

KEMBLE 'S RIOT
by
Adrian Bunting

Full Length version 2013

Adrian Bunting
The Estate of Adrian Bunting
12 Halfpenny Close
Chilworth
GU4 8NJ
United Kingdom
Estate@kemblesriot.com

THE PERSONS

John Kemble The actor and general manager of Covent Garden.
Sarah Siddons Great actress and elder sister of John Kemble.
Henry Clifford Radical barrister.
Mary Austin Respectable servant.
Heavy Security Guard

OPTIONAL PERSONS

Fiddler and sidekick to Henry Clifford.
Fiddler and sidekick to Mary Austin.

SCENES

ON STAGE COVENT GARDEN - House Lights ON.
AUDITORIUM COVENT GARDEN - House Lights ON.
BACKSTAGE COVENT GARDEN - House Lights OFF.
KEMBLE'S HOUSE - House Lights OFF.
EMPTY AUDITORIUM - House Lights OFF.

NOTES

The actors on stage will be dressed as of 1809. The two audience leaders will be sat amongst the audience with a section of the audience each. Henry Clifford stage left and Mary Austin stage right. The sections should be very easily defined. **All action taking place in the auditorium by the audience leaders should be as free-form and improvised as is comfortable. They should be dressed in contemporary clothes and in larger theatres may use modern protesting equipment such as megaphones.**

ACT 1 SCENE 1

EMPTY AUDITORIUM COVENT GARDEN. House Lights OFF.

(The scene is set for the banquet scene in Macbeth with a table and chairs. Enter George Cooke.)

GEORGE COOKE

Hello.

(Pause)

Hello. Who's there? Kemble, are you there? Is this another of your damned tricks? Bloody hell. Kemble? Have I got the right day? I must have, the doorman didn't say anything. Damn and blast. I can't be early. Can I be early? I hate being early. Damn. I'm bloody early. Bugger this. I'm going to come back when I'm late.

(GEORGE COOKE goes to leave. Enter SARAH SIDDONS)

SARAH SIDDONS

First! George Cooke first for a rehearsal? Who would have ever thought it possible?

GEORGE COOKE

Mrs. Siddons. What a sight for tired eyes. How the devil have you been?

SARAH SIDDONS

Well, very well George, I have been playing Bath, and though it is easy enough to woo a provincial audience, I have been dieing for this day to come. I have missed London so very much.

GEORGE COOKE

Isn't that the truth. A few miles from London and we aren't in the same country. I can barely understand them, especially in Manchester. I had some troubles there, I can tell you. I'm sure they didn't know who I was. Honestly, I was expected to play second fiddle to the most oaken fellow.

GEORGE COOKE (CONT'D)

I kept telling them, "I'm George Cooke, I studied with Garrick you know. I'm not sharing the stage with this broomstick."

SARAH SIDDONS

You weren't drunk were you? Not during the play, George. Oh George. Not again? I thought those days were behind you.

GEORGE COOKE

Yes, well even if I was, can you blame me? I just lost my rag with the fellow. Bag of nerves he was, I could barely hear him and I was stood right next to him.

SARAH SIDDONS

What happened?

GEORGE COOKE

You know me, I can't rightly remember but after the show I woke up on a stage to Preston with my bags, a broken hand and my fee in my pocket.

(Shows bandaged hand)

Shan't ever go back to find out. And that's a promise.

SARAH SIDDONS

Have you no recollection?

GEORGE COOKE

None whatsoever. But better a broken hand than a broken jaw.

SARAH SIDDONS

So this is why you are so keen to impress John and arrive early.

GEORGE COOKE

No, it is bloody well not. George Cooke is never early. I thought I was a good hour late.

SARAH SIDDONS

That's not a good boast. Anyway, John always tells you the meeting time is an hour earlier than it really is. You know that.

GEORGE COOKE

Of course I know that. Oh God, he must have made it two this time. Damn him. God I hate him.

SARAH SIDDONS

Say what you like, but you know full well that my brother is the only man in London that will employ you. Really I don't think you think more than two minutes ahead about anything.

(Enter DOROTHY JORDAN)

DOROTHY JORDAN

Hello, you reprobates, where's Kemble?

SARAH SIDDONS

I beg your pardon?

GEORGE COOKE

My Lord you're a beauty. And who may we have the pleasure of meeting?

DOROTHY JORDAN

I'm Dotty Jordan. Who were you expecting?

GEORGE COOKE

Dorothy Jordan eh? I'd heard you have been engaged for this season? George Cooke at your service, and though I'm sure you need no introduction, this is Mrs. Sarah Siddons.

DOROTHY JORDAN

It is a great honour to meet you and Mrs. Siddons.

(To SARAH SIDDONS)

I have followed your career for as long as I can remember. As, I believe did my mother.

GEORGE COOKE

So you're one of us then. Excellent. Comedy's your bag ain't it? And breeches parts, having the finest legs in Europe, they say. Not a tragedian like Sarah here.

DOROTHY JORDAN

I like to think that I can do both passably.

SARAH SIDDONS

It's generally considered best to concentrate on one or the other.

GEORGE COOKE

Where's you damned brother then? He shouldn't be too busy for his cast. Without us this is nothing.

SARAH SIDDONS

I shall go and find him, no doubt he is engrossed in some new work.

(Exit SARAH SIDDONS.)

GEORGE COOKE

I like you. The finest legs in Europe then. Is that true?

DOROTHY JORDAN

I have been told so.

GEORGE COOKE

So what have you heard about me then?

DOROTHY JORDAN

That you're a very fine actor and popular too. With the people.

GEORGE COOKE

And you're a diplomat as well. My dear I am fully aware of my reputation, as I wager you are unless you have never read a newspaper. I like a drink or three and a lady or two as well. So what do you think of Black Jack then?

DOROTHY JORDAN

Who, excuse me?

GEORGE COOKE

Kemble or Black Jack to me.

DOROTHY JORDAN

I've never met him, he employed me on the recommendation of his scouts.

DOROTHY JORDAN (CONT'D)

Today was supposed to be the first time we'd meet.

GEORGE COOKE

Oh my dear, this will be fun, so tell me what have you heard of him? If you've followed Mrs. Siddons then you must have followed him, the pair are intertwined.

DOROTHY JORDAN

Well, he is the finest actor of his generation, a gracious, clever and studious man. Tall, elegant, good-looking, no, handsome. I have seen him play, some years ago in Dublin. He was captivating. He played Hamlet. Oh, the introspection, his subtlety, the quiet tense mood he brought to the anguish of the character. It was a thing of beauty.

GEORGE COOKE

(GEORGE COOKE laughs)

(Enter JOHN KEMBLE and SARAH SIDDONS)

And speak of the Devil.

KEMBLE

Right then everybody, are we ready to start?

DOROTHY JORDAN

Mr Kemble? May I introduce myself? Dorothy...

JOHN KEMBLE

Yes, yes I know who you are. I am eager to go over Act three Scene four. I have some ideas. Let us begin.

(Exit GEORGE COOKE)

You know your own degrees, sit down at first and last the hearty welcome.

DOROTHY JORDAN

Thanks to your majesty.

JOHN KEMBLE

Ourselves will mingle with society, And play the humble host.

JOHN KEMBLE (CONT'D)

I had else been perfect, whole as the marble, founded as the rock, as broad and general as the casing air. But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in to saucy doubts and fears. But Banquo's safe?

DOROTHY JORDAN

Ay, my good lord, safe in a ditch he bides, with twenty trenched gashes on his head, the least a death to nature.

KEMBLE

Thanks for that. There the grown serpent lies, the worm that's fled hath nature that in time will venom breed, no teeth for the present. Get thee gone, tomorrow we'll hear ourselves, again.

SARAH SIDDONS

May't please your highness sit.

(COOKE as GHOST OF BANQUO enters with sheet over him, he stumbles and falls with the sheet and sits in KEMBLE's place)

KEMBLE

Now George, I have been thinking on this long and hard and am convinced that there should be no ghost.

COOKE

There's always a ghost. Its clearly written by the Bard. Enter Ghost.

SARAH SIDDONS

Are you sure John? It is a very traditional thing.

KEMBLE

I am sure. It is frankly nonsensical. George stand aside, I'll try it without the ghost.

(COOKE stands aside)

SARAH SIDDONS

Sit, worthy friends, my lord is often thus, and hath been from his youth, pray you, keep seat, the fit is momentary, upon a thought he will again be well. Feed, and regard him not. Are you a man?

JOHN KEMBLE

Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that which might appal the devil.

SARAH SIDDONS

O proper stuff! This is the very painting of your fear. This the air-drawn dagger which, you said, led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts, impostors to true fear, would well become a woman's story at a winter's fire. Shame itself! Why do you make such faces? When all's done, you look but on a stool.

JOHN KEMBLE

Prithee, see there! Behold! Look! Lo! How say you? Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too. If charnel-houses and our graves must send those that we bury back, our monuments shall be the maws of kites. I am convinced. It works much better without a ghost. Do you not think? James, what is your opinion?

SARAH SIDDONS

Though I see it works, I worry the audience might not like so radical a change.

JOHN KEMBLE

The audience will see what I show them. Do you think the audience chooses the play, or the actors, or the direction? No they do not. I decide what the pit will see. Does it work? That is all that I am interested in.

SARAH SIDDONS

Yes I believe it does.

DOROTHY JORDAN

I think it works excellently. Really the fear of the unseen is much greater.

SARAH SIDDONS

(Cutting in.)

It's very good. I think we should go with it.

JOHN KEMBLE

Then it is decided. There will be no Ghost tomorrow.

(Exit KEMBLE, SARAH SIDDONS)

GEORGE COOKE

So what do you think then? He takes some getting used to. Obsessed.

DOROTHY JORDAN

I find that endearing.

GEORGE COOKE

Here this will help you know the man better.

(Gets out article from a newspaper)

There is an article about him here all about his pronunciation. They have a whole list of words translated so that the audience can understand Mr. Kemble's meaning.

DOROTHY JORDAN

Really, let me have a look.

GEORGE COOKE

No, let me read a word and see if you can tell its true meaning.

(Reads the newspaper.)

GEORGE COOKE (CONT'D)

Furse

DOROTHY JORDAN

Furs?

GEORGE COOKE

No, fierce.

GEORGE COOKE (CONT'D)
Bird.

DOROTHY JORDAN
Bard?

GEORGE COOKE
No beard. It's not easy is it? Harse

DOROTHY JORDAN
I must get this one. Horse.

GEORGE COOKE
Though he actually says arse.
(Breaks into a character.)
Excuse me my dear, have you seen my
arse? I want to sit on my arse. But I
can't find my arse anywhere. I'm sure it
was here. Have you seen my arse?

DOROTHY JORDAN
Ooh Sir. I think it might be behind you.
(COOKE turns around.)
Oh yes there it is. It is a skinny
little thing, ain't it?

GEORGE COOKE
Are you playing with me? There's no arse
here.
(Enter KEMBLE)

KEMBLE
Still rehearsing? Good.

GEORGE COOKE
No, actually. We were just reading about
your pronunciation.
(Reads from newspaper)
Yes, it is a subject I have often
wondered about and never asked you.
Aitches? Aitches, why do you say aitches
when you mean aches.

KEMBLE
Fill all thy bones with aitches, make
thee roar. It is quite clear to me that
Shakespeare required two syllables for
this phrase to flow.

KEMBLE (CONT'D)

I have studied many archives and found absolute evidence that at the time of Shakespeare they would have pronounced aches, aitches. It is very clear. Ake, says Baret in his Alvearie, is the verb of this substantive Ache, ch being turned into k.

COOKE

But you do not mind the criticism of the public? The hatred even?

That is what I cannot comprehend. You may well be historically correct, but, the audience want what they can understand. Why do you give them the opportunity to harangue you?

KEMBLE

Because I am right. And they must be educated. I will not change on this.

GEORGE COOKE

I well recall when you first did it. Oh the audience went mad. Shouted him down they did. In the middle of the play. You had to stop I believe.

JOHN KEMBLE

I did. I had to explain my position.

GEORGE COOKE

They wouldn't listen though would they?

KEMBLE

If they are too pig headed to be told by someone that clearly knows better, then what can I do?

DOROTHY JORDAN

What did you do? Surely if there is no leeway, what was the outcome?

GEORGE COOKE

He vowed never to show the play again.

KEMBLE

And I never have and never will do. They lost the chance to see the play. For ever.

SCENE 2

AUDITORIUM OF THE OLD COVENT GARDEN THEATRE 1808
HOUSE LIGHTS - ON

(MARY AUSTIN AND HENRY CLIFFORD take their places in the AUDIENCE, one either side, or so as there to be clear separation of the sections they are in charge of.)

MARY AUSTIN

What a treat. This is marvellous isn't it? Macbeth with, I can hardly believe it, Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth. I have heard so much about her performance but have never had the chance to see her before.

(To audience member.)

Have you had the chance to see her before?

HENRY CLIFFORD

I love the theatre. I come all the time, I use the Crown and Anchor as my office, so I have seen many performances. But nothing can compare to seeing Mrs Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth. Nothing, except for her brother John Kemble as Macbeth. He is breathtaking.

MARY AUSTIN

It's Mrs. Siddons I'm keen to see. Oh, the dagger scene is apparently amazing. People have said you can almost smell the blood.

HENRY CLIFFORD

Again I say, Kemble in the banquet scene is astonishing. I've heard rumour that tonight they are to play it with an imaginary ghost and not a real one. As soon as I heard I knew that would be right, it makes such sense. How did we put up with it before? Eh, what fools we were!

MARY AUSTIN

Hush. Look the curtain is raised.

(Pretending that an audience member has asked her a question.)

Why are the lights still on you ask?
Have you never been to the theatre
before? Poor dear, how long do you think
it would take to extinguish all those
candles and then light them for the
interval? No, inside the theatre, they
are always on. Now hush. They resume.
Scene seven I believe.

(Enter JOHN KEMBLE as Macbeth. The acting should be contrived and to a modern ear "Over The Top" but NOT "Hammy". If this extract seems over-long, it is. This is to induce a feeling of unease in the audience.)

JOHN KEMBLE

If it were done, when 'tis done, then
'twere well,
It were done quickly : If the
assassination
Could trammel upon the consequence, and
catch,
With his surcease, success; that but
this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all
here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of
time,—
We'd jump the life to come. But, in
these cases
We still have judgement here ; that we
but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being
taught, return,
To plague the inventor: This even-handed
justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd
chalice
To our own lips. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath
been
So clear in his great office, that his
virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued,
against

JOHN KEMBLE (CONT'D)

The deep damnation of his taking-off:
 And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
 Striding the blast, or heaven's
 cherubim, hors'd
 Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
 Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
 That tears shall drown the wind. I have
 no spur To prick the sides of my intent,
 but only Vaulting Ambition, which o'er-
 leaps itself, And falls on th' other.

(Enter SARAH SIDDONS as Lady Macbeth)

How now? What news?

SARAH SIDDONS

He has almost supp'd: why have you left
 the chamber?

JOHN KEMBLE

Hath he ask'd for me?

SARAH SIDDONS

Know you not, he has?

JOHN KEMBLE

We will proceed no further in this
 Business:

SARAH SIDDONS

What Beast was't then
 That made you break this enterprise to
 me? When you durst do it, then you were
 a man: And to be more than what you
 were, you would Be so much more the man.
 Nor time, nor place
 Did then adhere, and yet you would make
 both: They have made themselves, and
 that their fitness now
 Does unmake you. I have given suck, and
 know
 How tender 'tis to love the babe that
 milks me, I would, while it was smiling
 in my face, Have plucked my nipple from
 his boneless gums, And dash'd the brains
 out, had I so sworn As you have done to
 this.

MARY AUSTIN

(Stands and applauds)
Oh Superb.

HENRY CLIFFORD

(Stands and applauds as well)
Marvellous. How truly evil she is. Look,
I tremble before her.

JOHN KEMBLE

If we should fail?
(Cutting the audience conversation.)

SARAH SIDDONS

We fail?
But screw your courage to the sticking
place, And we'll not fail: when Duncan
is asleep, What cannot you and I perform
upon The unguarded Duncan ? What not put
upon His spongy officers ; who shall
bear the guilt Of our great quell?

JOHN KEMBLE

I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible
feat. Away, and mock the time with
fairest show, False face must hide what
the false heart doth know.
Look. Smoke. My God, there's a fire.

SARAH SIDDONS

Heavens above. Fire! Fire!
*(The Old Theatre is burning down. Sound
track of screaming and flames
crackling.)*

HENRY CLIFFORD

I see it, there's fire in the roof.

MARY AUSTIN

Fire, Save yourselves. Fire!

ALL

FIRE! FIRE!
(House Lights - OFF)

SCENE 2

IN THE STREET OUTSIDE THE BURNT DOWN COVENT GARDEN
HOUSE LIGHTS -ON

HENRY CLIFFORD

Did you see it? I was there, whilst
Covent Garden Theatre burnt to the
ground. Last night after the show. I
escaped by the skin of my teeth. My God.
It was a scene from Hell. I have just
come past the remains. I went to see
what I could do, to help, if anything.

MARY AUSTIN

I was there too. We are lucky to be
alive. I saw them pulling out the
bodies. 30 dead they say. It's too
terrible to think of.
And the poor brutes who didn't die.
Mutilated, crushed limbs with their
roasted flesh falling from their bones.
Screaming and cursing their own
existence. What life for them now?
Poor, poor souls. Many of them firemen
who went in after it had started to try
and save it.

HENRY CLIFFORD

The fools. Risking their lives in a
burning building?

MARY AUSTIN

Firemen, Sir. Firemen. Dying or crippled
doing their duty. How dare you speak ill
of their bravery. They died to try to
save our theatre.

HENRY CLIFFORD

I do not blame the firemen. I blame the
men who sent them to try and save it.

(To audience member)

They should have let it burn to the
ground, it did anyway. There was no way
to save it. But those poor souls were
still sent in there. And what for? To
save rich men's toys? No life is worth
risking for that.

MARY AUSTIN

Well I'm not going to get involved in any politics. Never discuss politics they say. He'll be on religion in a minute.

HENRY CLIFFORD

I will not be on religion in a minute. Who do you think I am? I leave religion to women and priests. My rule is never discuss anything that the experts in wear dresses. But my good woman, politics is all. You cannot ignore it. It effects peoples lives, and that is important. Almost as important as theatre.

MARY AUSTIN

That I can agree with you on. And beer.

HENRY CLIFFORD

And beer.

SCENE 3

AUDITORIUM COVENT GARDEN
HOUSE LIGHTS - OFF

(Enter JOHN KEMBLE and SARAH SIDDONS.)

JOHN KEMBLE

So it is gone. Destroyed. Burnt to a cinder. Nothing remains but the arms of England over the entrance.

SARAH SIDDONS

And what of you John? How are you coping?

JOHN KEMBLE

It is easily summarised Sarah, I am ruined. Everything I had was in this theatre.

SARAH SIDDONS

Is it that bad? What about insurance?

JOHN KEMBLE

We had none.

SARAH SIDDONS

What?

JOHN KEMBLE

I couldn't afford to run it with insurance.

SARAH SIDDONS

No insurance? What were you thinking?

JOHN KEMBLE

Yes, I do know.

SARAH SIDDONS

How could you be..

JOHN KEMBLE

I know. Thank you. A life's work. Everything gone. I am poorer now than when we were children, even than father ever was. I have nothing. I am nothing.

SARAH SIDDONS

John, look at yourself. Pull yourself together. You are John Kemble. Kemble, a name we have made famous and respected. You have made John. You can still work. You can start again. We can both start again. Brother and sister together.

JOHN KEMBLE

Start again? I am not a young man. Twenty years of work lost. I have not a bean.

SARAH SIDDONS

Kemble, remember. Remember what we were John. Cast your mind back. To days of dreams and hope. And we fulfilled them. And how we got here. We two can do anything. You remember, roaming from town to town, all of our little family living in that tiny carriage. Travelling and performing show after show. Father, mother, you, Charles and I. I loved those days but always, you and I would talk of one day performing on the London stage. And we made it. My, how we made it. We have come so far. Think of who we are, how loved we are. The people will have such sympathy for you John. Surely they may even raise a subscription.

JOHN KEMBLE

They should not. There should be no sympathy for me. I gambled and lost. Forget the people, I want nothing from them. I should have bought a cart and put a theatre on it like father, and travelled the country.

SARAH SIDDONS

No John, do you think with the choice that's what father would have wanted? No. He would have loved the chances we have had. Things will turn out alright, they always do. I'm sure of it.

JOHN KEMBLE

How? How exactly can a ruined man
replace those years of graft?

SARAH SIDDONS

Because we still have our talents. And
the public will always pay to see us
perform. And I have friends, powerful
friends. I am Sarah Siddons, you are
John Philip Kemble. We will raise this
theatre again.

JOHN KEMBLE

I have no money.

SARAH SIDDONS

Then we will get money. You must do it
John.

JOHN KEMBLE

I must do nothing. Whatever I touch is
destroyed.

SARAH SIDDONS

There is no talking to you when you are
in a mood like this.

JOHN KEMBLE

Then do not talk to me.

SARAH SIDDONS

But you will do it. I will make sure of
it.

(Exit JOHN KEMBLE and SARAH SIDDONS.)

SCENE 4

IN THE STREETS OF COVENT GARDEN
HOUSE LIGHTS -ON

(The Crowd are gathered about the new theatre. A rumour is started in the audience that Drury Lane has burnt down too)

MARY AUSTIN

Did you hear that Drury Lane has burnt down too? Both Patent Theatres burnt down together. Unprecedented. The only two allowed by King's Patent to show Shakespeare and now both gone. What are we to do with no theatres in London allowed to show Shakespeare?

HENRY CLIFFORD

That sounds very suspicious, does it not?

MARY AUSTIN

Not at all, both were stupid accidents. But there is better news. Apparently the New Theatre Covent Garden will be open imminently.

HENRY CLIFFORD

Is it a year ago since the fire already? Is Kemble still in charge? Has he a share? I heard he was ruined.

MARY AUSTIN

Indeed, he has been loaned £10,000 by the Duke of Northumberland and still has a share. I say loaned, but the Duke tore up the loan note when they laid the foundation stone. £10,000, what a sum. But Mr Kemble is worth it. Thanks to him indeed. He does such a brilliant job.

HENRY CLIFFORD

Gifts from peers of the realm. If only we were all so lucky. Who does he think he is? Did he not start life as a gypsy? Living on a cart? His family a travelling theatre of vagabonds?

MARY AUSTIN

Ah, but look where they have ended up and what talents they have. What joy they bring us. And everyone agrees, even the King invites Mrs. Siddons to dinner. Oh, she has such qualities. It is even said that the princesses are so in awe of her that they try to steal glimpses of her when she sits at table. Can you believe it? Royalty in awe of an actress.

HENRY CLIFFORD

And I dare say you follow her every move in the papers, don't you my dear.

MARY AUSTIN

I do, of course.

HENRY CLIFFORD

And believe every word.

MARY AUSTIN

Indeed, why wouldn't I?

HENRY CLIFFORD

They don't let you hear what you need to hear, only what they want you to hear.

MARY AUSTIN

Well you would say that wouldn't you. I have no more reason to believe you than anyone else.

SCENE 5
EMPTY AUDITORIUM COVENT GARDEN
HOUSE LIGHTS - OFF.

(JOHN KEMBLE and SARAH enter, SARAH has her eyes closed and is being led by the hand by JOHN KEMBLE)

JOHN KEMBLE

(Excitedly)
Dear, dear Sarah. Are you ready?

SARAH SIDDONS

(Still hiding her eyes)
Yes, whenever you'd like me to open my eyes I am perfectly ready.

JOHN KEMBLE

Sarah, come look and see the New Royal Theatre of Covent Garden.
(SARAH opens her eyes and looks around.)
Isn't it the most beautiful thing? What do you think? Tell me. Sarah, tell me you love it. Tell me you've the best brother in the whole world.

SARAH SIDDONS

It's vast John. How will we ever make ourselves heard?

JOHN KEMBLE

That will be no problem. Not to us. Come now, tell me you love it.

SARAH SIDDONS

I do, it is beautiful. Look at us, the darlings of the London stage. With such a theatre at our disposal.

JOHN KEMBLE

Renown as the greatest actress to have ever trod the boards.

SARAH SIDDONS

And you the greatest actor.

JOHN KEMBLE

I have such dreams Sarah. Under the stage here I have built a cellar that can house the whole stage, above I have machines that can drop, in a click of my fingers, an entire scene. And running water and flying machines. See, look Sarah, 300 lamps light the stage, not the candles that light the auditorium. And look at the doors, all Mahogany. And the brightness of the walls, white and pink. Light, Light. Light.

SARAH SIDDONS

And it just looks so beautiful from outside, the columns and the carvings.

JOHN KEMBLE

I care not for anything but the inside, anything but the heart. The engine.

SARAH SIDDONS

As I do, as we have always done together. Why do you always make it seem that you care more than I do? You're exasperating.

JOHN KEMBLE

You led the way. I owe you everything and I will never forget that, nor will I ever be anything but your devoted little brother with half your talent. Nothing like this has been seen before. We can create magic here. The people will be in awe of it.

SARAH SIDDONS

The new theatre is a true wonder. A palace, a temple of drama.

JOHN KEMBLE

Honestly I feel as if this is my moment. Everything I have worked for has been leading to this. I know the suffering the fire caused. But from the ashes... I have been given a chance, and I intend to take it. I intend to grasp it and hold it triumphant.

JOHN KEMBLE (CONT'D)

Nothing can go wrong. I have prepared for every eventuality.

SARAH SIDDONS

Have you read the newspapers recently John?

JOHN KEMBLE

What a question, of course not. You know I gave up reading newspapers many years ago.

SARAH SIDDONS

John, the public are not happy. Not happy at all. I have talked to many and the mood is one of grievance, anger even.

JOHN KEMBLE

Tosh, what pray have they to be angry about? Have I not built them a theatre beyond imagination.

SARAH SIDDONS

It is the rise in prices. Are you unaware of everything outside these walls? They believe you are not entitled to raise them.

JOHN KEMBLE

Not entitled? In a private venture? To pay for the rebuilding? Nonsense.

SARAH SIDDONS

They say that because of the patent, only the king can sanction a rise. That you have monopoly.

JOHN KEMBLE

It's beyond ridiculous. The operation simply will not pay unless we have a small increase. I have no time for this.

SARAH SIDDONS

I merely report the mood of the public.

JOHN KEMBLE

Well I am sure I am right. That is what I am, a gauge of the public mood.

JOHN KEMBLE (CONT'D)

That is why I have had such success.
There will be no trouble, as soon as
they enter and see what we have done,
they will understand what we have spent
on the theatre and accept the rises.

SARAH SIDDONS

And what a brilliant choice for us to
open with.

(Striking a theatrical pose)

Come on; gentle my lord.
Sleek o'er you rugged looks; be bright
and jovial among your guests tonight.

JOHN KEMBLE

So shall I love and so I pray be you.
What else could it have been?
What other part would they let us play.
If not Macbeth then I believe they would
have called for it.
They will love this place, they will
love us in it and on its stage. They
will love the magic we will cast and
weep to the stories we will tell. We
rise to greater glory my dear. We will
be remembered. We open tonight. So, away
and prepare for our debuts in the
greatest theatre that man has ever know.
This night will go down in history.

(Exit JOHN KEMBLE and SARAH SIDDONS)

SCENE 6

FULL AUDITORIUM COVENT GARDEN
HOUSE LIGHTS - ON

HENRY CLIFFORD

Shame. For shame on you, Kemble. Shame on you.

MARY AUSTIN

Shhhh. The curtain is about to rise. Be quiet.

HENRY CLIFFORD

I am fully aware of that. Shame. Shame on you.

MARY AUSTIN

I say again, the curtain is about to rise. Quieten yourself.

HENRY CLIFFORD

I shall do no such thing. Nor will my friend here.

(Points to a person in his side.)

You, my friend, you are with me, are you not?

MARY AUSTIN

You do not intend to keep this display up?

HENRY CLIFFORD

I do. I fully intend to keep this up. All night, if necessary. Shame. Shame on you.

MARY AUSTIN

What is going on? Are we not to watch the play in peace?
I came to see some lovely theatre. Am I going to get that pleasure? No, apparently we are not. Thanks to this idiot's idea of protesting.

HENRY CLIFFORD

I have a right to protest. You cannot take that from me.

MARY AUSTIN

Protesting about what?

HENRY CLIFFORD

I am protesting about the prices. You cannot have failed to notice that they have raised the prices for this evening.

MARY AUSTIN

Well of course I have. But so what, it is such an insignificant rise. I just want to watch the play. But it's nothing, only a sixpence.

HENRY CLIFFORD

Nothing? You say raising prices is nothing? It is not their price to raise. It is our theatre. They cannot raise the prices, the prices haven't changed for a century. It is our right to pay that price.

MARY AUSTIN

Can you not protest afterwards? After the play maybe? I have been so looking forward to it. Haven't you? A year without theatre. Can't you hand some leaflets out quietly or something? Write a strongly worded letter?

HENRY CLIFFORD

And where would that get us? Action is required. No, I must be heard.

MARY AUSTIN

This is nonsense. What are you so enraged by, sixpence on the prices. Here have it back and keep your mouth shut.
(She throws a sixpence.)

HENRY CLIFFORD

(Throwing the sixpence back.)
It is not a single sixpence I am concerned with. It is the 3000 sixpences paid around you. Are you to pay these fine people as well? No? I thought not. The fat get fatter off the poor man's work.

HENRY CLIFFORD (CONT'D)

And when they make a mistake such as having no insurance, who pays? We do. Whilst they get richer still.

MARY AUSTIN

Who the Hell do you think you are? That you can spoil the play for everyone? And not just any play. Macbeth. Macbeth, with Mrs. Siddons.

(To her neighbours.)

Honestly I've been beside myself with anticipation. And when Covent Garden does finally re-open we get this stuff going on. I'm not happy.

(To HENRY CLIFFORD.)

Whoever you are. I'm not very happy about this, you know.

HENRY CLIFFORD

It cannot be helped. Shame. Shame on you, Kemble.

MARY AUSTIN

Shame on you. Who are you anyway?

HENRY CLIFFORD

I am Henry Clifford attorney at law and champion of the common man's cause.

MARY AUSTIN

(To Audience members.)

Is that anything special? Doesn't it annoy you when people thrust their positions at you. Especially lawyers. He doesn't look like a lawyer does he? I mean really you'd have to a bit desperate to have to rely on him for your defence. Quite honestly a scarecrow would be more use.

HENRY CLIFFORD

Shame. No new prices.

MARY AUSTIN

Enough of this foolishness. Look around you. Can you not clearly see with your own eyes why they have increased the prices. Any fool can see. We are in a brand new theatre.

MARY AUSTIN (CONT'D)

No-one can forget that not ten months ago, they were pulling the poor charred bodies of men from this very spot. And now look, a grand beautiful theatre. That's why the prices are increased. To pay for this, and Kemble himself has promised the most lavish of productions. They don't come cheap, you know.

HENRY CLIFFORD

But why are we expected to pay for it? Was it our fault the old theatre burnt down? Did we strike the match? Did we decide to live by risk? No, no we did not. For shame, I say. For shame on Kemble. Shame.

MARY AUSTIN

Please, it's about to start.

(To HENRY CLIFFORD)

You are not about to do your protesting during the national anthem I presume.

HENRY CLIFFORD

What kind of an Englishman would do that? Come on, everyone stand for the anthem. God save our King!

(AUDIENCE are exhorted to all stand and sing.)

God save our gracious King,
 Long live our noble King,
 God save the King!
 Send him victorious,
 Happy and glorious,
 Long to reign over us;
 God save the King!

(AUDIENCE all sit.)

SCENE 7

FULL AUDITORIUM COVENT GARDEN

(HOUSE LIGHTS - ON)

(Enter JOHN KEMBLE. He walks slowly towards the centre of the stage.)

JOHN KEMBLE

We feel, with glory, all to Britain due,
 And British Artists raised this pile for
 you;
 While, zealous as our Patrons, here we
 stand,
 To guard the staple genius of our land.
 Solid our building, heavy our expense;

HENRY CLIFFORD

Oh no, no, no, no

JOHN KEMBLE

We rest our claim on your munificence;
 What ardour plans a Nation's taste to
 raise,
 A Nation's liberality repays.

(HENRY CLIFFORD's SECTION is driven to boo, shout "Shame On You", hiss and hoot so as to drown him out. KEMBLE stands in silence until slowly withdrawing from the stage)

MARY AUSTIN

He's gone. See what you have done. You
 have made Mr. Kemble retire. Are you
 happy now? Disgraceful.

(New Price section of audience direct abuse to the OP sections. Enter SARAH SIDDONS.)

SARAH SIDDONS

Ladies and Gentlemen. Dear, dear
 friends. Please, quiet please.

HENRY CLIFFORD

Our issue is not with you. So speak.

SARAH SIDDONS

My brother and I so wish the play to
 continue, but he is unwilling to start
 whilst such disturbances resound.

SARAH SIDDONS (CONT'D)

He would like to know what it is that upsets you so very much.

HENRY CLIFFORD

(Quietens audience down.)

Get Kemble, he must hear us. Get Kemble to face us like a man. I'll tell him what it is. Affordable theatre is an unalienable right.

(Exit SARAH SIDDONS.)

It is the principle. It is theft, plain and simple. No mere theatre manager can dictate to the people. The common man has few entertainments, the theatre is his by right.

MARY AUSTIN

But what right have you to complain about this fine theatre and its management? Do you think the rebuilding cost nothing? They have had to raise the prices. Who are you to say what they should do?

HENRY CLIFFORD

I am a member of the public, that is rank enough.

MARY AUSTIN

We are all that, members of the public.

HENRY CLIFFORD

Then we should all be up in arms.

MARY AUSTIN

But we are not and we do not want to hear you. We have paid good, hard earned money to see the show tonight, and you have taken that from us. I'm in service and have spent all day from six this morning, on my broken knees scrubbing a cold stone floor. As I scrubbed all I could think to get me through the day was the thought that I had my ticket for this evening.
You and your cronies have stolen our evening.

HENRY CLIFFORD

No to new prices. We want the old prices.

It is not their price to raise. It is our theatre. It is the King's theatre. Kemble has a patent and a monopoly. I propose we demonstrate our disapproval and force the management to recant.

(To his section of audience.)

What do we think?

MARY AUSTIN

(To her section of audience)

We think it's fairly reasonable don't we? I mean it's not outrageous, they have clearly spent a great deal of money doing it up. And it's only sixpence. What right have they to disturb a performance?

Lets not make a fuss, but show our disapproval of these demonstrations.

(MARY AUSTIN gets her section to start to chant saying how much louder one side can be over the other.)

AUDIENCE

"WE LOVE YOU KEMBLE, WE DO"

(HENRY CLIFFORD gets his section to start to chant.)

HENRY CLIFFORD

What do we want?

AUDIENCE

Old prices.

HENRY CLIFFORD

When do we want them?

AUDIENCE

Now.

(Enter JOHN KEMBLE slowly, the audience is quietened down.)

JOHN KEMBLE

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have succumbed to your request and do require you to tell me, what is it that you want? I would most sincerely like to know.

HENRY CLIFFORD

What affectation! You know what it is.

JOHN KEMBLE

I beg you to reflect, that the price of admission to the pit was three shillings so far back as the reign of Queen Anne. For a century there has been no increase in those rates of admission. I beg you, ladies and gentlemen, we must pay for this, the finest theatre in Europe. We have only tried to give you they very best costumes, scenes and performers that money can buy. For your entertainment.

HENRY CLIFFORD

You speak well Kemble. But who was it that decided to have no insurance? You Kemble. Not us.

JOHN KEMBLE

Do you think I took that risk lightly? It was for your benefit, to keep the prices low.

HENRY CLIFFORD

To increase profit. Who asked you to gamble on our behalf?

JOHN KEMBLE

Have you not seen the wondrous thing I have built for you.

MARY AUSTIN

It is beautiful. Thoroughly stunning. Thank you Mr Kemble.

HENRY CLIFFORD

I see excess that we are asked to pay for.

JOHN KEMBLE

I have only your interest at heart. Whatever you have wanted I have provided for you. Where there was darkness I have provided illumination.

HENRY CLIFFORD

At our cost. We will not be held
accountable for your mistakes. Not us.
We will not bail you out.
I will make you acquainted with what we
demand and I will make you acquainted
with them in three words, so that even
you may understand. What we want is The
Old Prices. From now on Kemble, when you
survey your flock you will see only the
angry eyes of wolves returning your cold
stare.

*(HENRY CLIFFORD gets his section to start
to chant.)*

What do we want?

AUDIENCE

Old prices.

HENRY CLIFFORD

When do we want them?

AUDIENCE

Now.

*(MARY AUSTIN gets her section to start to
chant.)*

AUDIENCE (CONT'D)

"THERE'S ONLY ONE JOHNNY KEMBLE"

*(JOHN KEMBLE slowly withdraws from the
stage.)*

ACT II Scene 1
BACK STAGE COVENT GARDEN
HOUSE LIGHTS - OFF

(Enter JOHN KEMBLE and SARAH SIDDONS.)

SARAH SIDDONS

That was horrific.

JOHN KEMBLE

They do not understand. Why can't they understand? It's very simple. Why can't they see what I have done for them. What more do they want, what more can I give them but to provide them with the finest drama in the finest theatre in the world.

SARAH SIDDONS

Truly horrific. I have never seen anything like it.

JOHN KEMBLE

A sixpence, that's all it is. They complain of costs. What about my costs? They complain of profit but without profit we wouldn't start this enterprise at all. I have investors and shareholders to reimburse. They do not understand. Fools. Who the hell do they think they are?

SARAH SIDDONS

Well, what are you going to do?

JOHN KEMBLE

What do you mean?

SARAH SIDDONS

Are you going to call off the show?

JOHN KEMBLE

I'm not, I'm set on that. We carry on. We are in the right.

(Claps hands)

On, on come on. We must continue the play.

SARAH SIDDONS

Surely we cannot. Did you not see them? John I really do think this is a time for reflection. Let us cancel tonight and delay the opening. It's for the best.

JOHN KEMBLE

It's fine. It will all be fine. I'm sure they are just getting the changes off their chests. They haven't the stomach to continue for long. They will calm down, I'm sure of it. There's nothing to be worried about. We continue. We will rise above them and ignore them. They are only a rabble after all. What can a rabble achieve?

SARAH SIDDONS

John, they are the audience. Is there no way to maintain the old prices?

JOHN KEMBLE

There is not. I would have to sack half the staff. I have spent a fortune on costumes. It simply can't be done. I will not compromise a show. Never.

SARAH SIDDONS

John, must you go down this road because of stubbornness. This is a dangerous bridge we find ourselves on. Please John, be sure there is no alternative.

(Exit JOHN KEMBLE and SARAH SIDDONS)

ACT II SCENE 2

IN THE STREET OUTSIDE COVENT GARDEN
HOUSE LIGHTS -ON

HENRY CLIFFORD

Look what I have, its today's Morning Chronicle discussing the protests. Listen here. You'll be interested in this.

(Reads)

It is a noble sight to see so much just indignation in the public mind, and we could not help thinking, as Mr. Kemble and Mrs. Siddons stood on the stage, carrying each £500 in clothes upon their backs, that it was to feed this vanity, that the public were screwed.

The only resource the public has, is, as the proprietors of the theatre take no notice of them, that they take no notice of the proprietors of the theatre.

Let the public continue to show their displeasure.

Let the public agree to drown them out, and we shall see which can do without the other the longest, after 25 nights the public shows they still have the guts for it. The proprietors must come down and the public must win.

See we are in the right.

MARY AUSTIN

Well it says here in the Times, that the disturbances are a disgrace.

The spectacle is unforgivable. It has a life of its own now. People come just to watch the rioting as a tourist attraction.

Your behaviour is a thing to make Englishmen hold their heads in shame. Shame upon you all.

If you do believe that the prices are too high, the it is entirely within your right, not to pay, and therefore not to attend. Stay away. Perform your shouting in the street.

Keep our theatre a place of decorum.

HENRY CLIFFORD

It is our right to demonstrate. And we are in the right.
If the proprietors can, upon any reasonable grounds, justify the measure of raising the prices of admission, the public will be satisfied.
Let the necessity be fairly proved,.
Until such justification is afforded, let me urge you to continue this justifiable opposition. They are nothing more than gypsies, travelling actors who try to tell us what we must pay. It is unforgivable.

MARY AUSTIN

Then at least afford them the chance to prove as much.
Leave this demonstration until you are in full possession of the facts.

HENRY CLIFFORD

I have enough facts already.
The advance of prices is not for the purpose of bettering the condition of the performers, but for that of lining the pockets of a few individuals.
I know for a fact that the family of one of the managers alone receives a sum more than twelve times the average performer.
And as well I can prove, that the prices if kept the same are more than sufficient to pay the interest on the whole of the loan raised.
We must maintain this peaceful resistance and we must in the end prevail.
The managers cannot much longer persist in opposing the public.
We will prevail.
The public must prevail.

20

ACT II SCENE 2

20

BACKSTAGE COVENT GARDEN - House Lights OFF,
Curtains OPEN

*(SARAH SIDDONS is sat before a mirror
making herself up. Enter GEORGE COOKE.)*

GEORGE COOKE

Mrs Siddons how goes it?
Sick of this yet?
I confess I am thoroughly finished with
it. Why are we fighting his battles for
him? Huh, answer me that. We are on the
stage every night whilst Jack skulks
around the back striving not to be seen
and urging us all onwards, into the
snarling jaws of the Pit. Gallant in
front of his troops but a coward in the
face of the enemy. What dramatic hero
would he make? Eh? Richard even went to
battle, loathed as he was. But Mr.
Kemble? No.

SARAH SIDDONS

George. Can you not talk more
respectfully of my brother? After all
he's done for you. You are employed, you
should be thankful and happy

GEORGE COOKE

Oh I couldn't be happier. Facing this
disturbance every night? No Mrs.
Siddons, I am sick of it. You I can
understand, carrying on for the sake of
your brother, and very honourable it is
too. But I, no, I cannot continue I
think. I have no stomach left for it.

SARAH SIDDONS

George, what other choice have we? I am
here for everybody not John alone. We
are a team George. Over the years we
have been through much together you and
I. We all have. This will end, and we
will barely remember it. But we must
stick together. George you are such a
wonderful man and actor too. I count on
you greatly. I will not allow us to
split. George please, for me and our
friendship. Please continue.

SARAH SIDDONS (CONT'D)

It will not be for very much longer I am sure. The public are as sick of this as you are.

GEORGE COOKE

Maybe I can hold on a bit more, maybe. With some help.

(Reaches for a bottle and starts drinking. He empties it.)

Damn, I'll be back shortly.

SARAH SIDDONS

George please make sure you are and that you return in a fit state to perform? Please, you are more than drunk enough already.

GEORGE COOKE

A fit state to perform? For what end? Pray tell me. They cannot hear me speak, so why should I speak clearly at all. Ridiculous.

SARAH SIDDONS

Because we must be always ready. What if tonight they let us perform? Look at Joe, always ready, always professional whether they listen or not. Please George, for me?

(George Cooke goes to leave. Enter Dorothy JORDAN with a bottle of brandy and flowers)

DOROTHY JORDAN

Are you leaving George?

GEORGE COOKE

What's that you have?

DOROTHY JORDAN

Brandy, would you like it.

GEORGE COOKE

Yes I damn well would.

(George Cooke takes the bottle and starts drinking.)

DOROTHY JORDAN

Aren't you going to ask me why am I walking around with a bunch of flowers?

GEORGE COOKE

If I must.

DOROTHY JORDAN

(Reading from the card on the flowers.)

Well it seems I'm quite someone's favourite. A gentleman you may have seen for the last few nights hanging around. A gentleman with a rather large estate and a title to boot. A young gentleman with a rather pleasing face and kind manner. I young good looking gentleman I am rather enamoured by.

GEORGE COOKE

Be careful girl. You won't be the first to be led a merry dance and left to rue the lure of the pretty music whispered into your ears.

DOROTHY JORDAN

And what would you know of love George? Your choices have been less than good. And I do know what I am doing.

(Enter JOHN KEMBLE)

KEMBLE

Ah troops. All well? Ready for tonight?

SARAH SIDDONS

We are alright now I believe, though Miss Jordan was insisting on bringing up the subject of poor George's marriage.

KEMBLE

Ah, are we still not mentioning that George?

GEORGE COOKE

Thank you everyone, for doing such an excellent job of not mentioning my marriage.

GEORGE COOKE (CONT'D)

So in answer Jack, no we are still not mentioning the fact that my attempt at marriage was so spectacularly unsuccessful and that my wife ran off after 6 months. No we are still not mentioning it. And whilst we are at it are we allowed to mention your marriage?

KEMBLE

My marriage? There's nothing to mention there.

SARAH SIDDONS

I think what George is referring to is the time when you forgot you were married. On the very day!

KEMBLE

I have never understood why everyone finds that so amusing.

GEORGE COOKE

What that you get married in the afternoon and by the evening you've forgotten and returned to your lodgings and not your wife's bed? What could anyone find funny about that?

DOROTHY JORDAN

Is that true? Really, how did your wife feel?

KEMBLE

Do you know I've never asked her. Anyway, enough of that. I just wanted to say that you are all doing sterling jobs in these trying times, and I am most thankful of your continued support. Even though the disturbances continue unabated we must still perform as though there were no disturbance at all. It is vital that we do not show weakness or give cause to demands for refunds. I am convinced...

GEORGE COOKE

...that this state of affairs will not last much longer. Yeah, yeah, heard it.

JOHN KEMBLE

Very good. So carry on and good luck for tonight.

(Exit JOHN KEMBLE and SARAH SIDDONS)

GEORGE COOKE

What I meant about Mr. Kemble's marriage, was that it is a loveless marriage.

SARAH SIDDONS

Lucky the marriage that has love in it, George.

GEORGE COOKE

How many times have I heard that speech now? Is it fifty?

DOROTHY JORDAN

Nineteen. I am off to the stage. George, do you feel like getting beaten with a stick whilst I sing a song?

GEORGE COOKE

Go on. That's exactly what I feel like doing. That and leaving this damned place. Being beaten with a stick seems positively appealing.

DOROTHY JORDAN

And George, I do this because I am nothing without it and I'd do it for free.

(Exit GEORGE COOKE and DOROTHY JORDAN)

ACT II SCENE 3

ON STAGE COVENT GARDEN - House Lights ON,
(Enter DOROTHY JORDAN and GEORGE COOKE
DOROTHY JORDAN starts to sing a comic
song.)
(GEORGE COOKE is completely drunk.)

GEORGE COOKE

Excuse me. But can I take this
opportunity to just say how much I
support the pit. Well done men. You're
doing a fine job.

(Applauds the pit.)

Long have I wanted to bloody Black
jack's nose. To take his whining throat
and throttle it hard. Shake some passion
into the man.

He ought to be reminded.

Old prices and old acting styles.

CLIFFORD

Ah, see Mr. Cooke is with us. Hoorah Mr.
Cooke.

MARY AUSTIN

I wouldn't think Mr. Kemble will stand
for that, from his actors. Shocking
behaviour.

GEORGE COOKE

Black Jack, he can go stuff himself.
I've got options. Big offers you know.

(Exit GEORGE COOKE and DOROTHY JORDAN)

ACT 2 SCENE 4

BACKSTAGE COVENT GARDEN - House Lights OFF,
(Enter DOROTHY JORDAN and drunk GEORGE
COOKE)

SARAH SIDDONS

Mr. Cooke, your disloyalty is scandalous. After all my brother has done for you. The times he has forgiven your drunkenness. And let you continue to ply your trade.

GEORGE COOKE

Its not him. The public demanded me to return.

SARAH SIDDONS

The public are not the ones that pay your wages, George. Look around Mr. Cooke, and see the rest of the players all coming together to support Mr. Kemble and each other.
(Enter KEMBLE)

JOHN KEMBLE

Well done George. Bravo. That was exactly what we needed. Dissension in the company. With all this going on too. Your judgement is something to behold.

GEORGE COOKE

Jealous that the public still love me, Jack? Jealous that I am not the most hated man in London?

JOHN KEMBLE

They do not love you. They pity you, George.

GEORGE COOKE

They don't pity me. And they certainly don't hate me. Not like I hate you. Kemble. I hate you. I hate every bone in your arrogant body.

DOROTHY JORDAN

Its just the drink talking. He doesn't mean it.

GEORGE COOKE

I do I tell you. I hate it all. Damn
you.
Damn you all. Damn everyone.

JOHN KEMBLE

After all I've done for you George.
Where is the loyalty?

GEORGE COOKE

I don't see you out there Jack. Screw
you all, I don't need you. Good luck
with your money grabbing. Good riddance
to you all.

(Exit GEORGE COOKE)

ACT 2 SCENE 5

AUDITORIUM COVENT GARDEN - House Lights ON.

(Enter DOROTHY JORDAN to do a comic song.)

MARY AUSTIN

Can I just say ladies and gentlemen, that we should let the actors know that it is not they that we are railing against. And we should apologise and let them know that we continue to have the greatest respect for them. It is the owners and family of the manager that we reserve our displeasure for.

ALL

Hear hear. Three cheers for the actors. A round of applause for Miss Jordan. Boo to all Kembles.

HENRY CLIFFORD

Miss Jordan. We have something to say to you.

(DOROTHY JORDAN comes to the front of the stage.)

We would just like to let you know that it is not you who we rail against. Any action we take is solely against the management and the Kembles. We know that you must support us, being a man of the people like ourselves. So thank you. And as a measure of our respect we applaud you and we bow to you.

(OP sections are encouraged to applaud and bow to DOROTHY JORDAN.)

And to show your support for us give us a bow. Yes give us a bow.

MARY AUSTIN

You can't order her around like that. What do you think you are playing at? Do you think you can direct the actors now?

DOROTHY JORDAN

Thank you everyone, that is so kind of you. But bowing to you would put me in a very difficult position. You don't want to put me in a difficult position do you?

HENRY CLIFFORD

It should be easy. Who are you for?
Which side are you on? Tell us.

*(Audience are encouraged to demand to
know which side DOROTHY JORDAN is on.)*

DOROTHY JORDAN

*(DOROTHY JORDAN raises her hands to call
for quiet.)*

It's not for me to be serious. No, no
friends, what you want is me and a
little song, we'll share a little fun
together.

(Shouts to the wings.)

Bring me my guitar won't you.

MARY AUSTIN

That's right, pay no attention to them.

HENRY CLIFFORD

No Miss Jordan, this is the time for
seriousness. We demand to know what side
you are on. Are you for the people or
for greed?

DOROTHY JORDAN

I can't answer that. I love everybody ,
I have no fight with anyone. I just want
to share some fun with you all. That's
all an actress ever wants. Come on
everybody, the time to be serious is
with other people.

HENRY CLIFFORD

No answer. Answer damn you.

DOROTHY JORDAN

You don't want a straight answer form
me. I can't be serious. Laughter and
fun. They are the only ways I know. I am
a comedian, I take no sides.

HENRY CLIFFORD

If you decline to support us then you
must be against us?

MARY AUSTIN

You cannot make her choose. Do you not know what it is like to have an employer?

DOROTHY JORDAN

Ladies and most honourable gentlemen. I am not against the pit, how can I be? You good people know full well my love of you. Without your praise and applause I am nothing. I am forever thankful that you see fit to enjoy the fare I serve before you. I swear I shall never stop giving my all for your entertainment. If it means breaking every bone in my body, straining every chord in my throat, just to please you, then I will consider the pain a price well worth paying for your continued support. I freely admit I am your servant in that respect.

CLIFFORD

Say then, that you are against the management.

DOROTHY JORDAN

I cannot do that either. Do you know what you are asking me to do? You are calling for my professional suicide. This is no choice you give me. I only wish this damned affair over. But I'll be no part of taking sides. I sit between the theatre behind me and the people in front. And this is where I sit happiest.

MARY AUSTIN

You cannot force your will upon her. She is a paid employee of the theatre, she cannot show disloyalty. Where else could she work? What choices does a woman have in this world?

DOROTHY JORDAN

Thank you, but I need no help. I need no side. I am neither a Princes or a King's toy.

CLIFFORD

That is no answer. I swear I shall never pay to see you again unless you answer.

MARY AUSTIN

Again I say stop this. You cannot bully her into a position. And what is this anyway? What more weight has her voice than to any around you? None. You will not listen to my voice, our voices yet you care so much what someone with fame thinks of your actions?

You cross the public at your peril. Think hard. If you are not with us then you are against us. Think hard Miss Jordan. Which side are you on? I too will snub your performances unless you answer. We all will.

(Crowd are urged to agree and call for an answer.)

DOROTHY JORDAN

I cannot abstain?

MARY AUSTIN

You can abstain, you must abstain.

CLIFFORD

No, absolutely you cannot. We will not forget this.

DOROTHY JORDAN

I have no choice. A clown is a fool without an audience. If I must choose then I am for the people.

(DOROTHY JORDAN descends from the stage and into the auditorium. The OP crowds celebrate.)

ACT 2 SCENE 4

BACKSTAGE COVENT GARDEN - House Lights OFF

(Enter JOHN KEMBLE and SARAH SIDDONS)

ACT II SCENE 4

FULL AUDITORIUM COVENT GARDEN

*(In darkness HENRY CLIFFORD counts
5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30)*

HOUSE LIGHTS - ON

HENRY CLIFFORD

So? After thirty nights have you not heard us? Do you not hear us?

MARY AUSTIN

Of course he hears you. Who could not? For a lawyer, if that's what he is, he's not very bright is he? You're not very bright are you? Mr. Kemble has told you his very good reasons for the rise. It is you and your Old Price crowd that are not listening. If only we could return to watching the play in peace. It seems so long since I last enjoyed a performance. Oh, they gave us such joy, I lived from each visit to the theatre to the next thinking of the emotions that had been raised in me, and now I just have anger.

HENRY CLIFFORD

It would serve these celebrities well, to reflect a little on their own importance.

MARY AUSTIN

Their importance? And yet you were the one determined to make Miss Jordan speak out on your behalf! I care not for an artist's politics I care only for their art. And what is more important than an artist? We pay actors because of their talents. We watch them because they enchant us. We respect them because they elevate us and lead us into emotions we rarely feel. We envy them their gifts and fortune. I hear jealousy and nothing more.

HENRY CLIFFORD

Actors are nothing more than servants of the public. Well they should remember it.

HENRY CLIFFORD (CONT'D)

It is the public that pays their wages,
it is the public that endures them and
whenever they are inflated of their own
stature it is the public must correct
them.

MARY AUSTIN

You're a bit earnest are you my dear?
Aren't you getting any?

HENRY CLIFFORD

Getting any? I'm getting plenty. Plenty
of progress in this dispute, thank you.

MARY AUSTIN

Thought not.

*(HENRY CLIFFORD gets his section to start
to chant.)*

HENRY CLIFFORD

What do we want?

AUDIENCE

Old prices.

HENRY CLIFFORD

When do we want them?

AUDIENCE

Now.

*(Enter JOHN KEMBLE, he speaks to the
audience.)*

JOHN KEMBLE

If you will not allow us, then we cannot
perform. Why have you turned on me?
Do you forget the times you have cheered
me to the rafters, the times I have
brought you laughter that would have
kept silent, tears that would have
stayed unshed from your eyes,
understanding of emotions that would
have remained feral in the darkness of
your minds.
Did you not love me and call for my
appearance, ruing the days I am not
before you, and yet when I receive
recompense for my work, treat me with
contempt and begrudge me my earnings.

MARY AUSTIN

We do love you Mr Kemble. Oh we do. We think you deserve everything you ask.

HENRY CLIFFORD

He deserves nothing. Will you not listen to us. When will we have our Old Prices back? You deserve nothing but our approbation.

JOHN KEMBLE

Oh, if you could only know me and love me for who I am. You do not know the John Kemble of reality. You are ignorant of the study I have made of every aspect of the classics only so that you could see clearer the drama before you. You know only a simple actor, with my voice and body. You see only the vision I give to you. Do you not know that the men you hate, are the characters I have paraded before you. The monsters that I have given life to, on the stage, and ripped open the rib-cages of, for you to see the nature of the hearts that beat within. They are not I. My heart is as hidden to you, as any that never loved you. This cold and unfeeling man that you see before you is a phantom summoned by my skill. This villain is a story woven by my mastery of the stage. The greater your hatred, the more my talents are praised. I beseech you. Stop this nonsense and let me return to entertaining you.

HENRY CLIFFORD

Enough of you. Right everybody turn your backs on him. The worst insult for an actor. He'll hate this.

(HENRY CLIFFORD get his section to stand and turn their backs to the stage.)

MARY AUSTIN

That's a disgrace. Outrageous. You can't do that.

(MARY AUSTIN gets her section to chant.)

AUDIENCE

Shame on you, shame on you, shame on you.

(To the tune of "Here we Go, here we go, here we go.")

HENRY CLIFFORD

We Shall not, we shall not be moved.

(HENRY CLIFFORD gets his section to join in.)

We will not listen to you until you listen to us. If you won't perform we shall have to make our own entertainment.

(HENRY CLIFFORD calls forth a fiddler, though this can be any kind of performer.)

I've brought this fellow along to keep us entertained and to make sure Kemble cannot IGNORE us. Play Sir.

(Fiddler plays a short refrain and the Old Price section are made to cheer and clap. Exit JOHN KEMBLE and SARAH SIDDON, MARY AUSTIN makes sure her section don not clap.)

MARY AUSTIN

Oh this is ridiculous. Look at them carrying on. And they've played Mr Kemble off the stage again.

(To her section)

I don't suppose any of you lot can play anything can you?

(Long pause)

FIDDLER NO.2

I can play fiddle too.

MARY AUSTIN

Excellent, have you got it with you?

FIDDLER NO.2

Hang on.

(Long pause and searches around his seat.)

Here it is.

MARY AUSTIN

Perfect, now come on, then show them how to do it.

(Pause)

Are you any good?

FIDDLER NO.2

Not bad. Better than him.

FIDDLER NO.1

Oh no you're not.

(MARY AUSTIN stops and looks around audience and should need only by gesture get her section to shout on cue.)

NP AUDIENCE

Oh yes he is.

OP AUDIENCE

Oh no he's not.

(Etc)

HENRY CLIFFORD

Right, we have to settle this. Play
Sirs.

(The two fiddlers take it in turns to play refrains of increasing complexity, cheered on by their section of audience. Eventually they offer each other a hand signifying a draw. Applause is for both.)

HENRY CLIFFORD (CONT'D)

Well played Sirs. But we should not forget why we are here. Nor should Kemble be allowed to. If he thinks we are going to lose interest he is very much mistaken.

(HENRY CLIFFORD's section is led to chant "WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED". MARY AUSTIN's section responds and sings "THERE'S ONLY ONE JOHN KEMBLE". The fiddlers should join in with each.)

ACT II SCENE 5
BACKSTAGE COVENT GARDEN
HOUSE LIGHTS - OFF

(Enter JOHN KEMBLE and SARAH SIDDONS)

JOHN KEMBLE

The bastards. I won't have it, I won't let the bastards win you know. I simply won't. Who the hell do they think they are? They can't keep it up. I can. I bloody can.

(Turning to SARAH SIDDONS who he has forgotten about.)

And how are you faring Sarah? It has become a personal attack on all our family.

SARAH SIDDONS

I hate it John. I absolutely hate it. What have I ever done to deserve this?

JOHN KEMBLE

They are using anything that will hurt us. You have done nothing. I have done nothing wrong. Imagine them there now before us. Do they deserve our respect? Think of them as a pack of dogs, chasing senseless from one issue to the next. They have no memory, or plan. They have no stomach for hard work or dedication. One night one thing, another night some new cause to be remonstrated with. Not caring who they hurt in the process. We must treat them as such.

SARAH SIDDONS

The cheer of the pit is my life blood. The roar of approval, the silence of enrapture, the collective gasp of astonishment. These are my sustenance. All they've ever asked for in return is that I show them love, the best way I know how, on the stage.

JOHN KEMBLE

Love them, even when they spurn you?

SARAH SIDDONS

Is that not when you desire love most?
When it is spurned?

JOHN KEMBLE

No Sarah, they are not worthy of our love, they are base things. They have no taste. It is our tastes that shape their views. We show them what refinement is and they learn from us. Left alone they would watch nothing but melodrama and pantomime. It is up to us to lead them to the great works of theatre. To animate it for them. To reveal the mystery in the words they misunderstand. To open their eyes for them. To feed them, the food they require. We cannot have rifts amongst us. Not now. We must stick together. I can always rely on you Sarah, my dear sister. Lets have no division in these stressful times. Can I count on you?

SARAH SIDDONS

John, you have my support always but I do worry about the damage to our reputations.

JOHN KEMBLE

No we are big enough to survive any attacks on our reputations. I'm sure. Thank you Sarah. We'll beat the bastards soon. We must resort to force.

SARAH SIDDONS

Force?

JOHN KEMBLE

I am sure of it. We cannot back down now. Did Henry V meekly surrender? Did Prospero admit defeat? We will remove the ringleaders. This theatre is, after all, private property. Force it is.

SARAH SIDDONS

This is yet more folly. You cannot win an argument by force.

JOHN KEMBLE

It is merely asserting our rights. They speak of rights, what of ours. I am an eagle whose wings have been bound down by frosts and snows. Now is the time for me to shake down my plumage and free myself of these icy shackles and soar through the heavens unbound. I am resolved. It is not the people's theatre, it is mine.

(Exeunt)

ACT II SCENE 6
 FULL AUDITORIUM COVENT GARDEN
 HOUSE LIGHTS - ON

(Enter HEAVY into the auditorium dressed as a modern security guard. Audience should be at peak disturbance. Audience leaders may quieten their sections to be heard.)

(HEAVY makes his way to HENRY CLIFFORD)

HENRY CLIFFORD

Who are you? Its a heavy. They've hired heavies. What freedoms do we have left? An Englishman's right to voice his opinions and no-one will tell me different.

HEAVY

(To HENRY CLIFFORD)

I arrest you in the name of the law, for incitement to riot.

HENRY CLIFFORD

Arresting me for what? What about everyone else? You are no Policeman.

(Is dragged violently out by HEAVY)
 Kemble, you will regret this. I promise you. I'll sue you.

(To audience)

Keep up the noise. Keep up the disturbances. Old Prices. We will be triumphant.

(Quiet in the Audience)

MARY AUSTIN

So now he's gone what are you lot going to do? I'm not sure what I think about that. Is that right to resort to violence, in what was a peaceful protest?

(Talking to her section of the audience.)

What do we think? It's not right is it? There is a rule of law and I abide by it, but I expect that measured line to be drawn by all. This line has been crossed. I have hated these protests with all my heart but at least they have been peaceful. And that is everything.

(Enter HENRY CLIFFORD)

MARY AUSTIN (CONT'D)

(Lights go down CLIFFORD back stage counts 32,38,47,48,50)

HENRY CLIFFORD

What a farce that was. The magistrate laughed the case out of court. So now who is with us? Does that change your star stricken mind?

MARY AUSTIN

After that despicable action of your arrest, I think we may be more inclined to support you. I never thought I'd see violent action like that in a theatre. I am quite shocked by it.

HENRY CLIFFORD

Kemble. Listen to me Kemble. We will be heard here. The pit will hear me. You must hear the voice of the common man. This where I hear you, you, and you. This is where the common man speaks. This is where I can hear his plea and help him fight against the mighty who seek to down tread him. Just because a man is poor, that does not make him wrong. Do we seek great wealth like some? No, we do not. Do we cover ourselves with the trappings of success? Not like some. Do we seek the causes that help the common man, my dear? Fifty nights of disturbance, and how many times have we seen Kemble? He hides from us. All we ask for is the Old Prices.

(Directly to MARY AUSTIN)

This is enough now. Are you with us? You have seen these theatre owners use force upon us, when we were nonviolent. They have tried to use their influence through the law and have failed. They have shown time and time again that they do not care. They think they are superior and will not bow until we force them. If you love the theatre as you say, then you must be with us.

MARY AUSTIN

(To her section)

We are convinced. We cannot let this state of affairs continue for ever, we must decide to be one strong and clear voice. Kemble has resorted to violence and has not listened to reason. Enough is enough.

(To everyone)

Let him hide no more. To his house. He lives in Great Russell Street. Just around the corner. Kemble must listen to us.

HENRY CLIFFORD

He must hear us.

(OP Chanting is started and a section leaders start small conga chains around the auditorium. Chanting)

AUDIENCE

Lets all go to Kemble's,
 Lets all go to Kemble's,
 Lala la la,
 Lala la la.

(House lights start to dim. The music continues to tape with a crowd chanting as they march.)

ACT II SCENE 7
 JOHN KEMBLE'S HOUSE
 HOUSE LIGHTS - OFF

(JOHN KEMBLE and SARAH SIDDONS are in the centre of the room. The audience song moves from the music and degenerates into the sounds of a riot outside.)

SARAH SIDDONS

Dear Lord they come. They come for us.
 What do you think they want John?
 Are they likely to break down the doors?
 I have no idea what they are capable of
 anymore.

Why did you embark on this course John?
 For what purpose?

It is arrogance that has brought it this
 far. Your stubborn foolishness.

Damn you, you must stop this now.

(Looking out of the window)

There must be 500 of them. They look so
 furious.

I am truly scared John. What do they
 want of us? A mob can do such awful
 things.

*(Sound of window smashing. SARAH screams.
 SARAH runs into JOHN KEMBLE'S arms.)*

You know you must stop this.

Look at us, cornered like criminals
 evading justice. What fate have you made
 us? In three months, you have turned
 yourself from the most celebrated man in
 England to the most hated. For what? For
 all your work to be forgotten. And such
 good work. Such very good work. Your
 reputation and good standing in tatters
 with a mob outside your door.

You cannot fight the people and win.
 Never. You must know that. We are their
 toys. Their playthings.

(Sound of window smashing. SARAH screams)

John!

Can you not hear them? Listen to the
 sound of your stubbornness.

Stop this John. For your own sake. For
 my sake. Let me listen to the cheers of
 the crowd, not their abuse. That is my
 life. Give it back to me and end this
 nonsense.

SARAH SIDDONS (CONT'D)

Would you die for this principle? Its only money. Just money. We could die here, now. I am so scared John. I have never feared for my life before. They are destroying you, tearing you apart.

(SARAH SIDDONS goes to window)

Leave us. Leave us alone I beg of you. Please.

(JOHN KEMBLE pulls her away)

Have you forgotten who they are? Have you? They are your audience. And now you would not even have me speak to them? They are the reason for everything you have. John, see this for the madness it is. What am I but my reputation? What is anyone but that. Your reputation is ruined. A life's work destroyed in weeks. How hard you slaved to get acceptance and now it is discarded like an old shoe.

I cannot watch you destroy yourself. You have to give in. John, you must give in to them and carry on. You cannot keep this up forever or you will be ruined.

(Sound of window smashing.)

But you must stop this now. You have no choice. You must accept defeat.

(They huddle together and pray, sounds of smashing windows continue, roar of crowd fades.)

(Exit SARAH SIDDONS)

ACT II SCENE 8
INSIDE AN IMAGINARY THEATRE
HOUSE LIGHTS - OFF

JOHN KEMBLE

Damn you, damn you all.
You maggots, feeding on the rotting
corpse of my reputation.
Growing fatter and fatter, crawling over
each other in the haste to consume more
and more of me.
I have just done what is fair. My blood
is pure.
But, you fancy you could taste it, and
wish to sup on it.
Haven't you had your fill? No, of course
not, there is still some flesh left, you
must eat more till only the hollow bones
remain. The bones of my legacy directing
history to this monstrous disturbance.
You flies, coming at me again and again.
The more I flail and writhe the harder
you fly back at me.
Leave me alone.
Leave me be.
Thousands upon thousands of you. In my
eyes, in my ears. I cannot think for the
buzzing. If I stay still then I will be
smothered. A million tiny voices
drowning my cries.
I must move.
I must fight.
These damned flies. If I had something
to hold, to grab and wrestle.
If had fight left.
Oh, to be rid of you. Oh, for quiet and
peace and tranquillity, not this damned
noise and every piece of my skin to be
shared with this swarm.
Off me. Please. I beg of you please,
leave me be.
Please let me back to what I was.
Please, leave me be. You have done your
worst. Leave me to history.

ACT II SCENE 9
 FULL AUDITORIUM COVENT GARDEN
 HOUSE LIGHTS - ON

(Quietly and slowly as MARY AUSTIN starts to sing alone, HENRY CLIFFORD joins in AUDIENCE are exhorted to join in.)

(To the tune of Drunken Sailor.)

What shall we do with Johnny Kemble?
 What shall we do with Johnny Kemble?
 What shall we do with Johnny Kemble?
 Of Covent Garden Theatre.

Put him in a barrel and roll him downhill.

Put him in a barrel and roll him downhill.

Put him in a barrel and roll him downhill.

Till he has learned his lesson.

We want the old prices.

We want the old prices.

We want the old prices.

At Covent Garden Theatre. ETC

(Enter John Kemble, he puts his hands up to signal quiet. Everyone is quietened down.)

JOHN KEMBLE

(JOHN KEMBLE starts applauding.)

You win. Congratulations to you all. A splendid performance . Well done again. I never thought you had it in you. You the public. What awesome power you have and yet rarely use it. Shout, shout as one and you can shout the house down. My solitary voice has no answer to your unstoppable roar. So you have them and well earned they were. You have your Old Prices. Are you satisfied? ARE YOU SATISFIED?

(Lights Change AUDITORIUM LIGHTS OFF)

Is this how I will be remembered as the man who caused this monstrous disturbance? I know that alreday more ink has been poured on to the page about this matter than has ever been writ praising me and all black black stains on my reputation.

JOHN KEMBLE (CONT'D)

But is not for me to write my obituary,
it for you.

BLACKOUT (WHEN KEMBLE BOWS UNTIL ALL
ACTORS ARE BOWING)
LIGHTS