

The Blue Lamp

A Farce in Two Acts

By David Barrett

Dramatis Personae

Desk Sergeant Tomkins

WPC Louise Barnham

Cleaner Emily Wetherspoon

Escaped Convict Harry Stephens

Inspector Pickard

Norman/Norma Wilde, a cross-dresser

Evelyn Wilde, Norman's wife

Simon Appleby, Drunk Man

Delivery Man

Workman

Act 1, Green Lane Police Station

The action takes place somewhere in suburbia in the public waiting area of a police station. Stage left there is a long desk, the width of the room, with the sergeant's office behind, segregated from the public by glass panelling. One of the panels is missing and is awaiting replacement. At the upstage end of the office the desk swings up to form a door into the public area. Stage right are three doors: two lead to the male and female toilets and one to the locker-room and staff rest room. There are two doors in the upstage wall: one to the Inspector's office and one is the main entrance from the street. In the sergeant's office there are three telephones, office furniture, a safe, a radio communications set and an intercom connected to the inspector's office. In the public area there are several padded chairs, a filing cabinet, a plant in a pot and several small tables, on one of which is a coffee machine. The curtain opens on Sergeant Tomkins, alone on stage, shuffling papers on the desk.

(The phone rings and Tomkins lifts one receiver.)

TOMKINS Good evening; Green Lane police station; how can I help you?
(The phone continues to ring. Tomkins lifts the second receiver.)
Good, evening, Green Lane.... *(The phone continues to ring. He picks up the last receiver.)*
(In an irritated manner.) Good evening, what do you want?
Oh, I beg your pardon. Green Lane police station; how may I help you, madam? *(Pause)*
I do apologise, how may I help, sir?
Your wife is missing? Gone out into the woods with George? How long ago was this, sir? Three hours ago. And what gives you cause for concern?
(Another telephone rings.)
I'm sorry, sir; would you mind holding the line for a moment?
(He picks up a receiver) Good evening; Green Lane police.....
(The ringing continues. In his haste to pick up the third receiver, he knocks the first two onto the floor.)
Good evening; Green Lane police station; how may I help you? *(Pause)*
There's a man doing what? Hiding in your cherry tree and looking into your window. Do you recognize this man? He's your husband? Just a moment, madam, will you hold on please?
(He bends down to continue the other call but picks up the wrong phone.)
Hello! Hello? *(Realising his mistake he throws the phone over his shoulder and it hits him in the back. He takes the first phone now.)*
I'm sorry about that madam – sir! Now, you were telling me about George. *(Pause)* Full name, please? George Clooney? George is very strong, you say, and sometimes your wife can't control him and he gets his own way. Tell me, sir, have you been drinking? Alright, alright, can you please hold a moment?

(He throws the first phone over the other shoulder, replaces the third one on the hook and takes the second phone.)

Sorry for the delay, madam. Now, will you please explain what your husband is doing up a tree. I know you said he's hiding, but who is he hiding from? Alright, whom is he hiding from? From your boyfriend? Your husband is hiding from your boyfriend! Shouldn't it be the other way around? Oh, I see, you live with your boyfriend. I'm sorry but will you hang on a minute. *(Taking the other call again)*

Now sir, your wife is in the woods with George Clooney and he is getting his way with her. Now would this be **the** George Clooney? Oh, I'm the one being ridiculous am I? You're worried about George? I thought you were worried about your wife. He's recovering from an operation? He's been what? He's been neutered? Look, will you hang on a minute, please. *(Muttering to himself, he takes the other phone.)*

Ruddy nutter! Oh, not you, madam, the person on the other phone. Now, about your boyfriend, does he know your husband is up a tree? What? Your boyfriend's up a different tree? Now you've got me confused. Just a moment, please, I need to find out what's happened to George Clooney. *(He throws the phone over his shoulder again and takes the other call.)*

Now sir, you were telling me about George Clooney's operation. He has a weak bladder as well? He lifts his leg all over the house? Do you mean George Clooney is a dog? Of course I did – just making sure. Just one moment please. *(Taking the other phone.)*

But madam, why is your boyfriend up a tree? Hiding from your ex-boyfriend. And where is your ex-boyfriend? Hiding in the bathroom! And who is he hiding from? From you? You've lost me now. I just don't... *(The third telephone rings. Tomkins throw the current one over his shoulder and picks up the third one.)*

(Angrily) Yes, what is it? Oh, I'm sorry, sir, I didn't know it was you. No, I don't normally answer like that, it's just that I'm trying to deal with George Clooney and a woman with a husband and two boyfriends. Oh, never mind! *(Pause)* The new Detective Inspector? Coming tonight? Here? Oh my! Please excuse me for a moment.

(He picks up the other two phones and speaks into both at once.)

Just one moment, I am passing you over to someone who may be able to help you.

(He puts the two receivers together, earpiece to mouthpiece and secures them with parcel tape. He then puts them both in a drawer. Taking the other phone again...)

Sorry about that, sir, I just had to deal with a couple of nutters! Yes, sir, I will make him very welcome. Inspector Pickard, you say? Very well, sir. Goodnight, sir. *(He slams the phone down and mops his brow.)*

Just when I thought we were in for a quiet night.

(He leaps over the desk, taking a short-cut through the missing glass panel, and crosses to a plant pot in the public area. Reaching into the pot, he takes out a bottle and a glass, pours himself a drink and sinks into one

of the padded chairs. The bottle is a mineral water bottle but the liquid is clearly something a lot stronger by his reaction.)
(Louise is heard singing off-stage in the locker room. Tomkins panics, drains his glass and is about to hide it in the plant pot when Louise enters. He quickly conceals glass and bottle behind the coffee machine, but in view of the audience.)

LOUISE Evening Serg!

TOMKINS *(With his back to Louise, he fans his breath to dilute the alcohol fumes.)*
Oh, hello WPC Barnham. You're early.
(Louise looks around the room.)

LOUISE Is there someone here? You never call me WPC Barnham.

TOMKINS Things have become too informal around here lately. I need to tighten up on discipline.

LOUISE In other words, the new inspector is coming soon.

TOMKINS As a matter of fact, yes, he is.
(He crosses to the desk and leaps through the missing window into the office.)

LOUISE Then you'll have to start using the office door, like everyone else.

TOMKINS I'll have to soon anyway. The glass is due to be repaired.

LOUISE Thank goodness for that. Anything to report so far this evening?

TOMKINS It's been very quiet except for a couple of telephone calls – absolute raving lunatics. And – news has come in of an escaped convict seen in our patch; a conman. Non-violent but very clever at deception.

LOUISE Is that all?

TOMKINS Oh, and this. *(He opens the safe and takes out a glittering diamond necklace. Louise gasps.)* Found in the street by a twelve-year-old boy. Forensic are trying to discover whether it is part of a larger haul from that bank robbery last week.

LOUISE Wow, are they real diamonds?

TOMKINS Of course.

LOUISE Can I try it on - just quickly?

TOMKINS Certainly not. It is in our custody for safe keeping.
(He locks it back in the safe.)

LOUISE Well, I think I need a coffee before I start my shift.

TOMKINS I'll get it, Louise, I mean WPC Barnham.
(She starts to cross to the coffee machine but Tomkins leaps over the desk again and tries to pour it for her. The machine is empty, however.)

LOUISE I'll make coffee in the inspector's office – I could do with one myself.
Thank you. I suppose we won't be able to do that once the new man arrives. When does he arrive?

TOMKINS Tonight!

LOUISE My goodness, then I'd better tidy the office. Is Emily in?

TOMKINS Yes, Miss Wetherspoon is cleaning the locker room at present. *(Exits to inspector's office.)*

LOUISE Good, this floor needs mopping.

(She enters the sergeant's office, sees the wires coming out of the drawer, takes the two telephones out, unwinds the tape and replaces them on the receivers with an incredulous look on her face. Enter Emily from the locker room, dressed as a cleaner.)

Ah Emily, there you are.

EMILY

Evening, Miss.

LOUISE

Emily, do you think you could give this floor a mop, please? The new inspector is coming in later.

EMILY

Certainly, Miss. As a matter of fact, it's my next job. *(She fetches her mop and bucket and begins to mop.)*

LOUISE

Oh, and be a dear - the coffee machine needs topping up with water.

EMILY

Certainly, Miss. I'll do that first.

(She crosses to the coffee machine and sees the bottle of whisky.)

That's a good idea! Saves taking the whole machine out to the kitchen.

(She empties the whole bottle into the machine.)

TOMKINS

(Over the intercom. This makes Emily jump.) The train for Clapham Junction is about to depart from Platform Three.

EMILY

I really wish he wouldn't do that. It always gives me a fright.

TOMKINS

Mind the doors! *(Emily jumps again.)*

LOUISE

He certainly can't do it when Pickard arrives.

EMILY

Who?

LOUISE

Inspector Pickard – our new boss.

TOMKINS

(In a Geordie accent) Would Louise please come to the diary room! Your coffee is ready.

EMILY

Now Big Brother wants you.

LOUISE

He loves his little games.

EMILY

I'll go and get your coffee for you.

LOUISE

Thanks, Emily; I need to sort out all these files.

(As Emily exits to the Inspector's office, Louise drops an armful of files and bends down to pick them up.)

Enter Norman Wilde, in female attire. He does not see Louise, who is picking up the files but she is in full view of the audience. Norman rings the bell for attention and stoops to do up his shoe-lace. Louise leaves her files and stands up but sees no-one at the desk. She stoops down again to pick up the files. Norman stands up and rings the bell again. He then turns away from the desk and hitches up his false boobs, just as Louise stands up again. When she notices what Norman is doing she quickly bobs down again to hide. A few seconds later she tentatively rises and looks over the desk. Without turning round Norman impatiently rings the bell repeatedly.

LOUISE

Good evening, madam. *(Norman jumps violently in surprise.)*

NORMAN

(In a rather deep imitation of a female voice.) Oh my goodness, oh my gosh, you gave me quite a start. Where did you come from?

LOUISE

I was just picking up these files from the floor. Can I help you?

NORMAN

No, I mean, yes! Oh dear!

LOUISE

What on earth is the matter?

NORMAN It's that I was hoping to speak to a man.

LOUISE Can't I help you?

NORMAN Oh, very well. You see, my car has been stolen, it's a Rover – and... and my clothes, handbag, house keys and everything.

LOUISE Just a moment. I need to write this down. *(Taking her note-book.)*
Now, your name?

NORMAN Norman...er, I mean Norma Wilde.

LOUISE Address?

NORMAN Yes, it's nice isn't it..... Oh I see; 47 Rowan Crescent.

LOUISE Description of your Rover?

NORMAN How dare you? Oh, I see. It's blue, registration RWP 256F

LOUISE Rowan Crescent isn't far from here. I suggest you walk home and we'll call you if we have any news of your vehicle.

NORMAN Go home? I can't!

LOUISE Can you not get in.

NORMAN No, that's it! I can't get in. I'll just sit here and wait.

LOUISE I'm afraid it may be a very long wait, madam.
(Norman crosses to the padded chairs and sits. Enter Emily with Louise's coffee. She puts it on the desk. Noticing Norman she gives him a strange, unbelieving look.)
Thank you, Emily.
(Emily takes a dustpan and sweeps around the tables, re-arranging magazines and leaflets. Louise picks up a microphone.)
Calling all cars, calling all cars! Please look out for a stolen blue Rover, registration RWP 256F
(Emily gestures to Norman to lift his legs so she can sweep around him. He does so and she notices that they are extremely hairy. She looks askance at Louise then the audience.)

TOMKINS *(Over the intercom)* Would passengers for flight 633 to Morocco please make their way to gate 14.

NORMAN *(This line is delivered first in a male voice then, after a cough, in a female voice.)* What the devil?

EMILY Don't mind that, it's just the sergeant testing the intercom. There's a new detective inspector arriving tonight and everything must be in order for him.

NORMAN A new inspector eh? *(He pours himself a coffee from the machine.)*
What's he like?

EMILY We don't know; none of us has met him yet! *(She looks at his legs again.)*

NORMAN This coffee is delicious. It tastes like a liqueur. Is it a new brand?

EMILY Just cash and carry. Have you ever tried waxing?

NORMAN No, is that a good brand?

EMILY I mean your legs. Have you tried waxing?

NORMAN Have I tried what?

EMILY Waxing! I don't mean to be personal but it leaves you lovely and smooth.
(She puts her leg on the table, lifts her skirt and runs her hands up her leg. Norman stares, open-mouthed.)

NORMAN Men find smooth legs very attractive you know.
 NORMAN Yes, they do – don't they. *(He is so distracted he spills his coffee down his front and on the floor.)*

EMILY Careful, you're spilling your coffee.
 NORMAN Oh, I'm so sorry.
 EMILY Here, let me help. *(She takes a cloth from her trolley and dabs his front. His boobs go out of alignment, to Emily's horror.)*

NORMAN *(Snatching the cloth and turning his back on Emily to wipe his front and push his boobs back in line.)* I can manage – thank you.
(Enter Harry, looking furtive and anxious. He has a habit of periodically scratching his right ear when he is nervous. During this dialogue Emily and Norman make conversation and drink coffee.)

LOUISE Good evening, sir. Can I help you?
 HARRY I hope so. You may be expecting me.
 LOUISE Are we?
 HARRY Surely you recognize me by my description. It must have been broadcast. I would like to give myself up to the senior officer in the station.

LOUISE *(Sharp intake of breath.)* I'm so sorry, sir, we didn't expect you quite this soon. Welcome to Green Lane Station.

TOMKINS *(Off)* The next train for Bournemouth is the 18.43 from platform 12.
 HARRY That's not the sort of station I had in mind.
 LOUISE No, but that would be the senior officer you had in mind.
 HARRY I just can't carry on with things as they are. Please just do whatever is necessary – I can't stand looking over my shoulder anymore.

LOUISE I understand; you don't like taking orders yourself, sir. You want to be in charge.
 HARRY Go ahead and charge me. I deserve what I get.
 LOUISE That's great. We love a boss with a sense of humour.
 HARRY Just a moment, did you call me 'boss'?

LOUISE Yes, I'm sorry the old inspector didn't mind that. We can just call you inspector if you like.
 HARRY Hm! Either will suit me just fine – but... but....
 LOUISE Inspector Pickard, isn't it?
 HARRY What, oh yes, yes Pickard. *(He shakes her hand.)*

TOMKINS *(Off)* This is Dr. Barnes! Would all patients awaiting a fertility test please collect a bottle from the receptionist in order to provide a urine sample. And please ensure you aim carefully. Last week Mr Dickens
(Louise leaps towards the machine and slams her hand on the off switch.)

LOUIS Sorry, sir. Sergeant Tomkins just wants to ensure the intercom is working for you when you arrive. But you have arrived now – haven't you?

HARRY It would seem so WPC
 LOUISE Barnham, sir, Louise Barnham.
(Enter Tomkins in great mirth.)

TOMKINS What fun, eh Louise? We'd better enjoy ourselves while we can. We won't be able to do this once the old man arrives.

LOUISE No Serg. Except he's arrived already.

TOMKINS Sergeant Tomkins at your disposal inspector.
HARRY Well, sergeant, if you carry on like this ‘disposal’ will be an appropriate term.

TOMKINS Yes sir, sorry sir.
HARRY Now, sergeant, a briefing if you please; in here, I think. (*Gesturing to the sergeant’s office.*)

TOMKINS Certainly sir. (*He goes to jump over the desk as usual but checks himself before it is too late. He shows Harry the long way round. The three of them put their heads together.*)

NORMAN They’re a funny lot these police officers.
EMILY Are they?
NORMAN They seem to do nothing but talk and drink coffee. Speaking of which, is there a toilet here?
EMILY Sure, it’s that door just there.
NORMAN Thank you. (*He gets up and crosses to the toilets. As he exits.*) I say, any news about my car yet?

LOUISE Not yet, sorry ma’m.
NORMAN No hurry, I might as well stay the night. (*To Emily*) At least the coffee’s good here. (*Norman pushes open the door to the gents.*)

LOUISE Not that one, ma'm, that’s the gents.
NORMAN Oh, how silly of me. (*Exits to ‘ladies’*)
EMILY Some people are so eccentric! (*She starts polishing the tables.*) (*Harry crosses through door into public area.*)

HARRY Nearest fire escape?
TOMKINS The same door you entered, sir.
HARRY Well I think that’s about everything. Oh, one last question; where do you keep valuables – confiscated property and such like?

TOMKINS Just there in the safe, sir. (*Gestures towards the sergeant’s office.*)
HARRY And access?
TOMKINS Just the senior officer on duty, sir.
HARRY Well then, you’d better give me the keys, hadn’t you?
LOUISE But, but

HARRY Yes, WPC Barnham?
LOUISE Nothing, sir. (*Tomkins hands over the keys. As he does so, he spots a tattoo of a lion on Harry’s forearm.*)

HARRY Thank you, sergeant.
TOMKINS That’s an interesting tattoo, sir. A lion, if I’m not mistaken. Is Leo your birth-sign?

HARRY (*Brushing the comment aside*) My middle-name. Family tradition.
LOUISE Would you like that tour of the station now, sir? I’m sure you’d like to see your office.

HARRY Thank you, Barnham, that would be very appropriate.
LOUISE This way, if you please. (*They exit to the inspector’s office.*)
TOMKINS Oh my goodness, what a night! I need a drink.
EMILY Plenty of coffee in the machine, Sergeant.