

Marina Carr

**THE  
CORDELIA  
DREAM**



Gallery Books

## *Characters*

AN OLD MAN

A WOMAN

## *Set*

A space with a piano.

## *Time*

The present.

*The Cordelia Dream* was first performed at Wilton's Music Hall, London, by the Royal Shakespeare Company on Thursday, 11 December 2008, with the following cast:

MAN	David Hargreaves
WOMAN	Michelle Gomez
<i>Director</i>	Selina Cartmell
<i>Designer</i>	Giles Cadle
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Matthew Richardson
<i>Music</i>	Conor Linehan
<i>Sound Designer</i>	Fergus O'Hare
<i>Movement</i>	Anna Morrissey
<i>Company Dramaturg</i>	Jeanie O'Hare
<i>Company text and voice work</i>	Stephen Kemble
<i>Music Director</i>	Eloise Prowse
<i>Casting</i>	Sam Jones CDG
<i>Production Manager</i>	Pete Griffin
<i>Costume Supervisor</i>	Lisa Trump
<i>Company Manager</i>	Katie Vine
<i>Company Stage Manager</i>	Alix Harvey-Thompson
<i>Deputy Stage Manager</i>	Alison Daniels
<i>Assistant Stage Manager</i>	Sarah Caselton-Smith
<i>Musicians</i>	
<i>Violin</i>	Eloise Prowse
<i>Viola</i>	Amy Wein
<i>Cello</i>	Ben Davies

# ACT ONE

*The old man sits at the grand piano playing a beautiful melody. The buzzer goes. He stops playing. He sits quietly, hands raised. He resumes playing. The buzzer goes again. He stops again. He resumes again. The buzzer goes again. The old man goes to the door. Opens it.*

MAN You.

WOMAN Yes. Me.

MAN Well.

WOMAN It wasn't easy . . . seeking you out.

MAN Wasn't it?

WOMAN I stayed away as long as I could.

MAN You think I'm going to die soon?

WOMAN Maybe.

MAN You want to kiss and make up before that event?

WOMAN Some people visit each other all the time.

MAN I'm not some people. You of all people should know that.

WOMAN Can I come in or not?

*MAN stands back for WOMAN to enter.*

Thank you. This is where you live now?

MAN Yes.

WOMAN No trees. No grass. No birds. No sea.

MAN Old men don't need scenery.

WOMAN What do they need?

MAN Just a piano and a stool, a few pens, paper.

WOMAN Where do you sleep, eat?

MAN I manage. Sit down.

WOMAN Where?

MAN Here. (*Piano stool*) Or there's the floor, the window. Let me take your coat.

WOMAN (*Takes off her coat, hands it to him*) I brought wine, cheese.

MAN I've no bottle opener.

WOMAN I brought that, too.

MAN I don't drink now.

WOMAN You don't drink?

MAN Not since my false teeth fell into the toilet. I drink water obviously and one cup of black coffee every morning.

WOMAN (*Looking around*) Coffee. Where do you get that?

MAN From women mostly.

WOMAN Women. Not one woman but women.

MAN Does that annoy you?

WOMAN Yes, it does.

MAN You want to be my coffee maker?

WOMAN One time I was.

MAN I get coffee as a reward. Black. Steaming. I gulp it down. Scald on the throat, then a mad dash for the door before I'm asked to fix the washing machine or, worse, speak the language of love and loss in the morning.

WOMAN What's wrong with the language of love and loss in the morning?

MAN Love needs a streak of darkness. The day is for solitude. Morning especially. Morning is for death.

WOMAN And afternoons?

MAN At your age they're for transgressions, at mine they're for remorse.

WOMAN You know about remorse?

MAN I'm an expert on it. That's why I don't have an armchair. If I had an armchair I would sink into it and never get out of it again. Remorse is fine in its place. Whatever feeds the flame, as they say. And then there's the night, the arms of women.

WOMAN I wish you'd stop talking about them in the plural.

MAN Women? Women are plural.

WOMAN And men?

MAN We don't exist. We have pianos and stools. We part with semen to procreate. We are remorseful in the

afternoon. At night we disappear into women. If we're lucky. That's men for you. Sometimes we read a book or two and have really strong opinions. We make grand statements on Art, Music, Poetry, the state of the country, you name it, we can pronounce on anything. And what never ceases to amaze me is people believe us, worse, take us seriously. And somehow that's enough, that sustains us for eighty years.

WOMAN You're not fooled?

MAN Will I open that wine for you or are you just going to look at it?

WOMAN Only if you have a glass.

MAN I couldn't. But I could drink water out of a wine glass if that helps.

WOMAN That would help.

MAN I don't know why women are so afraid of drinking alone. When I was drinking I enjoyed others' company but it was nothing to the marvels of myself I unlocked when drinking alone.

WOMAN Yeah.

MAN You're not going to ask me what marvels?

WOMAN You're going to tell me anyway.

MAN I discovered one thing. My soul . . .

WOMAN You're not the first to uncover his soul in his cups.

MAN Let me finish. I discovered my soul stands appalled.

WOMAN Appalled. Why?

MAN Appalled that it is attached to me. Trapped in time, stitched to me.

WOMAN Isn't every soul appalled with its mortal frame?

MAN Some souls are smug. They can't believe their luck. Some fall in love with the Earth. Imagine that.

WOMAN I have known moments when I'm in love with the Earth.

MAN You in love is one thing. Your soul is another. Your soul to be seduced by all of this. It's pathetic. Cars, houses, the rising sun, children romping in the garden, come evening. To think it doesn't get better than this.

WOMAN I have five children now.

MAN Yes, I heard you had another one.  
 WOMAN You're not curious?  
 MAN About what?  
 WOMAN If it's a boy or a girl.  
 MAN I'm not curious.  
 WOMAN If it's called after you?  
 MAN That I think is unlikely.  
 WOMAN You're right there. It's not called after you. None of them are called after you. None of them ever will be.  
 MAN Well I'm glad we've sorted that out.

*He hands her a glass, sniffs the bottle, pours.*

Just as well I don't drink. I couldn't drink this.  
 WOMAN But it'll do for me.  
 MAN You bought it. You decided you and I were not worth a good bottle of wine. No, we're worth an almost good bottle of wine. Though this wine is expensive it's plonk. Let me give you some advice, my dear. Things are never what they seem. Never. Cheers.  
 WOMAN You're not going to congratulate me?  
 MAN On what?  
 WOMAN On the new baby.  
 MAN Why?  
 WOMAN It would be a normal response from someone in your position.  
 MAN Congratulations.  
 WOMAN You take no joy in new life?  
 MAN Why should I when mine is coming to a close?  
 WOMAN You're not sick, are you?  
 MAN Why should I delight in birth after birth? What have your obsessions with maternity to do with me?  
 WOMAN Not even a card.  
 MAN You don't want my cards!  
 WOMAN No, I don't.  
 MAN My baby presents. I sent those baby things, those outfits to the others. What were they? Boys? Girls? I've forgotten. I sent or rather my women sent those baby rags. Did you reply?

WOMAN You really want me to reply?  
 MAN Look, I've left you alone!  
 WOMAN Only after you lost. Only after there was nothing else you could do. You haven't left me alone. You've retreated to this sulphurous corner to gather venom for the next assault. You? Leave me alone? You haunt me.  
 MAN I? Haunt you?  
 WOMAN I know what you're planning. I know it.  
 MAN What am I planning?  
 WOMAN Your death. You're going to die and I'm going to be left with the fallout. I refuse to deal with your ghost. That's why I'm here. I want to sort you out while you're alive. While there's breath in my body.  
 MAN Are you dying?  
 WOMAN Can I smoke?  
 MAN Yes. Yes. Smoke. Smoke.  
 WOMAN What'll I use as an ashtray?  
 MAN Flick it out the window.

*He opens window. White curtain blows in and out.  
 WOMAN goes to the window. Stands there smoking. He looks at her.*

You're very like her.  
 WOMAN Am I?  
 MAN Standing there by the window, always at the window.  
 WOMAN I remember long ago when I loved you. A funeral, and she was weeping and I said, you look lovely, and she did. I'd never seen her weep before. It suited her, tears suited her. For once she was open and real. And she caught me by the arm and hissed, growled, whatever that elemental throat sound is. She said, well, I feel far from lovely. And suddenly you were there, between us, freeing my arm, leave her, you said, leave her alone, she's only trying to comfort you.  
 MAN Who would've thought I'd have it in me?  
 WOMAN To stand up for me?