn't she beautiful?

PERRY: Yes she is. Takes after me.

LOU: Shut up!

PERRY: It was all lies, of course.
That shit Flip fed you
About girl and boy babies.

LOU: It wasn't just him.
I heard it elsewhere too
Kind of urban myth.

PERRY: No, it was Flip.
He was so full of shit.
Nothing but lies, all of it.
He never had HIV, you know.

LOU: How did you find out?

PERRY: It never really added up.
Why didn't he tell me straight away?
It was only when we started to get serious -
You, me and the turkey baster.

LOU: He must have really hated the idea of that baby.

PERRY: And he never behaved like he had the virus
Never seemed upset enough.

LOU: You knew him too well.

PERRY: He was just a bad actor.
I threatened to get on to the Mortimer.
Tell them he was my partner
And refusing to tell me his result.

LOU: They never would have given it to you.

PERRY: I know that.
But Flip could be remarkably naïve.
He spilled the beans.

LOU: And Bev went with it.
She knew all along.
Tried to frighten us off.

PERRY: She never seemed too worried
I might have given you HIV.

LOU: And all the lovey-dovey stuff
When she had the turkey baster
Was just to let the sperm cool down
So it was useless.

Though it was horny as hell.

Thank you for rescuing me.
She was using the dog
To keep me trapped in that flat
I was terrified.

PERRY: That was one of the scariest moments
Of my life, when Sheba went for me.
Just as well I thought to buy
Some long cowhide gloves,
A shield against a vicious dog

LOU: I thought you'd choke that poor Alsatian

PERRY: Poor? That dog would have had my hand off

LOU: Because she was trained that way.

PERRY: It's over now

LOU: And here we are.
The three of us

DUET

Here with our girl
Our shot at the future.
Our hostage to the world

Our flesh, our love
Our hope, our DNA

It sails through us
Out of us
It sails down the river of time
Towards eternity

We are the vehicle
The vehicle of life
And all our petty self
Is unimportant
Faced with such a charge.

[Into the pram, a lullaby]

LOU: You lie so still and fast asleep

PERRY: I dare not breathe my watch to keep

BOTH: Everything so new and clean
Sweetest child there's ever been

LOU: Think I see a lovely view
A sunlit road ahead
All laid out for you

PERRY: So I wish you a gentle breeze
You'll gently rock on clear blue seas

BOTH: And every day
We'll keep you warm, we'll keep you dry
Every day
We'll guard you with a careful eye
You'll never have to want for anything
We'll let you live in a perpetual spring

We'll keep you safe, we'll watch you grow
You'll make us feel so proud, we know

And if you cry, as cry you may
Then we will kiss your tears away

We wish you health, we wish you hope
And lucky stars in your horoscope

We wish you friends so strong and true
We hope they're always there for you

So sleep your sleep
And dream your dreams
We're watching over you
So you can be
Who you can be

PERRY: That'll be enough for me
 Quite enough for me

LOU: Enough to please me too

QUARTET

[Somewhere – at a point suitable to you, Robert – the voices of BEV and FLIP come in, either onstage or off in counterpoint. This can be broken up any way you like - as long as you keep the rhyme structure!]

BEV: It's better far this way
 There's a new life to be had

FLIP: I really couldn't stay
 A kid would drive me mad

BOTH: We each have our own life to lead

BEV: I have a career
 Where I need to succeed

FLIP: Have a joint, have a beer

Have some coke, have some speed

BEV:

My whole life is a perpetual marathon
And I'm on my marks at the starting blocks
Now the kid has gone.
There's nowhere I'm so happy as in court
Proving that I should be made a silk – in short,
In the Crown Court, when the judge has slumbered
I'm often out-gunned, often outnumbered
Yet as long as I'm unencumbered
Always I'll prevail
Over any male

Who cares if I go to an empty flat?
My independence is where it's at.
Tell me, what the hell's wrong with that?

It's my life to do what I want to do;
And what the fuck is that to any of you?

What? What?

FLIP:

Look at me, I'm so young, yes I'm young and cute
All the horny guys come in hot pursuit
And there's nothing like feeling you're admired
If your body's on fire to be desired.
My mother wished I'd been aborted
Dad's ambitions always thwarted
But now by the hottest hunks I'm courted
I feel their affection
Feeling their erection

Who cares if there's lots of disease around?
I'll go where the lights of love are found –
Throw me a lifeline before I've drowned

Please.... Please.....

ALL:

Who knows what's a mistake?
Who knows if they do right?
The Fates can tell us, but they're not replying
But life itself flows on

And disappears from sight
Leaving us, the living and the dying.

CODA

[FLIP and BEV fade away, leaving LOU and PERRY with the pram.]

LOU: You know, people walking past
 Would take us for a married couple. *[Pause]*

A young heterosexual married couple.

PERRY: Young-ish

LOU: OK, young-ish. *[Pause]*

PERRY: Of course we could get married

LOU: We could

PERRY: I'm free, as Mr Humphries says.
[quotes, shrill] I'm FREEE!

LOU: And as for me, I'm Bev-less
 No wife, no dog

PERRY: No home *[Pause]*

LOU: Of course, we could get married.

PERRY: In many ways it would make life easier.

LOU: After what we've been through
 Anything will be easier

PERRY: I am a little in love with you, you know.

LOU: Oh, please, don't spoil it.
 Your heterosexuality
 Is like your appendix
 A vestigial organ

Which does nothing but grumble.

PERRY: I'd be happy if you moved in permanently

LOU: Lived together?

PERRY: An imitation marriage ?

LOU: Get a joint mortgage -

PERRY: Settle down -

LOU: Become a habit -

PERRY: Get in a rut -

LOU: Get bored -

PERRY: Start arguing -

LOU: Stop listening -

PERRY: Have rows -

LOU: Fights, even -

PERRY: Learn to hate -

LOU: Split up. **[Pause]**

BOTH: Hardly seems worth it, does it?

LOU: Let's stick to sharing the baby
That's quite enough to do.

FADE TO BLACKOUT