

E&R

*Act 1 of 2, Opera libretto based on the relationship of
Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton*

Act 1, Scene 1

January 1962, in Rome on the set of the movie 'Cleopatra'. Richard Burton is 36 years old, moderately well-known as a stage actor from his year playing King Arthur in Camelot on Broadway, and with his classical training is often touted as the next 'Laurence Olivier'. Married for 12 years to Sybil, he is also well-known for sleeping with most of his leading ladies.

Elizabeth Taylor is all of 29 years old, and has been world famous since the age of 12 when she starred in National Velvet. Divorced twice, widowed once, and now notoriously married to her deceased husband's best friend—Eddie Fisher—whom she 'stole' from girl-next-door actress Debbie Fisher. She is Hollywood's baby if ever there was one.

Both stars have been at work on the film for some time (a' la the legendary cost of making this movie), but on different sets and locations. Today is their first day working together, and they are to film the highly anticipated scene where Anthony meets Cleopatra.

Elizabeth is resplendent in a chair, full Cleopatra regalia, being primped and primed by her fawning coterie of hairdresser, wardrobe assistant, personal assistant, make-up artist, etc. Busy upon their tasks and their idol, the attendants accompany their labor with song, while Elizabeth unconcernedly studies her script, used to the attention.

Attendants (Demo Song 1, "Queen of the Nile"):

it is our heaven
to have you as Queen
it is our heaven
you starring as Queen
ever determined
you have your own way
surely there must be a kingdom needing rule
truly your beauty is breaking every rule

Queen of the Nile makes history today!
Cleopatra's still with us today!

like her your whole life's been publicly played
husbands you've won, and widowed so young
what Elizabeth wants, Elizabeth gets
fearless passion, what will you do next?
fearless passion, tell us what comes next?

Elizabeth looks up as the attendants offer her a hand mirror and she checks her image in its reflection.

Elizabeth:

so the day is here

Anthony meets his Queen

Burton the Great

King of the Stage

so classically trained

now let's see

let's see who will reign

in the camera's frame!

she smooths the luxurious skirts of her costume with sensual pleasure

A plainly dressed, burly gentleman approaches hesitantly, ducking his head apologetically as he begins to speak

Ifor (pronounced ee-for):

I know this is an important day (gesturing towards the broo-ha-ha preparation for the impending scene)

My name is Ifor

I am Richard's brother, friend,

close to a father

most of his life

He asked me to relay

that he can't play this scene today

Last night I fear he drank more than wise, even for he

in this big way he does everything, you see

wine, women and poetry

he loves them all...equally

Last night he drank, today he pays

his stomach turns, his face is gray

he cannot work today

yes sickness keeps him away

the morning after is the bill he pays

his brow is black, his face is gray,

he cannot work today

He asked me to say you may be as mean about him

as you please

you may say whatever you want to

say whatever you want to
for all of it is true

Elizabeth, who has been studying him intently, now stands up and her attendants fall away like a discarded shawl.

Elizabeth:

You must bring him to me
He must be here today for this vital scene
for Anthony meets his Queen
his only Queen
He must be here whether sick or well
go now—ignore his plea
bring him straight to me
bring him to me

Ifor opens his mouth to protest, thinks better of it, and leaves instead. Moments later he returns, half-carrying Richard.

Richard (weakly) (Demo Song 2: “Christ, My Head”):

O Christ my head!
O Christ my head!
bring coffee please, or shoot me dead...

Richard giggles nervously. Elizabeth laughs.

The attendants, now fawning over the handsome Richard, tumble over themselves to honor his request for coffee. Ifor, correctly assuming he is no longer needed, leaves.

Attendants:

just as he said
just as he said
bring coffee please, before he’s dead

Richards reaches for the cup of coffee, but his hands are shaking mightily. Elizabeth, who has been watching this display disdainfully, suddenly takes pity, swoops in and clasps the cup, holding it for him to take a drink. He is transfixed by her transformation from ice queen to earth mother, and she in turn is awash in her nurturing instincts. A bond is forged when she holds the cup to his lips.

Elizabeth:

Poor dear, I see how you tremble
the great actor’s human after all
a child within, so sensitive

you need looking after
you need looking after

Clearing space around the couple, the others murmur:

Attendants:

Elizabeth

Elizabeth

so much unfolds, with little said

Elizabeth

Elizabeth

so much unfolds, with little said

Richard, roused somewhat by the strong brew, now pats Elizabeth's hand, grateful and also uncharacteristically mute. Elizabeth idly straightens his hair with her free hand, now beginning to speak more to herself than to him--

Elizabeth (Demo Song 3, "Glimmer"):

I swear, I see a glimmer

of one who was so much to me

of a husband death stole from me

I see... a man grown stronger

by blacking out all that is weak

a man in need

Elizabeth starts to step away, lost in thought.

This day reveals someone I feel

I know within my well-worn heart

there's room....within my heart (attendants repeat this line)

This day reveals

there's room within my heart

within my heart

my heart, my heart has room! (attendants repeat this line)

She turns once more back to Richard. Attendants echo her last words, slowly slipping out of the room, sensing they are intruding. Richard takes her hand, pulls her to the corner where he has squirreled away a bottle of wine and a glass. Gives her the glass, fills it, then drinks straight from the bottle himself. They whisper, they laugh. Richard has regained his 'sea legs'...he clearly captains the conversation, charming, gesturing frequently with his hands. He refills her glass constantly.

Although the attendants had the sense to leave, the ever-present and creative Roman paparazzi pop up from various hiding spots and take 'guilty' snapshots of the couple throughout this wine-drinking break. Richard and Elizabeth, absorbed in the moment, fail to notice.

As they hear the film director start to enter and Elizabeth's attendants returning, Richard takes her hand again and pulls her urgently through the side door. Ifor runs in from the opposite side. Ifor, the director and her attendants are startled to find the stars missing and immediately begin the hunt, gossiping (the attendants), and panicking (Ifor and the director):

All:

Hell! Hell! Hell!

hell what's she done now

O hell what has she done now

what of her husband what of his wife
someone go find them before this ignites
what of her husband what of his wife
someone go find them before this ignites
the press will be all over it

Hell! Hell! Hell!

hell what's she done now

O hell what has she done now

Meanwhile there is some 'stage business' taking place with the paparazzi selling their new 'Liz & Dick' photos to other men, the Roman press corps.

With everyone darting about, Elizabeth and Richard re-enter through the side door, flushed from the wine and rumpled from caresses, her a few feet ahead of him (as if that fools anyone....). Ifor, spotting them first, shouts out--

Ifor:

Have you two any idea what they are saying?!

Where have you been?

Richard:

My brother, calm yourself

the lady and I merely went for a walk

Ifor:

You must watch what you do, she's too famous

you can't just take off; the Press is too curious

Elizabeth, loudly, not quite sober and egging for a fight:

O let them TALK I'll still do what I think right
seems I've spent my whole life in the damn spotlight

The director, observing this display and correctly assessing that his mussed-up and tipsy stars are unfit to film, announces with equal parts resignation and frustration--

Director:

That's all--we will call it a day.

Anthony and Cleopatra

will have to wait

a thought occurs to him, and he sends a cloaked warning towards the star-crossed stars--

they HAVE to wait!

The director turns heel and abruptly leaves. Elizabeth and Richard turn to each other, pleased with themselves and the free afternoon they have inadvertently created. They leave again, arm in arm.

Only Ifor remains. Having watched them leave, Ifor hangs his head and turns to follow the director. But in rushes a copy boy, handing Ifor a newspaper, the front page adorned with a huge picture of Elizabeth and Richard necking, topped with the large headline "Le Scandale!"

Ifor:

Too late!

Scene 2 "LE SCANDALE"

This is conceived as one long scene in which a sort of 'revolving door' of people enter and leave, the comings and goings helping to emphasize the confusion and conflict that characterized this time period.

The year is 1962, in Rome filming the movie 'Cleopatra'. Elizabeth and Richard rendezvous via connecting rooms to a hotel suite, entering from opposite doors (a subterfuge) after a day of working together on the movie set. A table is setup with a scrabble board, a game in progress. Sheets on the luxurious bed are ruffled.

Door opens stage right. We hear the sounds of Italian voices shouting "Leez! Leez! Baci!" as Elizabeth slams the door shut and leans with relief against it.

Door opens stage left. Richard dashes in, a voice outside behind him is heard asking sarcastically “Any new denials today, Mr. Burton?” Richard slams the door shut. Slightly out of breath, he glances around, then takes off his coat and places it over a chair. It is clear that he makes himself at home in her room. He unbuttons his shirt collar.

Richard:

Where is Eddie these days?

Elizabeth:

I sent him house-hunting
he’s in Switzerland

Richard nods and they embrace, hands roaming greedily on each other.

Richard:

You were quite a mess on the set today, old girl.

Elizabeth:

You were rather a mess yourself, old boy

Richard turns to the liquor cabinet to pour drinks for them. Hands her a glass and puts his other arm around her. Richard drinks deeply and then so does Elizabeth, following his lead. Each setting their glasses down, she returns his caresses.

Elizabeth:

but somehow at night the wine doesn’t seem to slow the old boy down...
except, perhaps...at Scrabble!

she turns teasingly from him and steps over to the table with the Scrabble board. He follows her and looks over her shoulder at the board. Fingering the board:

Elizabeth:

I believe I proved myself the master of the 4 letter words

he turns her around and starts to kiss her

Richard:

yes and I think I’d call you master of them in other ways too

There is the sound of commotion outside the room, faint cries of “Leez, Leez!”. They break apart, the mood broken, and Richard glances at the door. Grabbing his glass again and taking a large gulp, Richard shakes his head in wonder:

Richard

Elizabeth

I had no idea how famous...
I thought I knew about success
but walking down the street with you
something divine manifests
they think you're miraculous
I can't stop thinking of it

Elizabeth:

and I can't stop it
its not so divine (*outside the room more cries of "Leez, Leez! Baci, Baci!"*)
when it's all the time

Richard:

I've had a taste of some success
but once I had been seen with you
my salary- they double it!
I hear my name right and left
I can't stop thinking of it

Elizabeth:

when you can't stop it
its not so divine
all day and all night

Richard wraps his arms around her comfortingly.

Richard:

but you are divine
all the time

Elizabeth:

and I want you
all the time

They embrace again, slow kisses. There is a knock on the stage right door. "Special Delivery!" is shouted through the keyhole. They break apart again, Elizabeth holding up a hand to calm Richard's annoyance and indicate it's okay, that she's expecting this. She admits a servant, who brings in two huge steaming bowls of chili.

"Chasen's" she explains to an astonished Richard.

Richard:

From Los Angeles?!

Elizabeth shrugs, then sits down and picks up a spoon:

Yes, when I have a craving
I cave in—
I have it flown in

Richard is momentarily speechless. Drinking deeply from his glass, he admires her greedily attacking the bowl:

Richard:

You even eat lustily

Knock on stage door left. "Ifor" shouted through the keyhole. Richard tenses up and stares at Elizabeth, who shrugs, quickly throws on a scarf and dark glasses, grabs her bowl of chili, and leaves stage door right. Richard opens the door for Ifor, as he does so flashbulbs pop and we again hear the paparazzi yelling "Leez! Deeck! ". Ifor turns around and waives his fist at them, then storms In and slams the door behind him, taking in the scene including the rumpled bed. He aggressively approaches Richard.

(Demo Song 4, "I Rue the Day"):

Ifor:

I rue the day you met that (----)(gesturing with his hand to indicate his distaste)
Sybil's your wife
we Welsh men marry for life
Come to your senses, Rich!
Come home to your family

Richard pours a drink for Ifor, taking another drink himself before responding:

Richard:

calm down brother
you don't have to fight me
this is just a... 'once-over-lightly'

ifor (incredulous and infuriated):

a 'once over lightly'?!
with Elizabeth Taylor?!
she's not one of your 'once-over' girls!
and she doesn't do anything 'lightly'
she makes men marry her
they always marry her

Richard:

Marry that girl? (gesturing stage right)
Never!

you know me better
I've had my affairs
but it's Sybil I love
she understand me
she thinks there's ...
genius within me

Ifor rolls his eyes, then shakes his head in defeat

Ifor:

for God's sake
at least try to be more discreet
those photos are all over the place
those photos can't be denied

Richard:

how was I to know
the woman was so famous?
hell how was I to know
she's more famous than the goddamn pope?

Ifor shakes his head in disbelief over Richard's cluelessness, finishes his drink in one gulp and leaves, clearly unsatisfied. More flashbulbs pop as he opens the door, and Ifor charges towards the paparazzi as he slams shuts the door. Stage door right opens and Elizabeth re-enters, plunking down an empty chili bowl. Both tossing back drinks, they embrace, but Richard's mind is elsewhere now. Sensing it, Elizabeth is subdued.

Richard turns to leave, only saying, almost cruelly:

Richard:

It's late and I must go
the children expect me
I'll call you
you understand
I must go

He brusquely hugs her, then grabs her hand, looking closely at it. He's looking at her dead husband Mike Todd's wedding ring, which she still wears. It was found burned and warped in the wreckage of the plane crash that killed him.

Richard:

this ring of Mike's
you should get rid of it
how does Eddie put up with it?

what kind of man puts up with it?
you dead husband
was his best friend
you're just pretending it's him
this ring of Mike's
you should get rid of it

Elizabeth nods mutely, indicating she understands. She is hurt and confused by his brusque mood. Richard exits stage door left. Flashbulbs pop and the paparazzi yell in triumph as they capture on film his gloomy face. He barges past them.

Door knock stage right, "Telegram" shouted through the keyhole. Elizabeth opens the door and is handed a piece of paper. She reads:

Elizabeth:

Twentieth Century Fox suggests
Elizabeth stop seeing Richard Burton
or be sued for violation
of her contact's MORAL CLAUSE

Elizabeth (Demo Song 5, "Honor"):

"Moral Clause"?!
my feelings are not without honor
my heart is not theirs to rule
they can't tell me who to love
it is a big mistake
to tell me what to do
(she paces, fuming)
this isn't me being a star
this isn't me playing a part
I'm no different than any woman
we just want to obey our hearts
my feelings are not without honor
my heart is not theirs to rule
they can't tell me who to love
I make my own mistakes
everyone knows **that's** true

Without even a knock, in walks Eddie Fisher stage door right (after all, this is his room too!)

Elizabeth *(startled to see him):*

Eddie!

Eddie:

I found us a lovely Swiss chalet, just like you asked.
And of course I brought you something
just like you would expect
(places a sparkling necklace around her neck, kisses the back of her neck)

Pours himself a drink, stands with his back to her, gazing at the glass in his hand.

Eddie:

Tell me the truth

Elizabeth *(solemnly):*

I always do

Eddie:

Is there something between
you and Burton?
the headlines tell me
it's the "Romance of the Century"

Elizabeth *(quietly, glancing down)*

Yes

you know I don't lie

Eddie:

so it's true what they say
I'm the last to know
I'm the cliché
but I should've known
you still need drama
despite all that you've been through
but we'll survive this
get past the drama
take a second honeymoon
I know you love me

Elizabeth:

you know I love you

Eddie:

you're all that I need

Elizabeth:

it's not enough for me

I think...

we've been deceived

it's not good--can't you see?

I think...
we've been deceived

Eddie:

The room is spinning
what are you saying?

Elizabeth:

when Mike died
my husband

Elizabeth & Eddie together:

my best friend

Elizabeth:

I couldn't sleep alone
or I couldn't sleep
we were deceived
you were the closest thing

Eddie:

I was so close

Elizabeth & Eddie together:

to Mike

Elizabeth:

we were deceived

The two silently stand off, then Eddie turns and walks out, stage door left. Flashbulbs again. Eddie raises his hands and lowers his head to block the view of his sad face as he exits and shuts the door with finality. Elizabeth stares after him, dismayed by what she has done. A newspaper is shoved under the door. Headline: "Eddie Fisher Dumped". Elizabeth paces, drinks, contemplates her image in front of the mirror. From stage door left, In bursts Elizabeth's Mother Sara:

Sara:

what have you done!
your poor husband!
you can't mean it
that damn Burton
he's got that look
like a motherless child
women just can't resist

but he's married
you're married

and he won't leave her
men never do
he is married
you're married
and he won't leave her
men never do

my child
all our hard work
and now you're the first
the first to be paid a million
the first name up on the marquee
my child
my dream and yours
as big as can be
my child
tired, confused
that's all this can be
you've been so ill
why, you almost died
just months ago
we almost lost you
tired, confused
some rest will help you
just get some rest
put this behind you

Elizabeth:

I was not a child as long as most

I can't say why exactly
but my heart had room
when he came he filled a room
I didn't know was empty

like the song that soothes the child's cry
his voice has become my lullaby
like the ocean changes with the sky
every truth I knew became a lie

every truth I knew became a lie

when he came he filled a room
I didn't know was empty
now there is no longer room
for any other memories
somehow this fits
and from now on
this it it
he's all there is for me
I can't call it right
I can't call it right
but he's all there is

I loved him before I should have
but once the die was cast
the breaking of so great a thing
would make a greater crack

Elizabeth glances longingly over to the empty bed, and hanging her head, walks slowly, sadly out of the room, stage door right. Her mother gazes after her, holding her hand to her heart, then abruptly hurries out the door to follow her.

Eddie barges in on the empty room from stage door left, looking like he half expected to find the lovers there. He stalks the room, checking behind curtains, furniture. Picks up the phone, asks the hotel operator:

Eddie:

Sybil Burton, please

after a brief pause, Sybil joins on the other line, and Eddie continues:

my wife

is having an affair

with your husband! (pause)

she told me

yes it's true (pause)

maybe before

he always came back to you

yes, I'm sure...

so you say

love and family

always brought him back to you

oh I'm sure (sarcastic now)
that he swore
on bended knee
this thing with her was over
deny away
but the game's not the same
when the players change
you may know your husband
but clear as day
you don't know my wife
what Elizabeth wants
Elizabeth gets
deny away
but this is not the worst it will get!

Eddie hangs up the phone firmly. He grabs a suitcase from the closet, messily throws in a few things and then exits the room, stage door left. Flashbulbs pop again, and from out of sight we hear the paparazzi ask "Moving, Mr. Taylor??"

Elizabeth re-enters. It is clear she was peeping through the door, waiting for Eddie to leave. She slumps against the wall. A new thought occurs to her and she straightens, crossing over to the bed, opening the nightstand drawer, then sitting on the bed contemplating the pill bottle in her hand. Door opens stage left and in walks Richard, slamming the door shut quickly against the shouts of "Leez!" from the pursuing paparazzi. As he hastily takes off his coat then pours and gulps a drink, she puts the bottle back in the drawer and hastens to him.

Richard:

Sybil knows!
yes Eddie told
(Elizabeth gasps)

Richard:

Elizabeth
this mad moment can't last
we have played games
with those we love the best
this mad moment
this madness...

Richard paces the room, frenzied, stopping only for another drink.

Richard:

I fall in
like the ocean
near you there's no other sound
I give in
I'm imprisoned
with you I'm happy to drown

He goes to her, and she welcomes his caresses. Richard draws back:

Richard:

you're the ocean
tide and current
but this must be our last
mad moment

Casting a glance back at the nightstand that contains the pill bottle:

Elizabeth:

this mad moment
is life and death

Richard:

you can't be serious
I'm not worth all that
I've been lost in your sea

Richard turns away, as does she, both lost in their own thoughts:

Richard:

but every voyage has to end
and, after all
I'm a family man

Elizabeth & Richard, in a somber duet:

and, after all,
he's a family man
so, after all
this is where it ends

His mind made up, Richard kisses her tenderly, then with sad resignation goes and puts on his coat, and neatly finishes his drink. Faced away from him, Elizabeth sings to herself:

Elizabeth:

but I no longer know
who I am

I reached my zenith with this man
now I no longer know
who I am
and can't face knowing
what I've done

As Richard opens the door to leave stage door right, in walks the film director. He glares at Richard, who gives him a curt nod, and an understanding has passed between them. Richard has perhaps been following orders. Elizabeth, meanwhile, darts to the nightstand, takes out the pill bottle and swallows a handful of pills.

Director:

Elizabeth!
we haven't seen you in days
we've been worried sick
we all love you
everyone loves you
here, I brought you this

He places a glittering bracelet around her wrist.

Come to the set
you've haven't been there for days
it's no time to quit
we're all waiting
everyone's waiting (his carefully controlled frustration peeks through here)
we all love you
whatever you want
just ask, you'll have it

Elizabeth:

It's very hard...

Director:

...to fight the tide?
I'm so sorry my dear

Elizabeth:

funny you say 'tide'
Richard calls me "Ocean"

Director:

But he calls another "Wife"

Elizabeth recoils at the reminder.

Director:

Come back to us my dear
let the role of Cleopatra
be your strength

your triumph
you can't go on like this
too many homes would be wrecked
Come back to us
everyone loves you

Elizabeth slumps over, appearing to fall asleep. The director tiptoes out, stage door right. Elizabeth opens her eyes, groggily sits up.

Elizabeth:

"home wrecker" ...
Eddie and Debbie
were already through
but this time ...
this time it would be true

She opens the bedside table drawer again and this time swallows the rest of the pills.

Sara, her mother, enters stage door right and glances around, confused. Spotting Elizabeth, she rushes over to the bed, sees the discard pill bottle and Elizabeth's still figure, and screams "Oh My God, She's Taken Pills!", rushes to the open door, calls out:

Sara:

Help! Emergency!

Ambulance attendants rush in immediately.

Sara:

Oh thank God, you're...already here?

Ambulance tech:

The studio keeps us on standby
the way things were going
they thought it wise...

The ambulance team starts to examine Elizabeth, eventually carrying her off on a stretcher, exiting stage door left. Sara, watching their administrations, standing a few feet away, starts to muse:

Sara:

my poor girl
this is my fault
nothing was ever denied her
nothing was out of her reach
this only happened
because of me
because of our dreams

When I was on stage
oh...what glorious days!
still, my best performance

was her ascendance

so precocious
just a little thing
but she'd command
those studio kings
those flashing eyes
never really young
transfixed us all
oh, what have we done

now when her life
doesn't follow the script
Elizabeth gets very sick
now when her life
doesn't follow the script
Elizabeth...can't live with it

Choking on her thoughts, Sara starts to rush out of the room, after her daughter. She is stopped by a throng of reporters yelling questions at her. After a brief hesitation, Sara responds with two words

Sara:

food poisoning!

She pushes her way out to follow after her daughter.

Richard bursts into the empty hotel room from stage door right, newspaper in hand, leaving the door open behind him. Reads aloud the newspaper headline, then scans the room:

Richard:

Food Poisoning!

My poor girl!

She must still be at the hospital.

Ifor rushes in after Richard, in a confrontation manner:

Ifor:

Rich! You can't do this!

Richard:

Brother--

Ifor:

you publicly

repeatedly

humiliate--

Richard:

leave me alone

Ifor:

your wife
your family

Richard:

give me some room

Ifor:

I promised them

Richard:

there's a war in my head

Ifor:

I'd bring you back

I promised them—

Richard:

I don't want war with you

I've always looked up to you

I've always listened to you

Ifor:

I promised them--

Richard:

this is not the time

to 'big brother' me

Ifor:

you publicly

repeatedly

humiliate--

Richard:

Dammit Ifor!

stop pushing me!

Ifor:

I'll bring you back

I'll drag you back--

Richard and Ifor scuffle.

Ifor:

I'm through with you

so help me

I'm through

Ifor storms out of the room, stage door right, leaving door open behind him. Richard pours himself a large drink, takes several big swallows. (During the following scene Richard should face towards stage left when starting to sing about Sybil, towards stage right when starting to again refer to Elizabeth.)

Richard:

I'm going to leave Sybil
we'll run off together
ah, I can't leave Sybil...
the best wife, best mother
no more Elizabeth...
no more Elizabeth?
how to face that verdict

If only I could have both lives
what I know
and what I want to know
if only I could try it out
my appetite
could fill two lives

if only I could try it out
keep all I have
and just expand
taste every bit
my appetite
could fill two lives

If I could just have both
both wives, both lives, two sides
but a Welshman is true
our home's what gets us through

if I just didn't stop
to count the cost
to leave Sybil
is unthinkable
Elizabeth
is all I think of

Sybil's a good woman
(turning from stage left now to stage right, to help indicate he's referring to Elizabeth:)
my god what a woman!
(the back-n-forth continues, back to Sybil:)
she takes care of us all

devoted, unselfish
I thank god for her

she's a good mother
(Elizabeth) she's an earth mother
life revolves 'round her
the whole world dilates
pulsates in her glow

She's so amazing
(Sybil) she is amazing
she's the only thing that's sure
(Elizabeth) there's nothing that's certain with her
(Sybil) she thinks I'm amazing
(Elizabeth) she thinks I'm amazing

(Demo Song 6, "We Are Too Alike". Please note: we started the recording in the middle of the actual song, as the first half would be confusing without the visual cues as to which woman Richard is referring to):

but we are too alike
slaves to our appetites
in a relationship
we'd be a sinking ship
Sybil understand me
she takes care of my needs
I've been blessed with a saint
I can't toss that away

but then the ocean writhes
her breath is like the tide
her body, the current
Elizabeth
so brash so rich so much

if I didn't stop
to count the cost
if there was no cost
to be counted

At some point during Richard's 'aria of conflict' Elizabeth has returned from the hospital, and stands silently listening to him from the open doorway stage right.

Elizabeth:

My darling
I can't stand to see you this way
I can't stand to see you in pain
go back
they'll forgive you
you go to them
I'll be..
I'll be your friend
whatever you need
that's what I would be
it would be enough
to share the same sky
to talk on the phone
it would be enough
to share the same sky
and if not too much--
share a thought
a script, a plot
now and then
it would be enough—

Richard:

Elizabeth, hush

Elizabeth:

-- to talk on the phone
now and then

Richard:

we cannot pretend
this has to end
You must live your life
Go live your life

Richards backs away from her, holding onto her hands until they break apart and he turns and walks out the door, head hanging. Elizabeth takes a breath, then speaks softly to the closed door:

Elizabeth:

will it be...enough?

turning around, her fighting spirit stirring:

Elizabeth:

for the first time love is enough
enough to disprove selfishness
patience can be cultivated
Elizabeth, recreated
my secret candle burns
while I hope for my turn
and hope is enough
it must be enough
my secret candle burns
while I hope for my turn
and hope... is enough

*Door opens and her attendants walk in, forming a supportive circle around her...a coven, if you will.
Elizabeth barely realizes they are there. She raises her arms and begins to sway and spin:*

Elizabeth:

I'll search the sky
Ask the stars to align
Like a gypsy I'll play
With heaven's design
All reason cast away
as I try to make you mine

I'll pray for fate
To stir the cosmic mind
Raise love out of the fray
And let our lives entwine

At this point Sara walks in the other door, startled by this disturbing, almost primitive, display. The attendants now join Elizabeth in singing:

All reason cast away
as I try to make you mine

Elizabeth collapses to the floor. The attendants start to kneel by her still body, parting to make way for Sara as she draws nearer. Sara caresses her seemingly unconscious daughter, and seems to come to a decision. Rising again:

Sara:

my child
I can't bear this

your unhappiness
claws at my breast
I'll regret this
that man will break your heart
but child
you are your own woman
like your mother
like any mother
I want you happy
and clearly you're not happy
you're not happy alone
dear child
I will fix this

Sara abruptly leaves. The attendants watch her go, understanding her unspoken mission to bring Richard back. Elizabeth, however, is still unresponsive, seemingly unaware of her surroundings.

Attendants:

Elizabeth
Elizabeth
please don't get sick
don't give up yet
Elizabeth
Elizabeth
we all feel pain
from your distress
oh lovely one
oh lovely one
we hear your pain
your lonely song

Sara returns, standing just inside the doorway. In her wake walks Richard. The attendants gasp, standing and taking a step back from Elizabeth. Elizabeth, now roused, rises slowly, hopefully, as he approaches her:

Richard

it was not one thing
but many
it was not suddenly
yet all of a sudden
it was

without your heat
I can't feel my pulse
far off and down deep
it makes itself known
the feeling repeats
synchronizing my soul
as deep as the ocean
as old as Rome
and all of a sudden
you are my home

I have many doubts
but your violet eyes
casts each one out
I have moods so black
only your radiance
lights the way back

I have many doubts
but those violet eyes
hypnotize
exorcise
cast aside
and all of a sudden—
there's no room for anything else
it was not one thing
but many
it was not suddenly
yet all of a sudden
it was

Richard grabs Elizabeth's hand and the two 'nestle'. At some point during Richard's aria Ifor has walked in. The Director enters shortly after Ifor.

Ifor:

It won't be easy

Elizabeth (sharply, defensively):

I never thought it would be!

Sara:

Divorce is messy

Elizabeth and Richard:

they can blame it all on me

Ifor:

it will cost dearly

Richard:

they deserve all my money

Sara:

you both have tempers

Elizabeth (leaning her head against Richard):

but it soon turns into purrs!

Director

the studio will be—

Elizabeth & Richard (cutting him off)

there will be other movies!

Sara:

the Pope is upset

Richard:

he's not on my party list!

At this point Eddie walks in, contemptuously throwing down a stack of papers:

Elizabeth:

Eddie! sorry...

Eddie:

here are the papers you need

Elizabeth:

please don't hate me

Eddie:

for an exorbitant fee

Elizabeth (turning joyfully to Richard):

so now I am free

A flurry of activity as the attendants rush out of the room and back in, adorning Elizabeth with a veil, a long white cloak that drapes behind her like a wedding dress train, and a bouquet of flowers. They also push in through the door a bewildered looking church minister.

Attendants:

they will be wed

they will be wed

it all unfolds

it's all been said

Paparazzi (with Italian accents):

this ought to be good

they'll never behave

the drama potential

will raise our credentials

a wedding- you bet

it's the best news yet

Leez & Deeck

we're your 'buzzing insects'

and with you

we will stick!

we love you

Leez & Deeck

Richard pulls a ring from his pocket and places it on Elizabeth's finger, then kisses her.

Ifor, Sara, Director, Minister:

it may not be right

there's lots to not like

but

we'll get out of the way

we'll get out of the way

Sara, Director:

and we'll see if it sticks!

Ifor, Minister:

I am no optimist!

Attendants:

We love you

Elizabeth!

Paparazzi:

we love you

Leez and Deeck!

Richard tucks Elizabeth's hand under his arm and walks with her to the front of the stage.

Richard:

Ladies and Gentlemen

meet Mrs. Burton

from now on, like The Bard once said

"there will be no more marriages"

*Act 2 of 2, Opera libretto based on the relationship of
Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton*

First Years of Marriage—(the tigers are tamed)

November 1962, E & R returning from Mexico where Richard has just finished filming “The Night of the Iguana”. Door opens stage right on the luxurious hotel room suite (with a large bar downstage, far corner stage right, and also two large comfortable reading chairs with ottomans, a tall stack of books beside one of them), in walks Elizabeth in traveling coat, followed by a a bevy of bellhops, carrying an enormous quantity of expensive-looking luggage of all shapes and sizes. The bags are placed into a large double-doored closet backstage right. An attendant takes her coat while Elizabeth starts to look around questioningly, glancing back towards the open door.

Elizabeth:

Richard? Darling, where are you?

In walks Richard, smiling, looking pleased with himself, holding a jewelry case firmly in both hands. The attendants leave, quietly shutting the door behind them. He opens the box to display a vastly expensive emerald and diamond necklace, and Elizabeth squeals with delight.

Elizabeth:

Richard!

Richard:

To celebrate! Thank you for coming to Mexico with me
Richard fastens the necklace around her neck.
we had ...(he kisses her neck seductively) fun
wouldn't you say, Mrs. Burton?

Elizabeth:

The emeralds remind me of your eyes
and your eyes...
remind me of the way you look at me
then she turns around to face him

Elizabeth:

You'll finally get your Oscar, darling, when the movie comes out.
I'm so glad you took that part
without it we might never have found
Puerto Vallarta
our sleepy little fishing town

Richard:

we should buy that home
then we'll always have Casa Kimberley

Elizabeth:

where it can be simply you and me
Richard picks up the phone and makes a call, and we understand him to be arranging the purchase of Casa Kimberley. Elizabeth admires her fabulous necklace in the mirror, girlishly delighted. Richard ends the phone call and comes up behind her, embracing her.

Richard:

You bloom in the heat

Elizabeth:

I'll read in the sun

Richard, smiling:

I'll read in the shade

Elizabeth:

I'll swim in the ocean

Richard:

you are my ocean

my eternal one-night stand

(she punches him playfully in the shoulder in response), but Richard is serious, and takes her hand:

when I was young and troubled and poor

I dreamed of a woman

now, sometimes

the dream returns

but when I reach out

she is here by my side

when I was young and troubled and poor

I dreamed of you

before ever I met you

Elizabeth is deeply moved as Richard gazes at their clasped fingers. The phone rings, Richard eagerly picks it up, nods at Elizabeth, says 'thank you' and hangs up the phone. Elizabeth claps her hands happily.

(Demo Song 7, "Casa Kimberley"):

Richard:

now we'll always have Casa Kimberley

Elizabeth, gazing again at her reflection in the mirror, fingering the necklace:

I was so happy there

just Mrs Burton

nobody's movie star

"Mrs. Burton" – how I love that sound!

it was so lovely there

no paparazzi

no trace of Tinseltown

Hollywood life... it's like a pink cloud

but with you life

is far more Technicolor

than any life without

thank goodness

we have Casa Kimberley now

Richard, clasping her hands again as if in a vow:

you know you are my home

and in that welcome place

my heart's lied down to stay

when shadows start to grow
when they refuse to let us go

Elizabeth and Richard:

that's when we'll say
let's make our way
back to our playground by the sea
Casa Kimberley
when demons say hello
when they refuse to turn and go
that's when we'll say
let's go away
back to our playground by the sea

let's rest our gaze
on Bandaras Bay
it will be simply you and me
at Casa Kimberley

They embrace, kiss, and move to lay down on the bed. Suddenly there is a loud knock and a flood of attendants stream in to the room, bringing in clothes on hangers, setting up numerous bottles of alcohol on the bar, appetizers, glassware, etc. Large posters advertising the movie "The Sandpiper" are propped up on display.

Richard sits up, crossly:

what the hell—?!

Elizabeth, interrupting him, her hand caressing his face:

don't be grumpy, dear
you remember—
tonite our movie opens.
we're giving a party.

Richard grunts in frustration, stands up, running his fingers through his hair in agitation. An attendant places a drink in his hand.

Elizabeth, teasing him:

oh don't worry Old Coot
there will be plenty of pretty ladies who
you can tell your stories to

Richard smiles reluctantly:

what's that about my stories,
Twiddle Twat?

he slaps her playfully on the bottom as she gets up. Elizabeth is escorted out of the room to prepare for the evening, while Richard's dresser upgrades him to a black bow tie and tuxedo jacket, combs his hair. Now ready, but waiting for Elizabeth to return, Richard settles down in the large chair by a stack of books, takes one off the top and immerses himself in the story, occasionally glancing at his watch and over towards the closed door, wondering how late Elizabeth will be this time. Doors open and the attendants stand regally to either side as Elizabeth, breathtaking in an emerald green gown (and wearing the new emerald and diamond necklace), proceeds in like a queen immediately followed by a trail of press agents and industry people, along with Sara and Ifor, all dressed in their fancy clothes, the guests heading straight to the bar and then standing in groups, chatting, laughing. Richard neatly finishes his drink then rises, takes E's arm and proudly walks her over into the center of the group who part to form a half circle around her. Attendants hand E & R drinks.

A young fashionably attired man named Michael is standing in the farthest corner, his conversation abruptly pausing as Elizabeth is escorted over by Richard. (This man goes on to become a famous fashion designer, and will reappear in the final scene.)

Michael, to the person beside him:

She makes an entrance

that ...entrances

like no one else

like no one else

look at that dress

look at that necklace

look at how...

they look at each other

others amongst the guests join in:

look at that dress

look at that necklace

look at how...

they look at each other

R's brother Ifor spots E's mother Sara, walks up to her:

Ifor:

I don't mind telling you

we wanted to hate her

but when she came to us in Wales

and she said, so simply

"please don't hate me"

all we could do was embrace her

Sara:

and I have to tell you
I sure didn't trust him
I was sure this whole thing would fail
but he loves her fiercely
it's plain to see
all we could do was embrace him

Elizabeth and Richard are feeding each other appetizers, quaffing wine, touching each other frequently, laughing with those around them. While this has been going on three Paparazzi have managed to sneak in and infiltrate the guests, working together to shield from view the camera one of them has around their neck.

Paparazzi:

now who would have thought
they'd still make headlines
after they married
became legitimate
now Leez and Dick
are no longer illicit
now it seems...

second Paparazzi interjects:

just look at them!
with Taylor and Burton
marriage is sexy
marriage is hot

all three Paparazzo:

now it seems
with Taylor and Burton
marriage is sexy
marriage is hot

Photographer snaps a photo, which alerts the attendants to their uninvited presence. They shoo the offending paparazzi back out the door.

Meanwhile, the alcohol is flowing, and Richard is getting pretty loud and animated. Suddenly he bursts out, quieting the party in the process:

Richard:

I, the twelfth child
the twelfth of thirteen
born to a barmaid
and a coal minor
born poor as can be

yet somehow
the most beautiful woman in the world
has married me!

He takes a bracelet case out of his suit jacket, opens it to show her a bracelet to match her emerald and diamond necklace, and proudly clasps it on her wrist. Elizabeth gasps in surprise and admiration for the beautiful bracelet. Richard proudly continues, raising his glass in a toast:

Richard:

I introduced her to beer
she introduced me --
--to Bulgari!

The guests raise their glasses too, and cheer. Elizabeth hugs him. They pose for a press photographer, in front of one of the "The Sandpiper" posters.

Sara, E's mother, is standing amongst the guests chatting with R's brother Ifor, both watching the proceedings with interest:

Sara:

that fabulous jewelry
Richard knows my girl

Ifor, shaking his head:

my brother's in a whole new world
the excitement she radiates
the thrill of being in her wake
seems to chase his black dog away
those black moods that hound him
are washed away in her wake
THAT is the great gift she brings him

After his associate has snapped the photo, the reporter, notepad in hand, asks E & R (still standing in front of the movie poster):

Reporter:

And what do you think of your new motion picture?

Richard, his voice booming out, the alcohol making him uninhibited:

The Sandpiper?!

In my opinion, it stinks.

Richard quotes from the tag line displayed on the movie poster:

"from the beginning,
they knew it was wrong.
but nothing could keep them apart."

The script is awful.

A parody of milady and me.

But, for the money, we dance!

Elizabeth is miffed at Richard's tactlessness. She grabs his arm and yanks it hard.

Elizabeth:

Richard, shut up, for chrissakes!

Richard, beyond drunk now, has edged into a state of meanness—he roars back at her:

and what would you know,

growing up in that movie factory

what is it you know

about poetry or prose

you with your MGM education?

Elizabeth, after a slight pause, the whole room holding their breath:

well now, Luv

we can't all be geniuses like you

she turns and walks away from him

Everyone in the room has gone silent. Uncomfortable with the situation, they exit the room, embarrassed for their hosts. Elizabeth turns and she and Richard stare at each other across the rapidly emptying space. Paparazzi take photos from the doorway. Richard and Elizabeth are still on edge with one another:

Elizabeth:

well, well

another day

another drama...

we scared them off

Richard:

Good!

Elizabeth, sarcastic:

We can't throw a party, Luv

and then scare everyone away

Richard:

they scare too easily

then, with regret, rubbing his face in his hands:

I'm sorry, dear girl

I didn't mean it

I behaved...badly

Elizabeth, closing the distance between them, agrees:

you behaved...badly

Richard:

sometimes the booze
chases the black dog away
sometimes it draws him closer

I **am** sorry

Elizabeth, *forgiving him, reaches up and kisses him:*

you boozed-up Welshman
she continues, inspired now, and rather tipsy herself:

we'll show them what marriage really means
I've learned there's no deodorant like success
"home wrecker"--

twice now they've handed me that sentence
I'm Jewish--

yet somehow the Pope demands penance
they even named a new sin for us!

Richard:

'erotic vagrancy'
what ingenuity!

Elizabeth:

the critics
blamed us for Cleopatra's excess
why even Congress tried to ban us!
but you see--
there's no deodorant like success
and we'll make of this marriage a success
we'll show them what marriage really means
we gave up too much
to do any less
than to make of this marriage a success

Richard:

yes we fight, and drink a bit

Elizabeth:

I like to swear; they don't expect it

Richard & Elizabeth:

trading insults keeps the brain fit
we'll show them what marriage really means
even if it's not squeaky clean!
we'll make this marriage a success
we'll show them what marriage really means
let them read it in the magazines!

Richard, *continuing his apology by quoting his beloved Shakespeare, waving his arms broadly:*

“For nothing this wide universe I call
save you, my rose, in it you are my all”
and did you know, Luv--
I can recite that sonnet backwards?!
“all my are you—“

She shushes him finally by kissing him and pulling him down onto the bed

The Middle Years of Marriage-- (Theme: EXCESS)

Scene goes dark, two years have passed....we are now given a sense of the constant travel these two, the original ‘jet-setters’, needed both for film work and to avoid taxes in any one country. Never more than 3 months in one place.

Lights rise, maid comes in and opens curtains. Richard gets up, pours himself a drink, sits down in his reading chair, picks up and open a book. Gets up for another drink. Attendants come in, get Elizabeth up. Her wrist is wrapped up, another one of her many ailments. Attendant rewraps the wrist, Richard looking up from his book, glancing over with concern. Attendants bundle the two of them into coats, escort them out the door, then transport all the suitcases out again. Not a word has been spoken—this is a regular routine for them.

Lights dim, and then rise again, another year has passed. Doors open and Elizabeth, Richard and all the attendants flood in. Elizabeth takes off her coat, hands it to a maid, sighs tiredly, and the maid removes a back support belt from around her waist, then E lays down on the bed to rest. A massage therapist comes in, helps her roll over and massages her back briefly, pulling her this way and that. Richard also removes his coat, pours himself a drink, sits down in his reading chair, picks up and opens a book. Gets up for another drink. The massage therapist leaves, Elizabeth rolls over and sits up in bed.

Elizabeth, ruefully:

well, THAT was fun!
falling from a horse
falling down stairs
falling...(teasingly, she glances over at Richard) for you
it’s amazing I can still stand!

She gets up, comes over and kisses him, makes herself a drink, washes down a handful of pills, then disappears into the large closet.

He makes himself another drink. He picks up a different book and starts to read. Tinkling sounds coming from the closet.

Richard:

What are you doing, Lumpy?

Elizabeth, in a childish voice:

Playing with my jewels

Richard, charmed, laughs delightedly. He puts down his book, picks up his diary and a pen from the table beside his chair. He glances over towards the closet, starts to write about her in his diary:

(Demo Song 8, "Sunday's Child"):

Richard:

she is Sunday's Child
a man's dark fantasy
she is shy and witty
arrogant and willful
she is Sunday's Child
beautiful girl
she is nobody's fool
my mistress, lover, wife
I live within her eyes
and I'll love her 'til I die

Elizabeth comes over to his chair, bends down and gives him a tender kiss, and lightly smooths his hair.

Elizabeth:

Dear, remember,
tomorrow is Monday
and we leave for LA

Richard, groaning--his good mood destroyed--tosses down his diary:

we're doomed nomads
no more than 3 months in one place
or the tax man slaps us in the face

Elizabeth, heading over to the bar to make herself a drink:

I know

Richard, getting up to pace, somewhat agitated:

I'd like to be alone with you
for two hundred years
but can't even get two days
what we need is an eternal Sunday
where we could lay in bed
eternally...rutting
and reading
maybe we should take a break
out of the floodlight's blaze
the glare that fills our days
the circus that's our life
what we need is an eternal Sunday
I'd like to be alone with you
for two hundred years

but can't even get two days

Richard sits down again, and this time picks up a script, which he seems almost immediately captivated by.

Richard, thoughtfully:

Who's Afraid ...

He reads a bit more of the script.

Richard, excited now:

you have only to read

the very first page

to know this is great!

Elizabeth comes over, reading over his shoulder, rubbing the back of his neck as she reads. He looks up at her and she nods.

Elizabeth:

the censors will hate it

which means I love it!

Richard:

we'd better do it

to stop anyone else

from causing a sensation

by doing it!

Richard get up and makes make a phone call (to the Director). Soon the Director walks in.

Richard:

So, this movie of yours...

Director, eagerly:

Yes, it's groundbreaking, isn't it?

You're interested?

Richard:

Well, we were actually thinking

of taking a break

a break from movie making

Director, panicking:

A break?! But—but—

half of Hollywood's income

comes from movies

the two of you make!

it would be a mistake!

Richard, nodding:

we've been told we generate
more business than
some smallish nations

Director:

I'm sure it's true!
it would be a mistake
not to ride this milktrain
ride it as long as it last

inspired now, trying to sell his point of view:

the cameras flash
the diamonds flash
those violet eyes flash--
you surely should
ride it as long as it lasts!

Richard, mildly impressed by this display:

I suppose you are right
pauses briefly to consider

Richard:

so, what do you think
of me and the Mrs.
as your brow-beaten professor
and his scathing wife?

Director, slowly, choosing his words carefully:

obviously
Elizabeth
is too young and beautiful...

Elizabeth

with a gray wig?
the right make-up?
I'm not afraid to trade
my glamorous ways
hell, I can even gain weight!

(Director and Richard glance at each other at that comment)

Director:

Yes, that could work
but you—*(turning to Richard)*
on screen you look too strong
for a hen-pecked husband
you look as if you have four balls!

Richard, with quick wit:

only four??

(both men laugh)

you'll see *(slapping the Director on the back conspiratorially)*

I can conjure this character

and Elizabeth

I predict

will amaze

it will be her Hamlet *(gazes lovingly over at her)*

Elizabeth comes over to put her arm around Richard

Elizabeth:

besides

since we've been together

our contracts require

we never be more

than one hour apart

so using us both would be smart

Richard, kissing her, agrees:

since we've been together

we've been unable to be apart

Director:

all right then

it's settled

how about we do a quick run-through?

He hands them each a copy of the script.

R: You're fooling yourself

E: IT'S NOT THE LIFE I'VE WANTED!

R: That's not it. It's that you're sick...

E: I'LL SHOW YOU WHO'S SICK!

R: Calm down, you're going too far.

E: I'LL SHOW YOU WHO'S SICK! I'LL SHOW YOU!

R: *(he shakes her)* Stop it! *(Pushes her back into a chair)* Now, stop it!

E: *(dripping contempt)* You...

R: I warned you to stop

E: *(sarcastically faking fear)* ooohhhh

R: now you've really gone too far

E: I'm just beginning!

Director *(with a clap of his hands to stop them):*

bravo!

Elizabeth (*totally shaking off her character from the play, claps her hands too*):

that was fun!

let's have lunch now

join us!

There's a knock on the door—Richard opens it and in come the servants with trays of food, setting them on the center table. Our three Paparazzi sneak in behind them.

Richard, taking the drink a servant has poured for him, sits down at the table and gestures for the Director to join him. Elizabeth sits down too, takes a glass of wine poured for her by a servant. They start to sample food with great delight, their wine glasses constantly refilled by the servants. (These were known as their "liquid lunches".)

Paparazzi:

all this 'free love' talk

singles are swinging

and marriage is 'square'

down with establishment!

but Leez and Dick

make marriage groovy and hip

what a team

second Paparazzi interjects:

just look at them!

with Taylor and Burton

marriage is sexy

marriage is hot

all three Paparazzo:

now it seems

with Taylor and Burton

marriage is sexy

marriage is hot

They snap a photo, which alerts the attendants to their uninvited presence. The attendants shoo the offending Paparazzi back out the door.

There's another knock—Richard opens it and in comes a journalist (this could again be Michael, the fashion designer, as the interviewer) shakes Richard's hand, bows to Elizabeth.

Journalist:

I'm here on behalf of "Look" magazine

I'm here for your cover interview

Richard grandly invites the journalist to join them at the table. Elizabeth discretely steps away to the mirror, touching up her make-up and hair.

Richard: *pouring a shockingly large drink for the journalist*

There are few pleasures to match tipsiness

in this murderous world

any dark day now

some frigging foreigner

will press a button

and gone it will all be

he lifts his glass in a toast to who knows what, then glances over at Elizabeth

Richard:

come over here

you Hollywood baby you

we want to gaze

on your lovely face!

Elizabeth: *(sashaying over, sitting down and picking up a large bite of food):*

What did you call me?

Richard:

Why, a Hollywood baby

Elizabeth, nodding agreement:

Yes, a *golden* baby

Richard teasingly:

Well, you certainly like gold

And you're plump like a baby

Elizabeth: *taking a deep drink from her wine glass, then slapping his arm playfully*

there are countries

where they like their women

to have some meat on them!

Elizabeth belches loudly

Elizabeth: *turning to the reporter, smiling sweetly*

I know I'm vulgar

but, really...

would you have me any other way?

Journalist, smiling:

they call you the "Battling Burtons"

but you seem to enjoy this

Elizabeth quickly, wittily, snorts:

Stick around!

then, pretending to preen for the journalist:

yes, my best feature

is my gray hairs

I have them all named—

they're all called Burton!

Richard, *ignoring Elizabeth's comment, turns to the journalist:*

the truth is

we'll pitch a battle purely for the exercise

we act out for the public's benefit

the sort of nonsense

they've come to expect

Elizabeth, *competing with Richard now for the journalist attention:*

Richard loses his temper with such enjoyment

that it's beautiful to watch

he goes off like a bomb,

sparks fly, walls shake

floorsreverberate

Director (*watching his stars get a bit too animated with booze, decides to interrupt*): ahem...shall we rehearse a bit more now that we're ...warmed up?

The journalist takes his cue, stands up and shakes Richard's hand again, bows to Elizabeth, and leaves.

Both Elizabeth and Richard have been drinking steadily and are quite tipsy now, and a certain belligerence accompanies it. They circle each other—the script reading has become a competition, and a pretend fight turns into a real one. They circle each other as they speak:

(Demo Song 9, "The Confrontation"):

Elizabeth, *with venom:*

your mind is a snakepit

if we did a lobotomy--

Richard: *with heavy sarcasm:*

big words, dear

have you been reading again?

Elizabeth:

--out would fly frogs

and worms and bats

Richard:

whereas you

you are just a monster

(at this point both set aside their scripts—they are now speaking their own feelings)

a spoiled, self-indulgent, willful, vulgar dirty-mouthed monster

Elizabeth, *taken aback at this litany of insults, responds defensively:*

just because you needed me

for your success

doesn't mean you should hate me

I sacrificed too!
I sacrificed as much as you!

Richard:

nobody sacrificed as much as I did
I sold my soul
you would settle for nothing less!

*Richard storms out. Elizabeth fumes, drinks, throws something against the wall, then storms out too.
The Director, aghast, follows them after a moment.*

*After a short time lapse, Richard comes back, finds Elizabeth gone, and anxiously answers a phone call.
The call is about the 33-karat Krupp diamond (later renamed the “Taylor-Burton diamond”).
Unbeknownst to Elizabeth, Richard had been bidding on the diamond, but he ultimately lost out to the jeweler Cartier.*

Richard, angrily into the phone:

What?! He outbid me?
That bastard!
Get him on the phone.
Offer him the million
plus fifty thousand for his trouble
I must have that diamond
it is incomparably lovely
And it should be
on the loveliest woman in the world

He hangs up the phone.

Richard, laughing ruefully at himself:

damn my Welsh moments
when the black dog looms
that Celtic gloom is costing me this time!

Suddenly Elizabeth walks back in carrying a framed painting—a Van Gogh! She grabs a chair, steps up and hammers in a nail, and hangs the Van Gogh on the wall. Richard watches, bemused. She climbs down, steps back to admire her handywork, then hurries over and embraces him.

Elizabeth:

Darling
I’m so sorry
I got carried away
I hope you like your present
I bought you a Van Gogh!
(teasingly) Another man with your dark moods...

Richard, struck by her observation, kisses her quickly on the cheek then lets her go so he can take another look at the painting.

Richard, contemplatively:

in my mother's tongue
we call it hireath (pronounced something like "here- ryeth")
a longing for things
unnamable
a longing for memories
we never had
a melancholy
you can't penetrate

They are startled by a loud knock on the door. Richard moves to open it.

Richard:

I got you something too--

To her astonishment, he opens the door to two heavily armed security guards (with machine guns!) and one man in a business suit carrying a briefcase. The man holds the suitcase horizontally, then flips open the lid to display a dazzling large diamond ring carefully displayed on a jewelry cushion. Elizabeth clasps her hands and turns back to Richard, speechless.

Richard:

You love jewelry so much
you make even a stingy man like me
want to shower you with glittering things

Elizabeth, reaching out and putting on the ring, staring raptly at it on her finger:

oh Richard--it's ravishing
I swear I hear it humming
with it's own hypnotic life
I swear I feel it summon...
it's like I could fall in...

Richard, slightly self-conscious:

well now, Luv, like you always say, big girls—

Elizabeth, interrupting him joyously:

-- need big diamonds!

Richard, pleased with her reaction to his gift and the resolution to their earlier fight:

Come—let's go shopping!
you need a new fur coat
to show off your bauble
and it seems I need --(*glancing over his shoulder at the painting she'd hung*)
a book on Van Gogh!

Elizabeth and Richard happily exit, arm in arm, followed by the three men.

Lights dim, years pass. The scene is an Academy Awards after-party in their hotel suite. Richard and Elizabeth, dressed to the nines, drunk –and angry–enter the suite. Elizabeth has won a second Oscar, Richard, who was also nominated, lost.

Richard:

Well it's official.

I am now the most nominated actor
never to have won.

Always a bridesmaid...
never a bride

Elizabeth:

I can't believe we have to sit through a party now.

There's nothing to celebrate!

At least it's just the family...

Richard, snorting with derision:

"just the family"

means about a hundred fifty
and more caviar

than swims the northern sea
that's what happens

when you throw your own party

Elizabeth (sarcastically):

but it's such an honor to be nominated...

Richard:

just let me get good and drunk
before the others show up

There's a quick knock at the door, and in stream the party-goers, seemingly oblivious to the mood of their hosts. Our 3 paparazzi sneak in too.

Paparazzi:

no one spends money

like the Burtons can

their movies may bomb

but they stole the headlines

from the moonwalk

we've seen so much of them

they're like old friends

second & third Paparazzo interject:

just look at them!

Taylor and Burton
we'd all like to try
their swanky way of life

Ifor and Sara, coming in last, standing like outsiders near the back:

Sara:

so have you any news?
my calls never reach her
my letters must be lost in the mail
I can't help but worry
are they okay?
such isolation can't be so great

Ifor:

for me, the same is true
my calls never reach him
their people form a wall I can't scale
I can't help but worry
he can be mean
his bad moods can make the whole house shake

Ifor & Sara:

I can't help but worry

Ifor, shaking his head with resignation:

I hope she gives as good as she takes!

Sara, knowingly:

Trust me, she gives as good as she takes!

While all this is going on, Richard and Elizabeth are mingling, and starting to have a row we can't really hear, we just catch the end of it, as their voices raise.

Elizabeth:

that's all you've got to say for yourself?
where's your backbone?

Richard:

Now you're sounding like your character again
No wonder you won
You and that harridan are the same!

Elizabeth slaps him and rushes out of the room. He stops, looks around, embarrassed, finishes his drink and leaves out the other door.

The party guests, bewildered, sing as they slowly set down their drinks and exit, each throwing out their own theory as to the problem:

Ensemble:

“The Battling Burtons”
at it again

Guest #1:

it’s ‘cause she won --
that must have stung!

Guest #2:

I hear that he’s—
under her thumb

Guest #3:

surely you know—
it’s ‘demon rum’!
the two of them
are under ITS thumb

Ensemble of guests:

it’s his temper
it’s her temper
all that money
all those parties
she’s forever getting sick
all those hospital trips!
awfully high strung--
needs attention--
“The Battling Burtons”
“The Battling Burtons”

Elizabeth comes storming back in to the empty room. Gazes around, startled to see it now empty. Just as she turns back towards the door, in walks Richard, “hat in hand” (looking abashed). She opens her arms wide to him, he mirrors the gesture, and they walk into each other’s arms. All is forgiven. Suddenly she sneezes, twice rapidly.

Elizabeth:

I swear I can catch cold
just from the weather forecast!

Richard:

let’s go to Mexico
you bloom in the heat

Elizabeth and Richard, tenderly:

you know you are my home
and in that welcome place
my heart’s lied down to stay

when shadows start to grow
when they refuse to let us go
that's when we'll say
let's make our way
back to our playground by the sea
Casa Kimberley
it will be simply you and me
at Casa Kimberley

Lights dim and the two quietly exit.

Divorce, and Then Some -- (Theme: "we lost control of it")

Years pass. It's now 1972. Lights rise and we find Richard and Elizabeth in their suite. Richard is sitting in his chair with his ever-present stack of books. Elizabeth is seated too, looking through magazines in a bored manner, tuning Richard out as he rambles on.

Richard:

All these months
with no alcohol
I feel so much better
No shakes
No bloat
No memories lost
No blazing rage
I may be boring now
But I'm in a better place
And you, luv
you with the 'hollow leg'
you have really cut back
you look amazing--

Pounding on the door. A startled Elizabeth opens it to reveal her mother Sara. Sara rushes past her daughter straight to Richard and grabs him by the shoulders, gasping:

Sara:

Rich!
Everyone's been trying to reach you
It's I for...
he's dead, Rich
I'm so sorry

Aghast, both E & R grab their coats and head out the door following Sara. Lights dim, raise (a few days have passed). Door opens and E & R enter, both dressed in black, returning from Ifor's funeral. It is clear Richard is drunk, and in a foul mood. Richard heads immediately to pour himself a drink.

Richard, sitting down and staring into his glass, slowly says:

Hero
brother
father
confessor
best (*chokes with emotion*)—
... friend

Elizabeth, with concern, reaches out towards him

Come Richard
hold my hand

Richard, meanly, perversely:

I do not wish to touch your hands
they are large and ugly
your hands are red
I don't want to touch them

Elizabeth, compassion waning:

Piss off!

She sits, hurt and indignant. Both fume silently in their separate chairs. Richard gets up and starts to load a briefcase with a couple of books and some papers.

Elizabeth, resentfully:

You have to go back to the set now?!
we just got back
it's that girl, isn't it?
that French actress

Richard:

how can you say that?
I've held this movie up long enough
I need to be working
keep my mind off things

Elizabeth:

maybe you should take it easy with that stuff (indicating the drink in his hand)
boy when you fall off the wagon
you fall pretty far!

No reply from Richard. Elizabeth gets up and paces, frustrated.

Elizabeth:

it's that girl
I know it is.

after all we've been through
you cheat on me??

Still no reply from Richard.

Elizabeth, now worked into a state of duress:

when you're sober
you can't even be bothered
to fight back
is that it?

Elizabeth stops in front of him now, in confrontation,

I suppose you bought her jewelry too?

it's humiliating (*spoken with a sob*)

Richard ignores her, continues fiddling with his briefcase. Finally closing it, he turns and exits, swaying a bit as he replies.

Richard:

I'm going to work

Elizabeth wildly searches for a pen and paper and sits down to rapidly write something. She takes the paper and goes to the door. The paparazzi, who have been eavesdropping, nearly fall into the room when she does so. Standing very straight, gaining some composure, she reads aloud from her paper, while the paparazzi hastily take notes.

Elizabeth:

I am convinced
it would be a good idea
and a constructive idea
if Richard and I separated
Maybe we love each other too much
together, maybe...too much
I think we've lost control of it
It's not one thing, but many
I think we've lost control of it

Pray for us

Pray for us

Elizabeth brushes past them and disappears down the hall, leaving them with the paper she's written.
Lights dim, scene ends.

1975. The essence of this scene is confusion—a lot happens in a short period of time, none of it entirely making sense; not making sense to E & R, to their close circle, or the casual observer. Their divorce nearly final, E & R's actions seem motivated by a desire to provoke or get even with each other. When they DO reunite, it happens very quickly and very jubilantly, as if there had never been any resistance.

Scrim creates a generic patio scene across front of stage (or, without a scrim, back of stage dark, only front brightly lit). In the following action, Richard walks on and off from stage left, Elizabeth from stage right. Both speak into corded phones, Richard carrying his, Elizabeth carrying only the handset while an attendant follows behind her carrying the base, comically trying to stay out of E's way as she paces and talks.

Elizabeth, *walking onto stage as she speaks into the phone, talking to an unnamed friend:*

oh, yes, haven't you heard?

now he's *engaged* to "The Princess"

we'll see how long that lasts

once she gets a taste of his less than regal temperament...

she walks back offstage

Richard, *walking onto stage as he speaks into the phone to an unnamed friend:*

She's still with Wynberg?

That used car salesman? (*Richard snorts contemptuously*)

why I heard he even—

he walks back offstage

Elizabeth, *walking back onto stage, her outfit changed to indicate the passage of time. She's listening on the phone. A man in a business suit comes up to her, hands her some papers. Glancing at them, Elizabeth takes a step back, almost as if slapped. She leans on the man for support. Speaking into the phone--*

Elizabeth:

My divorce to Richard is final.

It's final.

I can't breathe well.

I'm going to go lay down.

She hangs up, then dials another number—Richard's.

Elizabeth:

Richard...do you think we did the right thing??

I just feel so...

walks off stage

Elizabeth, *walking back onto stage, her outfit changed again to indicate the passage of time, again she speaks into the phone, talking to an unnamed friend.*

oh, no, he's not

he's not with "The Princess" any more

guess she got fed up with his... excess

now he's with that actress

yes, I think you're right

I *should* call and make sure he's okay

oh yes we still talk all the time

oh yes, he's still 'on the wagon'

I'm so proud of him!

she walks back offstage

Richard, *walking onto stage as he speaks into phone to Elizabeth:*

Yes, Elizabeth

Yes, dear, I'm well. How is your back doing?

Oh, I see, that is troublesome.

You'll be in town?

Sure--Fine, Fine. I'll see you next week.

hangs up the phone

Richard, *more intrigued than annoyed:*

that woman is up to some game

that I don't quite understand

well, well

what will it be like to see her again?

I think I'm a little scared!

*laughing to himself, he walks offstage, then returns---clothes changed to indicate the passage of time--,
speaks into phone to an unnamed friend:*

Richard, *annoyed:*

She was supposed to call last night!

Sick?! What is it? (*anxious*)

Never mind—I'll call her

Richard hangs up the phone, dials again

Richard, *now speaking to E:*

What's wrong my dear?

It's what?

(*tense pause*)

A spot on your lung?

they think it might be---?

Horror struck, Richard runs off, stage right (E's side)

Scrim is raised. E&R return arm and arm to the hotel suite, happy and gay, dressed in 'safari' clothing, having just returned from South Africa, where they remarried. They stop and look at each other, holding hands,

Richard:

Hey! Do you realize we are actually married?!

this is so good

Elizabeth:

even better than before

Richard and Elizabeth:

this I can do for a lifetime

Richard:

I love you
mindlessly
hopelessly
simply
beyond measure
and above everything

Elizabeth:

I've never been so happy in my life
everything makes sense again
what a wonderful wedding
in South Africa, with all the wild animals
baboons and elephants and cheetahs
oh, the cheetahs!

Richard:

I'm so sorry I got sloshed
after the wedding
I'll go back to the clinic
if it will make you happy

Elizabeth and Richard:

this is a far better marriage than the first
this is so good
even better than before
this I can do for a lifetime

Richard and Elizabeth:

this I can do for a lifetime
I love you
mindlessly
hopelessly
simply
beyond measure
and above everything
this I can do for a lifetime

They kiss, and she moves away toward the closet, an attendant coming in to help her change. Richard has a delighted little conversation with himself:

Richard:

E is my only ism and a very nice purpose in life.
Elizabethism.

Do you have any firmly help belief or creed or politic Mr. Burton?

Yes, I believe in Elizabethism.

Elizabeth the Great of course.

Of course.

End of interview.

Next day's headlines:

"BURTON CONFESSES TO BEING AN ELIZABETHIST!"

Elizabeth laughs along with him, clapping her hands, but then clutches her lower back, weariness starting to show through. Richard's voice turns somber with concern.

Richard:

Dear

you don't look well

your color is off

all this travel...

you should lay down

Elizabeth:

yes

I think I'll lay down

Richard (to himself):

Please god she's ok

I'd die without her now

Worried, nervous, Richard paces while she rests. Repeatedly approaches the bar, then summons willpower and walks away (he is back 'on the wagon'.) From the bed, Elizabeth lets out a low moan of pain, sits up, gulps a handful of pain pills from the nightstand. Her vocalizations of pain are too much for Richard, and he pours a drink, gulps it down rapidly, but then sets the empty glass down with resolve and backs away from it.

Richard, *walking over to her now still form in the bed, contemplative:*

Those hours were the most agonizing of my life

before we found out you didn't have cancer

I think I will feel that shock for the rest of my life

how did I live without you?

the days were a dreary desert

what could life be without you?

you are alright

you must be alright

but I am still night-mared

I am still scared

I love you more
than a lifetime of words can confess
I love you more
than sanity smoothed over madness
you are alright
you must be alright
but I am still night-mared
I am still scared
what could life be without you?

Elizabeth (*now disoriented and woozie from the pills, half sits up*):

whaz that sweetie-poo?
the rest of your....?
(*she slumps back over on the bed*)

Seeing her like this, Richard succumbs to the beast, and consumes glass after glass of alcohol. An attendant comes in and give her a shot in the arm. This temporarily revives her. She moans again, clutches her stomach in pain. Richard darts to her side. She looks at him, unfocused, doesn't recognize him. She clutches the sheet to her chest in a paranoid manner, yells accusingly at him:

Elizabeth:

Who are you?
What do you want from me?
Leave me alone
she starts sobbing

Richard, shocked, turns away from the bed. Drunk now, he stumbles and falls. At this, the attendants rush in to help him, but he is belligerent and pushes them away. Elizabeth stirs, starts to sit up and watches him in a speechless daze.

Richard:

I don't need you interlopers!
away with all these people!
You and your entourage
why I only need (*drunkenly counting them off on his fingers*)
my secretary
my driver
my dresser
but you—
you need someone to blow your nose!
and just about everything else!

well it won't be me anymore!
total love my ass
total control is more like it
I want a divorce
you bewitched me again
with your cunt and your cunning
I want a divorce!

Richard storms out of the room. Elizabeth, astonished, rises and tries to follow him, the attendants helping support her. But he is already gone.

Scenes goes dark. Some months later, positioned downstage with scrim or with back of stage dark, E walks on stage carrying telephone, assistant in tow.

Elizabeth, to unnamed caller:

He wants another divorce. *(voice flat)*

Of course he does.

He's marrying that blonde model.

She hands the phone back to her assistant. Scrim rises and Elizabeth moves to stand in front of the mirror, examining herself.

Knock on door, handsome man enters and kisses her on the cheek, takes her arm to escort her out to dinner. On their way to the door, he stops her, turns, and gets on one knee to propose. She reclines her head to accept. Man looks grateful, escorts her joyfully out of the room. Elizabeth's mood is more pensive. Shortly thereafter, she returns, alone. She faces herself in the mirror:

Elizabeth:

Have I used up my share...
my share of happiness?
will I ever again be content?
or will the rest of my life be spent
searching for joy
but finding only remnants?
on boats and planes
finding only remembrance?
Have I used up my share of happiness?

Knock on door—unseen figure announces “5 minutes to curtain, Ms. Taylor”. Elizabeth sighs, walks out. Scene goes dark. 9 years later. 1984. Elizabeth walks in, very energetically, followed more slowly by a well-dressed man --her current fiancé. (Different than the last one...) Elizabeth heads to the mirror and attendants dart in to remove her coat, touch up her hair.

Fiancé *(haltingly, trying to be tactful, and hesitating each time before saying the word “AIDs”):*

darling, this benefit for ...AIDs...
your fund-raiser
forAIDs
maybe you should drop it... just for now
focus on our wedding... just for now

At this Elizabeth whirls around from the mirror to face him, shrugging off the attendants.

Elizabeth (*very animated*):

How can you tell me to 'drop it'?
Do you really think it will just go away?
people are dying
How can I do anything but everything?
there's no treatment
there's no cure
and this rampant homophobia
is inhumane!
How can I do anything but everything?
How can I do anything but everything?

Fiancé:

I was just thinking
maybe
someone else should lead the way
you're pushing people so hard
you're making them...uncomfortable

Elizabeth (*openly angry now*):

I certainly hope so!
no one else is doing **anything**
this homophobia is insane!
let's face facts, shall we?
There would be no art in America
if it weren't for gays
Finally! Finally there is a use for my fame
I don't care if they only want to come
to see if I'm fat or thin
pretty or plain
if I really have violet eyes
great! come!
my fame finally makes sense to me

my name can open doors
ignorance hides behind those doors
this won't just go away
this homophobia is insane!
people are dying
finally there's a use for my fame
How can I do anything but everything?
How can I do anything but everything?

Elizabeth wrings her hands, pleading her case. Her fiancé has lost his tentatively waged battle, and accedes graciously by grabbing her hands and kissing her on the cheek. Pacified, Elizabeth gives him a sweet smile. Phone rings, Elizabeth answers.

Elizabeth:

Yes?

(Demo Song 10, "It Makes No Sense"):

(pause) her voice rising:

Richard is dead?

Richard is dead?!

I can't believe...

it can't be

it makes no sense

no, no, he's too young

no Richard in this world...

it can't be

it makes no sense

She drops the phone, collapsing on the floor in what appears to be a dead faint. Aghast, momentarily frozen, the fiancé soon moves to help raise her up and help her into a chair. Elizabeth turns away from him, curling up in the chair, gulping for air in between sobs.

Fiancé, with slow determination:

so... I see

I see you are still tied to him

now I see

what he has been to your life

I could never replace him

could never take that special place in your heart

away from HIM

I can't marry you

you are still--

--somehow!--

married to him
Grand Passion??
outlandish obsession!

And with that he grabs his coat and heads for the door, leaving without looking at her.

Elizabeth, detached from her surroundings, appears to neither see nor hear him. Some moments pass, then the attendants flood in, bundle Elizabeth in a black coat and a veiled black hat (funeral wear) and half carry her out of the room. The attendants sing mournfully:

Attendants:

Elizabeth
Elizabeth
we all feel pain
from your distress
oh lovely one
oh lovely one
we hear your pain
your lonely song

Lights dim, then rise. Elizabeth returns, still in the black coat. She crosses to the phone with determination, makes a call. Her voice cracking:

Elizabeth:

I want to sell Casa Kimberley
yes, as soon as possible
we'll use the money for AIDS research
she hangs up the phone, then continues, to herself:
he loved it so
I could never go
there...
now ...

her voice trails off, then weakly sits down in a chair
attendants rush in

Attendants, soothingly:

Elizabeth
Elizabeth
death is less
than a love like this

Elizabeth, responding to the attendants:

my life with him was full
he brought me so many things

I don't mean the jewelry.
He taught me poetry
great books, he read them to me
what joy he showed me
his generosity
was to a glorious degree
now there is just
such silence

She lays down on the bed. Lights dim. Years pass. It is now 1987. Knock on door. Attendants come in and help her rise, somewhat stiffer from age, from life. They put a formal robe on her. In come a couple of well-dressed businessmen, one carrying an elegant tray with a large violet colored perfume bottle.

Businessman:

This is the formula you selected, Miss Taylor
you have chosen well
your taste in fragrance
is as exquisite
as your taste in jewels
What will you call it?

Elizabeth removes the stopper from the bottle, raises it to her nose and inhales deeply, and with satisfaction. Gazing into the distance, not looking at the businessman, she says with conviction:

Elizabeth

"Passion".

The men nod, surprised. By way of explanation, Elizabeth continues:

honoring my passions
has been my life's pursuit
it brought me great happiness
and it brought me tragedy
but I didn't run from any of it
I want them to know that
and I want this (*gesturing to the bottle*)
to remind them of that
to honor...all of that

Impressed, the men bow and then follow Elizabeth out of the room. Lights dim, scene ends.

Many years pass. The year is now 2006. Attendants open the door to the room to admit Michael, now a prominent fashion designer, carrying a large leather envelope under his arm, who announces:

Michael:

I'm Michael Snow
here for Elizabeth's interview

Attendants:

Oh yes, Mr Snow,
we've heard of you
you design such beautiful clothes!

He smiles and inclines his head, acknowledging the compliment. The attendants leave. Michael paces, waiting for her, looking at pictures on the wall. Eventually Elizabeth is pushed into the room in a wheelchair, a tiny figure now.

Elizabeth:

Shit, am I late?
I fully plan on being late to my own funeral.
Really! *she laughs weakly, but genuinely, explaining:*
The instructions are in my will.
Richard used to say if I was fifteen minutes late
I thought I was half an hour early

Michael, laughing with her

we all love you for your honesty

Your beauty
your style
that intensity
has been one of the great inspirations of my life
the clothes I design
somehow they always have you in mind
I saw you in person as a young man
it brought everything into focus for me
When I saw you and Richard together
it was an unforgettable thing
when I saw you together I thought
'nothing is as much as this'

Elizabeth:

he was my destiny
for a very long time
he was my life

Michael:

nothing is as much as this

both fall quiet, remembering.

Michael:

tell me,
if it's not too much...
would you autograph this for me?
It is an original photograph
of you and Richard
I bought it at an auction many years ago
I have always hoped the day would come
that I could bring it to you

Michael carefully removes the large black and white photo from its leather sleeve, lays it back on top of the sleeve for support and then presents it to her. Elizabeth clutches her chest with one hand when she views the photo, then reaches out her other hand, hovering it over the images almost reverently.

(Demo Song 11, "My Heart's Lied Down to Stay"):

Elizabeth:

Now **that** was a kiss.
Then, softly:
my heart's lied down to stay
somehow this kiss
seems like just yesterday
this kiss
I still can taste

Michael, moved, tenderly encloses her hand in both of his.

Lights down. From offstage we hear Richard starting to sing the "Sunday's Child" aria. Lights up, now just Elizabeth on stage and Richard continues singing as he reenters the stage along with the cast for final bows.

The End.