

Oh No It Isn't

Part 1 – The Show

The Sisters enter and sing. They're onstage in panto.

BOTH

Sisters sisters

There were never such devoted sisters

Never had to have a chaperone

No sir

I'm here to keep my eye on her

Caring, sharing, every little thing that we are wearing

When a certain gentle man arrived from Rome

She wore the dress and I stayed home

All kinds of weather we stick together

The same in the rain or sun

Two different faces but in tight places

We think and we act as one uh huh

Those who've seen us know that not a thing can come between us

Many men have tried to split us up but no one can

Lord help the mister that come between me and my sister

And Lord help the sister that come between me and my man

All kinds of weather we stick together

The same in the rain or sun

Two different faces but in tight places

We think and we act as one uh huh

Those who've seen us no that not a thing can come between us

Many men have tried to split is up but no one can

Lord help the mister that comes between me and my sister

And lord help the sister that comes between me and my man

Sisters sisters sisters sisters

Lights change and we're in the dressing room

A: *(Taking wig off.)* I can't believe you were fucking out again.

B: I was not out.

A: You were out, you miss the entrance everytime.

B: You're coming in too early, you're ahead of the fucking track.

A: You're dragging the tempo.

B: You're impossible.

They continue their change.

A: I can't believe they asked you back.

B: It's what the audience want!

A: Your jokes have been doing the rounds longer than I have.

B: Well if it ain't broke...

A: At least you're back in a frock this year, what were they thinking casting you as the prince last year.

B: Sleeping Beauty needs a prince.

A: A fucking handsome prince. A fucking George Clooney lookalike, make the mums cream and the dads jealous prince. Not Matt Lucas and Susan Boyle's fucking lovechild.

B: Just shut up and undo this for me.

(A undoes B's frock and vice versa)

A: Oh they've done a good job on this this year, the stitching's lovely

B: And the attention to detail.

A: Was it a new designer?

B: I don't think so.

A: Still Audrey?

B: Yeah.

A: Isn't she about ninety now?

B: Seventy five she said.

A: Seventy five my arse.

B: That's what she said.

A: She's been seventy five for the last six years that I know of.

B: Well either way she's done a good job.

A: Lovely fabric.

B: Yeah.

(Pause)

B: What were we talking about?

A: Can't remember.

(Pause)

A: You know, I've never asked you your favourite?

B: My favourite what?

A: Panto

B: Aladdin

A: Ah yeah.

B: You?

A: Jack And The Beanstalk.

B: Fair enough.

A: Least favourite?

B: Cinderella

A: What? Really?

B: Yeah

A: Why?

B: No decent dame part

A: Er what?

B: Well you know what I mean.

A: You don't like sharing the dame part you mean?

B: Oh give it a rest.

A: You hate that you have to share the limelight with someone else.

B: It's got nothing to do with that.

A: You've always hated sharing the stage with me.

B: Rubbish

A: You have

B: Nonsense

A: Ever since Babes in the Wood.

B: Look.

A: You haven't been the same since then.

B: We agreed...

A: You can't let it drop.

B: I can't let it drop? You're the one that brings it up. Every year. Without fail. Move on.

A: Move on?

B: Move on.

A: I'd love to but you keep letting it get in the way.

B: I let it get in the way?

A: Well clearly.

B: I wasn't the one that requested a separate dressing room this year.

A: Well. You weren't supposed to know about that were you?

B: Yeah well. Walls have ears.

A: Well if we'd have had separate dressing rooms we wouldn't be arguing all the time would we?

B: No but you couldn't get into that finale frock on your own.

A: How'd you find out anyway?

B: I have my sources.

A: Who? That's breach of confidence.

B: Oh fuck off.

A: No seriously. My contract negotiations are my business, how did you find that out?

B: Look, it's panto, word gets round.

A: I'm fucking livid.

B: What's next?

A: Hovel scene.

B: Oh

(Pause)

B: Needs more gags.

A: Needs new gags.

B: Oh here we go again.

A: What?

B: You can't just let it go can you?

A: Let what go? I'm just saying/

B: You're like a stuck record

A: I'm just saying that some of those gags have been doing the rounds/

BOTH: Since my granddad was a child.

B: I know.

A: Well it's true.

B: You're just jealous that I get more laughs than you.

A: It's got nothing to do with laughs, I just think/

B: What's your least favourite?

A: What?

B: Your least favourite panto?

A: Oh. Puss In Boots.

B: Why?

A: Because it's fucking shite.

(Lights change, they're back on stage)

A: Hello Girls and Boys! *(Waits for response, possibly recorded – ad lib etc)*

B: Rumour has it that the prince is coming round to hand out invitations to the royal ball and we're going to snare him without him even realising.

A: We're going to be so alarming

B: Alluring.

A: That's what I said. We're going to harm him with our wiles.

B: Charm him with our smiles.

A: That's what I said. Then marry him and live happily every after.

B: Marry him and live happily after.

A: Sorry yes you're right. Marry him and live happily ever after.

B: Well I am.

A: No I am!

B: When he's sees me he won't be able to contain himself.

A: Yes I'm sure he'll be positively frothing with anticipation.

B: I'll look like a million dollars.

A: Yes green and crinkled. He won't even notice you because I'll look like a movie star.

B: Yes. Shrek.

A: You're just jealous because I'm so sexy.

B: You think you're sexy?

A: If anything I'm a bit too sexy!

B: Too sexy?

A: I'm too sexy for my skirt
Too sexy for my skirt
So sexy it hurts

B: And I'm too sexy for Milan
Too sexy for Milan,
Scunthorpe and Japan

A: And I'm too sexy for your party

B: Too sexy for your party?
Just watch me disco dancing

BOTH We could be models, you know what we mean
And I do my little turn on the catwalk
Yeah, on the catwalk, on the catwalk, yeah
I do my little turn on the catwalk

B: I'm too sexy for my car
Too sexy for my car
Too sexy by far

A: And I'm too sexy for my hat

B: It makes your neck look fat
What d'ya think about that?

BOTH We could be models, you know what we mean
And I do my little turn on the catwalk

Yeah, on the catwalk, on the catwalk, yeah
I do my little turn on the catwalk

I'm too sexy for my
Too sexy for my
Too sexy for my

'Cause I'm a model, you know what I mean
And I do my little turn on the catwalk
Yeah, on the catwalk, yeah, on the catwalk, yeah
I shake my little tush on the catwalk

I'm too sexy for my cat
Too sexy for my cat
Poor pussy
Poor pussy cat

I'm too sexy for my love
Too sexy for my love
Love's going to leave me

And I'm too sexy for this show! (*Lights change – dressing room*)

- A: That routine is so dated.
- B: It just needs more before the number.
- A: It needs a different number.
- B: The song gets laughs.
- A: Oh come on. Nobody under fifty knows Right Said Fred.
- B: Who?
- A: Right Said Fred.
- B: Yeah. Who?
- A: Are you kidding?
- B: No.
- A: Right Said Fred.
- B: Yeah you just repeating it isn't really making it any clearer.

A: They sang that song.

B: Which song.

A: That song. That fucking song. The one we just sang.

B: Oh really?

A: Give me strength.

B: Why are you in such a foul mood?

A: Foul mood?

B: Yeah.

A: You think I'm in a foul mood?

B: Yeah, you've been as miserable as sin all night.

A: Oh right, okay.

B: What gives?

A: Oh I don't know. Maybe it's something to do with the fact that I've spent this entire season playing alongside an arrogant, talentless prick who tries to upstage me in every scene.

B: Well don't pull your punches, tell us how you really feel.

A: An untrained, amateur who has slept his way into every job he's ever had.

B: Man's gotta work.

A: Who wouldn't know real acting if it slapped him in the face.

B: And how many Dr Who's have you done?

A: This is exactly what I mean! You only got that job because you slept with the producer!

B: Associate producer.

A: Exactly.

B: And they had nothing to do with the casting.

A: I've been here longer than you and yet your name has somehow ended up above mine on the poster.

B: Well it's clearly what the punters want.

A: You have no technique, your voice is substandard and your accent's all over the place.

B: For fuck's sake it's only panto.

(Pause)

A: Fuck you.

B: What?

A: Fuck you.

B: Okay

A: You've no respect for me, you've no respect for your audience, you've no respect for the show.

B: Mate, it's just a job.

A: No respect. For the form.

B: It's panto, you turn up, piss about and fuck off. That's it. They love it.

A: You can't even get a simple spoonerism right.

B: What're you talking about?

A: Last year. Fairy Hucklebuck.

B: Are you still going on about that?

A: You went out in front of eight hundred people and shouted "Has anyone seen the hairy fucklebuck"

B: Yes I remember. I was there.

A: It's a family show for Christ's sake!

B: Made the local news. Doubled the audiences.

A: You're so ignorant.

B: It's a business buddy. You've got to treat it as such. If you love it too much it'll kill you.

A: Just... fuck you.

(Silence)

B: Look I know this gig means a lot to you.

A: No you don't. You don't know the half of it.

B: But you have your ways and/ I have my ways

A: Just stop. Stop talking.

B: Fine.

A: You've ruined this panto season for me.

B: Well I'm sorry about that.

A: At least if I'd had my own dressing room I'd have had a bit of my own space.

B: No room for egos in this game mate.

A: Its not about fucking egos. It's about me getting away from you, it's about me having the space to... to...

B: To what?

A: Oh fuck off.

B: No go on, I'm genuinely interested in what you have to say.

A: Just, just you know.

B: No I don't. What?

A: A fucking cupboard would have done. Just somewhere I could change away from you.

B: Well if I'd have known you felt that strongly then I'd have said yes.

A: What do you mean said yes?

B: When they asked me if I'd share with the chorus boys.

A: When who asked you?

B: Sarah

A: Box Office Sarah?

B: Stage manager Sarah

A: Stage manager Sarah asked you if you wanted to share with the ensemble?

B: Well why would Box Office Sarah ask me about my dressing room?

A: Stop being flippant. She asked you if you wanted to share with the ensemble?

B: Yeah. I said no. Clearly.

A: How come you got asked?

B: What?

A: How come you got asked which dressing room you wanted to be in? They never ask me.

B: Well you're not sleeping with stage management are you.

A: Oh god! You're fucking Sarah?

B: When I feel like it yeah.

A: I don't believe this.

B: Weekends only at the moment.

A: Is there anyone in this company you haven't slept with?

B: Most of the ensemble.

A: Most?

B: Yeah. Twiglets don't do it for me.

A: And how do they all feel about it? Do they know about each other?

B: Well Josh and Lucy do because they were there together.

A: Oh my god.

B: Love a threesome

A: TMI

B: Don't know about the rest.

A: You really think you're gods gift don't you?

B: Not really. Just like sex.

A: Have you ever actually loved some one, like really deeply had feelings for someone?

B: What's that got to do with it?

A: Well I think it's got quite a lot to do with it!

B: Well I... disagree.

A: Course you do.

B: Are we off?

A: What?

B: It's gone quiet are we late?

A: We can't be.

B: It's gone really quiet, what's happening?

A: She hasn't sung yet has she?

B: I don't think so.

A: Shit maybe you're right.

B: Oh shit. Quick

(They hurriedly put their wigs on and do up their frocks when the band strikes up)

A: I told you she hadn't sung yet.

B: Yes well we'd have known that if you hadn't have been prattling on about love and all that bollocks.

A: It's not bollocks.

B: No these are bollocks. (*Grabs crotch*)

A: Oh will you grow up.

B: Grow up?

A: Do you not realise that you could be really hurting people? Sleeping with them and dropping them without a word.

B: Mate, it's panto – everybody knows what this is.

A: Not necessarily.

B: What?

A: Just because you don't have feelings doesn't mean that they don't.

B: Well more fool them.

A: You're so selfish.

B: Oh I see.

A: What do you see?

B: That's what this is all about.

A: What.

B: My god it's so obvious.

A: What's so obvious?

B: What this is about. Why you keep going on like this.

A: What are you talking about?

B: Babes in the wood!

Lights change and they're onstage.

A: Hello girls and boys! *(Waits for response – ad lib etc)* We're very glad you're here as we need help getting ready for the ball don't we darling sister?

B: We certainly do, but first we need to find the bag with all the make up in it.

A: Ah yes the old bag. *(looks at B)* Found it!

B: Oh boo to you. Can you see the bag girls and boys? *(Behind you)* Where? *(Etc. They find the bag)*

B: Ah yes! Here it is!

A: It certainly is an old bag.

B: Very old.

A: Almost as old as you.

B: How dare you! I'm not a minute older than you.

A: No, only 57 seconds older.

B: Where is that bag from anyway?

A: This bag? Well it used to belong to Daddy.

B: It's dad's bag?

A: That's right it's Dad's bag.

B: Ah yes I remember! It's dad's bag.

A: Yep definitely dad's bag.

B: And where did he get it from?

A: Baghdad.

B: Baghdad?

A: Yes Baghdad

B: Did dad get that bag in Baghdad?

A: Dad did get this bag in Baghdad.

B: Did he?

A: Diddy? I suppose he was never that tall.

B: So. Did diddy dad get that bag in Badghdad?

A: Diddy dad did get this bag in Baghdad.

B: It's quite a big bag isn't it?

A: Compared to diddy dad it's a big bag yes.

B: So did diddy dad get that big bag in Baghdad did diddy dad?

A: Diddy dad did get this big bag in Baghdad diddy dad did.

B: It's a bit baggy isn't it?

A: I suppose it is quite baggy yes.

B: So...

A: Brace yourselves.

B: Did diddy dad get that bit baggy big bag in Baghdad did diddy dad?

A: Sorry what?

B: So did diddy dad get that bit baggy big bag in Baghdad did diddy dad?

A: One more time.

B: So did diddy dad get that bit baggy big bag in Baghdad did diddy dad?

A: *(inhales deeply in preparation)* Yes.

B: Well get it open and let's do our make up for the ball!

A: I'm so excited!

B: What have we here then? *(Removing props from the bag)* Face wash.

A: Oh goody.

B: Face cream.

A: Oh goody goody.

B: Corn plasters

A: Oh good... Corn plasters?

B: Yes. In case the corn gets hurt.

A: *(Under his breath)* That'll have to go, it never gets anything.

B: And to finish a nice powder puff.

A: Oh goody goody goody.

B: Who's going first?

A: Shall I go first?

B: What if I want to go first?

A: Let's flip for it. Do you have a coin?

B: Yes. Here! *(Pulls out coin)*

A: Great! *(Takes coin and pockets it.)* Okay you can go first.

B: Oh must be my lucky day.

A: So first off, lets wash your face nice and clean with lots of face wash. *(Pumps/pours lots of facewash into B's face.)*

B: Oh thank you.

A: Oh I mustn't forget to rub it in. *(Rubs it quite vigorously)*

B: Ow! Blimey. You're really getting in there today aren't you darling sister?

A: Well we want to make sure you're nice and clean to meet the prince!

B: Though I don't think you need to wash me quite so hard!

A: All done. Now it's time to wash it all off! *(Bucket/soda squirter to wash it off, soaks him)*

B: Ah that's better!

A: Oh don't you look radiant!

B: Do I?

A: Oh yes.

B: Nobody has ever told me I look radiant before.

A: Oh no sorry not radiant, like a radiator. You look like a radiator!

B: *(Under his breath)* If we're cutting the corn gag then that needs to go too.

A: Next up, the face cream!

B: Oh yes! What is it? Oil of Olay?

A: No.

B: Ah is it the Mexican version? Oil of Ole?

A: No, I think it's French. It says Oil On-zhee-nay

B: Ooh Oil On-zhee-nay. Sounds lovely slather it on!

A: *(Slathers thick black oil over B's face)* Here we go!

B: Blimey is it meant to be that colour?

A: Well I assume so?

B: Pass me that bottle!

A: I want you to really reap the benefits! I'll put some more on! *(pours more on before passing the bottle to B).*

B: On-zhee-nay? ON-ZHEE-NAY!?! That doesn't say On-zhee-nay it says Engine! You've put engine oil on my face!

A: Whoops! Sorry sister dear! Let me wash it off for you! *(more soda/water)*

B: Oh I feel like a fireman has unleashed his hose on me.

A: I'd love to have a fireman unleash his hose on me!

B: How do I look?

A: Just one final finishing touch!

B: Oh? And what's that?

A: A bit of powder.

B: Oh yes powder!

A: Are you ready?

B: As I'll every be!

A: Here we are sister dear! *(Swings a full powder puff and catches B square in the face. Lights. Backstage)*

B: What the fuck was that?

A: What?

B: That!

A: That was the slapstick routine. Same as I've always done it.

B: You nearly broke my fucking nose.

A: Oh stop moaning.

B: And you put twice as much of the oil on.

A: They were loving it, it's what they wanted!

B: Stick to the routine!

A: You know as well as I do that the routine is old and tired. They've seen it a hundred times before, I'm just trying to keep it exciting.

B: You're impossible.

A: Well it's the interval next, you've plenty of time to redo your makeup. I'm going for a coffee. *(A leaves)*

B: Fucking amateur.

B removes what's left of his make up and starts to re touch it as the lights fade.

Part two – post show.

In the darkness we hear the final strains of “We’ll meet again” over the show relay followed by rapturous applause and shouts of “encore”. Eventually the applause dies down and is followed by audience murmurs which in turns dies out. The lights come up in the dressing room and we find B sitting at his dressing table dressed in his civvies. Checking his phone. A enters still in full costume and make up. He stands in the doorway. There is a pause.

A: That’s it then.

B: Yep.

A: All over for another year.

B: Uh-huh

A: Ticket sales were slightly down this year.

B: Really?

A: Yeah.

B: Well they’re making them too expensive.

A: I suppose.

B: Costs a family of four nearly a hundred and fifty quid just for the tickets, it’s too much.

A: Especially if you factor in a four pound programme, sweets and ice creams.

B: And a cheeky gin and tonic.

A: That’s another seven pound fifty.

B: No wonder ticket sales are down.

A: They can sit at home and watch Michael McIntyre for nothing.

B: I’ve never seen the appeal.

A: Me neither.

(There is another pause as A takes off his wig and frock. B sits there.)

A: You're ready quickly.

B: I've got people to meet.

A: Family?

B: Agent

A: Oh nice.

B: Yeah. They like to make the effort.

A: Haven't they seen it already?

B: Yeah, press night.

A: Yeah.

B: Has your agent seen it?

A: No they don't really like panto.

B: Oh right.

A: I don't think they understand it to be honest.

B: Are they local?

A: No London.

B: Well it is a bit of a trek.

A: Yours has been twice, so it can't be that hard.

B: I suppose.

(another lull in the conversation)

B: I should go meet them then.

A: Yeah don't let me hold you up.

(B wants to say something but thinks better of it, grabs his bag and heads to leave.)

A: I've got a bottle of red if you want a glass?

B: Erm.

A: It is tradition.

B: Yeah.

(A takes bottle from his bag and B finds two mugs)

A: Always raise a glass on the last night.

B: What is it?

A: Red wine.

B: Yeah I can see that. What type?

A: *(Studying label)* Just says 'red wine'

B: Ah classy.

A: £7.50 from Tesco's

B: Right.

A: Says it goes well with red meats and cheeses.

B: Perfect.

A: Haven't got either of those but it's good to know.

B: Yeah I suppose.

(In silence A pours two mugs full)

B: Cheers.

A: Yeah cheers.

B: To Cinderella.

A: To Cinderella and all who sailed in her. *(Drinks)*

B: I did. *(Drinks)*

A: *(Spitting out his wine)* Oh for god's sake.

B: After the company curry night.

A: I don't know why it still surprises me.

B: She's filthy.

A: Is there anyone you wouldn't sleep with?

B: Well like I said twiglets aren't really my thing, but I'm not fussy.

A: Clearly.

B: Male, female, dolphin. Anything with a pulse.

A: I meant what I said earlier. You'll hurt people.

B: Ah, chances are I'll never see them again.

A: You might.

B: Meh.

(They drink)

A: You got anything lined up?

B: Yeah a rep season in Canterbury. Some nice stuff actually.

A: Oh nice. It's making a bit of a comeback; rep.

B: Yeah. Nice to get to play a load of different parts.

A: What plays you doing?

B: Some new thing by a local writer, a Pinter, an Agatha Christie and a Shakespeare.

A: Oh, which Shakespeare?

B: Twelfth Night.

A: Okay. Who're you playing?

B: Toby Belch.

A: Oh course. You done Shakespeare before?

B: No not yet.

A: Well I suppose Twelfth Night is as good a place to start as any. It's flawed though, the timelines don't make sense.

B: If you say so.

A: I've always wanted to play Hamlet. So complicated, such a brilliant journey.

B: Bit wordy though.

A: What?

B: Bit wordy innit.

A: Hamlet?

B: Yeah.

A: He's dealing with some of the deepest existential issues that can face a human. Battling depression, suppressing rage, grieving. He has some of the best soliloquys in the English language.

B: Yeah, like I said, wordy.

A: You're a charlatan.

B: And proud of it.

A: You'll struggle with it if you've never done Shakespeare before.

B: Ah it's all the same; show up, shout a bit, go to the pub. Nobody understands what's going on anyway, they just pretend to, to look intelligent.

A: Rubbish.

B: Fact.

A: If they audience don't understand what's going on it's because the actors aren't telling the story clearly enough.

B: What story? It's a load of idiots in silly costumes tarting around.

A: I can't talk to you.

B: Well if you're so desperate to do some Shakespeare then tell your agent to get you some.

A: Oh yeah why didn't I think of that?

B: Have you spoken to them recently?

A: My agent?

B: Yeah

A: Not really.

B: Not really?

A: Well we spoke just before Christmas.

B: And did you tell them you wanted to do some Shakespeare?

A: Well no.

B: Well there's your problem then, they probably don't know!

A: They're dropping me.

B: What?

A: That's why they called. They're dropping me.

B: Oh... well.

A: Didn't do a single other job between last year's panto and this one.

B: I see

A: And they don't feel that our relationship is one that they can see bearing fruit in the future.

B: Oh mate I'm sorry.

A: I'll live.

B: Still, break ups can be hard.

A: It's not a break up.

B: Well it's kind of a break up

A: It's just the end of a business agreement that's all. Plenty of actors work without agents.

B: True. So you're not too upset then?

A: No course not.

B: I know it means a lot to you

A: Yeah, well.

B: I don't think I've met anyone as passionate about this industry as you.

A: Thanks.

B: How long have you been doing it?

A: All my life.

B: That's what they all say.

A: Since I was nine.

B: Nine?

A: Yeah,

B: Nine years old?

A: Yeah.

B: Jesus

A: It's what I've always wanted, what I've dedicated my life to.

B: Nine years old.

A: Yep, it all started with a panto, got the bug.

B: I see.

A: How about you?

B: I sort of fell into it after college.

A: Fell into it?

B: Yeah. I just used to spend a lot of time fooling around and someone suggested my energy could be harnessed in a more productive way. Did a bit of am dram, got and agent and have just been stumbling through since then.

A: Right.

B: Fairly different paths then.

A: You could say that.

B: But you're genuinely alright?

A: Yeah course.

B: You sure.

A: Of course I'm sure. I've been doing this for twenty years.

B: Okay. I mean, I know we have our differences but I'd hate to see you upset.

A: Oh yeah you've always tried to spare my feelings haven't you?

B: What?

A: Doesn't matter.

B: No go on.

A: No it's nothing.

B: It's clearly something.

A: Just go meet your agent

B: No, say what you have to say.

A: I shouldn't have said anything. It's fine

B: This is about Babes in the Wood isn't it?

A: What?

B: Look I'm sorry but it's just the way I am.

A: I don't know what you're talking about.

B: If I'd have known you were going to hang on to it this long then I wouldn't have...

A: Stop this

B: I didn't mean to hurt you.

(Long pause)

A: Yeah well.

B: It was a showmance. These things happen.

A: Can we not?

B: I was just out of a long term relationship I wasn't in a good place.

A: Seems like you're still not in a good place.

B: I really didn't mean/ to hurt you.

A: Let's just leave it. Please.

(pause)

B: Are you coming back next year?

A: Well yeah I assume so.

B: You assume so?

A: Yeah, they've usually asked by now haven't they?

B: Erm. I don't know.

A: But yeah, if they ask I'll do it. You?

B: Erm. Yeah. Yeah same.

A: Right.

B: Yeah.

A: Maybe separate dressing rooms next year though

B: What and miss out on all the fun?

A: Is that what you call it?

(pause)

B: Well I'd better not keep them waiting any longer.

A: Yeah, no, sure. Sorry.

B: No worries.

A: Well. Maybe see you next year.

B: Yeah, erm maybe.

A: Good luck with the rep season.

B: Thanks. Good luck with... everything.

A: Thanks.

B: Yeah.

(Silence. B leaves A sitting at his dressing table with a face full of make up. A looks at himself in the mirror)

A: Oh that this too too sullied flesh would melt thaw and resolve itself into a dew.
(He begins to remove the make up slowly. He wipes away all trace of the panto as the lights very slowly and very gradually fade to black)