

MR. WINKLE IS A CHILDREN'S STORY

By Jerold London

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In loving appreciation of the genius of Mrs. Liz Flatt, author, mother, and storyteller supreme.

MR. WINKLE IS A CHILDREN'S STORY

TIME AND PLACE

2025.

Crossland University, Grahamstead, Surrey, England, and vicinity.

Center stage: A windowless rehearsal room on the first floor of a Crossland University lecture hall, outside of which is a small garden. The walls of the rehearsal room are temporarily fixed with numerous rolls of draw-down brown drawing paper, together with several additional flip-chart art easels about the room for drawing. Boxes of chinks and multi-colored drawing pens are by the walls and easels.

At one side of the stage, toward the back: Anthony's bedroom. Attached to it, but not visible to the audience, is his bathroom.

CHARACTERS

LANE ANTHONY, male, mid 30s, semi-retired writer of children's books.

CARA KNOWLTON, female, mid 30s, CEO of the One Pound Fund (a national lottery supporting community, sport, arts, educational, and heritage projects across the UK).

LAWRENCE WILLIAM ('Lawrie') BLAKE, male, mid to late 20s, actor and songwriter.

BEVERLY ('Neverly') GAINSBOROUGH, female, mid to late 20s, artist and caricaturist.

Four children – three by their own names, one named KIMBERLEY.

... in the dialogue indicates either a thoughtful break or an interruption.

SCENE 1

ANTHONY, in his bedroom, wakes, goes into the unseen bathroom, showers, and returns into his bedroom wearing pants.

He finishes dressing, picks up a letter from the nightstand in his bedroom, briefly re-reads it, puts it in the pocket of his sports jacket, and exits.

On the way to the lecture hall ANTHONY passes a child on the street.

SCENE 2

ANTHONY arrives at the center stage lecture hall, enters and finds his way to the rehearsal room. Seated at the table is KNOWLTON, who rises as ANTHONY enters.

ANTHONY

My apologies.
I'm new to this campus.
Am I in the right place?

KNOWLTON

You're here for the One Pound Fund Project?

ANTHONY

That's me.

KNOWLTON

Extends her right hand.

Well, I'm Cara Knowlton, CEO of the One Pound Fund.
Pleased to meet you.

ANTHONY

Shakes her hand.

I'm Lane Anthony.
Maybe you guessed....
I don't know....
I used to write children's books.
Is that why I got this letter?

Showing.

KNOWLTON

I know your work.
It was some of the best ... before you stopped writing....

ANTHONY

[*beat*] I lost my genius.
I'm plain Lane, now.

KNOWLTON

We'll see.

**BLAKE arrives outside the lecture hall,
enters and finds his way to the rehearsal
room.**

**KNOWLTON and ANTHONY are still
standing.**

BLAKE

My apologies.
Am I in the right room?

KNOWLTON

If you've come for the One Pound Fund Project, you are.

BLAKE

Hello.

Extends his right hand to KNOWLTON.

I am Lawrence William Blake.

KNOWLTON

Shakes his hand.

A pleasure to meet you, Lawrence.

BLAKE

Mostly I'm called Lawrie.

KNOWLTON

Lawrie, it is.

I'm Cara Knowlton, who wrote you; and this is Lane Anthony.

They shake hands.

BLAKE

Lane Anthony, the children's story writer?

ANTHONY

Semi-retired.

BLAKE

Your stories were great.
I loved them.

ANTHONY

Thank you.

BLAKE

I write children's songs, myself, and some others.
And act, when I get a part.
My career's not off to a flying start, I'm afraid.
Mostly I wait on tables to keep the wolf from the door.

ANTHONY

You're young.

BLAKE

I've been thinking that; but not as young as I used to be.

KNOWLTON

None of us are.

GAINSBOROUGH arrives outside the lecture hall, enters and finds her way to the rehearsal room.

KNOWLTON, ANTHONY, and BLAKE are still standing.

GAINSBOROUGH

Excuse me.
Is this the place for the One Pound Fund Project?

KNOWLTON

It is.
I am Cara Knowlton, CEO of the Fund.

GAINSBOROUGH

Hi.
Extends her right hand to KNOWLTON.
I'm Beverly Gainsborough.... You wrote me.

KNOWLTON

Shakes her hand.
A pleasure to meet you.
[*indicating*] And this is Lane Anthony.

They shake hands.

KNOWLTON

[*indicating*] And this is Lawrie Blake.

They shake hands.

BLAKE

'Beverly,' you said your name is?

GAINSBOROUGH

'Beverly.'
But lots of people call me 'Neverly' though.

BLAKE

Should I ask?

GAINSBOROUGH

Probably not now.

BLAKE

Okay.

GAINSBOROUGH

[to KNOWLTON] So ... I'm a bit confused.
And I've been wondering about it.
You say in your letter that this is a project to create a new children's story.
A play ... or maybe a film.
But I'm an artist.
I sketch people. Make funny caricatures.
Why am I here?

KNOWLTON

Let's sit down.

**They all sit on the same side of the table
(facing the audience).**

KNOWLTON

To answer your question, Beverly, it's a *children's play* ... on the surface.
It's for children, and the people who come to see it with them.
And it will depend on the visual effects as much as on the story.
A play with live actors, and puppets, too, possibly.
Not an animated film sort of thing.
And we need an artist of your calibre to transform the stage into a children's
kingdom.
A kingdom of imagination.
The way I believe you can do.

GAINSBOROUGH

Okay. Just wondering.
You're the boss.

KNOWLTON

I imagine all of you are wondering about the project the national lottery fund has in mind.
Well, it's meant to be entertaining, and silly, and childish, and package something of an uplifting message or moral, so to speak.

GAINSBOROUGH

What kind of moral?

KNOWLTON

Let's just say, we don't know that yet.
Whatever fits.
Okay?

GAINSBOROUGH

I like stories where one of the characters has to use her wits to avoid another character making a disastrous mistake, without embarrassing him.

KNOWLTON

We'll see what we can do.

ANTHONY

Or taking a famous person from someplace else, and putting him into the story in some unexpected way.

KNOWLTON

Like: 'And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen?'

ANTHONY

O no! I didn't mean anything like that.
I don't think we want to be telling children that Jesus walked on our shores, back in the day, and told stories to the Britons that aren't in the Bible.

BLAKE

Who'd believe anything like that in the first place?

KNOWLTON

Other than your namesake?

BLAKE

My namesake??...

Oh, you mean William Blake, that old fart!

KNOWLTON

William Blake wrote a number of children's stories in his day.

GAINSBOROUGH

And illustrated them, too.

ANTHONY

I think, that if that's where you're headed, we'll be toasting our creation with large cups of bitter wine. But what do I know?

GAINSBOROUGH

[to KNOWLTON] Do you have any idea where the story might begin?

KNOWLTON

It begins in our imaginations.

But as a starter, let me suggest a story a friend of mine told me, that her mother told her and her sisters, at bedtime ages ago.

GAINSBOROUGH

What's that?

KNOWLTON

A wanderer, named Mr. Winkle.... Just plain Mr. Winkle at first. He's arrived in Mrs. Squirrel's neck of the woods, looking for suitable accommodations.

GAINSBOROUGH

What's this Mr. Winkle look like?

KNOWLTON

Tall (for a two-legged inhabitant of a forest). Sort of a man, but not the height of a man. And thin. Unimaginably thin.

Wearing a natty heather tweed suit with a neat handkerchief in the top pocket and well shined brogues.

GAINSBOROUGH

Like this?

GAINSBOROUGH goes to the wall, pulls down a strip of brown drawing paper to the floor, and begins sketching a concept of Mr. Winkle.

GAINSBOROUGH

What are his head and face like?

KNOWLTON

Picture his hair as one long daisy chain tumbling down his back, kindly eyes and mouth, and a sweetly curled up caterpillar for a nose.

GAINSBOROUGH continues drawing, including the features that KNOWLTON has described.

GAINSBOROUGH

What else?

KNOWLTON

In a sunny, grassy clearing he sees a huge old oak tree casting deep shade. In the oak he discovers two polished doors, one short and round, and the other tall and thin.

GAINSBOROUGH pulls down another strip of brown paper and sketches the tree and doors.

GAINSBOROUGH

Go on.

KNOWLTON

There's a notice pinned to the short round door that advertises: 'Room to let, suitable for a tall tenant. Enquire within.'

GAINSBOROUGH adds the notice to her drawing of the tree.

KNOWLTON

Intrigued, Mr. Winkle stoops down and knocks at the short round door. It opens to reveal a plump squirrel in a flowery apron.

GAINSBOROUGH pulls down a third strip of brown paper to sketch Mr. Winkle knocking at the door.

And then a fourth strip of brown paper to sketch the squirrel in a flowery apron answering the door.

KNOWLTON

They introduce themselves – Mr. Winkle and Mrs. Squirrel.
He asks about the advertised room, and she offers to show it to him.
Actually, Mrs. Squirrel is too plump to go through the tall thin door; but she unlocks it for Mr. Winkle to take a look inside.
Which he does.
It's perfect – very clean and cosy; a high ceiling inside the tree; and he fits easily through the door.

GAINSBOROUGH pulls down a fifth strip of brown paper to sketch the room in the tree behind the tall thin door.

KNOWLTON

He tells her how pleased he is with the room, and they agree the rent.
Mrs. Squirrel then suggests tea to celebrate.
But just as she can't get through his tall thin door, he can't get through her short round one either. So they have tea outdoors.

GAINSBOROUGH

Outdoors? In a forest? How's that?
How do they do that?

KNOWLTON

Mr. Winkle settles a bit uncomfortably on a tree root, careful not to get twigs and dirt on his suit; and she emerges from her home after a short time with tea and cakes on a tray.

GAINSBOROUGH pulls down a sixth strip of brown paper to sketch the tea party.

BLAKE

What do they chat about?

KNOWLTON

I'm not sure. My friend didn't tell me that.

ANTHONY

One thing or another, I'd suppose, until the subject comes up where Mr. Winkle has lived.

GAINSBOROUGH

Where was that?

ANTHONY

He's been homeless some of the time, I'd guess.

GAINSBOROUGH

Homeless!!

ANTHONY

Sleeping rough, and finding Good Samaritans for a bite to eat and a hot shower.

GAINSBOROUGH pulls down a seventh strip of brown paper to sketch Mr. Winkle walking down a country lane.

Underneath it she writes:

I WAS A STRANGER, AND YOU TOOK ME IN.

KNOWLTON

Enough of that! That's not at all the case!
Mr. Winkle is a story character, without a backstory.
There is not, and never was, any homelessness for him.

GAINSBOROUGH

Did he have any money?

KNOWLTON

Yes.

GAINSBOROUGH

How did he get it?

BLAKE

He sang songs, like a minstrel.

ANTHONY

Or told stories to children in Hyde Park.

GAINSBOROUGH

Or made street art.

ANTHONY

Or sold flowers in Covent Garden.

GAINSBOROUGH pulls down an eighth strip, to sketch him selling flowers.

KNOWLTON

Stop it! I told you. That's not a proper theme for a children's story.

GAINSBOROUGH

What about the Little Match Girl? That's a children's story.

ANTHONY

Or Eliza Doolittle?

BLAKE

The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain.

KNOWLTON

Absolutely no more! Mr. Winkle is my friend's mother's story; and if we're going to use it, we're going to use it as it was told.

Got that? No wild donkey extraneous additions.

ANTHONY

Yes, Sergeant.

KNOWLTON

These itinerant fancies of yours are not what we're here to tell.

Mr. Winkle is someone special.

Different from the rest.

Meeting people and making friends in his own, polite and proper way.

Do you understand what I'm saying?

ANTHONY

All I'm saying is that two of the greatest stories I've ever read have been about children without a real home....

Oliver Twist, and Les Mis.

KNOWLTON

Please.
I won't argue the point.
This is supposed to be a light and happy children's story.
I hope all of you can accept that.
Okay?

BLAKE

Okay

GAINSBOROUGH

Okay.

ANTHONY

Okay.

BLAKE

Be thankful, Lane.
At least it's not a story about bunnies, bears, and doe-eyed deer.

KNOWLTON

I suspect this is enough for this morning.
Let's take the rest of the day off, to think about it.
I'll see you here in the morning. At half nine. Okay?

BLAKE

Okay

GAINSBOROUGH

Okay.

ANTHONY

Okay.

They exit.

SCENE 3

ANTHONY, in his bedroom, finishes dressing and exits.

On his way across stage to the rehearsal room he again passes the same child on the street (whom he passed in Scene 1).

When he enters the rehearsal room he finds KNOWLTON, BLAKE and GAINSBOROUGH sitting, waiting for him.

The eight rolls of brown paper with Gainsborough's drawings on them are still hanging on the wall.

ANTHONY

Looks at his watch.

[to KNOWLTON] Just half nine. Isn't that the time you said?

KNOWLTON

As my father might say:

We're all here. Let's begin....

[beat] Any thoughts from yesterday?

BLAKE

I like the Winkle story.

It's new, and refreshing, and gives us lots of room to expand.

But one question.

KNOWLTON

Yes?

BLAKE

How are we going to stage the characters, with a short, fat squirrel and a man as thin as a board?

KNOWLTON

I picture normal sized actors. Children, I'd hope. One as tall and thin as can be found, and the other costumed as a fat, furry squirrel, set simply on stage with a few giant-sized trees.

BLAKE

Oh. I guess that would work.

GAINSBOROUGH

With some help from their friends.

ANTHONY

Help from your chinks, is more like it. And from the kids.
There's little limit to what kids' imaginations can do.

KNOWLTON

Then it's a 'go' to continue on with the Mr. Winkle story?

ANTHONY

I don't see why not.
We don't have anything better, do we?

BLAKE

Not that I see.

GAINSBOROUGH

But only '*Mr. Winkle*'?
Doesn't he have a first name?

KNOWLTON

I'm just getting to that.
After his chat with Mrs. Squirrel at their elevenses, Mr. Winkle goes for a stroll, to
take a look around his new neighbourhood.
Shortly he hears a very grumpy voice:

'Oh *Fiddle Dee Dee*
Oh *Fiddle Dee Dee*
Oh *Fiddle Dee Dee.*'

Curious, he investigates closer, and discovers that the voice is coming from a
gorse bush that is shaking wildly.
He peers inside and sees a hedgehog caught up in the thorns, thrashing about,
trying to get out.
'Calm down a bit, Little One,' he tells the urchin, 'and I'll get you out.'
Fortunately, Mr. Winkle always carries a small pair of nail scissors, for his nails,
and a comb, for his daisy petals; and he gently starts to snip away at the gorse
until the hedgehog can wriggle out, at which point Mr. Winkle uses his comb to
tease out the strands of gorse and thorns until the creature is free of all of it.

BLAKE

That was convenient.

KNOWLTON

That's theatre.

ANTHONY

That's children's stories.

KNOWLTON

Anyway, the hedgehog is very grateful, and asks whether he can do anything in return.

'If it's not too much trouble,' Mr. Winkle says, 'I'd like to have one of your spines to use as a pin.'

But only if it's no trouble.'

Instantly the hedgehog pulls out a long spine which he hands to Mr. Winkle, who uses it to attach a nearby flower to his heather tweed jacket, and they part friends.

GAINSBOROUGH goes to the wall, pulls down a ninth strip of brown paper, and begins to sketch Mr. Winkle with his new boutonnière.

GAINSBOROUGH

What happens next?

KNOWLTON

On his way home Mr. Winkle makes up a ditty, about the happenings of the day, from which he gets the title 'Dee Dee' at the end of his name.

BLAKE

What?

Something like?

'Brave Mr. Winkle

Dee Dee

Heard a cry of 'Fiddle Dee Dee'

From a hedgehog, stuck in a tree.

Then Mr. Winkle

Dee Dee

Cried, 'I'll set you free,

You can trust me.

I'm Mr. Winkle, Dee Dee!'

GAINSBOROUGH

Mr. Winkle Dee Dee.

She writes his name at the bottom of her sketch.

ANTHONY

Stuck in a tree?

BLAKE

I know.

But I couldn't think of a rhyme offhand for gorse bush.

GAINSBOROUGH

What next?

KNOWLTON

Mr. Winkle returns to the oak tree, where he finds Mrs. Squirrel bustling about, clearing up the tea things and sweeping the path free of crumbs.

'I've a new name,' he announces.

'Not Mr. Winkle, as we agreed?'

'Oh, still a Winkle, to be sure.

But with a new title at the end. *It's time for that.*

From now on I'm not a plain Winkle any longer.

Not on your life.

Now I am Mr. Winkle, Dee Dee.'

Mrs. Squirrel snorts down her squirrel nose, and tells him she hasn't time for such posh nonsense.

'You will always be just Mr. Winkle to me,' she says, 'and that's what it's time for.'

Pause.

BLAKE

I know what it's time for.

KNOWLTON

What?

BLAKE

Kids. Let's get some kids in here.

SCENE 4

ANTHONY, in his bedroom, finishes dressing, checks his watch, and exits.

On his way across stage to the rehearsal room he again passes the same child on the street (whom he passed in Scenes 1 and 3).

When he enters the rehearsal room he finds KNOWLTON, BLAKE and GAINSBOROUGH standing with three children, examining (and asking about) Gainsborough's nine rolls of drawings hanging on the wall.

Conversations with the children are impromptu and ad lib (challenging as that may prove to be at times).

ANTHONY

Looks at his watch again.

[aside to KNOWLTON] Ten minutes before half nine.
What's going on?

KNOWLTON

As my father might say:
We're here when it's time for all to be here.
I like being earlier than planned, in case something unplanned puts its foot down on my way, and I have to go 'round it.
My father likes that, too.
I guess you don't have those problems.
At least not that you'll be prepared for.

ANTHONY

I will be, in the future.

KNOWLTON

And not grumpy about it?

ANTHONY

You and I are not the same, are we?

KNOWLTON

No.
And yet ... I can see a common cloud between us.

ANTHONY

I hope not.
[*hastily adding*] What I mean by that is: I hope you're not under any clouds at all, to speak of.

KNOWLTON

No worries. I understand.

ANTHONY

[*beat*] Who are all these children?

KNOWLTON

From a school in town.
Their teachers have sent them, on our invitation, to hear about our tall, thin man, and Mrs. Squirrel, and maybe become actors in the play.

She claps her hands.

Okay now.
Let's take our seats and hear more about Mr. Winkle, Dee Dee.

**ANTHONY, GAINSBOROUGH, BLAKE
and KNOWLTON take the seats they had
before at the table – facing the audience.
The three children sit down on the
opposite side of the table.**

KNOWLTON

Well, children, you've heard and seen something about Mrs. Squirrel's forest, and her oak tree, and her new tenant, Mr. Winkle.
And their tea.
And his walk, where he saves a hedgehog.
He's back at Mrs. Squirrel's tree now, where he decides to take a nap, after so much excitement in the morning.
He fetches a blanket from his room inside the tree, and spreads it out in the shade.
Mrs. Squirrel puts on one of her everyday bonnets and takes a wicker basket to go shopping for dinner.

GAINSBOROUGH goes to an easel and sketches Mrs. Squirrel in her bonnet. Possibly a child or two join her.

KNOWLTON

Mr. Winkle drifts off to sleep, but is awakened by a splatter of raindrops on his face.

'Fiddle Dee Dee,' he cries out, and scrambles to get out of the rain.

He's begun to like the phrase.

But he can't get all the way up!

Something is holding his head down.

What on earth is happening?

Gingerly he reaches around and soon realises that all but the top three daisies of his daisy-chain hair have taken root, and are fixing him to the ground.

Reminding himself that he is become a brave and determined being, Mr. Winkle, Dee Dee feels in his jacket pocket for his trusty nail scissors, reaches round, and snips the rooted daisies from his hair.

GAINSBOROUGH goes to another easel and sketches Mr. Winkle's plight.

KNOWLTON

When Mrs. Squirrel returns home, her basket bulging, she finds Mr. Winkle Dee Dee sitting on a blanket in the wet grass collecting more daisies.

She helps him remake his daisy-chain, even longer and more beautiful than it was before, attaching it to the three daisies that remained on his head.

'Now 'tis time I fix us dinner.' she says.

'Never mind. I know you haven't had time to go shopping for yourself, so I'm going to cook dinner for both of us. For a treat.'

That pleases Mr. Winkle, and he tells her so.

She takes the basket into her house; and he goes into his tall, narrow room to dry off and comb out the petals of his new hair.

The caterpillar had crawled into Mr. Winkle's top pocket, to shelter from the rain; and as Mr. Winkle fishes it out to resettle it on his face, he realises that his handkerchief is all wet and dirty.

GAINSBOROUGH sketches Mr. Winkle's nose-less face on another easel.

KNOWLTON

Now Mr. Winkle cannot bear a dirty handkerchief, so he goes to get another from his hold-all.

GAINSBOROUGH

How many does he have?

KNOWLTON

He has seven altogether – one for each day of the week, in all the colours of red, mulberry, purple and green that match his heather tweed suit.

‘O Fiddle Dee Dee,’ he exclaims, ‘all my handkerchiefs are creased!’

What to do?

Mr. Winkle knocks for Mrs. Squirrel to ask her whether she has a flat iron he might borrow; and when she tells him, yes, he decides to buy an ironing board to make a proper job of it.

So he goes to the village ironmonger’s and returns with a shiny, new board.

He carries it through his tall, narrow door and begins to put it up.

But, O Fiddle Dee Dee! the room is too narrow.

One set of legs goes into the fireplace, while the other gets stuck halfway up the opposite wall.

ANTHONY

A fireplace??

Is it a smoking tree?

KNOWLTON

It’s a kids’ story, I’ve told you.

BLAKE

Yes, Lane.

It might even have dogs with eyes the size of teacups, beach balls, and water wheels in the basement.

Be patient.

ANTHONY

[*sarcastically*] Funny, Lawrie.

Very funny.

KNOWLTON

May I continue?

GAINSBOROUGH

Yes.

Please.

KNOWLTON

Mr. Winkle struggles and struggles with the ironing board.
It won't even go back outside, now that the board's been opened.
Finally, for all he's worth, Mr. Winkle Dee Dee manhandles it through the door –
by now slightly less shiny – and leans it against the oak.

**GAINSBOROUGH sketches Mr. Winkle
wrestling with the ironing board.**

KNOWLTON

In a bit of a sweat Mr. Winkle stoops down to knock at Mrs. Squirrel's door.
She comes out, wiping floury hands on her apron.
He explains his problem, and asks whether he can put the board up in *her* place.
She agrees; but, as it turns out, it's too long to go all the way inside her short,
round room.
Fiddle Dee Dee!
'Never mind,' she says.
'Fiddle Dee Dee,' he repeats.
'And stop all this Fiddle Dee Deeing, Mr. Winkle,' she replies.
'We'll leave the board partway in, and partway out, and I'll bring you a hot iron.'

So Mr. Winkle Dee Dee ...
Take note that although he's officially assumed this new addition to his name,
Mrs. Squirrel refuses to accept it, as pure vanity on his part.
Anyway, Mr. Winkle fetches his six remaining handkerchiefs and kneels down on
a blanket to iron all of them.
Mrs. Squirrel resists the urge to take over, as Mr. Winkle appears at first so
clumsy; but when she sees how neatly he irons, she goes inside and brings out her
bonnets for him to just crimp up the ruffles that frame her face.

BLAKE

Bonnets? [emphasising the plural]

KNOWLTON

She has four:
Two for everyday life.
One for best.
And the fourth for Easter.

**GAINSBOROUGH sketches Mr. Winkle
ironing his handkerchiefs, with Mrs.
Squirrel's bonnets waiting on the side.**

KNOWLTON

She thanks him, and tells him that dinner will be ready soon.
'Just time enough for an evening stroll to work up your appetite.'

Mr. Winkle sets off.

I think that's enough for all of us for today.
Thank you, Children, for coming to join us.
We'll see you tomorrow.

SCENE 5

ANTHONY, in his bedroom, finishes dressing, checks his watch, and exits.

This time on his way to the rehearsal room he does not cross paths with the child on the street (whom he saw in Scenes 1, 3 and 4).

When he enters the rehearsal room he has a shock. The three children of the day before are costumed, one as a very plump Mrs. Squirrel, one as a surprisingly tall Mr. Winkle, and the third as a hedgehog. But even more remarkable: The child he has seen before on the street is there, standing in the midst of the others. She is of an appropriate young age.

KNOWLTON notices the surprise on Anthony's face.

KNOWLTON

Which surprises you most?
The children's costumes, or our newcomer?

ANTHONY

I've seen that child before.
On the street, as I come here.
Who is she?

KNOWLTON

The children tell me she's an orphan. And homeless.
We all have just met her.
She says her mother died several months ago, and she has no one else.
And nowhere to go.
She's living in a vacant building in town.
Her name is Kimberley, she says.

ANTHONY

[*absolutely stunned*] O! My dear God!!

KNOWLTON

Are you all right?

ANTHONY

[*somewhat dazed*] What is unnamed is named.
What is rare is wild within us.
What is impossible is now.

KNOWLTON

Lane Anthony?... Are you okay?

ANTHONY

What are we going to do?

KNOWLTON

What should we do?...
What would you do?

ANTHONY

I'd give her a home in my small place, in a second.
But I can't do that.
I'm a man.
And a single man at that.

KNOWLTON

I believe I'm going to Hell, if I don't do what's right here.
Aren't I?

ANTHONY

There is no Hell.
It exists only in the mind.
It's only a story.
I've been there. I know.
Why are we even here? Telling stories?

KNOWLTON

Let's talk about this later.

ANTHONY

When?

KNOWLTON

Half seven.

ANTHONY

Where?

KNOWLTON

Here.

I've got a key to the hall.

ANTHONY

All right.

At seven then.

KNOWLTON

Half seven.

ANTHONY

I hear you.

GAINSBOROUGH comes up to them.

GAINSBOROUGH

The children want to hear some more of the story.

KNOWLTON

Claps her hands.

As my father might say:

There's no better time for a story to begin than the time for it to begin.

Everybody takes a seat.

**They all take their seats at the table – the
four children with their backs to the
audience.**

KNOWLTON

When Miss Beverly made her drawings yesterday, and the days before, she showed us how Mrs. Squirrel and Mr. Winkle see the world.

It's not our world, but it is a world that exists.

In the minds of children.

And in the minds of the two of them.

We left off with Mr. Winkle, Dee Dee, about to take an evening stroll before dinner.

He's pretty hungry; but Mrs. Squirrel has told him dinner will be ready in just enough time for him to take an evening stroll.

And Mr. Winkle knows good manners. So he heads off.

BLAKE

What good manners are those?

KNOWLTON

When your hostess tells you that dinner will be ready soon – in just enough time to take an evening stroll – you take an evening stroll, and don't hang around.

BLAKE

Oh.

The child costumed as Mr. Winkle walks around the table a couple of times.

KNOWLTON

As Mr. Winkle sets off, his nose starts to itch, and he wonders whether he is getting hay fever.

The child playing Mr. Winkle reaches up to scratch his nose, as the others watch.

KNOWLTON

He reaches up to scratch it, but the oddest thing: Instead of his usual furry ball, his nose feels hard and smooth. There's no mirror nearby, so he goes over to a small puddle where his new friend, the hedgehog, happens to be taking a drink.

The child costumed as the hedgehog gets up and joins the one playing Mr. Winkle.

KNOWLTON

'Hello,' he says to the hedgehog, 'been caught in any more gorse bushes lately?' His friend smiles, then looks up at Mr. Winkle Dee Dee with a concerned expression.

'What's happened to your nose?' he asks. 'It's gone all hard and shiny.'
'I don't know,' Mr. Winkle answers. 'I came over here to have a look in this puddle.'

The two of them stare down at the water together.

The two children stare at the floor.

KNOWLTON

Just as they are looking, the hard shiny nose begins to split in half, and out comes a beautiful butterfly, flexing and drying its multicoloured wings. They stare, astonished, as the butterfly spreads its wings and flies away.

The children playing the hedgehog and Mr. Winkle reach up and try to chase the butterfly.

KNOWLTON

'My dose, my dose,' cries Mr. Winkle, 'it's gone. All gone. What the Diddle Dee Dee will I do now?'

'Don't worry,' says the hedgehog, 'you've come to the right place! Wait here for me.

I eat things that look like your old nose all the time; and I know where to find them.'

GAINSBOROUGH

Oh yuk!

KNOWLTON

Claps her hands.

The hedgehog goes off, nose whiffing, and a few minutes later returns with a big, furry green caterpillar held gently in his mouth.

Pity not to eat it, he thinks to himself, but anything for a friend.

He drops the caterpillar at Mr. Winkle's feet, who picks it up and settles it on his face.

Looking down into the water, he sees that it is bigger and wrigglier than his old nose; and he decides it makes him look even more dignified.

'We must always be there to help one another and a friend,' he tells the hedgehog, giving him a careful stroke of the bristles.

The child playing Mr. Winkle gives the one playing the hedgehog a gentle pat on his costumed bristled back.

Pause.

GAINSBOROUGH

What happens next?

KNOWLTON

Mr. Winkle Dee Dee returns to the oak tree with his new nose just as Mrs. Squirrel comes out to look for him.

She sees his nose, and exclaims how wonderful, even noble, it looks.

He is delighted!

The child dressed as Mrs. Squirrel stands, goes to the child playing Mr. Winkle, and gives him a hug.

KNOWLTON

As it turns out, of course, dinner is ready.
Mrs. Squirrel declares with pride, 'I've made my favorite dish for you.
Acorn and earwig stew!'
And she ladles a big bowl of it for him.

GAINSBOROUGH

Oh double yuk!!

Suddenly the lights go out.

GAINSBOROUGH

Oh no!
I can't see.

**After a few moments a torch is lit by
KNOWLTON.**

KNOWLTON

Follow me.
It's a power outage.
We'll go outside, and I'll drive the children home.
We'll get together here tomorrow, at half nine.
Just the adults tomorrow; not you children.

**They exit in a line, hands on the waist of
the person in front, all following
KNOWLTON.**

SCENE 6

ANTHONY, in his bedroom, finishes dressing for the evening, picks up a letter from the nightstand, briefly re-reads it, puts it in the pocket of his suit coat, and exits.

He crosses the stage to the lecture hall and enters the rehearsal room. Lights are on.

KNOWLTON is seated, waiting for him. he sits down next to her.

ANTHONY

It's seven.
Why am I not surprised?

KNOWLTON

We had to get here early, to make certain the lights were on.

ANTHONY

We?

KNOWLTON

Kimberley and I.
She's waiting in the room across the hall.

ANTHONY

You've brought her with you?

KNOWLTON

Be serious.
What else would you expect I do?

ANTHONY

Nothing else, Cora, of course.
I know how you must feel. I feel the same.
It's natural to want to protect a child in need.

KNOWLTON

I know you know, Lane.

ANTHONY

She is homeless, then?

KNOWLTON

Yes.

I told her that.

When she denied it, I said, 'Girl! You're homeless!'

'I am not,' she cried.

'Then show me one thing that's yours.'

She pulled a Swiss army knife from her pocket.

ANTHONY

[*pause*] You love her then? Already?

KNOWLTON

I don't know whether I do or not.

This whole thing has come on so suddenly, and unexpectedly....

She's a sweet thing, though, and deserves to be loved.

ANTHONY

You know you're toying with a life-changing event, don't you?

KNOWLTON

I know...

And I'm frightened as Hell!

ANTHONY

That's almost the way it feels, finding love.

KNOWLTON

You know love? Or you know fear?

ANTHONY

Both. But the only person in my life I ever loved was a child.

KNOWLTON

Why?

ANTHONY

I suppose because we're a species that's hard-wired to love and protect children, more than anything else.

We'd risk our lives for them.

It's as fundamental for us as the fear of death.

KNOWLTON

Or the fear of rejection?

ANTHONY

Where's that coming from?

KNOWLTON

Me, I guess.... I let myself be deceived once, and the fear of it is still there.
All the way to becoming engaged, and telling all my friends and family.
Only to be dumped.
Dumped on a whim, for a better opportunity he figured.
[beat] I know I'm not such a good looker

ANTHONY

I don't agree....
It's not your looks, at all, that put me off at first.

KNOWLTON

What?

ANTHONY

Your tough-as-nails attitude.

KNOWLTON

I've earned it. I've paid my dues.
My pride's been shattered once; and once is more than enough for me.
If you don't have your pride, what do you have?

ANTHONY

No one says you haven't paid your dues.
I'm just saying that you're plenty enough an attractive woman.
Who doesn't appear to want any man to take notice.

KNOWLTON

Sometimes I feel I hate men.

ANTHONY

That's harsh.
Do you hate Mr. Winkle, too?

KNOWLTON

Laughs.

I hate lying and deception. Like men do to women. You can't trust them.

ANTHONY

Cara
There *are* honest, truthful men in the world.

KNOWLTON

Like you?

ANTHONY

What do you mean by that?
We hardly know each other.

KNOWLTON

So you assume.

ANTHONY

What are you talking about?
When have I ever crossed you?

KNOWLTON

You haven't.
A few disagreements, maybe, about the story we're producing.

ANTHONY

Then what are you talking about?

KNOWLTON

You're a man....
Who hides his emotions.

ANTHONY

Thank God, then, Kimberley is female.

KNOWLTON

What do you mean by that?

ANTHONY

If she were a boy, she'd be poop out of luck.

KNOWLTON

Laughs. (She can't help herself).
You run deeper than I expected.

ANTHONY

And I feel an undertow starting to change my perspective of you, too.

KNOWLTON picks up a paper lying on the table in front of her.

KNOWLTON

Did you write this?

ANTHONY

What is it?

KNOWLTON

[reads] Butterfly Wings

Butterfly wings
And firefly strings
Those wondrous things
To find in children's smiles!

But at a price – the randomness of life.
Butterflies and firefly lives aren't free, you see.

Time grants its holy moments, but never forever.
The joy of Kimberley, blind now but in the angels' eyes.

Like a stone drop in a lake
Rippling to the shore
My love of Child Kimberley
Expands to every child I see.
It's where and there, in all the faces,
Her loving grace rests faultlessly.

Or like a rainbow arc of selfless kindness
Reaching comfort near and far
Returning solace to the troubled waters of
My grieving parent flooded heart.

How can I go on living without her?
Unless I can feel her soul alive again.
I need to have that.
I'm nothing but a wandering firefly
Who loved a child more than she loved herself.

Why does a child prefer to catch a flying firefly, than watch?

Pause.

ANTHONY

Suppresses a sob.

How did you get that?

KNOWLTON

It is yours, isn't it?
It has your name on it.

ANTHONY

Yes; but how did you get it?

KNOWLTON

Off the web.

ANTHONY

Where?

KNOWLTON

Deep Weavers Faith.

ANTHONY

Nobody reads that website.

KNOWLTON

Nobody minus one.

ANTHONY

I don't understand.
Kimberley was a closed cabinet in my heart until today.
And now two of you.

KNOWLTON

It's a coincidence.

ANTHONY

There are no coincidences in life. Only random notes.

KNOWLTON

And random acts of kindness, as you say.

ANTHONY

And what we have the sense or passion to do with them.

KNOWLTON

You loved that girl.

ANTHONY

With everything I have.

KNOWLTON

Tell me about her.

Long pause.

ANTHONY

I was young.

Too young to give up my plans for life. For an unplanned pregnancy.

She was a friend.

Really ... only a friend. A good friend, but a friend.

We had fun together, but weren't in love with each other.

Either one of us. Not at all. Nothing that way.

And had too much to drink one night...

It was an accident.

A pure, unplanned accident.

And I didn't know what to do.

Except I knew we couldn't You know what I mean.

Then, out of the blue, an answer came for both of us.

From just about my only friend ... my only close friend.

The only person I told, told me he'd marry her.

And raise our child.

I could hardly believe it. At first I couldn't understand why.

He loved *me* that much.

And she was fine with it, too.

He was a good sort. And his family had money.

And we knew he would make a good father.

I was the best man at their wedding.

And the baby came.

Kimberley, she was called. Kimberley. Kimberley. Kimberley. The same name.

It's impossible.

I went to see her at the hospital. And at their house a few times.

Until one day, I don't truly know how it happened....

Tearing up.

KNOWLTON

[*beat*] You knew you loved her.

ANTHONY

There's nobody going to tell you what love really is.
Until you feel it for yourself.
Or how it comes at you, to hit you.
Out of nowhere.
And it hit me.
The first time I held her.
In my heart.
And in my mind.
And in my gut.
In all of me.
I was Kimberley's Uncle Lane; and her father; and the person who loved her most
in the world.
And you don't need to ask why. Some things just are.

KNOWLTON

You're lucky.

ANTHONY

I'm the most unlucky man alive.

KNOWLTON

To have had a love like that.

ANTHONY

To have had a loss like that.

KNOWLTON

That, too. That was unlucky.

ANTHONY

You don't figure it.
You figure you'll love your child, and in due course you leave them for whatever
awaits on the other side.
And it's not fair, if she leaves you first.

KNOWLTON

Your poem says you need to feel her soul alive....

ANTHONY

Have I?
Is that your question?
For me to have stayed alive all this time.

KNOWLTON

It might be.

ANTHONY

When she was alive, and we visited places, like London, and Brighton, and Stonehenge, and to her child sports matches, and dance recitals, and choral events

My God! I never missed a one.

And loved everything about them.

And about my girl.

And everything we did together.

And telling her stories before her mother put her to bed at night.

But when she died, all the light of my stories vanished.

All of the reason to tell them.

All of the soul she was in me died.

It was a bond no one could break ... except for death.

Is that what life is meant to be?

Is that what love is meant to be? Only temporary?

KNOWLTON

If I could answer that question I wouldn't feel so lost and ignorant right now.

But, I know it's not my question to answer it.

Is it?

ANTHONY

We didn't see this coming, did we?

When we started our children's-story project.

KNOWLTON

Hardly.

ANTHONY

We just wanted a story that was new, and would make children happy, and feel warm inside.

KNOWLTON

Precisely.

ANTHONY

What would the children say?

KNOWLTON

What children?

Our children.

ANTHONY

Our children?

KNOWLTON

Mr. Winkle.
And Mrs. Squirrel.
And the hedgehog.

ANTHONY

Oh.
Those children.

KNOWLTON

Yes.
Those children.
What would they say?

ANTHONY

About Kimberley?

KNOWLTON

About Kimberley.
And what we should do.

ANTHONY

I hadn't thought about it.
But, offhand, I suspect they would want her taken in.
And loved and cared for.
I suppose, as my father would.

KNOWLTON

By you?
By us?

ANTHONY

Us?
What do you mean, us?

KNOWLTON

You love children, too, don't you?

ANTHONY

KNOWLTON

I've never had any.
Obviously.
But, yes.
If life had gone my way, children would have topped my list:
Children.
Career.
Intimacy.
And friendships....
In that order.

ANTHONY

I'm not telling you what to do about this.
But the one thing I can definitely say:
Your life isn't over.
You're young.
And whatever happened in the past is in the past.
Forgive it or not, forget it.
You're far too vital to waste the woman you are.

KNOWLTON

I'm sorry, Lane, but I can't do it alone. Not at my age.

ANTHONY

I can understand that....
There's been an unpaid debt I've carried on my back all these years.
What my friend did for me when I was barely twenty.

KNOWLTON

Don't say it!!

ANTHONY

What?

KNOWLTON

What you were about to say.

ANTHONY

Why not?

KNOWLTON

Unless you really mean it.
Too many lives and feelings are involved.

ANTHONY

Let me show you something.

ANTHONY pulls the letter out of his pocket that he's been carrying, and gives it to KNOWLTON to read.

KNOWLTON

What's this?

ANTHONY

Read it.

She reads.

ANTHONY

I wrote to the people who work with Greta Thunberg.
Making enquiry whether I might be able to volunteer.
For a year, or two, to begin with.
To see whether I could manage it, and whether I could be of any real service.

KNOWLTON

Why?
Why would you do that?

ANTHONY

Too many children in this world need help.
And I felt Kimberley telling me that.
Inside.
Calling to me.

KNOWLTON

The letter says that they will accept you, on your terms.

ANTHONY

I know that.
And I am seriously considering going.

KNOWLTON

Even at the risk of your life?

ANTHONY

What else do I have left in my life, other than the debt I owe?

KNOWLTON

Your friends.
Your writing.
Your talent.

ANTHONY

I have no real friends left.
I've turned them all away.
To be frank with you, I feel closer to you now, than to any friend I have.

KNOWLTON

You're lying.

ANTHONY

Why do you say that?

KNOWLTON

Because you said, 'To be frank with you.'
And anyone who tells me that, is not an honest person, normally.

ANTHONY

I've never thought of it that way, but I get your point.
I take it back.
Given all the Hell going on in the world today, it has occurred to me that I don't
feel I have any friends left who feel the way I do.
It's my fault, I know.
I let it happen.
For fear, I suppose, of what it might do to me.
Or my reputation.
But as of this moment I have had a realisation.
You, Cara Knowlton, and Greta Thunberg, are people who say and stand for
principles that I believe in, to the core.
People I want to be with, and work with, and feel I'm of some use again.
And right now, I would prefer it to be with you.
And Kimberley.
Does that make sense?

KNOWLTON

If you're sincere, it does.
But how do I know?

ANTHONY

There are things in life you simply have to take on faith.

KNOWLTON

On faith?

ANTHONY

I have no better answer than that.
Except ... in a crisis, you might have to rely on your own gut instincts.

KNOWLTON

She's not your Kimberley, you know.
Not your flesh and blood.
It won't be all fun and games.

ANTHONY

If you have room for Kimberley and me, and if you're comfortable with it, I will join you in giving her a home and family.
And take on the responsibilities which go with it.
I promise you that.

KNOWLTON

It's the only truly British thing to do, isn't it?
My father would say that.
It would be the worst manners in the world to turn a helpless child like her away.
And, besides, she seems to be someone we could truly love, in time.

ANTHONY

I wonder....
Do we ever have enough time for all we want in life?
I know I didn't, with my Kimberley.
Nor from anyone else important in my life.
Nor from a world seemingly set to burn up love and friendship.
Except for Britain.
The country I love, and the people I love.

KNOWLTON

[*beat*] Let's call in Kimberley.

SCENE 7

ANTHONY, in his bedroom, finishes dressing, checks his watch, and exits.

As he leaves his home he make a sudden leap of joy, arms outstretched.

He crosses the stage to the lecture hall and enters the rehearsal room.

KNOWLTON, BLAKE, GAINSBOROUGH and KIMBERLEY are seated.

ANTHONY takes a seat, smiling.

KNOWLTON

Claps her hands.

Time to get started.

When we last were with Mr. Winkle Dee Dee, yesterday, before all the lights went out, he was being served a healthy portion of acorn and earwig stew.

‘O dear and Fiddle Dee Dee,’ thinks Mr. Winkle, as he peers into the brown and green sludge in his bowl.

And he thinks he can see a few black legs wriggling in there, too.

GAINSBOROUGH stands and goes to an easel to sketch Mr. Winkle and his bowl of acorn and earwig stew.

KNOWLTON

Time to tuck in!

‘Do you think I could have some salt?’ Mr. Winkle asks.

And when Mrs. Squirrel goes inside to get it, he pours half the bowl behind a tree root.

‘And pepper?’ he asks when she returns.

Her second absence allows him to dispose of the rest.

‘I didn’t need pepper after all, it was delicious without it,’ he lies.

‘Goodness, you must have been starving,’ says Mrs. Squirrel.

‘Would you like some more?’

‘Oh no, thank you,’ he replies, patting his very empty stomach.

‘Mustn’t be greedy.’

GAINSBOROUGH sketches Mr. Winkle holding the empty bowl.

KNOWLTON

'I'm very tired now, it's been a long day,' Mr. Winkle announces.

ANTHONY

What a day it had been.

BLAKE

What a rare mood you are in.

ANTHONY

Pinch me.

KNOWLTON

Hush, you two!

'I think I'll go to bed now,' Mr. Winkle continues.

'Good night, Mrs. Squirrel. And thank you for my lovely new home.'

'Good night, Mr. Winkle,' she says, 'and sleep well.'

Mr. Winkle Dee Dee sleeps in a tall, narrow chair with his feet up on a tall, narrow stool.

Before he closes his eyes he rummages in his hold-all and roots out an old heel of stale bread and a bit of dry cheese.

He is happy.

Very happy with his new nose and hair.

[*beat*] That's it, as I remember it. What do you think?

GAINSBOROUGH applauds.

Then the rest applaud.

BLAKE

It may need a little more for length, for what we want.

KNOWLTON

What do you suggest?

BLAKE

I don't know. Maybe something for Mrs. Squirrel.

ANTHONY

Maybe she has a family that comes back to visit her.

BLAKE

I raised my share of squirrel kits
I raised them in this very tree
I taught them manners, gave them wits
And yet they never visit me.

KNOWLTON

Careful, you two!
Don't tread on the story.

GAINSBOROUGH

Maybe butterflies.
I could paint some marvelous butterflies that we could make fly around on stage.
The children could chase after them.

GAINSBOROUGH sketches a butterfly.

BLAKE

Butterfly wings
A pretty girl sings
And moves her hands in time.

She's an angel sent
From up above
An angel lent
To bring us love.

Butterfly wings
O butterfly wings
I miss them more than words can say
I miss their beat
I miss their smiles
I miss them every day.

GAINSBOROUGH

Have you ever thought there's something in being wild that keeps nature alive?

BLAKE

Nature's a brute. Brute beauty.
The mastery of the thing, animals living apart from people!

GAINSBOROUGH

Can anyone fall in love, in your story?

KNOWLTON

I don't think so.
It's a children's story.
Certainly no sex.

GAINSBOROUGH

Heavens no!
Sex is hardly for everybody.
Certainly not for children.
I was thinking more along the lines of Beauty and the Beast, or the tin woodsman getting a heart in the Wizard of Oz.

KNOWLTON

If you can figure a way that it could work, without ruining the native folly of the story, I'm willing to listen.

GAINSBOROUGH

I'll try.

KNOWLTON

Well, let's make that a plan for next week.
Have a good weekend.
See you Monday.
Half nine.

**KNOWLTON and ANTHONY exit with
KIMBERLEY.**

BLAKE and GAINSBOROUGH remain.

SCENE 8

GAINSBOROUGH and BLAKE are sitting at the table together in the rehearsal room.

BLAKE

What's just happened?

GAINSBOROUGH

You mean Cara and Lane?

BLAKE

Right in front of our very eyes.
Are they magicians, or something?

GAINSBOROUGH

Why do people think love is magic?
It's just art. And art's not magic.

BLAKE

To you maybe it isn't.
But watching you, to me it is.

GAINSBOROUGH

Because the whole power of magic consists in art.
The work of magic is the attraction of one thing by another because of a certain affinity of nature.
If you just pay attention to the right things.

BLAKE

The same thing can be said of love.

GAINSBOROUGH

I suppose.

BLAKE

What did you mean before when you said that sex is hardly for everybody?

GAINSBOROUGH

Just that.

BLAKE

Not for you, you mean?

GAINSBOROUGH

It never has been.

BLAKE

Never?

GAINSBOROUGH

I'm not called 'Neverly' for nothing.

BLAKE

You're a virgin??

GAINSBOROUGH

You could say that.

BLAKE

I don't believe it.

GAINSBOROUGH

Then don't.

No one's forcing you to.

BLAKE

Well, I guess I do, because I believe you.

And why would anybody go out of her way to lie about a thing like that?

GAINSBOROUGH

Why would I go out of my way to lie about anything?

What would be the point?

BLAKE

Wrinkle up that pretty nose
Put an acorn 'tween your toes
Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall
Mrs. Squirrel, afraid he would fall,
Called the police and firemen
To get Humpty down safely again.

GAINSBOROUGH

What are you doing?

BLAKE

Courting you with poetry.

GAINSBOROUGH

You call that ‘poetry’?

BLAKE

Do you know the Muffin Man?

GAINSBOROUGH

The Muffin Man?

BLAKE

Yes, the Muffin Man.

GAINSBOROUGH

The Muffin Man who lives on Drury Lane?

BLAKE

Yes, the Muffin Man who lives on Drury Lane.

GAINSBOROUGH

Sure I know the Muffin Man.

BLAKE

The Muffin Man?

GAINSBOROUGH

The Muffin Man.

BLAKE

The Muffin Man who lives on Drury Lane?

GAINSBOROUGH

He’s a friend of mine.

BLAKE

Do you know what I really want to ask you?

GAINSBOROUGH

About the Muffin Man?

BLAKE

No. About you.

GAINSBOROUGH

Why I’m still a virgin?

BLAKE

Exactly.

GAINSBOROUGH

As though it's any of your business.

BLAKE

It's such a mystery.
And I love solving mysteries.

GAINSBOROUGH

Are you a virgin?

BLAKE

No!
Not at all.

GAINSBOROUGH

I bet you're not.

BLAKE

A healthy, young man like me?

GAINSBOROUGH

And has it made your life any better?

BLAKE

In what way?

GAINSBOROUGH

In any way.

BLAKE

I'm not sure what you mean.

GAINSBOROUGH

Has it helped you fall in love with anybody?

BLAKE

Not really.
Is it supposed to?

GAINSBOROUGH

That's what songs and poetry say.

BLAKE

I guess I haven't learned much from songs and poetry.

GAINSBOROUGH

Then you're no farther along than I am.

BLAKE

You're going to stay a virgin until you fall in love?

GAINSBOROUGH

I'm going to stay a virgin until I find the perfect man to make me not be one.

BLAKE

There is no perfect man for that.

Don't you know?

GAINSBOROUGH

Then what is there?

BLAKE

There's adventure, wild animals, anticipation, the thrill of opening a Christmas present, touching. Beauty, even.

GAINSBOROUGH

Always?

BLAKE

Sadly, no.

GAINSBOROUGH

What is there, when there isn't?

BLAKE

Don't make me describe it.

GAINSBOROUGH

Why? Are you afraid to?

BLAKE

A description of the bad ones only disparages the good ones.

GAINSBOROUGH

Like the description of dog poop only disparages a blue-eyed Siberian Husky?

BLAKE

You're weird. You know that?

GAINSBOROUGH

That's about the size of it.

BLAKE

Aren't you curious, Beverly?

GAINSBOROUGH

No, Lawrie, I'm not.

Not that way....

I'm curious about a lot of things....

A lot of things that won't get me burned.

BLAKE

Burned? How?

GAINSBOROUGH

Let's say I did.

And it made me fall in love with him.

But it did nothing for him.

And he left.

And I'd be left with a broken heart the rest of my life.

For what?

BLAKE

So what do you do?

That's the big question.

Run away your whole life from taking a chance?

GAINSBOROUGH

The 'big question' is, where do people fit in with each other and nature?

Where's the affinity?

If there's love, then why is there so much unloved in this world?

If there's not love, then what's the point?

The only answer which makes any sense to me is children.

So if I'm to find the perfect man, he'll have to start with loving children first.

BLAKE

Children love stories.

Parents love children.

Between the two there's courtship.

GAINSBOROUGH

I want children, eventually.
And I'm not stupid.
I know what that means.
But life isn't in the wanting.
It's in the sharing.

BLAKE

So you're a winner now by not sharing.
And a loser in the end.
Is that it?

GAINSBOROUGH

I'm a winner if I find the right person.
And, I guess you're right:
I'm a loser if I don't.
But that's life.
You can find the right person, and lose them anyway.
When I was a child I probably looked at things differently.

BLAKE

Children explore.
Children have fun.
Children get naked.

GAINSBOROUGH

Two adults getting naked together is a bit of a farce, don't you think?
If they don't love each other.

BLAKE

[*beat*] Well, I guess it's time I get going.
Have a good weekend ... Neverly.
See you Monday.

BLAKE stands, and exits.

**GAINSBOROUGH goes to an easel to
paint. She begins by writing:**

MR. WINKLE IS A CHILDREN'S STORY.

END