

Circles of Truth

Paul Ekert

For performance permission, please send an email to
PaulEkert@PaulEkert.com

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Cast

Peter:

Should be dressed simply. Not old clothes or cheap ones, but simple. Peter speaks with a slight stutter on some words.

Peter is a writer whose books sell in very small numbers, even though they receive academic recognition. He is a self-centred man, unhappy with his failings and unable to see where his true strengths lie. Over the years, he has developed an alcohol problem that lead to relationship problems and susceptibility for depression. As the play begins, he is considering suicide.

Simon:

Dressed with a little more style, although not overly so. He mimics Peter's stutter from time to time. He needs to look as though he has just come from the bed of a married woman.

Simon is a rather more successful writer than Peter, that is he produces commercial fiction, which Peter despises. At the start of the play, it is clear that Simon looks down on Peter as being a failure as much as Peter looks down on Simon for selling out.

The dynamic of their relationship becomes clear during the play.

A Doctor:

Sex unimportant. Local area doctor.

A Policeperson:

Sex unimportant. Local bobby.

Both the above parts can be performed using pre-recorded voiceovers

Set:

A basic living room.

One settee that faces outwards towards the audience.

To the right of the settee is an armchair facing at an angle between the audience and the settee.

A small coffee table sits between the settee and the audience.

To the left of the settee, against the wall is a cocktail cabinet or drinks tray.

Centre back is a door that is the single access point for this room.

On the wall are various A4 frames containing awards Peter has won.

Various bookshelves with books stacked in a chaotic way. Books should also be on the floor and scattered over the coffee table.

Lights up.

PETER IS SITTING ON THE SETTEE READING
ALOUD FROM A PAPER RESTING ON THE
COFFEE TABLE IN FRONT OF HIM...

HE IS MUMBLING... HE ONLY SPEAKS SOME
OF THE PHRASES ALOUD.

HE HOLDS A GUN IN ONE HAND, WHICH HE
SEEMS TO HAVE FORGOTTEN ABOUT. ALSO
ON THE TABLE IS A BOTTLE OF WHISKEY
FROM WHICH HE CONSTANTLY DRINKS.

PETER. QUOTING FROM NEWSPAPER IN HIS HANDS

“Witty...”

LOOKS BITTER

“I found a highly entertaining read.”

“F-f-funniest book of the year.”

LAUGHS WITHOUT IRONY

“Simon Hughes on top form with this righteous tumble of
humour ...”

THROWS PAPER ON FLOOR

A righteous tumble of humour. What the f-f-fuck is that
supposed to mean?

HE LOOKS ANGRILY DOWN. SEEMS TO
REMEMBER THE GUN. LOOKS AT IT FOR A
LONG TIME. TAKES THE BOTTLE FROM THE
TABLE AND DRINKS LONG AND HARD

FROM IT, THEN PLACES THE BOTTLE ON THE TABLE BEFORE SLUMPING BACK IN THE ARMCHAIR.

AFTER A MOMENT, HE SEEMS TO REACH A DECISION, PLACES GUN INTO HIS MOUTH AND SCREWS HIS EYES UP AS IF ABOUT TO PULL THE TRIGGER.

SIMON. *(OFF)* You're not going to do that.

SIMON ENTERS THROUGH THE DOOR. CLOSSES IT BEHIND HIM.

SIMON. You know you're not. We've been here before.

PETER. *(Beat)* Go away. This is supposed to be a p-p-private suicide.

SIMON. A p-p-private suicide? Steady Peter, that was almost funny.

PETER. I m-m-mean it Simon, get out.

SIMON IGNORES HIM AND WALKS INTO THE ROOM. SITS ON SETTEE OPPOSITE PETER.

PETER. Or why don't you make yourself comfortable while I blow my b-b-brains out.

SIMON DOESN'T REACT, HE BEGINS TO PICK THROUGH THE DISCARDED NEWSPAPER FROM THE FLOOR.

PETER. Why don't I j-j-just talk to myself?

SIMON. Yes, why don't you. *(Beat)* Oh you've been reading the reviews.

READS OUT LOUD

“A righteous tumble of humour”.

LOOKS UP

Now what the fuck is that supposed to mean?

PETER. It means the g-g-great Simon Hughes has another hit

DRINKS HEAVILY FROM BOTTLE

SIMON. Yes, I suppose I have *(laughs)*. Do you know, you make that sound positively unpleasant? Being a hit. But then commercial success never sits well with a true artist. Does it?

PETER. What would you know about being an artist? T-t-true or otherwise?

SIMON. Oh fuck all I am sure. But who cares, so long as the m-m-money roles in.

(Beat) Look, do you mind not waving that gun around while you're drunk. You might end up shooting the wrong man.

PETER. LEVELS GUN AT SIMON

Or maybe I'll get the r-r-right one.

(Beat) What? No f-f-funny one liners? No last words of contempt from the great and 'righteously f-f-funny' Simon Hughes?

SIMON. *(No longer smiling)* You're not going to do that either.

PETER. What? Shoot you? I m-m-might you know.

SIMON. But you won't.

PETER. But I m-m-might.

SIMON. Don't you think you're overreacting? Just a little? So what if Sally left you?
She's just one more woman gone from your life.

PETER. And this is how you persuade me not to shoot you? Taunt me with Sally and all the other w-w-women that have left me?

SIMON. (*Beat*). She's not coming back.

PETER. I know.

SIMON. She's packed her stuff. She's gone.

PETER. (*Louder*) Shut up.

SIMON. You need to face up to it.

PETER LEAPS TO HIS FEET AND POINTS
GUN IN SIMON'S FACE

PETER. And you need to SHUT UP!

SIMON. Okay. I heard you. (*Beat*)

SIMON MOVES TO BRUSH THE BARREL
OF THE GUN OUT OF HIS FACE

Look, this really is most unpleasant...

AS SIMON FINGERS TOUCH THE GUN,
PETER COCKS THE HAMMER

PETER. Take your f-f-fucking hands...Off...My...Gun.

SIMON. I think, Peter, you need to relax.

PETER. And I t-t-think you need to shut up.

THE TENSION BREAKS AND PETER
WALKS AWAY TO THE COCKTAIL
CABINET AND GRABS ANOTHER
BOTTLE

SIMON. You know you're wallowing don't you?

PETER. I like to w-w-wallow.

OPENS NEW BOTTLE AND TAKES A
DRINK

SIMON. Oh I forgot, we don't want you to lose our reputation as the great moody artist. Legendary for pissing off agents and publishers alike.

PETER. I Should be m-m-more like you?

SIMON. Perhaps.

PETER. A sell out?

SIMON. You should at least think about it.

Selling out's not so bad. In fact, after a while, it feels great.

PETER. I'm sure it does. To someone like you. The g-g-great Simon Hughes.

RAISES BOTTLE IN TOAST TOWARDS
SIMON

The g-g-great purveyor of shit.

SIMON. Oh please, the g-g-great purveyor of shit to the masses. Yeah, I sold out. But I still get the money. And the fame. And the glory. Oh yeah, and the women.

PETER. I get w-w-women too.

SIMON LAUGHS

I do to. I've had as many as you.

SIMON. Yeah, Right.

PETER (Drinking Heavily) It's t-t-true. Since... Since she left...

SIMON. Sally?

PETER. (*beat*) Since she left, I've seen other women. I've had other women. (*Counts off on his fingers*). There's Paula, Lesley, (*Beat*) Vicky and... and ... And Jezebel.

SIMON (*Laughs*) Jezebel? Oh come on. If you're going to invent women, at least give them believable names.

PETER. She's real. She was the one from...

PETER LOOKS MOMENTARILY
CONFUSED

From the bar... The.. The Tropicana... Happy Hour... Last Thursday. She was...

SIMON. (INTERRUPTS)...the short fat one?

Oh no. Not the one with greasy hair and breath that smelt like an ashtray?

Now she had repressed librarian written all over her. If you hadn't turned up, she would have shagged the barman for a free box of matches.

PETER. Shut up.

TAKES ANOTHER LONG DRINK

I l-l-liked her. She was...

SIMON. ...Smelly? Why is it you always like the feeble ones? Tell me Peter, does it make you feel morally superior when you're fucking someone with less humanity about them than you?

PETER DOESN'T APPEAR TO HAVE
HEARD THIS LAST REMARK, HIS
EXPRESSION IS ONE OF SOMEONE
TRYING TO REMEMBER SMALL
DETAILS

PETER. D-D-Debbie, there was a D-D-Debbie from the same bar, different night... I... I don't remember which one. And Jane and Laura and... and...

SIMON. And the prostitute you met last week. (*Laughs*) Yeah, let's not forget her, and your anonymous little encounter in the park.

PETER WALKS BACK OVER WITH THE GUN

PETER. I told you to shut up!

(*Beat*)

Why? Why do you do this? Why do you do this to me?

SIMON. You want me to shut up and answer your questions?

PETER. Why do you p-p-pick at me? You're like a razor backed knife sawing into a c-c-clam shell.

SIMON. Oh nice simile. I'll have to use that one.

PETER COLLAPSES INTO THE CHAIR

PETER. You just keep p-p-poking and p-p-prodding... Looking for my weak spots.

SIMON. (*to himself*) I don't have to look too fucking far do I?

PETER. What?

SIMON. I said you're a sad pathetic man whose dreams have never been realised.

PETER. I think with a gun in your f-f-face you could be a little less honest.

SIMON. You won't hurt me.

PETER. I hate you.

SIMON. You envy me.

PETER. That's not true.

PETER LEVELS GUN AT SIMON

What do you think of me? R-r-really? What do you r-r-really think of me?

SIMON REACHES INTO HIS JACKET
AND PULLS OUT A CIGARETTE, HE
PLACES IT IN HIS MOUTH, LIGHTS UP
AND THEN INHALES AND EXHALES
SMOKE IN PETER'S DIRECTION

SIMON. You're a cunt. *(beat)* Cigarette?

PETER KNOCKS THE PACK FROM
SIMON'S HAND

PETER. My life, m-m-my end... *(Beat)* It's just another one-liner to you isn't it?

SIMON. I thought you liked it like that. Or did you think I just came round to give you some sympathy?*(Laughs)*
Ah no Peter, you see the truth is you're just an irrelevant author who's decided to check out of the planet. And there is nothing special in that. Listen...

COCKS EAR

You hear that? That's the sound of no one caring.

PETER JUMPS UP AND PUTS GUN TO SIMON'S HEAD, SIMON REACTS BY TRYING TO PULL BACK, HIS FACE IS FEARFUL

PETER. You b-b-bastard.

TENSES AS IF TO PULL THE TRIGGER, PAUSES FOR A LONG MOMENT AND THEN JUST AT THE POINT WHERE IT LOOKS AS THOUGH HE WILL PULL THE TRIGGER, HE SLUMPS AND MOVES BACK TO THE CHAIR

I... I can't do this anymore... I just can't...

PETER STARTS TO CRY INTO HIS HANDS

LONG PAUSE WHILE PETER CRIES AND SIMON CARRIES ON SMOKING, LOOKING SLIGHTLY SHAKEN

SIMON STUBS HIS CIGARETTE OUT, LOOKING DISTURBED AT THE OTHER MANS CRIES

SIMON Oh for god's sake, don't cry on me. You try to shoot me like that and you're bound to miss. End up shooting my dick off.

(beat) I'll be the laughing stock of the hospital.

(Speaks with funny voice) "What happened to the guy with no dick?"

(Speaks with different funny voice) "Oh someone tried to blow his brains out"

PETER. *(Chokes back his crying)* Everything's a j-j-joke to you isn't...

SIMON. No, not everything, just you. Do you really want to know why women leave you? Do you? It's because you're not me. You're not Simon Hughes. You're Peter nobody...

PETER. (*Interrupts*) ...Thank god...

SIMON. ...and the only reason they go out with you in the first place. The only reason that they even contemplate crawling into your bed, is because they think they're gonna meet me.

PETER. That's not true.

SIMON. But you never let them. (*Beat*). And so they leave.

PETER. That's not true. I have a life. At least I did. I did before you came along. Before Simon Hughes became the big star writer.

(Points gun at Simon)

I should k-k-kill you. Shoot you now.
Solve all my problems with one p-p-pull of the trigger. I should just get you out of my life.

SIMON. I am your life. I am all that you ever wanted to be.

PETER. You are everything I despise.

SIMON. Why because I make money? Because people like my books? Because people actually read my fucking books?

PETER. You don't write books.

FETCHES A PILE OF THING BOOKS
FROM A SHELF AND THROWS THEM AT
SIMON

These are books. Real books. Books that people want to read.

SIMON. No they don't.

SIMON THROWS THE BOOKS ON THE
TABLE

At least not these ones. They're boring Peter. Pretentious piles of crap. An intellectual masturbation that about four people have enjoyed and one of them is you.

PETER. At least my books get short listed. (*Walks over to frames on wall and points to them with the gun*) I go up for p-p-prizes; your books just get made into f-f-fucking dreadful films.

SIMON. Oh yeah, I'd almost forgotten about the films. The ones that make more money than the fucking dreadful books.

PETER. It shouldn't be about m-m-money.

SIMON. No, but it is... (*Laughs*) Okay Peter the great... Pray tell, what should it be about?

(PETER LOOKS AWAY FROM THE
QUESTION AND TAKES ANOTHER
SWIG FROM THE BOTTLE).

Yeah, I thought so. You have no idea.
But think on this, while your books are getting short listed into obscurity, mine are making money. Solid cash.

TAKES BOTTLE FROM PETER AND
TAKES A SWIG BEFORE GIVING IT
BACK

Face it Peter. I have everything you want.

PETER. And to have all of what you have, I just need to write crap books.

PETER BEGINS LAUGHING
DRUNKENLY

SIMON. Books people like. (*Beat*).
That's what really gets up your nose isn't it?
That people actually like this sort of crap. That they'd rather read my stuff than yours. (*Peter stops laughing*).
That's what really sticks in your throat isn't it?

PETER. (*Becoming vague and distant and talking over Simon*) I need you out of my life Simon...

SIMON. ...That's why you're really sitting here, with a gun in your hand and a bottle of whisky in your gut....

PETER. ...I need you to g-g-go away. I need some peace and quiet....

SIMON. ...You couldn't give a f-f-fuck about Sally leaving. Not really....

PETER. ...I just need to pull this t-t-trigger and watch the bad parts of my life slide away.

SIMON. (*Stops and laughs*) 'Watch the bad parts of my life slide away'? Oh now I really must use that in one of my crap books.

PETER POINTS THE GUN AT SIMON

SIMON. (*Beat*) Put the gun down Peter. You're not going to kill me.

PETER. Yes I am. I can do this. I c-c-can.

SIMON. No you can't.

PETER. Don't tell me what I can't do.

SIMON. Okay, you won't do this.

PETER. But I can.

SIMON. But you won't.

PETER. I will (*beat*). I will (*beat*). I want you g-g-gone Simon. I want you out of my life... I want you D-D-DEAD.

PLACES BOTH HANDS ON THE GUN
AND TRIES TO HOLD IT STEADY AND
THE PULL TRIGGER. AFTER A BEAT,
FINDS HE CAN'T, LOWERS GUN AND
WALKS AWAY

SIMON. (*Laughs*) Ha. Pathetic.

PETER. SHUT UP! (*Turns and points the gun flushed with anger*)

**FADE QUICKLY TO BLACK FOLLOWED
BY THE SOUND OF A GUN GOING OFF**

PAUSE BEFORE LIGHTS UP

A BODY CAN BE SEEN LYING ON THE FLOOR BEHIND SETTEE WITH ONLY THE LEGS STICKING OUT. THE REST OF THE BODY CANNOT BE SEEN. THE CHAIR AND TABLE ARE OVER TURNED, THE BOTTLE LIES ON THE FLOOR, CENTRE STAGE

POLICEMAN. (*Enters room through door*). And this, Doctor, is where we find him, obvious suicide if you ask me.

DOCTOR. (*Doctor follows*) Actually I didn't. However, you do look to be correct in your assumption.

OPENS NOTEPAD AND BEGINS WRITING DOWN

Single shot to the head; gun in the hand of the victim. Obvious remains of cigarettes and empty bottles of strong alcohol.

POINTS AT TABLE WITH PEN

Clearly the scene of a strained mind. Who was he?

POLICEMAN. A Peter someone or other. A writer apparently.

DOCTOR. Ever heard of him? (*Still writing something down*).

POLICEMAN. No, but the cleaner...

TAKES OUT NOTEBOOK

...Mrs Thompson, she said Peter had more success using a pen name... (*looks in notebook*). A Simon Hughes?

DOCTOR. (*Looks up*) He was Simon Hughes? Really? How terribly tragic; the poor man. Do you know, I've just read one of his books. He was so wonderfully funny.

POLICEMAN. Not any more.

Fade to black.

End of play

Word count – 3,000

Rough performance time of 25 minutes