

***THE LIGHT FROM THE WINDOW
OR, WHERE'S THE FOOD***

by Audrey McGee



Self Portrait with a Bottle of Wine (1906)
Oil on canvas (110 cm x 120 cm)
Munch Museum, Oslo

CHARACTERS

JAMES – (M/F, 30+) A poorly dressed person with a warm demeanor, but being the most grounded character, he can be grave at times.

EMIL – (M, any age) The senior waiter. Tall, both charming and threatening. Promises everything and delivers nothing.

CLEMENT – (F, any age) The junior waiter. Tall, both charming and threatening. Gaslights.

EDWARD – (M, 30-40) A proper gentleman looking for an excellent dinner.

Note – All characters have masculine names and pronouns, but can be played by a variety of actors, with playwright preferences listed above.

PLACE

XXX

TIME

XXX

THE LIGHT FROM THE WINDOW OR, WHERE'S THE FOOD

At rise. A restaurant. Tables with white tablecloths, one place setting on the central table. In the corner is a small table with no tablecloth, where JAMES is sitting, staring out a window. Besides him, it is completely empty, but there are sounds of lively conversation. CLEMENT and EMIL enter, EMIL holding a wine glass and CLEMENT holding a wine bottle. They look out at the audience.

CLEMENT. Is he here yet?

EMIL. Does it look like he's here?

CLEMENT. I can't tell them apart yet.

EMIL. The real ones are usually quieter, and they have shadows.

CLEMENT. *(Looking at James)* So, what about—

EMIL. Not him! Never acknowledge him.

CLEMENT. James...

EMIL. Exactly.

CLEMENT. You've never spoken to him?

EMIL. You don't want to. Keep away from that window.

EDWARD enters. EMIL nods in his direction, and the waiters' demeanor changes. They're simultaneously more charming and more threatening. This becomes more pronounced throughout the play, as they interact with EDWARD. They approach.

EMIL. Good evening, sir.

EDWARD. Evening? Surely it's not that late.

CLEMENT. At our restaurant, sir, it's always evening.

EMIL. No one has to wait for wine, sir.

EDWARD. Ah, excellent. Cabernet, if you please.

EMIL leads him to the place set at the table.

EMIL. Have a seat, sir.

EMIL places the glass and CLEMENT prepares to pour.

EDWARD. Ah, but I will wait for the dinner.

EMIL. It's on its way, sir – it will hardly take a minute.

EDWARD. But, I—

CLEMENT. You've already ordered, sir.

EDWARD. Have I?

EMIL/CLEMENT. Yes sir, quite ordered.

EDWARD. Ah. Well. Bring on the wine, I suppose.

EMIL leaves and CLEMENT pours a white wine into the glass.

EDWARD. I say! This was supposed to be red.

CLEMENT. Only white lies within our cellars, sir.

CLEMENT leaves.

EDWARD. That seems lacking.

He looks out to a specific audience member, or two, as if they're sharing his table. If they respond, the actor may ad-lib.

EDWARD. Well, good evening. They didn't seem to have the room for a private table, did they? Quite a popular restaurant. Is the food as good as they say? Look at this place – bustling with all sorts of elegant persons. I have to assume that the conversation is most fascinating.

The waiters re-enter, hovering behind EDWARD. He doesn't notice.

EDWARD. Did you get any wine? White as well. I simply have to protest – but of course, it must be just as high quality as the food. Mine should be arriving soon.

He looks around, the waiters pretend that they are busy. He can't get their attention and turns back to the audience. As soon as he does, the waiters go back to watching him.

EDWARD. A toast? Well, I usually wait... but as they said, it will be out any moment. A toast, yes! To... health? Wealth? Wisdom? *(He laughs)* To tonight. Why not?

He toasts and takes a sip of the wine. It's not pleasant. The waiters smile at each other and swoop upon EDWARD.

EMIL/CLEMENT. How is everything so far, sir?

EDWARD. Delightful, yes. From the company to the...wine. Where's the food?

EMIL. It's on its way, sir.

EDWARD. Yes, you mentioned that. I do hope there's some benefit to waiting.

CLEMENT. Absolutely, sir!

EMIL. We must make you aware of our most singular establishment, sir.

CLEMENT. Entertainment is everywhere, sir. From the musicians—

A strain of music plays.

EMIL. To the murals—

Colored lights dapple the stage.

CLEMENT. To, of course, the company!

A burst of laughter breaks out. The waiters lean down; they're in EDWARD's face.

EMIL. There is only one friendly word of advice.

CLEMENT. Watch where you look.

EMIL. It changes what's real.

EDWARD uses the audience as an aside.

EDWARD. (*Amused*) I'm thoroughly baffled. But heavens, something does stink in here. (*To the waiters*) What is that awful smell?

They keep their faces close to his.

EMIL. That, sir, would be the sea.

EDWARD turns toward JAMES.

EDWARD. I say – that's a brilliant landscape – why, the sunlight is glinting right off the waves. Ow.

He holds up his hand to block the light.

CLEMENT. We apologize for the inconvenience, sir.

EDWARD. Why, there's someone over there.

EMIL. Crazy James, sir. We can't get rid of him.

CLEMENT. He always talks about him "coming from the sea," and for the life of us, sir, we can't understand why he won't go back.

EMIL. All he does, sir, is open that fishy window, stare outside, and blind our customers. Don't pay him any attention, sir.

EDWARD blinks, turning away from JAMES.

EDWARD. I'm quite willing to oblige.

The waiters step back, satisfied. EDWARD speaks to the audience, unrolling his silverware.

EDWARD. Odd that they can't throw him out. Now, I—

He looks down, expecting his meal, but it's still not there.

EDWARD. Waiter!

EMIL. Yes, sir?

EDWARD. Where's the food?

EMIL. It's on its way, sir!

EDWARD. *(To the audience)* I feel I've been here an hour. But let's see about this... unique entertainment. The musicians were... where were they? I think they were over there...

He stares very hard. The music begins again.

EDWARD. By Jove, it works! I say, do they take requests?

He absent-mindedly sips the wine, then looks toward the audience, as if someone's called his attention.

EDWARD. Sorry, what?

The music stops. JAMES gets up and makes his way to stand close to EDWARD.

EDWARD. Oh, wait, wait!

He looks back towards the musicians, staring very hard. Nothing happens.

EDWARD. Blast! They've gone. Fickle—ephemeral. Why did you distract me?

JAMES. I had to, at some point.

EDWARD starts and turns to look at JAMES. Beat.

JAMES. Hello. *(No response)* I'm James.

EDWARD. You're the fellow sitting in the corner without any food or drink.

During this conversation, the sounds of other conversation fade slightly.

JAMES. I'm waiting for someone.

EDWARD. I thought you wanted to go back to the sea.

JAMES. You've listened to the waiters, then?

EDWARD. Well, of course, who else? Besides... they gave me a very important piece of information.

JAMES. Where you look changes what's real?

EDWARD. Yes.

He looks away, triumphant.

JAMES. Do you enjoy living in a world where your wandering attention changes the fabric of reality?

EDWARD is startled.

EDWARD. Well, I... it's hardly that serious, it's just entertainment.

JAMES. I'd prefer having something reliable. Real enjoyment. Real wine. Real food.

EDWARD. Ah, but the wine is real.

JAMES. Only white lies in their cellars.

EDWARD. And the food is on its way.

JAMES. Do you believe that?

EDWARD. Go back to the sea, sir.

JAMES. I told you. I'm waiting for someone.