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Repertory Plays

A Short Way
With Authors
by
Gilbert Cannan



LeRoy Phillips, *Boston*

Daniel L. Quirk, Jr.



Gaylord
PAMPHLET BINDER

A SHORT WAY WITH AUTHORS
A BURLESQUE IN ONE ACT

FOUR PLAYS BY GILBERT CANNAN

JAMES AND JOHN - - - - *one act.*

MILES DIXON - - - - *two acts.*

MARY'S WEDDING - - - - *one act.*

A SHORT WAY WITH AUTHORS, *one act.*

A SHORT WAY WITH AUTHORS

A BURLESQUE IN ONE ACT

BY

GILBERT CANNAN



BOSTON
LE ROY PHILLIPS
Publisher

811.8
C21.4 Sh

CHARACTERS

Mr. Bessemer Steel.

Mr. Cheeseman Clay.

Mr. Percy Vigo.

Mr. Bauerkeller.

Bateman.

Callboy.

Dresser.

Miss Britannia Metal.

Scene: A Dressing-room in a London theatre.

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LE ROY PHILLIPS

gift
D.L. Quirk
6.26-56

A SHORT WAY WITH AUTHORS

The scene is a dressing-room in a London theatre.

Time, 7.30 P.M.

Door R. Door leading into a little room L. back, up a stair or two.

Walls decorated with portraits of Mr. Bessemer Steel.

Desk L., on which is a telephone. Dressing-table and cheval-glass L.

In the far right-hand corner is a miserable-looking individual with a brown-paper parcel in his hand. This is MR. CHEESEMAN CLAY.

The telephone rings; the door up the little stairs is opened, and BATEMAN, the dresser, runs down to the telephone. He leaves the door open, showing a glimpse of BESSEMER STEEL struggling with his clothes. He is dressing for a Georgian part.

BATEMAN

[*At telephone.*] Who? . . . Mr. Vigo? . . .
Has he an appointment? . . . Right.

CLAY

[*Timidly.*] Do you think Mr. Steel could see me now? I've been here an hour and a half.

[*BATEMAN ignores him and returns to the dressing-room. CLAY slowly unwraps his parcel. As he does so, the door opens*

and youngish man enters with a large envelope under his arm. This is MR. VIGO. He comes up to CLAY with nervous effusiveness.

VIGO

Mr. Bessemer Steel? . . . How do you do? . . .
Shall I read my play to you?

[He begins to draw it out of his envelope.

CLAY

I wouldn't if I were you.

VIGO

I beg your pardon.

CLAY

I wouldn't if I were you. . . . You see, I'm not
Mr. Bessemer Steel . . . luckily.

VIGO

Oh. . . . I have an appointment with Mr.
Steel for half-past seven.

CLAY

So have I . . . for six.

VIGO

Oh!

CLAY

He's in there . . . dressing.

VIGO

Oh!

[VIGO sits and there is a moment of painful silence. BATEMAN bustles across the

room and out by the other door. STEEL puts his head out of the dressing-room door.

STEEL

Anybody there?

CLAY

Two of us. . . .

STEEL

Can't come out. . . . Dem breeches have split.
. . . Oh, it's you, Clay. . . . How do?

VIGO

My name is Vigo . . . Percy Vigo.

STEEL

Oh, heard of you. . . . Knock-out for old Ibsen. . . . What? . . . Sha'n't be long, once I'm sewn up.

CLAY

Doing well?

STEEL

Rotten. . . . They won't take it . . . won't take anything. . . . No money in front of the house. . . . Plenty behind . . . thank God. . . . Part for me, Mr. Vigo?

VIGO

I don't know any one who could play it better.

STEEL

I should think not . . . I didn't ask that.
Part for me is what I said.

VIGO

You shall see.

STEEL

Wait till I've got my breeches mended. . . .
 Dem that Bateman. . . . You young men
 will write plays . . . God knows why. . . .
 We want parts . . . plummy ones.

*[BATEMAN returns with a fattish woman
 armed with needle and cotton. They
 go into the dressing-room and the door is
 shut. CLAY and VIGO sit in silence
 for a little.]*

CLAY

Your first play.

VIGO

My name is Vigo. . . . I have had three plays
 produced in the provinces.

CLAY

My name is Clay . . . Cheeseman Clay.

VIGO

A dramatist?

CLAY

They did a curtain-raiser once — twelve years
 ago. I thought I was a made man and I
 threw up my position in a bank.

VIGO

I'm in Fleet Street.

CLAY

Better stay there.

VIGO

We must get life into the theatre. . . .

CLAY

You can't do it . . . it goes in at one end and out at the other. . . .

VIGO

Is that a play?

[He points to CLAY's parcel.]

CLAY

Yes. I've been reading it to him for ten years. He never listens.

VIGO

New school?

CLAY

It was new school when I wrote it. I don't know what it is now. It keeps me alive. . . . Sometimes I get a hundred down for it; sometimes I don't. . . . I've had four agreements for it with a penalty of £250. . . . They've always paid the penalty, and I'd be sorry if it was produced . . . I'd have to write another.

VIGO

I'll trouble you not to pull my leg, sir.

CLAY

I'm not pulling your leg. That's my profession. I'm an unsuccessful dramatist. I write to each of the managers once a year and say I would like to read my new play to them.

. . . Same old play. . . . I give it a new name — it's called *Heart's Misery* now; I read bits of it and sketch out the idea. . . . They don't listen, so it doesn't matter what you say. . . . And sometimes they give me a hundred down. Sometimes they take it for two years . . . I never give them more, it isn't safe; and I pray to Almighty God that they won't produce it. . . . If you find that a little monotonous you can sometimes make a contract for adaptation with the authors of famous novels. . . . The managers'll give you money down for the name . . . and that's quite safe. You needn't write a word, for the greatest novel of the century is always dead in a year. Nobody reads it. Nobody cares. It's like my play — same old novel with a new name. . . . And sometimes I wish myself back at the bank. You do know where you are there. . . . But the theatre's exciting.

VIGO

Sir . . . this is an appalling state of things.

CLAY

Oh, no. It's quite comfortable. I'm sorry. I thought you'd better know the ropes before you tackle Bessemer. He won't listen.

VIGO

My play is of the sort that compels a hearing.

CLAY

There isn't such a kind of play. . . . Nobody listens . . . nobody cares. It's nothing but a game of losing some one else's money.

VIGO

[*Excitedly.*] The theatre is a machine with which to feed the imagination of the people.

CLAY

You'd better not. . . . If the public had imagination and a sense of humour they wouldn't stand Bessemer for a week.

[The dressing-room door opens and BESSEMER STEEL appears attired in a much ruffled shirt and satin breeches. BATEMAN carries a brocade coat and waistcoat. He goes to the mirror and turns on the electric light. STEEL goes to the cheval-glass and parades himself in front of it. He draws himself up and spouts.]

STEEL

“Has the King honour? . . . I have honour too. Never shall it be said that Bainton Cholmondely, wild gamester though he is, besmirched the fame and honour of his family. . . . Why, I have diced away my patrimony, boxed the watch, wagered the impossible, and won and lost. . . .” —
It's rotten muck. . . . Can't think why the public doesn't like it.

BATEMAN

I said they wouldn't, sir.

STEEL

Old Bateman, most potent, grave, and reverend
Bateman, you never do believe in anything
but Shakespeare. . . .

BATEMAN

You can't do better than that, sir.

STEEL

But we can't all do it. . . . There are so many
idiots alive who will write plays . . . con-
found 'em.

BATEMAN

Tssh! Tssh!

STEEL

Eh? . . . Oh, beg pardon, gentlemen. [*He
turns to VIGO and CLAY.*] How do you like
my costume? From first to last it cost two
hundred pounds. . . . The brocade is of
the period . . . guaranteed. Might have
been worn by Fox or Sheridan. . . . I've
done everything I could for this play, but
they won't take it. . . . Miss Metal's
lace is genuine, every stitch of it. Real
Irish point and a dem lot of it. . . . Four
hundred pounds. . . . But they won't
take it, you know. . . . It's a rotten
year, that's what it is. I've tried every-
thing. . . .

VIGO

Except a play.

STEEL

Eh? I've tried everything, everything. Baby, mother's tears. . . . No go . . . they won't weep. . . . Frolicking peer, band-box, scene on a yacht, comic servant . . . they won't laugh. I've given 'em French farce, as French as French, adapted, of course, and the papers said I was vulgar. . . . I've given 'em American sentiment . . . treacle; it turned 'em sick. . . . And look at the engagements I've made! Every actress with any backing in London. . . . No, it's a rotten year . . . that's what it is; it's a rotten year. . . . Damme, I'll have to let my theatre to an American and go to Australia.

BATEMAN

You don't get me going out of London, sir.

STEEL

No. You're lucky, Bateman. You're thrown in for the rent. . . . Well, the play's the thing.

VIGO

[Startled.] Eh?

STEEL

The play's the thing . . . provided there's anything like a part in it for me. . . . What have you got for me, Clay?

CLAY

A drama in four acts. You are the noble gentleman who sacrifices all save his honour for another.

STEEL

Oh, better throw in his honour . . . They like that. . . Honour rooted in dishonour, you know.

VIGO

Quite a common experience.

STEEL

What am I — a duke . . . or a younger son?

CLAY

You can be whatever you like.

STEEL

Modern?

CLAY

Of course.

STEEL

You won't mind if I make up. [*He sits at the dressing-table.*] What about a trial scene — or a fight on the cliff with my wife hanging by a rope half-way down? . . . Have I a wife?

CLAY

If you like.

STEEL

I see. . . She deserts me. My sacrifice is to cover her reputation. I'm a young man

. . . Under-Secretary . . . or a diplomatist.

CLAY

You play diplomatists so well.

STEEL

I am wronged, but for her sake . . .

VIGO

Whose?

STEEL

For the sake of the woman I love I bear with injustice. . . . My chief, the Minister for War, calls on my wife, and . . . and leaves his papers behind. . . . The letter is found. . . . My honour is cleared.

CLAY

Yes.

STEEL

By Jove, Clay, you *have* written a play this time!

CLAY

I'm glad you like it.

STEEL

Give me the list of the characters . . . I can listen while I'm making up. [CLAY *hands him a sheet of paper.*] H'm . . . Sir Derek Verrinder. . . . Baronet?

CLAY

Bart. . . . by all means, Bart.; V.C., M.V.O., if you like.

STEEL

Yes; initials look well on the programme.

VIGO

Besides being a hint to the Prime Minister.

STEEL

Yes; they've all got it now. . . . Like so many
clever men, I've always been on the wrong
side in politics.

VIGO

The trouble is that there isn't a right side.

STEEL

Go on, Mr. Clay.

[He goes on with his make-up.]

CLAY

[Opening his script.] Act I.

STEEL

Which act has the big scene? How many acts
are there?

CLAY

Four.

STEEL

Which is the court scene . . . you did say it
was a court scene? . . . Oh, no . . .
fight on a cliff.

CLAY

Act III.

STEEL

Read that . . . don't worry about the first
two. . . . I know you, old man . . .

perfect technique . . . splendid. . . .
I remember your last play. . . . By Jove,
that was fine . . . fine! But I was so full
up. Who took it? . . . no one. . . .
I am surprised. . . . There is no writer
of whom we have greater hopes than Mr.
Clay, Mr. Vigo. . . . You don't object to
Mr. Vigo hearing you, Mr. Clay?

VIGO

I wanted to read a play of my own to you.

STEEL

A play? . . . of course. . . . I know what
your play's about, Clay, old man. . . .
Dem fine play too. . . . What do you say
to our listening to Mr. Vigo's?

CLAY

I've been waiting since six o'clock.

VIGO

I'm going to read my play.

CLAY

You've begun on mine.

VIGO

You've got to hear mine.

CLAY

There's money in my play.

VIGO

There's thousands in mine.

STEEL

There's only twenty minutes before my call . . .
I can hardly hear you both. Suppose you
toss for it.

VIGO

Well —

CLAY

I don't know. . . .

STEEL

Come . . . you can't quarrel.

VIGO

All right.

STEEL

Well . . . Clay?

CLAY

All right.

STEEL

I'll toss and give you three calls. . . . Heads.
Vigo, tails Clay. [*He tosses.*] Heads . . .
one to Vigo. [*He tosses again.*] Tails . . .
one to Clay. [*He tosses again.*] Tails . . .
one to Clay. Clay's won. . . . Hooray!
Good old Clay. . . . I say, I'll toss you
for shillings.

CLAY

I've only got one.

STEEL

Vigo, I'll toss you for shillings.

VIGO

I'm going to read my play.

STEEL

No sportsman. . . . What do you say to
poker . . . ? Bateman'll come in.

VIGO

I don't gamble.

STEEL

Bridge, then.

VIGO

I can't play.

STEEL

Have a drink, then?

VIGO

I don't drink.

STEEL

Good God, have you brought me a dramatisation
of Moody and Sankey?

BATEMAN

Better get on with the make-up, sir.

STEEL

Eh? Oh, yes. They're no sportsmen.

BATEMAN

I fancy the gentlemen came on business, sir.

STEEL

Oh, yes. Read your dem play, then. . . . It
can't be worse than the one I'm doing.

*[He sits again. CLAY sits by his side;
VIGO umbrageously some distance away.]*

CLAY

[*Reads.*] "Act III. . . . The scene is the vestibule of the Hotel du Lion d'Or at Maloggia."

STEEL

I thought you said it was a cliff.

CLAY

No . . . you said that. The cliff is off.

STEEL

A fight "off." That's no use. . . . Go on.

CLAY

At the right is a screen.

STEEL

Ah, a screen scene . . . that always goes.

VIGO

It depends entirely on the handling.

STEEL

[*Turning.*] Eh?

VIGO

That is my opinion. . . . My point is that the public will take whatever is good of its kind——

STEEL

You're a critic. . . . You're one of those damn critics.

VIGO

[*Quietly.*] I am not a critic, and I am not going to be bullied. I have written a play and I am going to read it to you.

STEEL

He's insulted me . . . in my own theatre . . .

BATEMAN

Steady, sir, steady.

VIGO

I have written a play and I am going to read it to you. It is your business to listen. If you are running this theatre as a private lark . . . well and good; I'll go. But if you are running it in the service of the public, then it is your business to listen to me.

STEEL

I'm a servant of the public, I am . . . I've always been a servant of the public . . . I've been thirty years in management, and I don't need to be taught my business.

VIGO

How much are you losing a week?

STEEL

[*Angrily.*] I'll . . . I'll . . .

VIGO

What will you do?

STEEL

I'll have you put into the street . . . into the street . . . by the firemen . . .

BATEMAN

I think the gentleman's connected with the Press, sir.

STEEL

Why didn't you say so before? . . . Of course I'll listen to your play . . . if you'll only wait. . . . Clay first, you know . . . he won the toss. . . . You lost your temper, you know. . . .

VIGO

I did not. . . . I'll wait.

STEEL

Now, Clay.

[He returns to his make-up.]

CLAY

[Reads.] "Act III. The scene is the vestibule . . ."

[The telephone rings. BATEMAN goes to it.]

BATEMAN

Yes. . . . It's Mr. Bauerkeller, of the *Reflector*, sir.

STEEL

I'll see him.

CLAY

[Reads.] "*Marion:* See, the sky and the gentian are both blue. The gentian outshines the sky, but I see in both only the blue eyes of my little Willie lying there on the hillside . . ."

STEEL

I say, you know, that's beautiful . . . beautiful. . . . That's poetry, Clay, that is

. . . poetry. . . . But I wouldn't have too much of it, you know . . . just a touch here and there.

CLAY

[*Reads.*] "Duval: You know there is nothing I would not do for you, if I could once be rid of Verrinder.

"Marion: Little Willie is his child.

"Duval: I know."

[*A dark, neat little Hebrew enters.*

STEEL

How do you do, Mr. Bauerkeller? . . . Drink?
. . . Smoke?

[BAUERKELLER takes both from BATEMAN.

BAUERKELLER

How's the play doing, Mr. Steel?

STEEL

Magnificent. . . . Never had such business since the *Vale of Acheron*. . . . Ah, that was a play.

BAUERKELLER

Glad of that. . . . We'll print photographs to-morrow.

STEEL

Thanks . . . thanks . . . awfully.

BAUERKELLER

What are your plans . . . Mr. Steel?

STEEL

Ah, Mr. Clay here is just reading me a play.

CLAY

Mr. *Cheeseman* Clay.

STEEL

And Mr. Vigo here . . .

VIGO

Please keep my name out of it. . . .

BAUERKELLER

Of course . . . of course.

STEEL

I have contracts with many of the leading dramatists. . . .

BAUERKELLER

Our proprietors think the Imperial sentiment wants waking up.

STEEL

It does . . . oh, it does. . . . *The Far-Flung Empire* . . . That's a title. . . . The proconsul would be a character new to the stage. . . . The strong man. . . . The governor of millions of aborigines. . . . Ah, that would be a part. . . . Scene . . . a durbar. . . . Elephants, rajahs, soldiers. . . . There is a mystery. . . . The proconsul . . .

BAUERKELLER

Ah . . . the sense of the theatre, Mr. Steel!



Gaylord

STEEL

That's it . . . the sense of the theatre. . . .
Of course, you'd advertise such a play?

BAUERKELLER

I can't promise anything. I only say that there
is such a feeling in the air. An Imperial
play . . .

STEEL

This play we are doing now will keep us going
for some months. . . . Just a popular
thing, you know. How do you like my
costume?

BAUERKELLER

Magnificent.

STEEL

It cost five hundred pounds. Just a moment.
. . . [*He rapidly finishes his make-up.*]

BAUERKELLER

Your views on the British drama just the same?
[STEEL *dons his stock, coat, and waistcoat.*]

STEEL

I may say that I have never known a time when
the theatre was so prosperous or in such
a state of healthy activity. . . . I have
spent ten thousand pounds on this produc-
tion. On a play which I have in view to
succeed it, an Imperial play, I shall spend
twenty thousand, if not more. I shall
spare nothing. I have re-engaged Miss
Britannia Metal for the unusual part of a

Rajah's chief wife who has escaped from the cruel confinement of the harem and placed herself under the protection of the proconsul's military attaché, a married man . . . The proconsul is a bachelor. . . . It would not be fair to the author to say more.

BAUERKELLER

Thank you, Mr. Steel.

[STEEL *does his wig.*

CALL-BOY

[*Outside.*] Five minutes.

STEEL

Good heavens, the clocks are slow!

BAUERKELLER

Good night, Mr. Steel.

[*He turns to go.*

CLAY

Don't forget . . . Mr. *Cheeseman* Clay.

STEEL

Now, Clay, for your third act. . . . Pity you missed the first two, Mr. Bauerkeller . . . splendid stuff.

VIGO

I'm going to read my play.

STEEL

I am always willing to hear plays.

[BAUERKELLER *has been held up at the door by the entry of a Georgian lady in a magnificent costume.*

BRITANNIA

Are you the *Sun*?

BAUERKELLER

No, Miss Metal . . . the *Reflector*.

BRITANNIA

It doesn't matter . . . I want to talk to you about the *fête-champêtre* organised by the Duchess of Bucketshire. . . . I am to wear a costume of the — but come outside. . . . It is a secret. [*She drags BAUERKELLER out.*]

VIGO

I am going to read my play to you.

CLAY

I am prepared to give you the option on mine.

STEEL

You see, gentlemen, I am always ready to hear plays. It is part of my business to hear plays. But, as you have just heard, I am contemplating a really big production, the Imperial character of which is bound to appeal —

VIGO

You are going to hear my play.

STEEL

Mr. Clay first. . . . Now, Mr. Clay . . .

VIGO

I am going to read my play to you. It is called *Discipline*.

STEEL

If it's about prisons, I don't want to hear it. . . .
Prisons have been overdone.

VIGO

My play is called *Discipline*. It is in four acts,
and each act is built so as to bear the weight
of the next.

STEEL

Suppose you send it to me. I'll read it.

VIGO

You wouldn't understand it.

STEEL

Go on, Mr. Clay. . . .

CLAY

[*Reads.*] "*Marion:* But once Sir Derek was my
husband — "

VIGO

[*Reads.*] "*Claude:* Are we to stand this much
longer, sir?"

CLAY

[*Reads.*] "*Duval:* It is impossible for a wife
to wrong such a husband."

VIGO

[*Reads.*] "*Bassett:* In such cases it is always
wise to wait until your rascal has over-
reached himself."

CLAY

[*Reads.*] “*Marion:* Blue sky, blue gentian, but nothing is so blue as Willie’s eyes, and they are Derek’s eyes.”

VIGO

[*Reads.*] “*Claude:* Business is business.”

CLAY

[*Reads.*] “*Duval:* Those eyes shall soon be closed.”

VIGO

[*Reads.*] “*Bassett:* No man should sacrifice his business to his vanity.”

[*STEEL rises and goes to the cheval-glass and admires himself. The two authors follow him.*

CLAY

[*Reads.*] “*Marion:* Heart’s misery . . . heart’s misery!”

[*The Georgian lady re-enters.*

BRITANNIA

Look here, Jack. I’m not going to stand these rotten houses much longer. . . . You print my name larger. . . . They don’t know I’m here. I shouldn’t wonder if they’re all going to the Haymarket thinking I’m still there. . . . They do know what they’re about there . . . gave me letters a foot and a half high.

[*STEEL strikes an attitude.*

VIGO

[*Reads.*] “*Bassett:* The whole business of advertisement is to be sure of the quality of your goods.”

STEEL

Miss Metal, you have such beautiful eyes, you could outstare the angels.

BRITANNIA

That’s all right for the girls, Jack . . . but it doesn’t wash with me. . . . You print my name larger. Either you bill me properly or I leave the theatre.

CLAY

[*Reads, sepulchrally.*] “*Marion:* Heart’s misery! Death must be sweeter than such poisoned love!”

STEEL

“Poisoned love” is good, Mr. Clay. . . . But pray sit down.

VIGO

[*Reads.*] “*Claude:* You’ll nail him down in time.”

STEEL

Please sit down, Mr. Vigo. . . . These gentlemen are reading me a play they have written. . . . They are collaborators.

BRITANNIA

Charming. . . . Anything for me?

[*She sweeps a curtsey.*]

VIGO

I am not in collaboration with Mr. Clay or anybody else. I have written a play and I am going to read it to Mr. Steel. There are no parts in it for anybody. The actors are to act my play; my play is not to serve as an advertising medium for the actors.

BRITANNIA

Don't you make any mistake, young man. You're not going to make Jack Steel produce you that way . . . is he, Jack?

STEEL

Admirable Miss Metal, I'll have new bills out to-morrow.

CLAY

[*Reads.*] "*Marion:* If one could blot out memory."

STEEL

Miss Metal, would you mind rehearsing the scene where Rupert rides from Belmont. . . . It must go better to-night.

[*The two Georgian figures bow and curtsey.*]

BRITANNIA

"I am vastly obliged, sir, but I cannot gainsay my heart, and that cries aloud, 'The King! The King!'"

STEEL

"And mine would fain cry out with it 'The King! The King!'—but oh, our two hearts cry aloud for different kings."

BRITANNIA

"My king before my love. . . ."

STEEL

"My love before my king. . . ."

BRITANNIA

"Why, then, sir, my king's a better king than yours."

STEEL

"My king's in power and master of us all."

VIGO

That's blank verse.

CLAY

[*Reads.*] "*Marion:* Here where I thought I could be free, I am most haunted."

BRITANNIA

"Your king's in power. . . . But how long?"

STEEL

"Lovely rebel. . . . But my king is here."

BRITANNIA

"How say you? Here? But how? Here?
. . . . But hark. . . . The horn! Rupert's
horn from Belmont! Victory! The King!
The King!"

STEEL

"God save his Majesty!"

BRITANNIA

"Which king?"

STEEL

"Mine! I am the king!" That's much better.
They won't laugh to-night.

BRITANNIA

"Oh! . . . Your Majesty!"

[STEEL holds out a royal hand. She takes it. The call-boy bangs on the door.

CALL-BOY

Call. . . Call! Curtain! Curtain!

BRITANNIA

"I am your Majesty's most rebellious subject."

STEEL

You shall be billed to-morrow in letters two feet high.

BRITANNIA

Thank you, Jack.

[STEEL lifts her hand high in the air with his most royal manner and escorts her to the door. She goes out. He turns.

STEEL

Good evening, gentlemen.

[He goes out. VIGO and CLAY are left.

CLAY

[Wrapping up his play.] I knew it wasn't any good. They never listen when they've got a failure. Good night.

[He goes. BATEMAN is busy at the dressing-table. VIGO sits grimly.

34 A SHORT WAY WITH AUTHORS

BATEMAN

Going to stay, sir?

VIGO

I'm going to read my play to him.

BATEMAN

There isn't a dog's chance, sir.

VIGO

I'll take it.

[BATEMAN goes up into the little room.
VIGO is left waiting.]

CURTAIN

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