

WORD

By Jerold London

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WORD

TIME AND PLACE

Present.

A table for two in the elegant dining room of a London private club.

An open fire is discreetly burning in the corner.

On the table is a vase filled with roses (red, matching the drapes, rug, and Kate's dress and shoes).

CHARACTERS

KATE.

WILLIAM BUTLER, Kate's husband.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

SCENE 1

Before lights.

KATE

What's the name of this secret club again?

Where we're having dinner?

WILLIAM BUTLER

"Word."

KATE

What "World?"

WILLIAM BUTLER

No. "Word." Just "Word."

Like, may I have a private word with you?

KATE

Oh. I've never heard of "Word."

Or any private club with a name like that. Sounds like a bookseller's.

WILLIAM BUTLER

Maybe they haven't heard of us either....

Except, of course, Gordon assured me that he would be telling them.

And promised we would be properly received.

KATE

We'll see.

Pause.

Lights rise. KATE and WILLIAM BUTLER are seated at a table at Word. First course has been served, with drinks. KATE is drinking gin; WILLIAM BUTLER, Veuve Cliquot brut.

KATE

I have *never!*!... Did you tell them to bring me this?

WILLIAM BUTLER

No. But Gordon knows that gin is your one and only. He must have told them. Why? Is something wrong?

KATE

Wrong? It's the best I've ever swallowed.
Nothing's ever felt so good.
I wonder what it is.

WILLIAM BUTLER

You're the expert, my Dear. What do you think it is?

KATE

I have no idea.
All I know is that it's the best ever, and not Hendrick's or Monkey's.
Not Cambridge, Nolet's, or Elephant, either. I know those.
And not Plymouth. It's from another world, it's that good.

WILLIAM BUTLER

Well, enjoy it, my Love.
This evening's meant to be your special treat we'll remember forever.

KATE

It was so funny, how they let us in, wasn't it?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Funny?

KATE

I mean, "strange." Well, funny, too, knocking at the door the way you did.

WILLIAM BUTLER

Gordon gave me the knock....

KATE

But it didn't work, did it?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Not until I tried it with my left hand.

KATE

And who told you to do that?

WILLIAM BUTLER

You did, Sweetheart. But how did you know?

KATE

Woman's intuition.

WILLIAM BUTLER

It makes absolutely *no* sense. None.

Who can tell the difference between a right-handed knock,
and a left-handed knock?

KATE

Maybe the wood can.

WILLIAM BUTLER

What wood?

KATE

The door, Silly.

WILLIAM BUTLER

The door knows which side of the body a knock comes from?

KATE

I know *I* would.

WILLIAM BUTLER

But you have eyes.

KATE

And wood has knots.

But what difference does that make? I could tell with my eyes *shut*.

WILLIAM BUTLER

Like you can tell your gin.

KATE

Precisely.

WILLIAM BUTLER

All right. You win.

KATE

However, that's not what I was talking about.

WILLIAM BUTLER

Which was?

KATE

How funny it was ... strange it was, the way they let us in.

WILLIAM BUTLER

Because they knew our names?

Gordon told them, I told you. He *must* have.

KATE

Not that they *knew* our names, but how they welcomed us back,
as though we'd just been here, a night or two ago.

WILLIAM BUTLER

I figured it was simply their way of being polite ... to Gordon, *and* us.

KATE

But when they saw that look on your face,
how they tried to smooth it over the way they did.

WILLIAM BUTLER

It was a little funny, wasn't it?

KATE

It felt ... woman's intuition thing, you know, like you had been here not long ago,
but with another woman. Like that.

WILLIAM BUTLER

Kate!

You know that's not true.

KATE

I didn't say it was true....
William B, we've been married for donkey's years.
And, yes, I know for a fact that it couldn't be true.
I *know* you. You'd never do anything in the world like that to me.
And be so stupid about it.
But it *was* funny, though.

Lights dim to darkness, and then return.

KATE

How's your wine?

WILLIAM BUTLER

It's so Veuve Cliquot, it's a cliché of itself. It's that perfect.

KATE

This whole place seems that perfect, doesn't it?
The waiters, in their white gloves.
They wait! And they know exactly what we want.
We hardly had to order, they knew us that well.
How many restaurants ... or clubs for that matter, have waiters who can't wait to come over to ask you how the first bite of whatever they've just served tastes?

WILLIAM BUTLER

I know.
Word is outstanding.

KATE

I'd say the word is positively extraordinary. Out of this world.

WILLIAM BUTLER

I meant

KATE

[*beat*] What?

WILLIAM BUTLER

[*beat*] I meant what you said ... this place is peaceful and heavenly.

KATE

That's what I was thinking.
We really do owe Gordon a special thank you for this.

Pause.

KATE

How much is this costing?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Oh, Gordon insisted that the whole evening is his treat.

KATE

What?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Yes.

KATE

But with the champagne and gin and all, and if we get dessert, it could run a thousand pounds, at the least!

WILLIAM BUTLER

Gordon will be pleased.

He doesn't want anything more than to know what a special evening this is for us. And it is, isn't it?

KATE

Of course.

WILLIAM BUTLER

And how especially beautiful you are tonight.

The new dress, and shoes, and all....

Kate, you are the most beautiful woman here. Everybody can see that.

But not just here. Tonight you are the most beautiful woman in the world.

But I've already told you that, haven't I?

KATE

What do they think?

WILLIAM BUTLER

What do they think?

KATE

Yes.

What do you think they are thinking right now?

About you and me?

WILLIAM BUTLER

How much is this costing?

KATE

No!

She slaps him affectionately on the hand.

KATE

I mean, do you think they think we're just a husband-and-wife couple having dinner out together?

That we do this all the time?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Oh, I doubt that.

Being members, as they are, they likely all realize that this is our first Word experience.

KATE

Our first "word" experience?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Our first experience being at this club....

You remember, don't you that, the club is named "Word?"

KATE

Oh, of course.

But ... do you think they think we're so nonchalant about it, that this isn't the most impressive date you've ever taken me on? in our lives?...

Or, do you think they think I'm your mistress, and your wife has no idea what you're doing?

WILLIAM BUTLER

My Lord! I hope that's not what they're thinking....

You mean, because of how magnificent you look tonight?

KATE

[in a teasing way] Don't I always?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Of course you do. You are the most beautiful woman in the world to me. Always. And to the end of time, the woman I love.

KATE

Are you making a pass at me?

WILLIAM BUTLER

How much gin have you had?

KATE

That's another thing.

The gin is the absolute best these trembling lips have ever tasted ... but ...

WILLIAM BUTLER

[*beat*] But what?

KATE

I hardly feel a thing.

And I've had a good share, by now....

Will?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Yes?

KATE

Do you think people still make love after they die?

WILLIAM BUTLER

You mean, do I think there is sex in heaven?

KATE

That's another way of putting it.

WILLIAM BUTLER

Not having passed the pearly gates myself yet ...

and no plans to in the near future, I might add,

it's something I haven't given much thought to.

But, since you ask, I'll tell you what has occurred to me ...

in the past, when I've thought about it.

KATE

[*beat*] Go ahead.

WILLIAM BUTLER

I don't think we know an ounce about what making love is really about,
compared to what they know in heaven.

Most of us don't, that is.

KATE

What do they know in heaven?
About making love?
That we don't know?

WILLIAM BUTLER

I think you'd agree with me, that making love is more in the mind than it is in the glands.
Right?

KATE

I think you're probably correct there.
So where does that get us?
You can't scratch your brain to relieve an itch.

WILLIAM BUTLER

The problem is that human beings over-plan love-making.
I mean, way, way over-plan it.
Even tonight.
Most couples would be sizing up an experience like this one in terms of what it's leading to.
Namely, do the man and the woman make it in bed together tonight?
Right?
And that's a waste!

KATE

A waste???

WILLIAM BUTLER

A waste, because the two things are both, but separately, precious in their own right.
They shouldn't depend on one another for validation.
This meal is the most exquisite we may ever experience.
Not just the tastes.
The aromas.
The feel and sound of the plates and the silverware around us.
Even the music. Have you noticed it?

KATE

The music?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Yes, the music they're playing.

KATE

It's so soft in the background ... no. No, Will, I actually hadn't noticed.

WILLIAM BUTLER

If I didn't know something of everything Beethoven had ever written, I'd swear on my life it was Beethoven. But it isn't....
Isn't that strange? Something Beethoven, and more beautiful?

KATE

Do you want to know what *I* think is more beautiful?

WILLIAM BUTLER

What?

KATE

You.
A man in a tuxedo.

WILLIAM BUTLER

Thank you.

KATE

No. Thank *you*.

WILLIAM BUTLER

I didn't quite plan it that way, but it illustrates what I was saying.

KATE

What?

WILLIAM BUTLER

That unplanned love is a world apart from the other thing.

KATE

What other thing are you referring to?

WILLIAM BUTLER

The problem is that human beings over-plan love-making. And that is where expectations and disappointments creep in, to tarnish it. If we could discover making love like a majestic sunset, out of the blue, totally unexpected, we wouldn't have time to set our expectations, and then be disappointed.
Who's disappointed with the astonishment of a breath-taking sunset?

KATE

I'm afraid I'm not following the thread of this.
Do you mean that if a woman spends the best night of her life,
out on a date with the love of her life,
it shouldn't ever cross her mind that she'll want to have sex with him at the end?

WILLIAM BUTLER

It's only half of what I mean.
Of course it's nice to have feelings like that flower.
But where the tarnish comes in is when the woman begins to suspect the whole
thing was set up just to get her naked, in bed.

KATE

You're weird!
What woman thinks like that?

WILLIAM BUTLER

A woman with a man who thinks like that.

KATE

Is that how *you* think?

WILLIAM BUTLER

I guess I used to.
A lot of the time.
I wasn't perfect.

KATE

Oh.

WILLIAM BUTLER

But tonight, when you are the most attractive you have ever been

KATE

[*beat*] Tonight, you what?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Tonight I am not thinking that way at all.
I am simply, at a loss for words, transfixed by your grace and beauty.

KATE

At a loss for words, *here*?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Yes, even at the Word, the source itself.
Imagine that!

KATE

And you aren't thinking about making love to me tonight?

WILLIAM BUTLER

If I let myself think like that, than what could I think that you would think about me?

KATE

That maybe I love you?
That maybe I especially appreciate what you've done for me?

WILLIAM BUTLER

And what Gordon has done for us?

KATE

And I'm supposed to think he's wanting to go to bed with me, too?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Could be.

KATE

That thought never, once crossed my mind, William Butler!

WILLIAM BUTLER

But I bet it's crossed his!

KATE

You make things way too complicated, you know.

WILLIAM BUTLER

That's the point I'm trying to explain.
That when I try to think how you're thinking about what we're doing,
and when you try to think about how I'm thinking about what we're doing,
everything starts to get rolled up into a ball of string, and gets tangled.

KATE

So we should just stop thinking?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Maybe not *stop*, but do less thinking with that thinking part of our brains.

KATE

Then what's left to do our thinking with?

WILLIAM BUTLER

The intuitive part of our minds.
The creative part.
The imagination.
And let more sheets fly to the wind.

KATE

You're making things *more* complicated.

WILLIAM BUTLER

Or trusting more in life, than I have before.
At least about the tangles of love-making.

KATE

But love *is* tangled.

WILLIAM BUTLER

Yes.
Yes!
On Earth, love *is* tangled.
That's why I said that in heaven they know much more what real love is really about.

KATE

Give me an example, of how you picture the way they make love in heaven.

WILLIAM BUTLER

All right.
Two people, free of the mind's preplanning, are walking the fields and clouds of heaven.
And unexpectedly, they fall into each other completely.
Unplanned.
Into the heart and throes of making love before either one of them knows what is happening, exactly.
The climax would be overwhelming.

KATE

I'm afraid your view of heaven is a pipe dream.
How could anything like that go on up there, with the angels watching?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Well, you asked, and I told you.
And, it might all be a dream.
Some people claim that life is but a dream.
Don't they?

KATE

So ... if I happen to take my clothes off tonight,
thinking nothing's going to happen,
and something does,
what then?
You've lost your mind?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Don't think about it.

KATE

Till when?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Pretend you'll never think about it,
and let love happen all over you, all at once,
like a stunning, unexpected sunset you'll never forget.

KATE

You want me because I'm beautiful.
I want you because of how you are, and how you think, and how good you are.
But we don't think about it. Right?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Think about this, if you must:
Sex is sacred love. In heaven and on earth.
Incense smoking on the altar.
Cool streams murmuring through apple branches.
Quivering leaves under a rose arbour.
Cups like these, filled with the nectar of your scent.

KATE

Dear Lord!
I wish you were always this romantic.

She reaches across to take his hand.

Lights dim to darkness, and then return.

KATE

Will ... this is the longest I can remember for you not to be talking about Maria.

WILLIAM BUTLER

She called me this morning.

KATE

She did?!

WILLIAM BUTLER

She wants me and her to write a book.
And give it to the school library.

KATE

A book about what?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Well, I'll write it, and she'll illustrate it.

KATE

That sounds like fun.
What's the story about?

WILLIAM BUTLER

It's a children's book, of course,
and I was imagining a story that's been in the back of my mind a long time.

KATE

About what?

WILLIAM BUTLER

About a little girl, who has dreamed for as long as she can remember about
finding that special teddy bear in her life.

KATE

You truly do love her, don't you?

WILLIAM BUTLER

My granddaughter?

KATE

Yes. Maria.

WILLIAM BUTLER

[*pause*] Yes. I. Do....
I can't justly explain it, Kate.
You know I love you.
But ... Maria is different.
If I were a better writer, it would be a morning like this morning was.
Totally overcast.
No blue in sight.
Walking alone, when suddenly there's an earthquake in the cloud right over my head.
And through a single crack shines a solitary beam of light, down,
as if directly from heaven.
And it comes at me.
Until like an arrow, it pierces my heart, and I die for it.
And I know at that moment, regardless of all of the rest of my life,
regardless of everything else I'd ever known or would come to know,
that she, and how I feel for her, would be the last light and memory I would take
with me to eternity's sunrise.

KATE

That bad, eh?

WILLIAM BUTLER

The last word I'll know, at the very end.
Maria.
Those blue eyes of hers, that take the whole world in.
And accept it.
And share with it the most profound love, from a nine-year-old's heart.

KATE

All of a sudden, was it?
No preplanning?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Touché.

KATE

[*beat*] Well then.
Tell me more of the teddy bear story.

WILLIAM BUTLER

The little girl is named Maria.

KATE

Of course.

WILLIAM BUTLER

And she tells her parents how she can see this one, special teddy bear in her dreams.

And then, one morning, she excitedly announces to them that he's coming. All they have to do is to go to Scotland to find him.

KATE

Scotland?!

WILLIAM BUTLER

The North Sea, actually.

Off Scotland.

You see, he's with the whales there.

KATE

This is crazy!

WILLIAM BUTLER

It's a children's story.

Listen:

When Tommy Teddy Bear was a tiny teddy bear,
he took a great big teddy bear's fall.
From the back of a goose, a long-necked goose,
at the top of the wind with the screech of an owl,
he fell and he fell, and he yelled and he yelled.
From the back of a spruce and a high-flying goose,
with the cry of a peacock, and the shriek of a cat,
he tossed and he tumbled through clouds of pink lace.
He flopped and he bumbled all over the place.
And then with a splat and a bend in his knee,
he splashed in the lap of the waves of North Sea.
Yes, he dropped on a dot, and up to his ears,
in waters of Scotland, the sea of salt tears.

Now, a sea of salt tears is a home of its own.
It's a place for the fishes and for creatures alone.
It's a place for some sailors and mysteries unknown.
But no place for a teddy, to find Tommy a home.

KATE

Fascinating....
From your brain?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Not my *brain*.
My sheer imagination, which resides south somewhat of the brain.
And is often at war with it.

KATE

Anything more you've written yet?

WILLIAM BUTLER

A little.

A lonely little teddy, drifting at sea,
looking and looking for someone to see.
Fish and more fish, and a great big whale,
eels, and stray seals, and a distant sail.
A sail in the distance attached to a boat,
tacking and trimming where Tommy's afloat.

"O wonderful whale, would you give me a ride?
I so need a ride," the teddy bear cried.

The whale heard the words, with a bit of surprise –
Tommy's too weeny for walloping whale eyes.
He looked and he looked, but he couldn't see,
where in the world tiny Tommy might be.
So he circled about, blowing water up high,
till again he could hear the teddy bear's cry.

"O thank you, fine whale, for finding small me,
I'm flying atop your rain from the sea."
Up and down, up and down, they started to play,
riding waves and the whale spouts through noon of the day.
Catching blue and sea green, and a far-away white –
the sail of the sailboat was still in their sight.

KATE

Is the little girl in that sailboat?
I bet she is.
Little Maria.

WILLIAM BUTLER

You'll see.

Humpty bump, humpty bump, Tommy bounced on his ride,
when, smack, swam another whale alongside.
A girl friend of Moby's came joining their swim;
and the two of them frolicked and forgot about him.

For the rest of the day, while the whales leapt around,
little Tommy got drenched, and nearly got drowned.
With a sun's early setting, red-glowing the sky,
O! the sailboat's white sail was so passing nearby.

Here's what you've been waiting for:

"Look, Mommy, look," said a lass with curled hair,
"two giant whales, dancing, and a brown teddy bear.
Can't you see the wee teddy, floating in their two streams?
Take me close, and I'll scoop him. He's the bear of my dreams."

Miss curly-haired bravery did just what she said,
which landed sweet Tommy a home on her bed.
"You're the teddy already I've hugged in my mind.
You're the perfect of smugglers I've dreamed I could find."

And that's it, Book 1. How Maria finds Tommy.

KATE

Book 1?

WILLIAM BUTLER

After it sells a few thousand copies,
Maria and Tommy's story will go all sorts of other wild places.
Into far-off forests in Germany. To South Africa.
Even the dark side of the moon.

KATE

You do have your plans!

WILLIAM BUTLER

Look. They've given us a message, rolled up and tied with a bow.

KATE

Our fortune? Open it.

WILLIAM BUTLER

Unties the ribbon, unrolls the paper, and reads.

A capricious little breeze, dancing up from the surface of the water, tossed the aspens, shook the dewy roses and blew lightly and caressingly in their faces; and with its soft touch came instant oblivion. For this is the last best gift that is carefully bestowed: the gift of forgetfulness. Lest the awful remembrance should remain and grow, and overshadow mirth and pleasure, and the great haunting memory should spoil all the after-life.

Lights dim to darkness, and then return.

KATE

How's your wine?

WILLIAM BUTLER

It's so Veuve Cliquot, it's a cliché of itself. It's that perfect.

KATE

This whole place seems that perfect, doesn't it?
The waiters, in their white gloves.
They wait! And they know exactly what we want.
We hardly had to order, they knew us that well.
How many restaurants ... or clubs for that matter, have waiters who can't wait to come over to ask you how the first bite of whatever they've just served tastes?

WILLIAM BUTLER

I know. Word is outstanding.

KATE

I'd say the word is positively extraordinary. Out of this world.

WILLIAM BUTLER

I meant

KATE

[beat] What?

WILLIAM BUTLER

[beat] I meant what you said ... this place is peaceful and heavenly.

KATE

That's what I was thinking.
We really do owe Gordon a special thank you for this.

Pause.

KATE

How much is this costing?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Oh, Gordon insisted that the whole evening is his treat.

KATE

What?

WILLIAM BUTLER

Yes.

KATE

But with the champagne and gin and all, and if we get dessert, it could run a thousand pounds, at the least!

WILLIAM BUTLER

Gordon will be pleased.

He doesn't want anything more than to know what a special evening this is for us. And it *is*, isn't it?

KATE

Of course.

WILLIAM BUTLER

And how especially beautiful you are tonight.

The new dress, and shoes, and all....

Kate, you are the most beautiful woman here. Everybody can see that.

But not just here. Tonight you are the most beautiful woman in the world.

But I've already told you that, haven't I?

KATE

I'm about to cry, I'm so happy.

This is the most wonderful memory of my life.

And I want to keep it, forever.

END