

Temptation

The scene is the Ninety Mile Beach in eastern Victoria. The tide is getting ready to turn. The beach is deserted, then a young married couple, Rene and Hilde, walk on, carrying a food basket, and a small tape recorder of which Rene takes great care. He puts it down to gather wood for a fire. When he's got enough wood he turns on the tape.

Tape Fin ch'han dal vino ...
Hilde Oh, not now! It sounds silly, with nobody here!
Rene It always sounds good.
Hilde You and the Don. You'll meet a bad end if you imitate him.
Rene I don't want to imitate him. I've got you.
Hilde You'd like a mistress. Men can be sickening you know.
Rene (referring to his wife) We can all be difficult ...

On come Carlo and Lyn, a recently engaged couple.

Lyn Difficult? They're talking about you, Carlo.
Carlo (jokily) Difficult? They're not talking about me!
Rene We were talking about the whole wide world.
Lyn (looking at the sea) A lovely sunset. What a night it's going to be.
Carlo We don't know that yet.
Lyn I want things to happen the way they ought to be.
Hilde That would be great ... if we could.

Lyn (coming close to Hilde) Who says we can't?
Hilde (close to Lyn) Rene's got a thing about Don Giovanni. I can't stop him playing it.
Lyn Playing ... it's what they do, isn't it.
Hilde I often wonder if they know anything.
Rene (overhearing) Well, who found this place, and brought us here?
Hilde You, darling.
Rene Thank you, my love.
Carlo Here're the others.

Enter Janet and Roger, and Deanne and Graham, with drinks, food and rugs. They greet those who are already there, look at the sea and the darkening west, then pour themselves drinks.

Roger Cheers, everyone.
Janet A long and beautiful night.
Deanne It's night that everyone desires ...
Graham That's when you come alive.
Deanne (thoughtfully) I do. It's a wonder, isn't it ...
Hilde It's when we surprise ourselves ...
Janet ... because we've got things bottled up inside ...
Deanne ... that we don't even know about ...
Graham ... yet!
Roger Speaking of bottles ...

Rene plays his tape again.

Tape Fin ch'han dal vino/calda la testa/una gran festa/fa' preparar!

Hilde turns it off, but Deanne is amused.

Deanne Don Giovanni! He might cause a bit of trouble if we had him here!

Graham I might cause a bit of trouble myself! It's not a bad night for it. (looking about)

Janet Why don't we go for a walk? Light that fire, Rene, so we know where we are.

Rene lights the fire he's gathered, and seven of them start for their walk. Carlo stays where he is.

Carlo I'll hold the fort!

Roger Don't you finish off the wine, Carlo.

Carlo You'd better hurry!

The walkers are soon out of sight, and Carlo is on his own by the fire. He takes his glass of wine to the edge of the tea tree.

Carlo Who knows what's in there. It's getting dark.

He is startled when he hears a voice, quite close to him, but behind him and out of sight.

Matilde (distantly; calling, a high, floating call) Carlo!

Carlo Hell! Who's that?

Matilde Carlo ...

Carlo It sounds familiar ...

Matilde Carlo ...

Carlo Ah ...

Tizzy (on the other side of him) Carlo ...

Carlo Two voices!

Judy (some way back) Carlo!

Carlo I know who that is!

Judy Carlo ...

Carlo I think I do!

Wilma (distant, and high) Carlo ...

Carlo What is this?

Wilma Carlo, Carlo ... cara cara Carlo ...

Carlo Stop it, you lot! Buzz off, go on, I'm having a family night, I don't want you hanging around!

Matilde Carlo ...

All 4 (voices in the night) Carlo ... Carlo ... Carlo ...

Carlo Go away! Please! How much do I have to pay you to make you go away?

All 4 Carlo, Carlo, Carlo ...

The voices fade and Carlo is left to himself.

Carlo Thank Christ for that! I'd better get out of here in case they come back.

He ducks off into the night in the opposite direction to the other seven, there are a few moments of quiet, then the main group returns, talking volubly.

Rene Yes, of course I'm married, and I'm pleased to be that way. But I am just putting a point of view ...

Deanne It's music, Hilde. It's a sort of moral tale.

Hilde Don't any of you know what it means to be married?

Rene repeats the offence which has got the conversation on this track by pressing a button on his tape player.

Tape Vieni, mio bel diletto!
 Mi fa pieta Masetto!

Rene (singing with the tape) Io cangiero tua sorte.

Deanne (ditto) Presto ... non son piu forte ...

R & D (singing along) Andiam, andiam, mio bene,
 a ristorar le pene
 d'un innocente amor!

Hilde (scorning them) Inn-o-cen-te! Look at you, wanting
 to go back into the night.

Roger Night gets to us, Hilde. It brings out things we can't
 always control.

Rene (taking Deanne's hand) Andiam, andiam, mio bene
 ...

Janet Where's Carlo?

Lyn Carlo!

Roger See what I mean? He's been swallowed in the night!

Lyn Rubbish. Carlo!

They listen.

Graham That's funny. Carlo!

Janet Carlo?

They look at each other, then form a group and call together, the seven of them.

The 7 Carlo!

To their amazement, they are answered.

All 4 Carlo! Carlo! Carlo! Carlo ...

Roger That's not an echo, there's someone there!

Janet It's coming from everywhere at once ...

All 4 Carlo! Carlo! Carlo! Carlo ...

The beach party is amazed. Night has settled by now, and the voices they've heard have come out of darkness. A moment later, so too does Carlo, returning to them, ashamed, afraid, not trusting himself to say anything. He walks to Lyn and stands before her, helpless.

Lyn Where have you been? (He's trembling.) Who's that out there, calling?

Carlo offers no reply. He stands before Lyn as if she must take control of him.

Janet Did you see those people, Carlo?

He shakes his head.

Graham Well who are they? What do they want?

Hilde They must have followed us here. How did they know?

Rene Don't look at me. I've no idea.

Graham Let's go home. I feel in danger.

Deanne We can't escape. It's something's inside us, trying to get out.

Janet What thing?

Deanne That's the question, isn't it. Going to tell us, Carlo?

Lyn (because he says nothing) Carlo?

The 7 (because he says nothing) Carlo?
Carlo (weakly) You're splitting me in two.
Lyn You were split already. Those women followed you here. They want you.

Carlo grabs her clumsily, trying to put her arms around him, as if that will make him safe.

Lyn Tell me who they are.

This is too much for him. He gasps, clinging to her.

Carlo Ooohh.

Hilde You do know who they are, don't you Carlo?

Carlo I can guess.

Hilde You know their voices?

Carlo I've got an idea.

Deanne And every one of them's an ex?

Carlo Only two. The others I haven't had ...

He stops, sensing that he's put his foot in it.

Lyn And you want them?

Carlo They want me to want them.

Lyn Do you want them, yes or no? The night's full of desire, Carlo. It's a big wide world, you have freedom of choice. They've called you. Do you want to go?

There is a pause while he grasps his situation.

Carlo I want to be with you.

Lyn That means ... are you listening ... you have to make me want to be with you.

Carlo I want to be with you.

Lyn You aren't listening, are you? In a minute, I'm driving home. You won't be lonely. You can get a ride with anyone who's got room. Or you can go off into the dark with those women ...

Carlo Ooohh ...

Lyn (sharply) What are their names?

Carlo Ooohh ...

Lyn Their names!

Carlo (weakly) Matilde.

Lyn That's one.

Carlo Tizzy ...

Roger (laughing) That's a good one! Did she get you in a tizz?

Carlo It's short for Titania, Queen of the Fairies. Tatiana ...

Rene The letter scene ...

Hilde Don't encourage him.

Rene He needs a bit of strength, poor boy.

Lyn (affected by the name) Queen of the Fairies. So she calls you into the night?

Carlo I don't want to go.

Janet Who are the others, Carlo? Do we know them?

Carlo Judith. And Wilma. Wilma was the one right at the back, far away. She was always like that, even when we ...

Lyn ... made love?

Carlo nods abjectly, wanting to be forgiven.

Lyn I'm going, Carlo. And once I've gone, you'll never get me back. Got anything to say?

Carlo Stay.

Lyn Why?

Carlo Because I need you.

Lyn You needed them ... (pointing into the night)

Carlo I don't want them now.

Lyn Oh?

Carlo They're nothing to me now.

Lyn Oh?

Carlo Since I found you ...

The seven break into laughter. It really is too pathetic.

Lyn Try again, Carlo. See if you can do better. Be quick though, because I want to watch XXXX (she names a television show) when I get home.

Rene Fin ch'han dal vino / calda la testa / una gran festa / fa' preparar ...

Hilde (softening towards Carlo) When they called you, Carlo, did you go off to find them?

Carlo I ran away.

Hilde Why did you run away?

Carlo I didn't want them to find me.

Hilde They'd already found you.

Carlo I didn't want them spoiling what I had.

Hilde With Lyn?

Carlo That's what I mean.

Hilde And when you heard us coming back to the fire ...

Carlo I came back ...

Hilde ... because ...

Carlo ... because I wanted to be with Lyn ...

Hilde ... because ...

Lyn (strongly) Because?

Hilde (gently) ... because ...

Carlo ... because I knew I'd feel safe ...

Hilde ... safe from?

Carlo Safe from temptation ...

Hilde (pressing her point) Safe from?

Carlo Safe from myself.

There are a few moments of silence while they consider the ground he's covered, and where it leaves them now.

Janet If we weren't here to restrain you, you might go off with one of them. Which one, I wonder, Carlo? Which one?

Carlo Wilma's always the furthest away. She puts distance between herself and the one she desires, and she makes him cross that gap. It's terribly tempting, I have to admit.

Lyn It's tempting you now?

Carlo This isn't fair. You can all read what's going on inside me. What's going on inside you people? Don't tell me you're never tempted to be with someone else. We all are! It's the way we're made.

Rene Andiam, andiam mio bene ...

Carlo You wanted to go off with Deanne. She sang with you. Love and music... they're as close as two fingers rubbing ...

Deanne True enough, Carlo, but it's one thing to feel desire and it's another to act on it.

Graham Thank God for that!

Deanne puts her arms around him, reassuring.

Graham Why are you with me, instead of him?

Deanne Two reasons ...

Graham Two?

Deanne He's got Hilde, and she's got him ...

Graham ... and ...

Deanne ... I want to be with you.

Graham Thank God for that.

Deanne God's getting a lot of thanks tonight.

Lyn Not from me he isn't.

Roger (looking at Carlo) I think he needs you, Lyn.

Lyn Do I need him? That's the question. Still. Do I want him, or would I be better off watching XXXX?

Janet You're the only one that knows that.

Lyn I want to be persuaded.

Graham (to Carlo) It's up to you, mate.

Carlo Can't you find it in you to love me again?

Lyn No.

There is the splash of a wave as they take in her refusal.

Carlo The sea's coming in.

Roger We should've built the fire up in the dunes. It's going to get flooded.

Carlo We'll all be home by then.

Lyn What are you getting at?

Carlo (pointing to the fire) If we wake up in the night, let's think about this. It'll all be black, and wet, and washed away.

Lyn So?

Carlo Next time we come here, we'll make our fire on higher ground.

Rene It was only supposed to last a couple of hours.

Hilde That's what he's getting at, I suppose.

Lyn What is he getting at?

Carlo There's such a thing as a mistake ...

Lyn Four of them?

Carlo ... and realising what you've done ... and knowing you have to change ...

Lyn Where are you now, then, great lover?

Carlo I'm recovering. I'm learning.

Janet Tell us about it, Carlo, if you want us to believe.

Carlo We do things because they're natural, but being natural isn't being smart.

Lyn Are you trying to outsmart me?

Carlo I'm trying to catch up with you. It's easier for you than for me.

Graham Double talk, Carlo. Come straight out with what you want to say.

Carlo I wanted to have as many women as I could ...

Deanne Oh, men ...

Carlo Yes! Men have to learn. Love's not an island where things happen and there's no result. Love's the everyday. Love's all around us, waiting for us to tap in ...

Lyn (more amiably) So?

Carlo We need to let it into us, and open so it can.

Hilde Open all the time?

Carlo Aware of it all the time, letting it do its job. Turning us into the best thing we can be.

Lyn Nice idea, but is it going to last?

Roger I think he means it Lyn. Going to give him a try?

Janet Roger! Let her make up her own mind!

Roger I was only making a suggestion.

Hilde Was it a good suggestion? It's not easy to say.

Rene My good wife means we're all on trial, tonight. Those voices have opened us all.

Graham You wanted Deanne to go for a walk with you.

Rene I did. She wanted to do it, too.

Deanne We've sorted this out already. What's next, that's what I want to know.

Lyn You're all looking at me.

Janet Well ...

Lyn Someone do something! Help me make up my mind!

Carlo La ci darem la mano ... (He offers his hand to Rene, asking for the tape. Rene gives it to him.) Shall I throw this tape in the sea?

Hilde Don't do that. It means something to us all.

Carlo La mi dirai di si ...

Lyn Felice, e ver sarei ...

Deanne You're on the right track!

Lyn ... ma puo burlarmi ancor! Ma puo burlami ancor!

The 4 (far back in the night) Carlo ... Carlo ...

Carlo Go away! I don't want you any more! I belong to Lyn!

Janet Does she belong to you?

Lyn I think she does. I think he's ready for me now. I think.

Janet We have to take chances.

Roger There's nothing else to take!

Lyn Andiam, andiam, mio bene ...

Carlo ... a ristorar le pene ...

Both ... d'un innocente amor!

All 8 Andiam, andiam, mio bene
A ristorar le pene
D'un innocente amor.

They listen to the night. The distant voices call no more. Another wave breaks, more loudly than the earlier one that caught their attention.

Rene When the water comes up, the fire's going to have a story to tell!

Janet Home time everybody.
Roger Are you right to drive, love? I think I've had a bit much.
Janet You'll be all right Roger. You stretch out in the back.

Three couples take each other's hands and leave.

Carlo I'm sworn to you now, in front of our friends.
Lyn Good, Carlo. Thanks for getting me out of that.
Carlo We'll come back in a year's time ...
Lyn ... and weigh up what we've done.
Carlo Are you driving tonight, my love?
Lyn You drive. I'll sleep till we get home. I'm exhausted.
Carlo I put you through so much.
Lyn I'll be right in the morning.
Carlo Another day.
Lyn We don't need many more like that.
Carlo It only needed one.

He takes her hand, she responds, and they follow the others.

Various lines in this libretto refer to the Mozart and Da Ponte opera, *Don Giovanni*. Specifically, the quotations are from 'Fin ch'han dal vino', the Don's song of excitement and expectation as he gets ready for a ball, and the seduction duet of Giovanni and the peasant maid Zerlina, whose wedding to Masetto has been interrupted by the Don. Going to see *Don Giovanni* was perhaps the first decisive thing I did after finishing school, and I have never forgotten the pleasure and excitement it gave me. The events of the libretto are loosely – very loosely – based on the events of a beach party near Lake Tyers, Gippsland, circa 1966, and it is dedicated to those who were there that night (names long forgotten, naturally).