

The Butterflies Are Sleeping

by Michael Olsen

Characters: Celia Gault 20s (F)
Liberty Gault 20s (F)

Lights come up on a messy lounge room in the Flint Hills of Kansas. Centrestage there is a ratty lounge facing out covered in newspapers. Downstage right there is a large birdcage covered with a cloth. Downstage left there is a laptop on a small coffee table.

CELIA GAULT, 20s, rushes in in her pyjamas. Her pyjamas have a butterfly pattern all over them. She hurries over to the covered birdcage, then makes her final approach on all fours. She looks at the covered birdcage from all angles.

LIBERTY GAULT, 20s, walks in holding a packet of mail. She is dressed in a white T-shirt and jeans. On the T-shirt is a colourful butterfly.

CELIA: Are they alive?

LIBERTY: You ask that every morning.

CELIA: Well are they?

LIBERTY: They're sleeping.

Celia lays her ear gently against the cover.

CELIA: I can't hear them.

LIBERTY: They don't snore like you.

CELIA: Wait! Wait! I can hear a slight rustle. They're moving around in their sleep.

LIBERTY: They'll be free soon. They need to fly all the way to Mexico to breed.

CELIA: *(singing)* Fly little butterflies fly away,
do da, do da
Fly little butterflies fly away
Do da do da day.

LIBERTY: Stop it you'll wake them up!

CELIA: Well I'm awake now, so they should be too.

LIBERTY: But you're not dressed. Go and get dressed. *(Pause)* Now!

CELIA: Alright alright!

Celia gets up and leaves. Liberty goes through the mail. She finds a letter that makes her drop the rest of them. She smells it, tears open the envelope, pulls out the letter.

LIBERTY: *(reading)* "My darling Liberty. The days are like the endless prairie you live upon, the sea of grass I drive through to see you to see your smiling face, your sparkling eyes, your shiny white teeth. I cannot wait to make another delivery to your house just so I can see you again. Zip code Strong City Kansas 66869 now means so much more to me. I love you so much it hurts to even think I will be away from you for even a minute. Yours, Chester Spertzberg."

Oh, Chester. You do love me!

Offstage we hear a thump thump thump.

CELIA: *(off, calling out)* Li—ber—ty! Have you seen the papers?

Liberty turns and Celia rushes in. She wears a long dress and a black T-shirt with a white butterfly on it. Liberty quickly puts away the letter, but Celia has seen it.

CELIA: Whatcha doin'?

LIBERTY: Nothing.

CELIA: Nothing much or nothing nothing?

LIBERTY: Nothing nothing.

CELIA: It don't look like nothing nothing. With that piece of paper.

LIBERTY: I'm just—I'm just...

CELIA: Yes?

Liberty looks around desperately, thinking.

LIBERTY: I'm just—playing a game.

CELIA: Oh goody I love games. What's this one called?

LIBERTY: It's called—*(looking down at her T-shirt)* Butterfly.

CELIA: *Butterfly.* OK. How do you play?

Liberty takes out the letter from Chester and tears it up into pieces.

LIBERTY: The aim of the game is to catch the butterflies before they hit the ground.

CELIA: Goody.

LIBERTY: Whoever catches the most—wins.

CELIA: Simple.

LIBERTY: Ready?

CELIA: Ready steady...go!

Liberty throws the paper up into the air. It flutters down all over the place. The sisters race around trying to catch all the pieces. Celia is the more enthusiastic, the more physical, and catches the most. In the end, she is also trying to get more pieces off Liberty, but Liberty won't let her, and the sisters get into a real fight. Finally, with Celia on top of Liberty, Celia looks down and frowns.

CELIA: Don't move!

LIBERTY: What is it?

CELIA: I think I've got it.

Celia squeezes a juvenile blackhead on Liberty's face. Liberty squeals.

CELIA: Gotta get those blackheads before they pop out! Now you're beautiful.

LIBERTY: I was beautiful before.

Celia gets off Liberty, brandishing the paper.

CELIA: I won!

LIBERTY: You won.

CELIA: I'm the winner!

LIBERTY: You're the winner. What's in the newspapers?

CELIA: I just heard about it on the radio. Where's the papers?

Celia goes digging through the newspapers on the couch. Finally she finds the page and shows Liberty for a second before taking it back and reading out the following:

CELIA: (reading) “The Strong City Amateur Repertory Theatrical Society will be holding open auditions for its next production, *The Last Waltz in Bognor Regis*, at the Strong City Hall Annexe, 1754 Cottonwood Street Strong City. Auditees are encouraged to prepare a monologue of between—

LIBERTY: That's great. What are you going to do?

CELIA: I don't know. What do you think I should do?

LIBERTY: Haven't you got a book of monologues somewhere?

CELIA: That's right!

LIBERTY: In your room.

CELIA: Oh. It's a bit messy.

LIBERTY: You'll find it.

CELIA: Can you help me?

LIBERTY: No. We agreed: I don't go into your room, you don't go into mine.

CELIA: Liberty. Please.

LIBERTY: No. I'll listen, I'll help you, but you have to find it and you have to learn it—yourself. OK?

CELIA: OK.

Celia slowly shuffles off. Liberty make sure she's gone, then whips out a cell phone and dials a number. She waits a moment and is about to speak, but hears an answering machine message. She waits impatiently through the message.

LIBERTY: (on the phone) Chester? It's Liberty. Call me back as soon as you can.

Liberty hangs up, a mix of excitement and disappointment. Finally, she can't take any more. She dials again. Again, the message.

LIBERTY: Chester, Chester, it's me again. Liberty. Sorry for the message I couldn't think what to say but now I can and I love you too. I can't wait to see you. Sometimes I just order stuff on the 'Net because I know that you're going to deliver it and I can't wait to see you at the door. I'm sorry I missed you last

time you came. I think my sister got you. I hope everything's OK. We live in a sea of grass and you're like a knight riding through to find me in my castle and I can't wait to see you—so, so—I can't wait to see you again.

Liberty hangs up, goes to the laptop, and starts pulling up a shopping website.

LIBERTY: What are we going to buy today?

Liberty goes through a number of sites, and a number of different things: “No. No. No. Good heavens, no.” Until finally:

LIBERTY: Absolutely! The All-in-One Kitchen Handymate. “A thousand different uses with only ten attachments. Self-cleaning. Even makes coffee.” Yes!

Liberty pulls out a wallet which she flings open to reveal twenty different credit cards.

LIBERTY: Which one to use?

Liberty checks through them, then picks one out, taps the number in.

LIBERTY: Postage? Yes please. And Chester delivers right to my door.

We hear a thumping again offstage.

CELIA: *(off)* Avast there, lads! Hold your positions!

Celia bursts in, brandishing a Model 1860 Light Cavalry Sabre.

CELIA: Don't fire till you see the whites of their eyes! Those red savages will know the best of Yankee steel before too long!

LIBERTY: What is this?

CELIA: Great granddaddy Gault. Don't you remember? Captain John Gault of the 54th Kansas Regulars. He held those two hundred Kiowa warriors at bay for three hours before they got him.

LIBERTY: Yes yes. What about him?

CELIA: I'm going to do a monologue as him, Captain Gault.

LIBERTY: For your audition?

CELIA: Exactly! Unique! Different! Special!

LIBERTY: Crazy! Unbelievable! Weird!

- CELIA:** Well what would you do? Something predictable, safe, pedestrian?
- LIBERTY:** Yes. Something they can relate to. A dead cavalry captain from the Indian Wars is not something you need to bring up again.
- CELIA:** How about someone who's like the endless prairie you live upon, someone with a smiling face and sparkling eyes, with shiny white teeth.
- LIBERTY:** What!?!?
- Celia pulls out a sheet of paper stuck together with heaps of sticky tape: it's Liberty's love letter from Chester. Liberty gets up.*
- CELIA:** *(reading)* "I cannot wait to make another delivery to your house."
- LIBERTY:** *(going for the love letter)* Give me that! Stop it!
- CELIA:** *(reading, dodging Liberty easily)* "Zip code Strong City Kansas 66869 now means so much more to me."
- LIBERTY:** Celia! I said stop it!
- CELIA:** *(reading)* "I love you so much."
- LIBERTY:** Celia!
- Celia lets Liberty take the sheet off her.*
- CELIA:** You don't have to worry about him anymore, darling.
- LIBERTY:** What?
- CELIA:** I had a little chat with Chester last time he came here. I think he was delivering that Exerciser 3000 you always wanted.
- LIBERTY:** You didn't.
- CELIA:** Just me and Great granddaddy's 1860 Light Cavalry Sabre.
re
Celia brandishes it about.
- LIBERTY:** No!
- CELIA:** Still so sharp after all these years. I remember a story from years ago, a sword that steals the souls of those it cuts. I wonder how many this sword has cut?
- LIBERTY:** Chester is alive, he—

- CELIA:** Is he? Have you spoken to him today?
- LIBERTY:** You didn't, did you?
- CELIA:** Run him through? Scalp him? Leave him to ride home on that little motorbike of his, trailing a trail of blood along the road behind him?
- LIBERTY:** Celia!
- CELIA:** I'll give him something, though, he didn't make a sound, just a sort of grunt as the blade went in, and the way he looked at me in total disbelief as if this shouldn't be happening. And then that wonderful sound, that swoosh as the blade came sliding out.
- Pause. Liberty starts to cry. Celia rushes to her side.*
- CELIA:** Libby baby I'm sorry! I'm sorry! It was my audition piece! Extempore! Improvisation! I didn't cut him, stab him, poke him or even touch him. I told you I was doing Captain Gaunt. I told you that.
- LIBERTY:** You didn't hurt him?
- CELIA:** No. Of course not.
- LIBERTY:** You're sure?
- Pause*
- CELIA:** I didn't need to.
- LIBERTY:** What do you mean you didn't need to?
- CELIA:** Why threaten a man with death when all you have to do is threaten a small part of his anatomy? (*lowering the cavalry sword to groin level*)
- LIBERTY:** Oh no.
- CELIA:** He won't be coming back in a hurry.
- LIBERTY:** This happens all the time! Why can't you let me have someone else in my life? Why? You drive them all away! All the time!
- CELIA:** That's true. There was Donnie Harbin, and Tony Menatoro, and Tom Wisden and—
- LIBERTY:** Exactly! You scared them all off.
- CELIA:** They didn't pass the test.

- LIBERTY:** You're testing them now? There should be no test. Nothing. You should just butt out. This is my life and I'll choose who I want to have in it.
- CELIA:** But—but don't you love me?
- LIBERTY:** You're my sister. Of course I love you. Can you doubt it?
- CELIA:** Well did you think I was any good?
- LIBERTY:** What?
- CELIA:** My performance. Did you think I was any good?
- Liberty throws her arms up in despair.*
- CELIA:** Is that a “no?”
- LIBERTY:** That's “I don't know anymore.” I don't know which part is my sister Celia Gault, and which part is made up by her, or from a book, or a movie. I've given up.
- CELIA:** That's OK, because I'm not going to get the part, you know.
- LIBERTY:** Why do you say that?
- CELIA:** You know why.
- Pause. They look at each other a moment.*
- LIBERTY:** I do.
- CELIA:** If I went for it, I'd have to—you know—leave. The house.
- LIBERTY:** Yes.
- CELIA:** I don't want to do that.
- LIBERTY:** We've been over this before a million times.
- CELIA:** I know I know but I think I've got something figured out.
- LIBERTY:** Really?
- CELIA:** Instead of going out, I could bring the theatre into the house.
- LIBERTY:** I'd never thought of that.

- CELIA:** Everything's here: the location, the lights, the seats.
- LIBERTY:** Indeed.
- CELIA:** We could sit here, on the couch, and watch it all unfold, the actors moving across, the lights in their eyes, the music—we've gotta have music—
- LIBERTY:** Yes.
- CELIA:** —and it would be all so alive and free and dazzling like—like—
- LIBERTY:** Like life, really.
- CELIA:** Yes, like—like life, and it would show us all the other worlds out there, the worlds full of the beautiful people, drinking champagne, and laughing at silly witty jokes and they would all look so beautiful, even the waiters would be darkly handsome with smirks on their faces as they poured the champagne and glided around the room, all so beautiful and free and—and—and—
- Celia falls to the floor and bangs the floor with her fists and starts screaming. Liberty rushes over and hugs Celia, trying to sooth her. Celia calms down.*
- LIBERTY:** It's OK, it's OK. Everything's OK. Shhh.
- CELIA:** The thing is, Lib, I don't want to be comforted, I want to feel better.