

Monte Jackson

Turner - Extract from a one-act play

Turner
A Play in One Act

By Monte Jackson

SCENE 1

Two train seats on opposite sides of the front of the stage, both in slightly battered condition. The remaining area of the stage, including the area between the seats, is dark.

In the seat on the stage-left side of the stage, is ADRIAN DAHL, a German, aged thirty-nine. He is tall and slender, with a wan, but handsome face and a nervous demeanour. He is dressed in blacks and greys, with a dark overcoat and gloves. Next to his seat is a heavy-looking suitcase.

In the opposite seat is OLIVER LENNOX, a Scotsman, aged forty-two. He is slightly shorter than ADRIAN, and of medium build. OLIVER appears confident and composed in a tailored brown suit and overcoat with a scarf. Next to his seat is a medium-sized attaché case.

With the faint sound of a train running on tracks in the background, OLIVER reaches into the pocket of his coat and draws out a letter.

On the other side, ADRIAN looks out a window - he is troubled.

Unfolding the letter, OLIVER begins reading it aloud.

OLIVER LENNOX: My dearest Oliver; I do hope this letter reaches you in time. As I mentioned in my last letter,

Leaning his head back against his seat and closing his eyes, ADRIAN joins in, reciting the letter as OLIVER reads it.

OLIVER/ADRIAN: I am going to Paris - for good this time. I take the train from Berlin on Friday and have arranged my things to have arrived by Wednesday.

ADRIAN trails off again and falls silent while OLIVER continues reading.

OLIVER LENNOX: If you are, by chance, in the area, I was hoping that you would agree to meet me one afternoon.

ADRIAN laughs nervously.

I was thinking we could meet at the café on the corner near your old flat - the one where I almost turned your coffee over into your lap and had to leave because I was too mortified to just buy you a new cup.

OLIVER shakes his head fondly.

I'm sure that you know the place, I'm just being ridiculous about it. Yours as always,

OLIVER trails off, taking his eyes off of the letter for the first time, and ADRIAN finishes the letter.

ADRIAN DAHL: Adrian.

Leaning on his armrest, ADRIAN returns his gaze to the window, and OLIVER carefully folds the letter, but does not replace it.

Black out.

SCENE 2

The outdoor dining area of a Paris café in 1949, late afternoon.

At a secluded table in a corner is OLIVER, still in a brown tailored suit, but without his overcoat and scarf. He is reading a paperback novel and smoking, a coffee sitting in front of him, largely ignored. The seat across from him is saved with a spread newspaper and his attaché case sits near his feet.

A small span of time passes, and then ADRIAN enters, staying a fair distance from the table at first. He is wearing the same colour scheme as before, but with a scarf. He still wears the gloves from the previous scene.

It takes him longer than he would like, but he finally spots OLIVER, who does not notice him at first.

He does not immediately approach the table, instead pacing back and forth and suffering several false starts before he finally seems to decide to go for it.

As ADRIAN steels himself for the approach, OLIVER notices him. The two make eye contact, and OLIVER closes his book and pointedly stubs his cigarette out in his saucer.

Resolute, ADRIAN makes a bee-line for OLIVER's table, but almost knocks over another table. He sheepishly rights it before continuing.

Once he makes it to the table, ADRIAN pauses to reassure himself.

OLIVER LENNOX: No, it's me.

ADRIAN relaxes, pulling his gloves off hastily.

ADRIAN DAHL: Oliver!

Laying his gloves on the table, he sits down, heedless of the newspaper, and takes OLIVER's hand as if eager to confirm that he is real.

OLIVER seems charmed.

OLIVER LENNOX: Good to see you, Adrian.

ADRIAN looks at OLIVER for a long time, as if marvelling that he is actually there.

OLIVER pulls another cigarette from his pack, lights up, and gives ADRIAN a quick, suave once-over.

You haven't changed much. (beat) You look good.

ADRIAN DAHL: (flustered) You haven't changed at all.

OLIVER LENNOX: Is that a good thing or a bad thing then?

There is an awkward moment in which ADRIAN appears unsure as to how to answer the question. Stalling, ADRIAN takes one of OLIVER's cigarettes and lights it.

Didn't know you smoked.

ADRIAN DAHL: Maybe some things do change.

OLIVER seems thrown off. He picks up his coffee cup and takes a sip from it. It is cold.

Noticing, ADRIAN starts as if to go find a waiter, but OLIVER stops him.

OLIVER LENNOX: It's fine. (beat) I take it you're settling in all right?

ADRIAN DAHL: It's been a long process. I'm sure you know how these things can be.

OLIVER touches the top of ADRIAN's hand.

OLIVER LENNOX: Well you're here now, that's what matters.

ADRIAN is surprised by the gesture,
but pleased despite himself.

ADRIAN DAHL: I'm...I'm glad you came. Really, I am.

OLIVER seems to disregard the obvious
affection, and ADRIAN becomes wary
again.

OLIVER LENNOX: So, why Paris?

ADRIAN shrugs.

ADRIAN DAHL: There's nothing for me back in Berlin.

OLIVER LENNOX: Isn't your sister there?

ADRIAN DAHL: (dry) Klara is married now - quite
happily, I might add, in West Berlin.

OLIVER looks surprised despite
struggling to conceal his reaction.

Berlin isn't for me, not any more. Too
many bad memories.

OLIVER LENNOX: I'd hardly call Paris a blank slate.

ADRIAN DAHL: There's more good than bad.

OLIVER LENNOX: Four years of being stationed in an
occupied country -

ADRIAN DAHL: (quietly) Five years.

OLIVER LENNOX: Five years of being stationed in an
occupied country by a government you
didn't even believe in! (beat) Look
Adrian, I know that Germany isn't exactly
home any more - I can't imagine it would
be, but you can hardly pretend that-

ADRIAN DAHL: I think I've earned the right to 'pretend'
anything I want, Oliver.

ADRIAN stubs out his cigarette in the
saucer, next to OLIVER's first.

Wouldn't you say?

OLIVER laughs, but it feels forced.

OLIVER LENNOX: I might. Might not. Depends on the place, I suppose.

ADRIAN seems to think something over, coming to a swift conclusion.

ADRIAN DAHL: Do you want to see it?

OLIVER LENNOX: What?

ADRIAN DAHL: Where I live. It's all settled now.

OLIVER LENNOX: Oh! The new flat! (suddenly coy) Well, if you're inviting me.

ADRIAN is unimpressed.

OLIVER laughs, putting out his cigarette and tucking the paperback into his attaché.

Of course.

ADRIAN gets up first and almost puts his gloves on, but then stops and offers his hand, and grinning, OLIVER takes it.

EXIT ADRIAN and OLIVER.

SCENE 3

ADRIAN's flat, evening of the same day.

The flat is minimalist, but comfortable, with simple, pragmatic furnishings. There is a small coffee table, and a sofa, both of which are dotted with books.

There are doorways on the stage-right and left sides of the room, leading into the kitchen and bedroom. In one corner is a coat rack.

ADRIAN and OLIVER enter, both of them intoxicated, though ADRIAN appears to be slightly more so than OLIVER and is leaning a little on the other's shoulder. Both men seem relaxed in each other's company - a shift from the previous scenes.

ADRIAN DAHL: No, really Oli, you didn't need to pay for dinner.

OLIVER laughs and pulls ADRIAN closer to him.

OLIVER LENNOX: Please, it was the least I could do.

ADRIAN starts to protest, and OLIVER stops him with a peck on the lips.

Call it a housewarming gift.

He kisses him again, and any tension left in ADRIAN's posture melts away.

ADRIAN DAHL: And what would you call this?

OLIVER LENNOX: (flirtatious) Oh this? This is for old times' sake.

OLIVER drops onto the sofa and clumsily manoeuvres ADRIAN down into his lap.

You really are lovely, aren't you?

ADRIAN looks at him wonderingly, letting his hands wander over OLIVER's face, neck and shoulders as if reacquainting himself with the contours of his features before settling against OLIVER's chest.

ADRIAN DAHL: No I'm not.

OLIVER's demeanour, while still drunk, is suddenly very tender, and he seems less intent on seducing ADRIAN and more on convincing him of his sincerity.

This consists of both tender gestures from OLIVER, which are received by ADRIAN with varying degrees of receptiveness, and attempts at kissing him, which are almost always thwarted.

Eventually, ADRIAN buries his face in OLIVER's neck.

OLIVER LENNOX: I've missed you so.

ADRIAN mumbles into OLIVER's neck.

ADRIAN DAHL: I wish I could believe that.

OLIVER LENNOX: What was that?

ADRIAN doesn't reply.

OLIVER tips ADRIAN's chin up and moves to kiss him again, but ADRIAN pulls away, angry.

ADRIAN DAHL: Oliver.

OLIVER LENNOX: (playful) Adrian.

OLIVER pulls ADRIAN back against him and tries once more to kiss him, but ADRIAN pushes himself backwards and scrambles to his feet.

ADRIAN DAHL: Oliver stop it.

OLIVER is shocked and uncertain of what exactly he has done wrong.

OLIVER LENNOX: Adrian? What on earth?

OLIVER stands. ADRIAN takes a step back.

ADRIAN DAHL: You're drunk.

OLIVER is confused by the accusation - of course he is. They both are.

OLIVER LENNOX: So are you. We've both been drinking, love.

He reaches for ADRIAN's hand.

I don't get what the big deal is, Adrian.

ADRIAN snatches his hand away.

ADRIAN DAHL: I said stop it.

OLIVER stares at him, still stunned and a little hurt, but then frustrated by the sudden change in ADRIAN, he gives up.

OLIVER LENNOX: Fine. Tell you what. I'm going to shower and -

ADRIAN DAHL: Good. Sober yourself up.

OLIVER gives him a 'And what about you?' look, but continues.

OLIVER LENNOX: And then we can talk this over.

He waits for ADRIAN to respond, and when he fails to receive a response, he EXITS through the bedroom.

Off-stage, there is the sound of a shower running.

ADRIAN paces anxiously, his entire form radiating tension, but after a moment, he EXITS into the bedroom.

Monte Jackson's lifelong affair with writing for the stage began in childhood through the influence of growing up in a theatre production company. While an undergraduate, he has written three plays, including his honours thesis, entitled *The Gospel of Judas* which he also directed as a reader's theatre production.