

The Power of the Dog

Ellen Dryden

First performed at The Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond in 1996.

Vivien Chadwick, Head of the English Department in a failing school run by an incompetent Headmaster, is preparing to take up a new appointment as Head of a school in South London. At the same time she is attempting to move house as well as visit her mother who has had a stroke,

Added to these problems is LISA, a brilliant but difficult sixth former, who she is encouraging to stay on at school and try for a place in university. In this scene Vivien is in her study waiting for LISA to arrive for an extra tutorial, LISA turns up late as usual with the same old excuses - waiting thirty-five minutes for the bus and Mum being stropky. Vivien asks if there is any chance of Mum coming to see her

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LISA

Nah! She doesn't like schools. Give her panic attacks. *(Pause)* And I don't want you to come to my house . . . *(LISA turns her back. Then changes the subject with great energy)* Listen. I reckon you owe me ten quid. I went to see that *Midsummer Night's Dream*. It was rubbish! Helena was about thirty-five, kept chucking herself all over the place - tossing her hair back and flinging her arms about. You know - just like young people always do when we're in love. Nearly ruptured herself. She was about six inches shorter than Hermia as well, so she'd got these gross high heels and Hermia had to bend at the knees all through the quarrel scene. And the Mechanicals wandered about in the audience and talked to us. I hate that! And Peter Quince sat in the Stalls and shouted his lines from there. And the fairies all lived in cardboard boxes and had tattoos. Puck was a drug-pusher. And it went on for nearly four hours. I reckon ours was better. And I couldn't afford it! . . .

Hey and guess what! Theseus and Hypolita played Oberon and Titania! Isn't that original? Everybody liked it except me. I wanted to get up and kill them all. Bunch of no-hopers ... I really love that play ... I don't think this had any . . . respect. And it wasn't -magic ... *(She stops, lost in thought for a moment)* I know. 'The best in this kind are but shadows and the worst no worse if imagination amend them ... It must be your imagination then and not theirs.' *(She is very still. Her face becomes a mask)*

(Very quietly) I like - magic. *(Briskly)* I suppose I'm talking rubbish - everybody else says it's brilliant. And they're paid to be in the imagination business, aren't they? And I've got no right to criticize them.