

# SEX, DEATH AND STARSHINE

by Clive Barker

Clive Barker is probably best known as the writer and director of the *Hellraiser* saga, which was based on his novella “The Hellbound Heart.” He has written and directed other films as well, such as *Lord of Illusions* and *Nightbreed*. Other works of his have been adapted to film by others, such as his short story “The Forbidden,” which was made into the film *Candyman*.

In addition to his work in Hollywood, he is the best-selling, award-winning author of many novels, such as *The Damnation Game*, *Weaveworld*, *Imajica*, *The Thief of Always*, and *Sacrament*. His most recent is *Mister B. Gone*. His landmark short story collections, the *Books of Blood*, won him a World Fantasy Award and established his reputation as a master of horror.

In *The Mammoth Book of Zombies*, Barker is quoted as saying, “Zombies are the ideal late-twentieth-century monsters. A zombie is the one thing you can’t deal with. It survives anything. Frankenstein and Dracula could be sent down in many ways. Zombies, though, fall outside all this. You can’t argue with them. They just keep coming at you.”

The zombies in the story that follows aren’t quite the killing machines that Barker’s quote suggests, but the relentlessness he implies with “They just keep coming at you” is certainly present.

Diane ran her scented fingers through the two days’ growth of ginger stubble on Terry’s chin.

“I love it,” she said, “even the grey bits.”

She loved everything about him, or at least that’s what she claimed.

When he kissed her: I love it.

When he undressed her: I love it.

When he slid his briefs off: I love it, I love it, I love it.

She’d go down on him with such unalloyed enthusiasm, all he could do was watch the top of her ash-blonde head bobbing at his groin, and hope to God nobody chanced to walk into the dressing-room. She was a married woman, after all, even if she was an actress. He had a wife himself, somewhere. This tête-à-tête would

make some juicy copy for one of the local rags, and here he was trying to garner a reputation as a serious-minded director; no gimmicks, no gossip; just art.

Then, even thoughts of ambition would be dissolved on her tongue, as she played havoc with his nerve-endings. She wasn't much of an actress, but by God she was quite a performer. Faultless technique; immaculate timing; she knew either by instinct or by rehearsal just when to pick up the rhythm and bring the whole scene to a satisfying conclusion.

When she'd finished milking the moment dry, he almost wanted to applaud.

The whole cast of Calloway's production of *Twelfth Night* knew about the affair, of course. There'd be the occasional snide comment passed if actress and director were both late for rehearsals, or if she arrived looking full, and he flushed. He tried to persuade her to control the cat-with-the-cream look that crept over her face, but she just wasn't that good a deceiver. Which was rich, considering her profession.

But then La Duvall, as Edward insisted on calling her, didn't need to be a great player, she was famous. So what if she spoke Shakespeare like it was Hiawatha, dum de dum de dum de dum? So what if her grasp of psychology was dubious, her logic faulty, her projection inadequate? So what if she had as much sense of poetry as she did propriety? She was a star, and that meant business.

There was no taking that away from her: her name was money. The Elysium Theatre publicity announced her claim to fame in three-inch Roman Bold, black on yellow:

"Diane Duvall: star of *The Love Child*."

*The Love Child*. Possibly the worst soap opera to cavort across the screens of the nation in the history of that genre, two solid hours a week of under-written characters and mind-numbing dialogue, as a result of which it consistently drew high ratings, and its performers became, almost overnight, brilliant stars in television's rhinestone heaven. Glittering there, the brightest of the bright, was Diane Duvall.

Maybe she wasn't born to play the classics, but Jesus was she good box-office. And in this day and age, with theatres deserted, all that mattered was the number of punters on seats.

Calloway had resigned himself to the fact that this would not be the definitive *Twelfth Night*, but if the production were successful, and with Diane in the role of Viola, it had every chance, it might open a few doors to him in the West End. Besides, working with the ever-adoring, ever-demanding Miss D. Duvall had its compensations.

Calloway pulled up his serge trousers, and looked down at her. She was giving him that winsome smile of hers, the one she used in the letter scene. Expression Five in the Duvall repertoire, somewhere between Virginal and Motherly.

He acknowledged the smile with one from his own stock, a small, loving look that passed for genuine at a yard's distance. Then he consulted his watch.

"God, we're late, sweetie."

She licked her lips. Did she really like the taste that much?

“I’d better fix my hair,” she said, standing up and glancing in the long mirror beside the shower.

“Yes.”

“Are you OK?”

“Couldn’t be better,” he replied. He kissed her lightly on the nose and left her to her teasing.

On his way to the stage he ducked into the Men’s Dressing Room to adjust his clothing, and douse his burning cheeks with cold water. Sex always induced a giveaway mottling on his face and upper chest. Bending to splash water on himself Calloway studied his features critically in the mirror over the sink. After thirty-six years of holding the signs of age at bay, he was beginning to look the part. He was no more the juvenile lead. There was an indisputable puffiness beneath his eyes, which was nothing to do with sleeplessness, and there were lines too, on his forehead, and round his mouth. He didn’t look the *wunderkind* any longer; the secrets of his debauchery were written all over his face. The excess of sex, booze and ambition, the frustration of aspiring and just missing the main chance so many times. What would he look like now, he thought bitterly, if he’d been content to be some unenterprising nobody working in a minor rep, guaranteed a house of ten aficionados every night, and devoted to Brecht? Face as smooth as a baby’s bottom probably, most of the people in the socially committed theatre had that look. Vacant and content, poor cows.

“Well, you pays your money and you takes your choice,” he told himself. He took one last look at the haggard cherub in the mirror, reflecting that, crow’s feet or not, women still couldn’t resist him, and went out to face the trials and tribulations of Act III.

On stage there was a heated debate in progress. The carpenter, his name was Jake, had built two hedges for Olivia’s garden. They still had to be covered with leaves, but they looked quite impressive, running the depth of the stage to the cyclorama, where the rest of the garden would be painted. None of this symbolic stuff. A garden was a garden: green grass, blue sky. That’s the way the audience liked it North of Birmingham, and Terry had some sympathy for their plain tastes.

“Terry, love.”

Eddie Cunningham had him by the hand and elbow, escorting him into the fray.

“What’s the problem?”

“Terry, love, you cannot be serious about these fucking (it came trippingly off the tongue: fuck-ing) hedges. Tell Uncle Eddie you’re not serious before I throw a fit.” Eddie pointed towards the offending hedges. “I mean look at them.” As he spoke a thin plume of spittle fizzed in the air.

“What’s the problem?” Terry asked again.

“Problem? Blocking, love, blocking. *Think* about it. We’ve rehearsed this whole scene with me bobbing up and down like a March hare. Up right, down left—but it doesn’t work if I haven’t got access round the back. And look! These fucking

things are flush with the backdrop.”

“Well they have to be, for the illusion, Eddie.”

“I can’t get round though, Terry. You must see my point.”

He appealed to the few others on stage: the carpenters, two technicians, three actors.

“I mean—there’s just not enough time.”

“Eddie, we’ll re-block.”

“Oh.”

That took the wind out of his sails.

“No?”

“Um.”

“I mean it seems easiest, doesn’t it?”

“Yes... I just liked...”

“I know.”

“Well. Needs must. What about the croquet?”

“We’ll cut that too.”

“All that business with the croquet mallets? The bawdy stuff?”

“It’ll all have to go. I’m sorry, I haven’t thought this through. I wasn’t thinking straight.”

Eddie flounced.

“That’s all you ever do, love, think straight...”

Titters. Terry let it pass. Eddie had a genuine point of criticism; he had failed to consider the problems of the hedge-design.

“I’m sorry about the business; but there’s no way we can accommodate it.”

“You won’t be cutting anybody else’s business, I’m sure,” said Eddie. He threw a glance over Calloway’s shoulder at Diane, then headed for the dressing-room. Exit enraged actor, stage left. Calloway made no attempt to stop him. **End of Excerpt**