

LUDO

A one-act comedy

by

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ISBN: 9781873130865
The Playwrights Publishing Co.

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CHARACTERS

Ludo, middle-aged man who lives on a desert island

John, middle-aged man who has been shipwrecked on the island

John 2, another middle-aged man who appears at the end of the play

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Scene One

(It is the present day. The scene is a desert island. Upstage centre is a tree. In front of the tree is a cooking pot over some wood. On either side of the cooking pot there are a number of wooden boxes, which can serve as seats. Upstage left there is a fishing-net, stretching from the shore to the sea, which has one or two fish in it. As the curtain opens, the sound of the sea can be heard.)

(John, whose sailing yacht has capsized, has just swum ashore. He enters from upstage left. He is wearing a wetsuit rolled down to his waist and a T-shirt, and is carrying a lifejacket. He walks towards the cooking pot. He sees it and looks surprised. He goes up to it to inspect it, then goes downstage right, looking for signs of life. He then wanders downstage left and looks out to sea. After a short while, Ludo enters from stage right, not noticed by John.)

Ludo: *(Looks at John for a moment, then calls out).* Hello!

John: *(Starts and turns round).* Oh, hello. Who are you?

Ludo: You first.

John: *(Slightly taken aback).* Alright, I'm John. Who are you?

Ludo: Ludo.

John: Sorry?

Ludo: I said Ludo, the name's Ludo.

John: Ludo? Is that short for something? Ludovic? Ludwig?

Ludo: It's not short for anything. It's Ludo, just Ludo.

John: Isn't that a board game?

Ludo: Maybe it is, but it's my name, as well.

John: Well, how do you do, Ludo. *(Goes over to Ludo. Holds out his hand. At first, Ludo does not reciprocate, but then does so, slightly reticently).*

Ludo: Fine, fine. *(Walks upstage left to stand the other side of the pot. John and Ludo now face each other either side of the pot).* Wasn't always my name, though, Ludo.

John: Oh?

Ludo: No, I used to be called John, just like you.

John: Why did you change it?

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- Ludo: Just did, I suppose. Anyway, what brings you here?
- John: Boat capsized. I lost radio contact, then a huge wave hit the boat. I fell overboard. Thought I was going to drown, but thankfully I saw this island. Must have been about a mile away, I suppose, and I swam to shore. So here I am.
- Ludo: Lucky man.
- John: How do you mean? I lost my boat, and I nearly lost my life.
- Ludo: There's not another island around here for miles, so you're lucky this island was close by.
- John: If you put it like that, I suppose I am.
- Ludo: The sea's full of sharks as well, so you're lucky they didn't have you for lunch.
- John: Yes. I can't imagine I'm particularly tasty, but even so....
- Ludo: *(Points to John's lifejacket)*. You won't need that now.
- John: What?
- Ludo: That lifejacket.
- John: You never know.
- Ludo: You might as well put it down. No one's going to run off with it, are they?
- John: *(Looks around briefly)*. I suppose not. *(John places his lifejacket on the ground. He then gets out a mobile phone from his pocket)*.
- Ludo: You won't need that either. No mobile phone masts on this island, thank goodness.
- John: You're probably right.
- Ludo: I am.
- John: *(Looks at the phone for a moment)*. It's stopped working anyway. *(Puts it back in his pocket)*.
- Ludo: Good. I hate them, mobile phones. Drive me crazy. Well, the morons who use them anyway. *(Shouting)*. Why do they always have to shout?
- John: I know what you mean.
- Ludo: *(Moves towards the cooking pot)*. I was just about to eat.

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- John: Can I join you? I'm really hungry.
- Ludo: (*Slightly begrudgingly*). I suppose so.
- John: Thank you. What have you got?
- Ludo: Fish.
- John: Silly question, really.
- Ludo: Not really. I grow my own vegetables, carrots, peas, that sort of thing. I'm vegetarian actually. Well, that's not quite true. I eat fish, of course, because, well, you know, there's a lot of it about, isn't there?
- John: No meat, I suppose.
- Ludo: No, I do eat meat, if there is some, but only on Fridays. (*John looks slightly surprised at this, but does not respond to it*). I've got a cage over there, where I keep anything I catch. (*Points offstage right*). Anyway, come and have some fish. Freshly caught.
- John: (*Ludo and John go over to the cooking pot. Ludo picks up a plate, puts some fish on it and hands the plate to John. He takes another plate for himself and puts some fish on that, too. They sit on boxes next to the cooking pot and start to eat*). Two plates?
- Ludo: (*Chuckles*). Yer, you never know when someone else is going to turn up, do you?
- John: I'm not the first, then?
- Ludo: (*Changing the subject*). So, where are you from?
- John: England.
- Ludo: I worked that out. Whereabouts in England?
- John: Surrey.
- Ludo: Oh, very nice. Surrey, eh? What made you leave leafy Surrey, then?
- John: Just fancied sailing round the world, really. Got divorced last year, kids have left home, so I thought, why not? What about yourself?
- Ludo: What about me?
- John: Where are you from?
- Ludo: Cambridgeshire.
- John: Whereabouts?

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- Ludo: Six Mile Bottom.
- John: *(Laughs)* Where?
- Ludo: *(Gives emphasis to each word)*. Six Mile Bottom.
- John: That's what I thought you said. Funny name, isn't it?
- Ludo: That's why I left. Fed up with people laughing at where I came from. I asked them to change the name, the local council, but they wouldn't. They said it's on all the signposts and all the maps, so it'll have to stay.
- John: So, that's why you left?
- Ludo: Partly.
- John: Why else?
- Ludo: *(Annoyed)*. You ask a lot of questions, don't you?
- John: I'm just interested that's all.
- Ludo: I used to teach languages at the local comp. Got fed up with that, and, well, I just couldn't stand all the rules.
- John: Rules? Which rules?
- Ludo: All of them. So many rules in Britain.
- John: Are there?
- Ludo: Yer, rule for this, rule for that. Don't do this, don't do that, don't do the other. Park here, don't park there, put your rubbish here, not there...
- John: So, you wanted to get away from all the rules?
(From now until the end of the scene, the lights start to dim very gradually as night falls).
- Ludo: Well, other people's rules. *(Puts his plate down, gets up and walks downstage left. Looks out to the sea briefly, turns round and speaks)*. You know... you're lucky you arrived on a Monday.
- John: I thought it was Tuesday.
- Ludo: No, it's Monday.
- John: How do you know? You're not wearing a watch.
- Ludo: Don't worry, I know it's Monday.
- John: I thought it was Tuesday.

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- Ludo: You thought wrong. It's Monday.
- John: It was Tuesday, when my boat capsized, so it must still be Tuesday now.
- Ludo: (*Slightly threatening*). I said it was Monday. Do you understand?
- John: Alright, alright, let's say it's Monday.
- Ludo: It is. (*Wanders downstage right*).
- John: So why I am lucky I arrived on a Monday, then?
- Ludo: (*Turns*). Because, my friend, the usual rules of the island don't apply on a Monday.
- John: Oh. What are these 'usual rules'?
- Ludo: (*John looks puzzled*). One of them is that you can only use words from certain languages on certain days. You're lucky it's a Monday today, because all the words are English.
- John: I speak some French as well.
- Ludo: That should be OK for tomorrow. The rules say you can use French on Tuesdays, but you might have a problem for the rest of the week.
- John: Who makes these rules up?
- Ludo: I do.
- John: But surely this island belongs to someone.
- Ludo: Yer, me.
- John: No, I mean a country. Isn't there a country that owns this island; makes up the rules?
- Ludo: Well, officially, it belongs to Chile, but they don't seem too bothered about it. I mean, I've been here for three years now, and I haven't heard a squeak out of them, so I've decided to run the place myself. I make the rules up. There's no one else to do it, is there?
- John: I see. And these rules, are they written down anywhere?
- Ludo: Don't be silly. Where would I write them down? (*Points to his head*). No, they're in my head.
- John: But what if someone comes along, like me, and wants to know them.
- Ludo: Oh, don't worry, I'll tell you what the rules are. (*Sits down, picks up his plate and carries on eating*).

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- John: (*Uncertain how to respond, so changes the subject*). Must get lonely.
- Ludo: How do you mean?
- John: Well, you being here all on your own.
- Ludo: Not really. I keep myself occupied.
- John: What do you do?
- Ludo: Fish.
- John: I should have guessed.
- Ludo: That's not all I do. If I can't sleep, I count grains of sand.
- John: Do you sunbathe? Must get the weather for it quite often.
- Ludo: No, I'm not one for just lying around. Always busy me. Sometimes I play Desert Island Discs.
- John: Oh?
- Ludo: You know, like they do on the radio. I select eight records, one favourite, a book and a luxury item.
- John: So, you've got a record player?
- Ludo: No, of course not. There's no electricity here, is there, so I can't play them. I just think about the records. Sometimes I sing them.
- John: A sort of Anti-Desert Island Discs, as it were.
- Ludo: How do you mean?
- John: Well, on the radio the guests get to listen to their records, don't they? You sing yours.
- Ludo: Yer, but they're not on a desert island, are they? They're just in some warm studio in ... wherever it is.
- John: London.
- Ludo: Yer, London. Mine's the real version, because I'm on a desert island, you see. They're not.
- John: Yes, I see. (*Not really seeing Ludo's point*). So, what records do you choose?
- Ludo: Depends, really. Sometimes it's something from South Pacific.
- John: Fair enough. And what book? Robinson Crusoe?

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Ludo: That would be too obvious, wouldn't it, though to be fair I did once choose Treasure Island.

John: *(They have now finished eating and put their plates down).* Well, that was delicious, Ludo. Thank you. Much better than ship's rations.

Ludo: Don't mention it. It's starting to get dark, isn't it?

John: Yes it is.

Ludo: I'll show you where you're sleeping.

John: Oh. You've got somewhere for me to sleep?

Ludo: Yer. As I say, you never know who's going to turn up, do you?

John: *(Laughs nervously).* I suppose not.

Ludo: Come on, then, it's over here.
(Ludo points offstage right. They get up and Ludo leads the way as they exit stage right. Lights dim gradually as night falls.)

Scene Two

(After a short while, the lights come on. It is the following morning. John enters stage right. He walks across to stage left and looks out as if surveying the sea. After a short while, Ludo enters stage right and sees John standing stage left).

Ludo: *(Slightly aggressively)* What are you doing?

John: Oh. Hallo, Ludo. Morning. I thought you were still asleep.

Ludo: I'm not, am I?

John: So I see.

Ludo: What are you doing?

John: How do you mean?

Ludo: What are you doing standing there?

John: Oh, I see. Just looking at the view. Lovely, isn't it. And so quiet. It really is like Paradise here. *(Points upstage left).*

Ludo: No. What are you doing standing *there*? You can't stand *there*.

John: What? *Here*? *(Points to the ground).*

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- John: Yes, *there*.
- John: Why not? I was standing *here* yesterday. In this exact same spot.
- Ludo: Yer, but you can't stand *there* today, can you, it's Tuesday.
- John: I know it's Tuesday.
- Ludo: Well, you can only stand *there* on Mondays, can't you?
- John: (*John looks confused*). I don't know. There's nothing to tell me I can't stand here. No sign saying 'Don't stand here'.
- Ludo: Don't be stupid. *I'm* telling you, you can't stand there, so you can't stand there. Alright?
- John: Where can I stand, then?
- Ludo: Not *there*. Come and stand *here* under this *arbre*. (*Points to the tree*).
- John: What?
- Ludo: This *arbre*.
- John: Oh. *Arbre*. Tree. (*Cottons on*). Yes, I get it, French today. Lucky I can remember my 'O' level French. (*Goes to stand under the tree*). Anyway, why are you only using French for 'tree'.
- Ludo: It's a noun, isn't it?
- John: So is 'noun'. So is Tuesday. So, why not use French for them?
- Ludo: Trying to trip me up, hey?
- John: No. Just trying to understand the rules, that's all.
- Ludo: Well, if you must know, you can only use French words for concrete nouns on Tuesdays.
- John: Very strange.
- Ludo: How do you mean?
- John: Why not just use English.
- Ludo: Look, just because in England there's a convention of using English for all the words, that doesn't mean that using another convention in another country is necessarily strange, does it?
- John: You said country. That's a concrete noun. Why didn't you say, what is it, *pays*?

- Ludo: Trying to trip me up, again, eh?
- John: No, it's just that I can't understand the rules. They seem completely arbitrary to me.
- Ludo: They're not arbitrary at all. It's for things on this island.
- John: Oh. Like *arbre*?
- Ludo: Yes.
- John: (*Pauses*). So, what's for breakfast?
- Ludo: What?
- John: Oh, er, *petit déjeuner*, that's it. Yes, I suppose that's a concrete noun.
- Ludo: I'm having *poisson*.
- John: *Poisson* – fish. Again. What sort of *poisson*?
- Ludo: What does it matter? You can catch your own.
- John: Oh, that's not very nice. I've only just arrived. Can't I have some of yours?
- Ludo: You had some last night. It's getting a bit much, isn't it? You arrive on someone else's island and just expect them to feed you.
- John: No, I just thought you might have some going spare.
- Ludo: I suppose I can give you some, but only if you can tell me the French word for it.
- John: That's a bit silly, isn't it?
- Ludo: Not at all. You're just using the norms of the society you come from to judge whether something is silly or not. I make the rules here and as it's Tuesday, we can only use French words for concrete nouns on this island. Alright? (*Gets the fish from the net on the seashore*). Here it is – what's the French for it?
- John: It's a cod.
- Ludo: (*Puts the cod in the pot*). I said the French.
- John: I know, I know. I'm thinking.
- Ludo: I haven't got all day.
- John: You're not going anywhere are you?
- Ludo: I've got to cultivate my *jardin*. I'm a busy *homme*. I grow *légumes* in it and

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that's what *I'm* eating tonight.

John: Cod, cod. Well, obviously I didn't manage to salvage my French dictionary...

Ludo: (*Interrupting, threateningly*). Don't get funny with me, mate.

John: I'm not, I just...

Ludo: I'll tell you just this once, but I won't be so kind in future. I don't like it when people take advantage of me. It's *morue*.

John: *Morue*, yes, that's it. I should have known. Well, I'll remember next time.

Ludo: Perhaps there won't be a next time.

John: How do you mean?

Ludo: I only use French on Tuesdays. The rules change on other days.

John: So what happens then? What happens tomorrow?

Ludo: You'll have to wait and see.

John: Look, Ludo, can't you just speak English all the time? It would make things so much easier.

Ludo: For you perhaps, but those are the rules of the island. As I say, you're lucky you arrived on Monday, when I use English all the time.

John: I hardly feel lucky.

Ludo: (*Annoyed*). Look, if you don't like this island, you can find another one.

John: But there's not another island for miles, maybe hundreds of miles, and the sea's full of sharks, you said so yourself, so I'll have to stay here.

Ludo: Then you'll have to conform to the rules, won't you?

John: But, what if I have one set of rules and you have another. That would be fair, wouldn't it?

Ludo: No, it would be too difficult. How could we communicate if we use different words for the same thing? No, I'm sorry. We've got to use the same set of rules. And it's my island, so it's my rules.

John: Fair enough, but I do feel at a disadvantage because you know the rules and I don't.

Ludo: Do you want some *morue* or not?

John: Yes, yes, that would be nice. Thank you.

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(Ludo puts a piece of cod on a plate and hands it to John. He also puts a piece of cod on a plate for himself).

Could I have a fork?

Ludo: A what?

John: Oh, a... a *Gabel*. No, that's German.

Ludo: Know some German do you?

John: A little. Not much. *Ein bisschen*.

Ludo: Might come in handy.

John: How do you mean?

Ludo: *(Holding out a fork)*. Look, do you want this or not?

John: Yes, but I can't remember the French for fork.

Ludo: Well, that's just too bad. *(At this point, John tries to grab the fork from John's hand, but fails to do so)*. No, you don't.

John: This is getting ridiculous.

Ludo: There you go again. You only think it's ridiculous because you've got preconceived notions about what's normal and what's not.

John: *Fourchette*. That's it, *fourchette*.

Ludo: Alright, but I won't be so patient next time. *(Hands John a fork)*. Here you are. Oh, and I'd do something about that French accent of yours. It doesn't sound too good.

John: Is that another one of your rules?

Ludo: What?

John: That you have to speak good French on a Tuesday.

Ludo: No. There's nothing in the rules about how good your French has to be, which is lucky for you. I just like people to speak with a good French accent, that's all. I don't think it's unreasonable. If you come to someone else's island, you should try to speak their language properly. It's good manners, that's all. You sound a bit like Edward Heath used to, when he spoke French.

John: I take it that isn't a compliment.

Ludo: Quick, aren't you?

(They look at each other briefly and then eat for a short while).

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So, what were you doing back in England? You haven't told me.

John: Teacher, like yourself.

Ludo: Oh yer? What did you teach?

John: Maths.

Ludo: I used to hate maths. No, that's not true. I like puzzles, codes, that sort of thing, but some of the other stuff, calculus, for example. Never understood it.

John: You're not alone.

Ludo: So, what did you do in your spare time?

John: Played a lot of cricket actually.

Ludo: Oh, yer?

John: Yer, you know, minor leagues.

Ludo: I used to play a bit of cricket myself, too.

John: Used to?

Ludo: Yer, until about ten years ago.

John: Why did you stop?

Ludo: Rules. I couldn't stand all the rules in cricket.

John: Rules are there to be broken, aren't they? That's what separates great sportsmen from the rest. How far they can bend the rules, without being penalized.

Ludo: Yer, well, rules is rules in my book. No one should break the rules in cricket and no one's going to break the rules on this island.

(They have now finished eating).