

THE LEATHER CLAD CHAPERONE

A play in one-act by James Gaunt

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I've decided on just one "f" to prevent misspelling

Hi mom and dad,
here she is.
I'm not insane,
it's just a story!

Love,
Jimmy

CHARACTERS

HENRY ALLMAN

NURSE

ANOPHELES, or, ANA

SLAV

EXTERMINATOR

A pair of MALE NURSES

FEMALE and MALE VOICES

THE JAZZ

TIME

The present.

PLACE

The quarantine wing of a modern American hospital.

SCENE ONE

A hospital room. Sterile blue light. A hospital bed, two large medical closets, a television, and a small desk make up the room. A blue door leads out. There are no windows. A speaker is on the ceiling. Those who wear biohazard suits are heard through this speaker. HENRY ALLMAN sits in his recliner bed, wearing a blue, floral printed hospital gown. NURSE, wearing a full biohazard suit, complete with mask, is laying out his things, and preparing the room.

A jazz ensemble lies offstage, in the dark. They will be called THE JAZZ from this point on. When *Bzzz* appears in the text, THE JAZZ represents the noise of a flying mosquito.

HENRY

You must be nearly finished.

NURSE

You didn't really ask for much.

HENRY

I am a simple man of simple plans. I fit all I need in one suitcase, and all I want in another. Fortunately, only my necessities were lost in India.

NURSE

What?

HENRY

I beg your pardon?

NURSE

Why are you talking to the ceiling?

HENRY

That is where your voice is coming from.

She touches his shoulder. HENRY is pleasantly surprised.

NURSE

Could you just look me in the eyes? I can't hear you very well with this mask on.

HENRY

How am I to make contact with eyes I cannot see?

NURSE

I understand, but could you just look in my general direction? I need to see your lips move. That's how they trained us.

HENRY

I beg your pardon?

NURSE

You're looking at the speaker again!

HENRY

I'm sorry. I'm not quite used to looking at a mask while listening to a machine, and calling it conversation.

NURSE

What?

HENRY

I see. Let me think a moment. Ah! We have a plan. When I was in India, and I needed to communicate with those without an ear for English, I made elaborate hand motions to compensate for their lack of aural understanding.

NURSE

Oh! Those were very good.

HENRY

And so were those, mademoiselle.

NURSE

Problem solved.

HENRY

Excellent! Where were we?

NURSE

I thought you were saying something.

HENRY

Right. I said that all I possessed were two suitcases, and that one was lost in India.

NURSE

I like a man who travels light. It shows confidence.

HENRY

And poverty.

NURSE

They say when you've found a confident bum, you're looking at the man with the secret.

HENRY

I doubt it was your mother who told you that.

NURSE

Ex-boyfriend, actually.

HENRY

Say no more. By the way, did you find all the videos I asked for?

NURSE

Yes I did, Mr. Allman.

HENRY

Please, call me Henry.

She presents a stack of five videotapes.

NURSE

Do you remember how to work a VCR, Henry?

HENRY shuffles through the videos.

HENRY

Yes, I believe so. Channel three, right? What is this?

NURSE

Campus Sweethearts. The...title...you asked for?

HENRY

This is not the...film I requested. The *Campus Sweethearts* I wanted is a classic Ginger Rogers musical.

NURSE

And this looks like the hard-core remake starring Ginger Musk.

HENRY

I never knew they were allowed to put these right on the box.

NURSE

They've blurred the key areas.

HENRY

One must leave room for the imagination.

NURSE

But, in the movie, you get to see everything.

HENRY inspects the tape in disgust.

HENRY

Everything but romance.

NURSE

Do you want me to return it for you? I don't think we have the Ginger Rogers version to replace it, though.

HENRY

Oh, I don't know. Perhaps they have kept the original soundtrack.

NURSE

You're lucky to get your hands on it, even if by accident. A man who died this morning held on to it for three weeks.

For only a moment, HENRY becomes very somber.

HENRY

Died. Well, then he is excused for not rewinding.

NURSE

But Mr. Allman has no interest in tapes like these. He loves the old musicals.

HENRY

Absolutely. The masterworks of American melodrama. They are the only things of ideal beauty our coarse and violent nation has ever managed to belch.

NURSE looks at the video jacket of one of the musicals.

NURSE

I had an uncle who just loved these kind of movies. He was a real song and dance man himself. Now, I wouldn't compare him to Fred Astaire or anything, but every few Sundays we would all go see him at the community theatre. Except Dad. He would stay home, and work in the yard. But every year Uncle Chet would send me a new pair of roller skates for Christmas, and, you know what, I think he bought himself the same pair. Larger size, of course, but the same pink sparkly roller skates, or whatever the style was that year. He was a real character. Are you an uncle, Mr. Allman?

HENRY gestures with the porno tape in hand.

HENRY

I also like large heaving breasts, you know.

NURSE

Is that right?

HENRY

Sure I do.

NURSE

Then you're no different from the man who guarded this tape for three weeks.

HENRY

I may be blessed with a little more imagination.

NURSE

You like to take the clothes off yourself, don't you? Undress young Ginger with your eyes?

HENRY

Wearing that suit gives you a lot of courage.

NURSE

I'm sorry, I was way out of -

HENRY

Oh, don't be sorry. I actually envy you, in that fine white suit. You must love the privacy.

They stare at each other for a moment.

NURSE

Well, should I leave the tape or not? It's one of our most popular titles, and you're lucky to get it, and it does get pretty lonely in here, and I'm just a suit so you don't have to be ashamed -

HENRY

Fine, leave it. I always hate to be the exception.

NURSE

Hate to be the exception? I don't hear of many Americans traveling to India. I don't even hear of many Indians traveling to India. That seems quite exceptional.

HENRY

And admire my triumphant return.

NURSE

At least you're only being quarantined as a mandatory precaution. You're lucky. You should see the infections some of these adventurers bring home.

HENRY

At least they come home with something.

NURSE

And the hospital is even allowing you visitors, as long as they wear the biohazard suits.

She grabs a clipboard.

By the way, you forgot to write down their names on the visitor docket.

HENRY

I am afraid not. I never forget.

NURSE

But don't you want visitors? You're going to need some visitors. Don't you have anybody?

HENRY

I suppose my cat left me, and besides, I doubt you have a biohazard suit that would fit her.

NURSE

No friends? No relatives? But you were barely gone three weeks.

Bzzz. (a short, sneaky burst of music, not too loud.)

HENRY

Did you hear that?

NURSE

Hear what?

HENRY

It sounded like a mosquito.

NURSE

That's impossible. You probably just heard the fan.

Bzzz.

HENRY

Now, you must have heard that!

NURSE

What?

Bzzz. He slaps his arm.

HENRY

It just bit me!

NURSE

Nothing bit you. This is a sealed environment.

HENRY

Then how do you explain this crimson inflammation on my arm?

NURSE

But no life form, not even a germ, can enter or leave this room. It's an absolutely sterile environment.

HENRY

Patients included? I'm not that old.

NURSE

But Popular Marvels Magazine just named us the hospital of the post-modern millennium!

HENRY

Well, you better fetch some bug spray before they change their minds.

NURSE

Oh no. I can't.

HENRY

Why not?

NURSE

The biological agents in insect killers and repellants are much too prolific for the quarantine environment. Here, I have that in my handbook somewhere.

She forgets she has no pockets.

Didn't I explain to you why your food is going to taste so bland?

HENRY

Well can you just kill it for me, then?

NURSE

I can't risk tearing the suit.

HENRY

And what if the mosquito kills me?

NURSE

Don't be a sissy, you'll just have to -

HENRY

I told you I-

NURSE

I mean don't be scared. What's the worst she could do to you? Besides, she's probably flown away by now.

HENRY

Flown away? To where? Flown out of a sealed environment?

NURSE

Then, she's probably full.

HENRY
She?

NURSE
Only the females bite. The males prefer the nectar of flowers.

HENRY
And old musicals.

NURSE
Don't put words in my mouth. Besides, did you know that male mosquitoes are physically among the most...manly creatures on earth?

HENRY
How do you figure?

NURSE
Well, their...genitals (giggle) make up a third of their overall body size.

HENRY
Now, why should a delicate young lady know that?

NURSE
I see her!

HENRY
Where?

NURSE
On the wall.

Bzzz.

HENRY
I don't see her.

NURSE
She flew away.

HENRY
Just what I need, another mercurial female to disrupt my solitude.

NURSE

Why don't you just kill her yourself? They're easy to squash once you spot them. I'll even roll you up a newspaper.

HENRY

I cannot. I'm a Buddhist.

NURSE

So?

HENRY

I do not kill living things.

NURSE

But you're allowed to hire a hit-woman?

HENRY

Perhaps. It's very complicated!

NURSE

What a quirky man you are.

HENRY

Quirky? Oh, beware that word, mademoiselle. "Quirky" is the word idiots use to describe people and things they have neither the courage nor the capacity to understand.

NURSE

Are you calling me an idiot?

HENRY

Of course not. You're young, yet. And I think you have great potential. I am merely trying to educate you.

NURSE

Oh. Well, thank you. I think you're very wise. So why would a man like you feel the need to run off to India?

HENRY yawns loudly.

HENRY

I beg your pardon, Nurse. That was unexpectedly rude of me. I am just so exhausted from my travels. What did you ask me, again?

NURSE

Oh, I see. It was wrong of me to ask. Sometimes I forget I am wearing this suit. I always dreamed of becoming a famous psychiatrist.

HENRY

What stopped you?

NURSE

Oh. It was just a fantasy.

HENRY

Nonsense! Tomorrow you may analyze me all you would like.

NURSE

You're very kind, Mr. Allman.

HENRY

No. just a little vain.

NURSE

Or lonely.

HENRY

Loneliness and vanity. An excellent analysis, Doctor. You've distinguished me from absolutely no one. Will you include my case in your lectures?

NURSE

You have to give me more time!

HENRY

How about a morning appointment, then?

NURSE

Eight o'clock sharp.

HENRY

Excellent. And bring a couch with you, if we're going to make this professional.

NURSE

Good night, Mr. Allman.

Bzzz.

HENRY

And bring an exterminator, too!

She exits. The blue door slams shut. The airlock seals.

Bzzz.

Perhaps a lady's laughter is faintly heard.

HENRY looks around the room with fearful eyes.

End of scene.

SCENE TWO

This scene develops a sense of lustful paranoia, as the mosquito takes hold of Henry's fragile, romantic imagination. With each musical representation of the buzzing mosquito, the sound should intensify, until by the end it's a cacophonous, yet beautiful wall of paranoid noise. But first, HENRY gets out of bed, sits down at the little desk, grabs a pen and paper, and begins to write.

HENRY

To whom it may concern, Indian Airlines,

Regarding: flight 261, nonstop New Delhi to Manhattan.

I write to report a lost suitcase. Among the contents were three finely tailored suits, exquisitely bound books, an ample amount of rupees, a Panama hat (made in Panama) and a toothbrush.

Bzzz.

He swats at the air.

Regrettably, but without reluctance, I also write to report three items of grave misconduct by your customer service department. Item one: a false phone number was given to me by the attendant at the airport. I hope that this was an incompetent mistake, rather than an insidious part of a plan to pilfer my necessities.

Bzzz.

He swats himself.

HENRY (cont'd)

I also hope that this is the correct address. But then again, if it isn't, you wouldn't be reading this. And that would be just another item to be added to my list of grave misconducts.

Bzzz.

He drops the pen, and swats the air, then himself, with both hands.

Be gone, winged victory!

He takes the pen.

And if I was forced to report four items of grave misconduct, in a letter representing just a single disgruntled customer, then your duct-taped fuselage no martini serving junkyard of a sorry excuse for a transcontinental airline would be guilty of such incomprehensible violations of basic -

Bzzz.

He slaps with both hands frantically, and stands up from the desk.

GET AWAY, GET AWAY, GET AWAY!

He sits back down, and sets the pen to paper. He sighs.

Bzzz.

He throws the pen to the wall.

I can't do this right now.

He puts a musical into the VCR.

Perhaps something delicate will calm her desire.

Bzzz.

He runs to his bed. As he runs, he slaps all over his ears and face. He throws a sheet over his head, and spies out of a slight crack in the sheet.

The musical begins in the middle of a scene.

FEMALE VOICE

Why sir, I've never danced the Hollister hop! I don't think I ever could...

MALE VOICE

You better try, sweetheart, if you want to be my number one singer!

FEMALE VOICE

But everything is moving so fast!

MALE VOICE

Don't worry, kid! Just feel it in your heart!

Bzzz. Slap.

FEMALE VOICE

All the girls told me to be wary of you!

MALE VOICE

What? I'll have those two-bit hussies out on the street so fast it'll make their head spin!

FEMALE VOICE

Oh, heavens no! I never wanted to cause any trouble!

MALE VOICE

I was just kidding sweetheart! Don't worry about me, I'm harmless! Just listen to your heart!

Bzzz.

A Tired, resigned, slap.

FEMALE VOICE

My heart, it's beating ever so fast!

MALE VOICE

Sorry, kid, I can have them slow it down if you'd like. That is, if you can't keep up with the steps!

FEMALE VOICE

No! My heart is aflutter, and I've never felt so wonderful!

Bzzz.

HENRY

I have always loved everything. Shall I love this mosquito, and smile as she drinks me all away? Is this my chance to endure the pain and emerge an infinitely more patient being?

Bzzz.

But this is not pain I feel. Pain is so predictable. Pain no longer surprises me.

Bzzz.

This is a tweaking and a stroking and a jabbing and an endless pestering penetration. She is gone before I know she is there and she returns before I know she has left. The itch lasts only as long as the next bite. And so she picks at me, hiding between the cracks of pain and pleasure, taunting me, haunting me, like some shameful vision from my past.

Bzzz.

My blood must be boiling. She cannot resist, for I make no effort to deny her. I must want to be bitten. This must be my desire.

Bzzz.

I am losing my patience.

Bzzz.

HENRY buries himself in the sheets. As a song from the old musical plays on the television, THE JAZZ starts to play around with the old song, pestering it, and toying with the melody. HENRY, under the sheets, tosses himself back and forth on the bed. The stage darkens until the end of the old musical song, at which point the lights come up in full, red light, and THE JAZZ blasts loud and hectic for a few moments. HENRY emerges from the sheets, sits up on the bed, and laughs quietly and hysterically to himself. The opening credits to a porno film now play on the television. Really cheap porno music plays. The opening scene of *Campus Sweethearts*, the porno title that is now in the VCR, follows.

FEMALE VOICE

I just don't know what house to rush! What letters would look good on me?

MALE VOICE

What about what letters would look good on my dorm room floor.

FEMALE VOICE

(Giggle giggle.) You're so funny.

MALE VOICE

That's not all I am baby.

FEMALE VOICE

Oh my god. It's so huge.

MALE VOICE

They don't call me the big man on campus for nothing baby.

FEMALE VOICE

Oh my god. I'm so drunk..

Bzzz.

Then, THE JAZZ erupts.

HENRY

I AM LOSING MY PATIENCE! I AM LOSING MY PATIENCE! I AM LOSING MY FUCKING PATIENCE!

HENRY gets out of bed. The noise of two people having sex is heard. Quick desperate breaths and deep moans. THE JAZZ goes in rhythm with the sex, as if it were the backing band to the pornography. HENRY runs to all parts of the room, completely mad, and slaps all over his body in a fruitless effort to end his suffering. Shadows appear on the walls, and a lady's laughter is heard. Eventually, HENRY begins to move with THE JAZZ, and the noise of the porno, as if he were hypnotized by some strange, exotic dance. He, after quite a lot of movement, finally falls to the ground, whimpering, on all fours. THE JAZZ is now just a desperate, quiet wail from the sax.

HENRY

I am losing my patience. I am losing my patience. I've lost my...I've lost my... I'm lost. How much more do you want from me? Haven't you taken it all? How much more could you possibly want from me? How could you want it all? How could you need it all?

Enter ANOPHELES, or, ANA, the mosquito, in full dominatrix leather. She is in the form of a terrifyingly sexy woman. She has a whip in her hand.

The JAZZ explodes.

ANA

Oh, it's not about how much I need, honey..

ANA whips him across his back. For the rest of the whipping, ANA circles him rapidly, as if she were stalking him and taunting him at the same time.

But about how much I want!

She whips him again.

HENRY

Please! Stop!

She whips him again.

ANA

Do you want me to stop, you little motherfucker?

She whips him again.

He nods desperately.

Because I don't have to stop, little bitch!

HENRY

Stop. Please stop.

She whips him again.

ANA

Do I want to stop?

She whips him again.

HENRY
Yes. Yes!

ANA
Do you want me to stop?

She whips him again.

HENRY
Please. Yes.

She whips him again.

ANA
Are you sure?

HENRY
Yes! Yes!

Complete silence.

She shadows him in utter domination.

ANA
Why didn't you say something before?

HENRY
Thank you.

ANA
What was that?

She sticks her face right in his, never bending a knee,
with the whip firmly in her hand.

HENRY
I'm a very lonely man.

ANA
And I am a very needy mosquito.

HENRY
I am a much lonelier man than I had ever imagined.

She examines her frighteningly sexy physique with
satisfaction.

I wholeheartedly agree.

ANA

Who are you?

HENRY

Anopheles.

ANA

What does that mean?

HENRY

It's Latin. It means hurtful.

ANA

That's a horrible name.

HENRY

It's not my name, it's my species.

ANA

Right.

HENRY

You may call me Ana, if you wish.

ANA

May I stand, Ana?

HENRY

She takes a step back.

If you can.

ANA

He struggles up to his feet, the two stare at each other for three moments, she wins, and he averts his eyes away from her gaze like a shameful little boy.

Have you had enough of me?

HENRY

I think so.

ANA

She raises his chin with a graceful hand.

HENRY

I see. Well, I don't know what to say here but -

ANA

Do you want to get to know me or something?

HENRY

No. Do you plan on leaving anytime soon?

ANA

I could stay for awhile. Would you like it if I stayed for a while, Henry?

HENRY

I don't know. Will you be wearing that?

ANA

What's wrong with this?

HENRY

It's rather frightening.

ANA

Then how would you like me?

HENRY

How everything ought to be. Beautiful.

ANA

This isn't beautiful to you?

HENRY

Beauty is not something to be feared.

ANA

Well, then you're going to have to tell me what you like, honey, because I know I look good.

He thinks for a moment, then looks at her high heels.

HENRY

A red dress, heels - but not those heels. The slight outline of a lacy bra, but classy, and humble, and pure and delicate.

ANA

I think I could come up with that.

HENRY

You owe me as much.

ANA

I owe you nothing. Slav!

SLAV stumbles out of the closet. He is the male mosquito. He reeks of sweaty leather, and wears a mask. Slav never stops moving, and he is also never silent. He whispers and laughs quietly and hysterically to himself about nothing. He carries a red dress, heels, and a lacy bra.

HENRY

Who is that?

ANA

That's Slav.

HENRY

Who?

ANA

My mate.

HENRY

How long has he been in here?

ANA

He never leaves me.

HENRY

How romantic.

ANA

Isn't it? If you'll excuse us.

ANA beckons SLAV, and he quickly follows her out of view. He changes her.

THE JAZZ begins a playful tune.

ANA (voice)

Right heel. Left heel. Unzip me. The buckle. The clamp. Sweat ring. The safety pin. The strap. Other strap. Right knot. Left knot. Lower zipper. Upper zipper. Central zipper. Outer three zippers. Undress me. The lacy bra (a longer pause, filled with SLAV ramblings). Oh. You're right. Did he? Henry?

HENRY

Yes?

SLAV runs back into view, and eagerly approaches HENRY.

ANA (voice)

What kind of panties?

SLAV grins and nods with pleasure.

HENRY

Panties?

SLAV

PANTIES!

ANA (voice)

Yes, you never told me what kind of panties you prefer.

HENRY stares at grinning SLAV.

ANA (voice)

You know, like a thong, a bikini cut, or a -

SLAV teems with excitement. HENRY is horrified.

HENRY

I certainly do not know, and neither do I want to know! Just get any kind.

ANA (voice)

Have it your way. Slav, you get to pick, then.

SLAV is overjoyed. He runs to one of the closets, opens it, thinks for a moment, and then slaps his forehead, amazed at his own stupidity. He slams the closet door shut without taking anything out. He dances to ANA.

ANA (voice)

What? Oh. Somehow, I'm not surprised. Then just put the dress on. Zip me. Right heel. Left heel. Be gone!

SLAV sprints back into one of the closets, accompanied by a rising wail from the sax.

ANA (voice)

Do you have anything to drink?

She emerges from the curtain a stunning beauty, as designed by HENRY.

I'd love a fresh glass of old red wine.

HENRY is mesmerized by her ideal beauty. The closet opens, and the hands of SLAV present a bottle of red wine and two glasses. HENRY takes them, and then SLAV slams the closet door shut before HENRY can thank him.

HENRY

Won't Slav be wanting some?

Whispers are heard from within the closet.

ANA

Slav prefers the nectar of flowers.

HENRY

That's right. You are a vision!

ANA

And you look like a victim. I want you in a suit. Slav!

SLAV runs out with a fine suit in hand. He responds quickly to the following commands.

ANA

Disrobe him.

HENRY is very self-conscious in his polka-dot boxer shorts. When Slav firsts touches him, HENRY squirms with repressed rage.

The pants. The socks. The shirt. The tie. The jacket. Get out of our sight.

SLAV runs off whispering into the closet.

HENRY

I thought I lost this suit in India.

ANA

What a pleasant surprise, then.

He pours the wine.

HENRY

To pleasant surprises.

They toast, and drink.

You look fantastic.

ANA

You told me. Do you want me to fuck you, Henry?

HENRY

What? No? I mean you can't just say it like that all of a sudden, and to use that word!

ANA

How would you like me to say it?

HENRY

Where's the romance?

ANA

I think it's with those two. Or is it four now? I can't tell.

The television turns on to the porn film, and sex is heard. HENRY rushes to the television and shuts it off.

HENRY

I don't watch that vulgar trash!

ANA

Liar! I watched you.

HENRY

I couldn't sleep.

ANA

Why not?

HENRY

You know why.

ANA

You couldn't stop thinking about me?

HENRY

You wouldn't stop hurting me.

ANA

I didn't think I was hurting you. I thought I was just a pestering penetration. That's why I gave it to you extra hard with the whip.

She approaches him sexily.

I wanted to make things a little clearer for you.

She whispers into his ear.

To help you understand.

HENRY

I actually prefer musicals.

ANA

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

HENRY

It means I never watch that sordid pornography. It was placed in my room by accident.

ANA

Kind of like me?

HENRY

Yes. I didn't ask for anything like this.

ANA

Sure you didn't. But you do want to dance with me, don't you? Like in your musicals?

HENRY

Would Slav mind?

ANA

Slav isn't allowed to mind.

HENRY

Why does he stay?

She shrugs, knowingly.

HENRY

Do you whip him as hard as you whipped me?

ANA

Harder. And he always asks for more.

HENRY

Where did you find him?

ANA

Find him? Honey, he came to me.

HENRY

He must really love you, then.

ANA

Ha! I'd be careful using a word like that. You wouldn't want to get confused.

HENRY takes a big drink.

THE JAZZ begins again.

HENRY

What's so confusing about love? Why else would he stay if he was not madly in love with you?

ANA

Slav doesn't love me.

HENRY

He must! And I will prove it to you.

ANA

How do you plan on doing that?