

HOTEL BRITANNIA

Note

In addition to the main characters there are a silent chorus and anti-chorus for as many extras as you want. If you have a proscenium stage it is best to have a thrust and a small raised area to the back of the audience. The original music for this was composed and played by a single pianist in minimalist style.

Extracts

Only Connect ...

Emilia - Morticia, darling, how nice to hear from you. How is everyone? ... I'm sorry to hear that but I'm sure Wednesday will find some new friends ... I know, people are so odd at times ... Yes, what rational child would be upset by having their Barbie doll cremated. ... Yes, of course it was only a mock funeral. ... What? Oh it wasn't... Sorry, didn't quite catch that, we've been having trouble with the telephone lately. ... Yes, isn't it? We so rarely have a chance to talk.

Petulia arrives and checks the telephone line - it is disconnected. She tries to interrupt Emilia and point this out.

... Oh dear, your Uncle Festus has passed on ... Again ... The second time in 2 weeks ... *(to Petulia)* Not now Petulia, please! ... And how is Gomez? ... For your 300th Wedding anniversary. ... How elegant! ... What, the whole rosebush, roots and all?

Petulia - Emilia dear, the line ...

Emilia - *(to Petulia)* Please Petulia, sorry Morticia. ... Oh, the hotel. We're not doing too well, I'm afraid. We still have the regular guests but I'm afraid the whole country is disintegrating and people just don't have the money to escape normality anymore. ... Yes, isn't it terrible.

Petulia - Emilia, have you forgotten, the telephone?

Emilia - *(to Petulia)* It's Morticia, dear, calling from America. Isn't it lovely to use the phone ... ?

Petulia - But the disconnection Emilia?

Emilia - Please, Petulia! ... I know dear, such a change from using the Telepathic Superhighway. Well, must dash. There's lots to do and I don't want to run up your phone bill. Goodbye ... Bye, bye. *(puts the phone down)* Now Petulia dear, what is the matter?

Petulia - Emilia dear, we were disconnected 2 weeks ago.

Emilia - Oh yes, *(looks at phone)* I completely forgot. Ah well, now what was it you wanted to see me about?

Petulia - The hotel finances, I'm afraid. I've had a charming, if rather pointed, letter from the Bank Manager. It appears our overdraft facility has finally caused some concern.

Emilia - Oh dear, has it? Is it a question of tens of pounds? *(Emilia shakes her head)* Hundreds? *(Emilia shakes her head)* Thousands? *(Emilia shakes her head)* Not, tens of thousands? *(Emilia nods)*

Petulia - So you see dear, we're in a spot of trouble.

Emilia - *(holds her hand to her head)* One moment!

Petulia - Have you looked into the future, dear?

Emilia - Yes, and it doesn't look too good.

Petulia - The crystal ball wasn't ... Black?

Emilia - No, red, I'm afraid. I really don't know what to do. I suppose we'll just have to carry on as normal ...

Petulia - Normal?

Emilia - Just a figure of speech. Perhaps we can arrange for another of those loan people to help us out?

Petulia - Selarchimorpha Fiscalis?

Emilia - Selarch ... Oh, loan sharks.

Petulia - Yes but I don't think they'll help this time. It may be a case of cuts.

Emilia - Really, how entertaining.

Petulia - Not those kind of cuts Emilia.

Emilia - Really.

Petulia - However, the Bank Manager has made an appointment with us this afternoon. I suggested after work but he seems to have some problem with coming here after dark. It may have something to do with the Rumanian guest. She only met him and invited him in ... of his own free will of course.

Emilia - Interesting. I suppose we had better call in Chef and the Head Porter as our affairs are so serious.

Petulia - That reminds me, Herbert's been annoying Chef again.

Emilia - As if we don't have enough problems.

Enter Herbert and Giacomo arguing.

Giacomo - I tell you there aren't!

Herbert - There are.

Giacomo - Aren't.

Herbert - There are.

Emilia - Thank you, what is the problem?

Giacomo - He says there are rats in the kitchen, that the kitchen is not clean.

Herbert - But there are. They're in the cage on the top shelf - next to the rotary spit.

Emilia - Herbert, you're taunting Giacomo about Penelope and Pietro again.

Herbert - Well it's not right keeping pets in the kitchen.

Giaconda - White rats are very hygienic, unlike some of your staff.

Herbert - What do you mean by that?

Giacomo - I mean the corridors and bedrooms are particularly filthy.

Herbert - If you're referring to the cobwebs, you know we don't touch them. The

spiders add character to the place and Marvin likes to hide in different places so he can surprise the guests.

Petulia - Oh yes, we mustn't do anything to Marvin, poor thing.

Wilfred, the blind waiter, walks in front of the stage, into the audience some of whom he greets, dusts down with a napkin and exits.

Emilia - Don't worry, of course we're not going to do anything to his natural habitat. *(to Herbert and Giacomo)* That's enough you two. I have some very important news, so if there's anything else?

Herbert - Well, I did want to mention Wilfred.

Emilia - Oh dear, what's he done now?

Herbert - It's table number 3 again. It's getting difficult to convince them the food is not soya protein.

Emilia - Number 3, that's ? ...

Petulia - The Vegans dear.

Emilia - I see. I should imagine that didn't go down too well *(Herbert raises his eyebrows)*.

Giacomo - But he works so hard and he's been with us so long. And ever since he went on work experience to that restaurant in Berlin ...

Petulia - Yes, we must remember his disability. It must have been quite an experience serving customers in the dark. He normally finds his way around marvellously. Although I must say since that visit he has had a tendency to turn off all the lights ... and the lamps ... and blow out the candles.

Emilia - I know. I'll have a quiet word with him. Now, both of you, I have some news. I'm afraid the hotel is going through something of a crisis.

Herbert - I told you. They've found out about the rats.

Emilia - Herbert, this is serious, we may have to sell the hotel.

Herbert & Giacomo - What?

Giacomo - But we've had the same staff for ... generations. There's nobody like us.

Herbert - I have to agree. This is our home.

Emilia - I know and we're going to try our best. The Bank Manager's coming this afternoon with a proposition that s/he hopes will be of interest to us and of course we'll communicate the result of our interview later. Thank you.

The New Boss Makes His Mark ...

Mr. Sargeant - Well my dear, that's it, our new home. *(Mrs Sargeant is about to reply but Mr Sargeant continues)* I know, it's a little ramshackle at the moment but it will be transformed. *(Mrs Sargeant is about to comment but Mr Sargeant continues)* Yes, don't worry. Things will change. I'm going to send in ... Norman! *(Mrs Sargeant again tries to comment)* What was that, dear? Ah, Mr. Brown, have you brought the deeds? *(Mrs Sargeant is ignored)*

Mr. Brown - Yes, here they are, all signed and properly documented by us, the understanding bank, because, you know, your money is safe in our ...

Mr. Sargeant - Excellent. Now we can get to work immediately to transform this country ... bank ... er, hotel into a streamlined, efficient organisation.

Mr. Brown - *(nervously)* You won't be requiring my presence at the hotel will you, Mr. Sargeant? Of course we are the understanding ...

Mr. Sargeant - Don't worry, just introduce Norman and he will deal with everything. I certainly don't intend to set foot on the premises until restructuring has begun, eh dear? *(Mrs Sargeant is about to respond but ...)* That's right.

Mr. Brown - May I ask who Norman is, Mr. Sargeant? I thought you were going to leave the Staff intact.

Mr. Sargeant - Oh dear, I forgot, you haven't met Norman. *(calls out and a man in a long brown workcoat with a blank face arrives)* Norman! Ah, there you are. Come and meet Mr. Brown. *(Mrs Sargeant draws back in distaste)*

Mr. Brown - Good day, Norman. I represent the understanding bank and your money could be safe in ... *(stops himself as Norman impassively nods)*

Mr. Sargeant - Doesn't say a lot Norman, but gets things done. *(Norman whispers in Mr. Sargeant's ear)* Don't worry, Norman, you can start immediately. *(Mr Sargeant looks at the hotel)* I bet there are lots of spiders in that old place, eh Mr. Brown?

Mr. Brown - *(getting agitated)* Yes ... lots.

Mr. Sargeant - Big ones too, I imagine.

Mr. Brown - Yes, yes there are.

Mr. Sargeant - With long hairy legs and fat bodies?

Mr. Brown - (*extremely agitated*) Yes, there are.

Mr. Sargeant - Don't worry, Norman will get rid of those.

The Guests Under Attack ...

Mechanic - (*on lower set left at bar*) Barman. Give us another pint, please.
(*Barman complies.*) It's like I was saying if you consider High Baroque art and compare it with the new Romanticism ...

Barman - I'm sorry, sir, would you require an extension?

Mechanic - Do what? It can't be 11 o'clock already (*taps watch*). It's not.

Barman - No sir, I'm afraid that now we have to charge extra for conversation with guests that lasts for more than one minute. Would you be requiring an extra five or ten minutes? I can put it on your tab sir.

Mechanic - Tab? Paying to talk. This is outrageous. You mean we can't even have a chinwag. Never been heard of before. Where's George?
George!

George - (*apprehensively*) Good evening. Anything wrong?

Mechanic - Of course there's something wrong. This geezer won't hold down a conversation with me. I mean, I could understand if he can't, but he won't.

George - Yes, new regulations. Everybody's the same.

Mechanic - Listen I come here so I can talk about interesting subjects I don't have time for normally. I mean I've come to expect a certain kind of service here.

George - By the way, Mr. Norman's asked me to ask you if you'd accept a discount if you serviced his motor. (*The Mechanic looks as if he's going to explode*) Now don't blow a gasket.

Mechanic - Gasket! More like a big end, like the gearbox has dropped out of my life. I mean, I come on holiday to get a bit of intellectual gratification, and what do I get - surcharged! Emilia!

The Mechanic exits. Lights up on upper set right. Lawyer mimes about to enter room. Assistant 1 is waiting.

Lawyer - Good evening.

Assistant 4 - Evening Madam. Sign here please.

Lawyer - Pardon? There is no legal requirement to sign on entering one's pre-paid temporary residence.

Assistant 4 - Pardon me?

Lawyer - I've already paid for the room.

Assistant 4 - Sorry, Sir/Madam. New regulations. Must sign before I can open the door.

Lawyer - Absolutely ridiculous. Oh very well, in the interests of legal approbation.

Assistant 4 - I'm sorry?

Lawyer - To save any trouble.

The Lawyer signs and enters but is followed by Assistant 4.

Assistant 4 - And could you sign to acknowledge entry, Sir/Madam?

Lawyer - This is too much. Never in all my years before the bench have I met with such obdurate behaviour. I am going to exercise my right to question the prima facie evidence.

Assistant 4 - Do I understand that you wish to make a complaint?

Lawyer - Indeed I do.

Assistant 4 - Then why didn't you say so? Sign here... And here... And here.

Lawyer - *(screams)* Aah! Petulia, Emilia.

Exits. The action cuts to lower set right. The Psychic is standing, meditating. Lights switch to lower set left and Assistant 5.

Psychic - *(places a hand to her head)* Now let me see if I can get a connection. *(struggles hard)*

Assistant 5 - Thank you for calling Intertime. If you wish to predict the future key star and I now.

The lights cross fade to lower set right and the Psychic redoubles her efforts. The lights cross fade to lower set left.

Thank you. You have registered your intention to see into the future. You will be charged at a rate of £1 per second. Please enter your credit or debit card details and key "2" now.

Psychic shakes with concentration.

You have not keyed "2". Transmission ends. Thank you. *(Assistant 5 exits)*

The lights cross fade to lower set right where the Psychic mumbles to herself.

Psychic - George, George. I can't seem to make contact.

George - *(enters)* That's because you're on the wrong line.

Psychic - I don't quite ... My vision has always been clear, up to now.

George - I suggest you read the future more clearly. No cash - no vision. The new code of practice, miss.

Psychic - I must, what must I do?

George - Complain?

Psychic - Ah yes *(places fingers to forehead)*!

The lights cross fade to centre set top where the Model prepares to practice her catwalk. She gets as far as lower set right.

Model - *(looks around)* Now, where is Herbert? Never mind, I can introduce myself. *(In commentator's voice)* And here, presenting the oldest evening gown from the House of Drac...

As she begins her walk she is intercepted by Assistant 6.

Assistant 6 - I'm sorry Madam, I'm afraid you can't walk in the gallery.

Model - I have always practiced here. Miss Emilia is most accommodating.

Assistant 6 - According to Schedule 1, paragraph 3, subsection C, the guests are not to be disturbed.

Model - Are you suggesting that I am disturbing?

Assistant 6 - Nothing personal, Madam, but Mr. Norman considers the appearance of a white-faced lady in red, at the dead of night, pacing the corridors as something to be avoided.

Model - *(takes a step towards the Assistant)* This is ridiculous. *(Stops)* Don't be afraid. I won't bite you. There is not enough blood in your veins, underling. *(She turns away in contempt)* Emilia, Petulia!

Lights cross fade to upper set left where the Trainspotter is trying to open the window of his room. He phones reception.

Trainspotter - Reception? Ah, good. I ... er ... need some assistance. You see, it's the 5.27 Goods Train from London. Yes, yes, pulled by a LNER 506. Yes, the one with the closing portals for the firebox door. It's *(looks at watch)* 5.20 and I can't get the window open. Can you send someone up?

Almost immediately Assistant 7 arrives.

Assistant 7 - Can I help you, sir?

Trainspotter - Yes. Time pressing. Can you open the window?

Assistant 7 - One moment, sir *(checks files)*. Ah yes, window closed due to prior breakage. Do you require it to be re-opened?

Trainspotter - *(becoming increasingly agitated)* Of course, it's the 5.27 arriving on the branch line.

Assistant 7 - If you could just sign the insurance indemnity form.

Trainspotter - What?

Assistant 7 - I'm afraid due to the prior breakage we must ask you to sign a waiver on the insurance.

Trainspotter - Anything.

Assistant 7 - Sign here. *(Trainspotter signs)* And here. *(Trainspotter signs)* And one more here. *(Trainspotter signs)* And one for luck. *(Trainspotter signs)* Thank you, sir. *(Assistant 7 opens window)*

Trainspotter - What time is it?

Assistant 7 - 5.28, sir.

Trainspotter screams, jumps at the Assistant as s/he is leaving, trips and falls

flat on his face.

Assistant 7 - And for your information sir we will only be running approved trains on the branch line from now on and all steam trains have been cancelled.

Trainspotter - No – o – o – o!

Lights cross fade to upper set right.

Scientist - *(to himself)* Where has all the equipment gone? Why can't I get into the attic? There's a fine storm brewing. And where are the Vegans?

Assistant 8 - *(enters)* Can I help, Sir?

Scientist - No, I want Igor.

Assistant 8 - I'm afraid we've had to let him go sir.

Scientist - I know he behaved like a wild animal at times but I didn't realize he was caged.

Assistant 8 - He was laid off sir, sacked.

Scientist - I don't understand. He was perfect for the job.

Assistant 8 - We've had to downsize to make economies sir.

Scientist - Really, I thought the size was perfect. In that case you'll have to do. Walk this way.

Assistant 8 - Should we do this, Sir? It is rather an old joke.

Scientist - What?

Scientist limps across set followed and copied by the Assistant.

Now why is the attic door locked?

Assistant 8 - I'm afraid the facility has been closed. Mr. Norman has decided the upkeep of the equipment and servants had to be weighed against other items of expenditure. Besides, there is the dry rot in the rafters, making it unsafe.

Scientist - The dry rot added character. How could I escape if the monster on awakening didn't fall through the floor! You are trying to save money at my expense. Emilia!