

THE COMMEDIA WORLD OF LAFCADIO B

a play by

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(After an idea of Luigi Pirandello)

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THE COMMEDIA WORLD OF LAFCADIO B

takes place in 1917 New Orleans, during an Influenza epidemic, in a room that was once the voodoo parlour of Marie Laveau, and in which Marie Laveau's ghost still hovers.

Enter the handsome, elegant, charismatic Con Man, "Lobo," who is constantly fighting the dreaded "ennui," and who returns to New Orleans, this day, to disentangle himself from a festering scandal,

and to be amused by — and to confront:

- the angry ghost of Marie Laveau,
- the blackmailing whore Aurora,
- the innocent, love-sick, shrimp fisherman, Acini DePepe—

and

- to get laid.

In the process, Lobo finds the momentary amusement
He so constantly craves; and once again proves
That he has found the rhythm in life
That allows him to transcend the dreaded "ennui,"
And to get away with anything — and always will.

FROM THE PLAY

AURORA: Are you a bastard then, Lobo? Like most of your friends?

LOBO: Friends? What friends?

AURORA: Or are you the Lobo some people say is generous, considerate?
A true gentleman?

LOBO (Grandly): I am any Lobo you like.

AURORA: How can you have such a bill for -- "grapes?" He did say "grapes."

LOBO: One night I longed for an orgy of old. Especially the kind where nude girls stand over you, popping grapes and nipples into your mouth. So I called the Vigne Brothers.

AURORA: The grape kings?!

LOBO: Only the best. So — just the cost of shipping . . .

AURORA: And the nipples?

LOBO: That creditor will call in another hour.

LOBO: Aurora is the easy kind to have. She's like a jelly pastry; seemingly thick-skinned throughout, but at the center --soft gook! Having her wasn't the problem. Not for Lobo. Having her too easily was the problem.

LOBO: There's a rhythm to everything in the cosmos. Once you find the proper rhythm, everything falls into place.

LOBO: This Joan Of Arc has got me by the vitals.

DIPEPE: But that's pleasant.

LOBO: Not when she squeezes, DiPepe!

LOBO: Ah, Marie Laveau! I knew I'd unhinge your rhythm. You don't like what I'm up to, do you. It's unfair. Unjust. You voodoo queens, in your own spooky way, really tried to redress injustice back when you were riding high. Well, those days are over. It's my day! The day of the Confidence Man!

CHARACTERS

Lafcadio Beaugard (Lobo)

Aurora

Acini DiPepe

Time: 1917

Place: New Orleans, in a
hotel suite that was once
the voodoo parlour of
Marie Laveau.

(This version of THE COMMEDIA WORLD OF LAFCADIO BEAU
Was revised at the 2005 LAST FRONTIER THEATRE CONFERENCE,
in VALDEZ, Alaska)

Dixieland music heard off.

New Orleans. 1917. A bare stage.
As music continues under, a card table
and chair with LOBO in the chair are
flown down from the flies.

LOBO is playing solitaire.
His makeup and costume suggest that
of an ARLECCHINO..

As soon as he lands, HE snaps
his fingers and a few other
bits of furniture are flown down. A
large round pouffe of red velvet, and
an ornate, black-lacquered table-desk
with phone.

When all is set, HE snaps his fingers
and music cuts out.

LOBO

(Turning over the last card)

I win!

(To audience)

Mais Certainment.

(Shuffles)

The point is, there is some kind of epidemic out there, raging in the streets of New Orleans, in this year of nineteen and seventeen. Influenza. But of a most virulent form. In-flu-en-za.

(HE likes the sound of the word)

Influenza. Influenza. Influenza!! Babies. Old folk

(The next, very red neck)

is 'specially meetin' eyeball to eyeball with their Maker!

(Himself again)

Prematurely.

(Shuffles again)

Listen --

(Snaps fingers. A Dixieland band is heard off)

. . .one of those funeral bands; playing "When The Saints come Marching In."

(Sings a little with the music)

LOBO

(Continued)

They usually play the happy part on their way back from the cemetery. But they won't play funky again until the epidemic is over. But for now -- here -- and all up and down the Mississippi, on those floating casinos within which my entire existence usually floats --

(Card-shark shuffle of deck)

even there it's, "When The Saints Come Marching In." Ha! Incredible city, this New Orleans. You can hire a band to accompany your love making, if you want.

(The next, as if answering a doubt from the audience)

It's true. I hired one once. It didn't help.

(Exaggerated sigh)

Nothing helps. Finally. Damnèd glands still keep promising excitement. But, in the end, it's the same old

(The next, very "bumps and)

grind.

(Laughs. Snaps fingers. Music Out. Then he cuts cards and is about to flip over one card but suspends the gesture as he says:)

--The trick is to find amusement at all times, N'est pas? Even during an unfortunate period; a period of catastrophe, say. In fact, I find that that's the period when amusement is sharpest. Contrast, I guess.

(Plays card)

Ah-ha! See? The Joker. That's me: Lafcadio Beau. Known as Lobo. Of course, Lobo is not about to dangle in front of the vorrrracious jaws of Monsieur Maker's messenger, Monsieur "Influenza." No, not just yet.

(Flips over another card)

Ah! Queen of hearts!

(Lasciviously)

Mais certainment. Whoever she will be. And she will -- must be.

(Shuffles again)

Yes, I can go out. And if I go out, I'll even walk around sans handkerchief to my mouth.

(Sticks his tongue out to the sky; gives God the raspberry)

So there.

(The lights from the sconces flicker)

Whoops! Sorry, Monsieur Maker. . . .No. Monsieur Maker might have thrown a lightning bolt; not just make lights flicker. Unless . . . Ahhhhhhhh. This place was once the house of a famous voodoo queen: Marie Laveau. . . .Was that you, Marie? Mad because I gave Monsieur Maker the raspberry?

LOBO

(Continued. Gives MARIE another raspberry.
Lights flicker. Sconces move)

Beautiful. I'd hoped you'd be around. That's why I took the room here. Hoped you'd be the kind of adversary worthy of Lobo. Are you?

(Shift)

And you really must believe, Marie, that I'm not afraid to go out there. I stay put because, out there, I'd get mad as hell. Because it makes me mad to look on such wholesale fear.

(Laughs)

Not to mention the ugly masks of those actually touched. Can't abide ugliness. That's why I'm glad you're not here in the flesh, Marie Laveau. I heard you were rather unattractive there toward the end.

(Lights biz)

(LOBO laughs and flips
over another card)

Jack of clubs.

(Very happy)

Mais -- mais -- mais certainment. Very promising possibilities.

(Picks up cards. Paces as HE shuffles)

But even more than ugliness, what really angers me to the soul is. . .are you ready, Marie?

(The next screamed from his very depths)

BOREDOM!!!

(Quick shift to soft charm)

What the charming Creole call "ennui." Imagine! Such a charming word for so ugly a meaning. Just like

(very lyrically)

"Influenza."

(Laugh, then scream again)

BOREDOM!!!

(Fast shift to charm again
but shuffles the cards faster)

Ennui. Well, the way to avoid ennui -- and I hope you agree, Marie -- is to constantly create strings. right? I mean entanglements to manipulate yourself into. Right? I mean entanglements to manipulate yourself into. Right? Until the strings are cut again and you've got to start from scratch: Creating strings. Cutting strings. Creating strings. cutting strings. CREATING STRINGS -- yes!

(Places the three cards back in the deck again.

Fans out cards on the card table

(Picks out one card)

The joker again. That's me. String number one.

LOBO

(Continued. Flips the card over onto table)

Do you see what I'm up to, Marie Laveau?

(No lights biz. Laughs, then to audience)

You see what I'm up to . . . You don't see what I'm up to. Well, it's simple.

(Says the same sentence in French, Italian,
German and Spanish. The HE says it in English)

Once again it's time to create

(does an impressive arc-shuffle
of the cards in the air)

strrrrrrrrrrrrrriiiiiiiiiiiiiinnnnnnnnnnnggggggggggssssssss!

(AURORA enters. SHE resembles,
in costume and makeup, a Colombina)

AURORA

YOU BASTARD!

LOBO

Pig!

AURORA

Slime!

LOBO

Flying cockroach!

AURORA

Pimp!

LOBO

Is something bothering you, Miss Aurora?

(HE takes her hand to kiss it.
SHE slaps his face)

AURORA

Don't you dare kiss my hand, Lobo! You know I can't stand for anyone to kiss my hand.

LOBO

But Aurora, my little ol' sweet whore --

AURORA

There! There you go! You know what my profession is; but you stop me from making my living at it.

LOBO

T'aint so.

AURORA

T'is so! You never paid me for my last--
(Says the next, very French)
liaison -- with you.

LOBO

That's so.

AURORA

And you haven't paid me for the goddamned photographs.

LOBO

And that's so.

AURORA

Then how am I supposed to live?

LOBO

What does one have to do with the other?

AURORA

Plenty!

LOBO

Oh? Then tell me about it. Sit here. . . .Now, let me have that handkerchief. That's too beautiful a mouth to hide. Besides, this hotel used to be the voodoo house of the voodoo queen Marie Laveau, and Marie's ol' ghost won't let Monsieur Influenza get at us. Now, I will place my head on your lap. . . .Like so. And you will tell me what is bothering you.

(A long pause)

AURORA

Isn't it right to pay someone for services rendered?

-- unspeakable photographs?
 AURORA
 No.
 LOBO
 There then.
 AURORA
 "There then" -- what?
 LOBO
 Oh!
 AURORA
 (SHE rolls him off, onto the floor.
 Jumps to her feet!)
 The PHOTOS!
 (SHE reaches down the back of her skirt
 and pulls up a small packet)
 These photos. With you in them. And the Governor. And the BISHOP!
 (SHE crosses herself)
 And that smug bitch, Kate Townsend. And
 (Crosses herself hard)
 the DONKEY!
 (One final cross)
 Loathsome.
 LOBO
 Ah, yes. That set.
 AURORA
 What do you mean, "that set?"
 LOBO
 (From the floor)
 Well, there's also the "Pig" set. And the "Dwarf" set. I just wanted to be sure. The
 "Donkey" set. Right.
 AURORA
 Despicable! Why did you have such photos made?
 LOBO

(From the floor)

To blackmail all the Powerful involved. With those photos I'm not in, of course. I'm afraid -- for the "Donkey" set - my glands and exhibitionistic nature got the better of me. So I took part.

LOBO

(Still from the floor. Sitting up!)

Gee, Aurora, I sure wish you'd give in to your better nature and give that Donkey-batch back to me.

AURORA

Pay me for them.

LOBO

That would do it. . . .On the other hand, they're probably as safe in the vicinity of your divine bun-buns as anywhere else.

AURORA

(Paces)

Oh, God! It is so aggravating to blackmail someone who won't be blackmailed!

(Sudden shift. Sweet. Smiling)

Three thousand dollars. That's all I ask. Three thousand. A fortune for me. Pennies for you.

LOBO

(Still from the floor)

Pennies? What pennies?

AURORA

(Still smiling)

Are you a bastard then, Lobo? Like most of your friends?

LOBO

(From the floor)

Friends? What friends?

AURORA

(Still smiling)

Or are you the Lobo some people say is generous, considerate? A True gentleman?

LOBO

(From the floor. Grandly)

I'm any Lobo you like.

AURORA

(Still smiling)

I like the generous one. Pay me for the photographs.

LOBO

(From the floor)

But I don't have any money.

(Begins to rise)

Not a single solitary cent and --

(AURORA stops smiling.

SHE quickly puts photo-pack back on
HER person, pounces on LOBO,
so that HE's back down on the floor,
and kisses him at intervals)

AURORA

And I have no heart!

(Kiss)

Everything's business with me!

(Kiss)

I worship money! Got to have it!

(Kiss)

Lobo, must I go against my better nature and tell the world -- your world
-- how you cheated a poor, simple whore?

(Kiss)

Do I have to run through the streets of New Orleans, waving the photographs and
screaming to everyone that Lobo is a bastard?

(Kiss, kiss)

Must I get the powerful degenerates involved to help HANG YOU?

(Kiss, Kiss, Kiss)

Lobo, MUST I DO THAT?

LOBO

(Strangling)

But if they hang me. . .YOU. . .don't get a. . .CENT!

AURORA

BUT I GET EVEN!!!

(AURORA gives LOBO one last bruising kiss)

LOBO

(Through kiss)

You already. . .HAVE! You're breaking. . .MY LIPS!

AURORA

(Releasing him)

Oh!

LOBO

(Rising)

God, you're powerful!

AURORA

And don't you forget it! If you're thinking of trying to take these!

(Pats HER rump, where she's
placed the packet of photos)

God! Do you realize the Navy's about to close Storyville?

(Takes out compact. Fixes face)

Every goddamned Sportin' House in the district is going to be shut down. That means that all those simple-headed quifs, who used to depend on their fat madams, will go independent -- become direct competition.

LOBO

Why don't you organize them? Start a franchise of disenfranchised whores?

AURORA

Because I work with no one! Independent -- that's me! Besides, none of those fornicating machines are in Aurora's league. I may be a "simple" whore, but I am not a "common" whore. Class. Miss Aurora is class. And you know it. I mean, did I pick you up? Did I make a play for you? Uh-uh. You made the fast pass. You even tried to get me to dance! Christ! How I hate to dance!

LOBO

I know that. And I am grateful for your -- your --

AURORA

"Creativity." I know. Someday I'm going to meet a man who cares nothing about art.

LOBO

Now, look, my little 'ol Hush Puppy --

AURORA

And don't think you'll -- how did you used to put it? . . . Oh, yes -- "dizzy me up." Well, don't think you'll "dizzy me up" and slip out of my sight. Not this time.

LOBO

How can I do that? My boat is quarantined. Beached.

AURORA

Oh, I know you. You're like an eel; quarantine of no quarantine. Forget it. I was brought up in eel country -- snake country, too. I'm very good at holding on to anything slimy.

LOBO

You do seem determined.

AURORA

Determined? I'm scared to death of catching the
(crosses herself)

sickness. But as soon as I heard you were back in town, not even that could stop me. And I have accepted the invitation of one of my admirers: To use his apartment whenever he's out of town. He is and I am -- using it, I mean. Apartment 7. Right below you. Apartment 7. Whose door will always be open a crack. With an eye glued behind it. Mine. How's that for determined?

LOBO

I'm impressed, flabbergasted and flattered! But you could fan the fires of the Nibelungen and ring it round this former voodoo house to keep me in, but you still wouldn't get the money. I honestly don't have it!

AURORA

Ha!

LOBO

I'm hounded by creditors. God knows how they found out I'm back in town. But they get to me. Every hour. Even in this time of In-flu-en-za they harrass me.

AURORA

Ha! Again!

LOBO

You think I'm lying. Okay. In five seconds -- watch!

(After exactly five seconds,
the phone rings)

Answer it, Aurora! But for God's sake don't say I'm here!

(AURORA, a bit shaken,
goes to the phone. Picks it up)

AURORA

Hello.

(SHE pushes the phone from her ear;
then pulls it back)

No, Lobo's not here.

(Same business)

AURORA

(Continued)

Hey! Hey! Hey! Stop shouting! I don't know where Lobo is. And I know nothing about his bills.

(Same business)

What? Me pay?! How dare you?! I'm his cousin from the country. AND I'M ON WELFARE!

(SHE slams down the phone)

PIMP!

LOBO

Not everyone's a pimp, Aurora. Like you, he's a creditor.

AURORA

How can you have such a bill for -- "grapes?" He did say "grapes."

LOBO

I've always had this fascination with the Roman Empire. And it came to me one day that, while we're as rotten as the Romans, we don't really have the knack of enjoying ourselves, the way they did. One night I longed for an orgy of old. Especially the kind where nude girls stand over you popping grapes and nipples into your mouth. So I called the Vigne Brothers.

AURORA

The grape kings?!

LOBO

Only the best. So -- just the cost of shipping . . .

AURORA

And the nipples?

LOBO

That creditor will call in another hour.

AURORA

Lafcadio Beauregard! You're a degenerate!

LOBO

Never! I just make realities of what, in other people, stay fantasies.

AURORA

I don't even know what you're talking about.

LOBO

Aurora, I want to pay. I'd love to pay —

AURORA

Then pay!

LOBO

But I don't have the—

AURORA

Bastard, bastard0, BASTARD!

LOBO

I NEED A MIRACLE!

(The Phone rings)

Hello. Yes, this is Lafcadio Beau; known as Lobo. . . .Of course I can guess who this is: You're Mr. DiPepe. Where the hell have you been? I've been expecting you. . . .Look, I've no time for small talk now. Just come right up. The address is 10 Basin Street. Apartment 9.

(Hangs up)

He'll be here in 5 minutes!

AURORA

Who?

LOBO

DiPepe, of course. That Wop shrimp-boat fleet! As usual, Aurora. I've slipped in dog shit again.

AURORA

Lobo!!!

LOBO

Ha! You genteel whores! If it isn't feelthy photos that shock you, it's the mention of dog poop. Look: All I mean is, I've slipped in good luck. You have slipped in good luck. Now, get out of here and be back in 20 minutes.

AURORA

Why?

LOBO

Come back in 20 minutes with the photographs and threaten me with a scandal!

AURORA

But I've already --

LOBO

I won't be here. Rich, rich, RICH Mr. DiPepe will! You will threaten me to him.

AURORA

But why?

LOBO

You want money. He has money. Understand?

AURORA

No.

LOBO

Think about it downstairs. He'll be here soon.

AURORA

But--

(LOBO kisses her — a kiss that turns long and passionate. Suddenly, she pushes him away)

AURORA

Oh, no you don't! You're not going to dizzy me up!

LOBO

I wasn't dizzying you up. I was feeling you up.

(HE tries again. She backs away)

AURORA

(Sweetly. Smiling)

Remember. Apartment 7. Try to slip by my evil eye and a well-aimed chamber pot, filled to the brim, will crack your skull.

(Still smiling, AURORA, sweetly smiling,
blows him a kiss and disappears.
After a beat, LOBO roars)

LOBO

Spunky, spunky, spunky! I really love these independent, self-educated whores. Confident. Secure. Like to think they've got you over a barrel. Ha! We'll see.

(MUSIC: Off. Dirge part of.
"When The Saints come Marching In")

LOBO

(Continued)

This is no time for a funeral. Things are looking up!

(Snaps fingers.

MUSIC out)

Besides, there's another rhythm that keeps beating in these two veins in my head. How did she put it! . . . "Are you a bastard then, Lobo?" Good rhythm. "A bastard Lobo."

(Continues saying it and dances
to the rhythm of it. Stops. To audience)

You see: There's a rhythm to everything in the cosmos. Once you find the proper rhythm, everything falls into place.

(As if answering a question
from the audience)

You don't believe me? Come on! Do you really think that I would have been trapped into that blackmailing business unless I wanted to be? Aurora is the easy kind to have. She's like a jelly pastry; seemingly thick-skinned throughout, but at the center — soft gook.

