



COVER UP

By Max Drayton

This play requires permission to perform and a performance fee.

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Approx. 15 minutes.

CAST

RICHARD (Reporter) 20+

MARTHA (aging widow) 60+

VOICE

(Broadcast over the site's loud speaker system) Any age

Programme Notes

New York. American accents required. Doonan could be Irish.

Cover-Up is based on a rumour which started the late 60's and was covered up by the US government.

DDT is a broad-spectrum pesticide, basically kills multitudes of insects at any stage in metamorphosis. But it is also one of the strongest, most durable, long-lasting compounds known to man. Its lifespan, that we know of, is from when it was first used in 1939 to the present and may well endure until the planet is completely destroyed.

Production Notes

American accents if possible.

Non-practical big red button front of stage.

COVER UP

(OPENING MUSIC – BIG YELLOW TAXI BY JODI MITCHEL.

LIGHTS UP ON OPEN SET WITH TWO CHAIRS)

MARTHA IS SEATED AND CRYING UNCONTROLLABLY, WITH HEAVING SHOULDERS. THE SMALL HANDKERCHIEF IS NO PROTECTION, NEITHER IS THE COMFORTING ARM OF A STRANGER AROUND HER SHOULDERS. MARTHA IS LETTING GO EMOTIONS THAT HAVE BUILT UP FOR OVER THIRTY YEARS.

HER COMPANION, RICHARD, DOES NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO. AS A JUNIOR REPORTER FOR THE HERALD, HE HAS NO IDEA HOW TO STOP HER CRYING.

RICHARD STANDS AND WAITS. HER SHOULDERS ARE STILL HEAVING, BUT SHE IS SILENT NOW. THE SOFT, ALMOST ANIMAL WHIMPER HAS CEASED. HE PULLS A CHAIR BESIDE HER AND SITS ON IT. HE WAITS.)

RICH: Can I get you anything, Mrs. Doonan?

(SHE SHAKES HER HEAD. HE FUMBLES IN HIS POCKETS.)

A mint?

(ANOTHER SHAKE. HE MOVES FORWARD TO LOOK OUT OF THE WIDOW – TOWARDS THE AUDIENCE)

Wayne Thomas Inc.

(MAKES A NOTE IN HIS NOTEBOOK)

Huge building. Nicely carved from the red stone of the walls and painted bright white. The name looks dull and out of place now.

MARTHA: Perhaps I will. If I may?

(HE GIVES THE WHOLE ROLL TO HER.)

Thank you. Most kind.

RICH: Please keep them. Feeling better?

MARTHA: Yes thank you. How embarrassing!

RICH: Not at all. It's an emotional day for you. We all understand. I'd do the same if I was.....

(SHE WIPES HER EYES AND LOOKS OUT OF THE WINDOW.)

MARTHA: Ugly. Isn't it?

RICH: Yep. In a beautiful kind of way. Hard to believe it's only sixty-years old. How they built them so ugly....I just don't know.

MARTHA: It's not just the building that's ugly. It's everything it stood for.

(RICHARD LOOKS AGAIN. NOT SEEING WHAT SHE WAS SEEING.)

You came for the story didn't you?

RICH: Yes. Yes of course.

MARTHA: Let me tell how ugly that place really is.

RICH: I'm all ears. Just ...don't start crying again. Please.

(SHE HANDS HIM A FOLDER WITH OLD NEWSPAPER CUTTINGS)

MARTHA: Read these.

(RICHARD READS OUT LOUD)

RICH: The old Thomas building had been in use since it was built in the mid-forties. It had always been a factory. Initially a wool mill, with tall wide-open rooms housing huge looms. Providing work for the locals and slowly improving the area's economy. The trade died, most of it going to 'developing' countries.

Small streams ran through the woodlands and trails wound themselves through the lush undergrowth. On a sunny day the air could be filled with butterflies and soft humming insects. The aroma from the shrubs and wild flowers wafted across the land and could be smelt by the small community to the south. They called it 'Paradise'. During the period when the building lay neglected, the woodlands encroached, covering the pathways and filling the streams.

In the late sixties, a new company bought the site and refurbished the building. Adding several floors and offices and a new modern production area. A recruitment campaign started that got the locals excited. Two thousand people were needed to fill this monstrous building.

MARTHA: Jerome Doonan, my husband, was one of them. He threw himself into his work and spent long hours at Chrome Chemicals Inc.

After two years they had expanded to take up all the available space on the site. Employee figures exceeded three thousand.

RICH: Your husband worked here?

MARTHA: For several years. Jerome's first hint that problems were approaching on the horizon was when he was asked to give an interview for the local TV station. He was flattered and agreed readily. We were both excited at his short moment of fame and looked forward to the TV crew coming to our home.

The interview lasted under an hour and comprised of a series of questions directed at Jerome. He answered them truthfully. At the end of the session, the questioner relaxed and took off his jacket. They talked in a relaxed manner and went over some of the responses Jerome had made to the financial questions. It was all very casual, but it was also fully recorded.

(SHE HANDS HIM ANOTHER FOLDER)

MARTHA: This is all about DDT.

RICH: (READING) DDT was mainly designed to kill the mosquito. Every 30 seconds, a child somewhere in the world dies of Malaria. It was cheap and easy to produce, but the eco lobby got it banned. Now..... Malaria is undergoing resurgence, worldwide.

Today there are once again millions of cases of Malaria in India, and over 300 million cases worldwide. Only those countries that have persevered with DDT production, such as Ecuador, have contained, or reduced Malaria. Cases of Malaria in South Africa have risen by over 1000 percent in the past few years.

RICH: I never suspected any of this.

(READING) Invented in 1948, DDT has the potential to prevent more human deaths by disease than any chemical ever invented.

Sri Lanka's use of DDT in a mosquito abatement program enabled them to go from one million cases of Malaria a year to only seventeen – in one decade. Nearly a million Indians died from Malaria in 1945, but DDT spraying reduced this to a few thousand by 1960.

However, a down side can result. DDT is widely believed to be a major pollutant. Linked to developmental defects such as cancer, and causing other major health problems in humans and animals. In 1969, the US Department of Agriculture cancelled the registration of certain uses of DDT. Mainly on tobacco, shade trees, in the home, and in aquatic environments.

MARTHA: The TV interview with Jerome, my husband, was made to show that the company Chrome Chemicals Inc. were ignorant of all the political and scientific pressure to close down the production of DDT. Jerome had explained at length that he was just in the financial department, but that part of the interview was omitted, allowing Jerome's comments to be misrepresented as general company policy. There were voice-overs of the interviewer asking questions, but these must have been recorded at a different time, for Jerome had never been asked some of these questions.

A question about how the company had developed the area to help create a false atmosphere of recreation and staff benefit was asked. It was the first time Jerome had heard it. But he heard his reply, which happened to be the answer to a previous question, not aired on that programme.

Jerome and I watched the conclusion of the programme in horror. He had been made to look like a high profile autocrat that had little or no regard to the community or environment, as long as his company was happy with increased output of polluting chemicals. Now he understood why no one else in the company had agreed to do the interview. They knew better. The PR guys avoided the pitfall, why hadn't they advised him?

The moment he walked through the door the next day he knew he was in trouble. He was summoned to the board room and suffered an hour long interrogation. He told them the deception the programme's producers had made and that he said nothing detrimental about the company. He was a long-standing honest worker and could be trusted by the company. He left the boardroom with his job still intact. He was advised to take a few days off and take a holiday. Not to talk to the press and to be more careful in the future with whom he spoke.

(RICHARD LOOKS UP TO SEE HER WATCHING HIM.)

You're probably too young to understand.

RICH: Too young to understand what?

MARTHA: The sixties and seventies. Corruption in industry and the government.

RICH: Well...I'm a reporter. I have to do research. You may be surprised to know how much.... I know.

MARTHA: I doubt it.

This is only apart of the play.

Please contact Max directly for a complete script.

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