"CRACKING THE WHIP"

A One-Act Comedy

By Bruce Kane

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"CRACKING THE WHIP"

PLACE: Inside the confused mind of Alan Bedford

CHARACTERS:

ALAN BEDFORD - late thirties… confused.

SUSAN - Alan's fiancee - thirty and prim

AMBER - early twenties, pretty, sexy and wearing next to nothing.

LAURA - mid thirties, large breasted, dressed in black s&m boots with whip and outfit to match

(LIGHTS UP: All the characters are arrayed on stage. Susan can not see Amber or Laura. Amber can not see Susan or Laura. Laura sees everything. Alan sees what he wants to see. The characters are frozen in place for several moments until Alan crosses to Laura. Susan and Amber remain frozen in place.)

ALAN: You can go. You're not needed here.
LAURA: It's your mind, Alan. All you have to do is stop thinking about me and I'm out of here.

ALAN: Trust me, I'd like nothing better than to not think of you.

LAURA: (to audience) Alan is in crisis.

ALAN: I'm not in crisis... Just a little tired.

LAURA: (to audience) Alan couldn't rise to the occasion last night.

ALAN: Go ahead... Tell the whole world. Call CNN, why don't you?

LAURA: You never had a hydraulic problem with me.

ALAN: I didn't dare.

(Susan now moves for the first time as she crosses to Alan)

SUSAN: It's okay, honey... Really... There's nothing for you to be embarrassed about... These things happen.

ALAN: Maybe to you. Not to me.

SUSAN: What's that supposed to mean? Maybe to you, not to me.

ALAN: Nothing... Nothing... I didn't mean anything.

SUSAN: Are you saying it was my fault?

ALAN: No... No... It's nobody's fault.

SUSAN: Maybe you should think about seeing a doctor.

ALAN: I am a doctor.

SUSAN: No, you're not... You're a dentist.

ALAN: (to audience) Is it any wonder dentists have the highest suicide rate of any profession?

LAURA: Is that supposed to be some kind of ploy for sympathy?

ALAN: From you? That's a laugh. No. I was just pointing out a little known fact.


SUSAN: I'm only concerned for your sake.

ALAN: (to Laura) See... A woman concerned for my welfare. Listen and learn. (to Susan) I'm fine.
SUSAN: I know how something like this can damage a man’s self esteem.

ALAN: My self-esteem will be up and around in no time.

SUSAN: It is me, isn’t it?

ALAN: It’s not you.

SUSAN: I don’t excite you anymore.

ALAN: This has nothing to do with you.

SUSAN: You’ve never had this problem before, have you?

ALAN: No, I’ve never had this problem before.

SUSAN: Then why now?

LAURA: Alan... You know, of course, that impotence is usually a symptom of unresolved conflict.

ALAN: I’m not impotent.

SUSAN: I didn’t say you were.

ALAN: Could we just drop the subject?

(Susan freezes in place. Amber now moves for the first time as crosses to Alan, drapes herself all over him and speaks in a gooey kind of sexiness)

AMBER: Alan... Honey...

ALAN: (goes into baby talk mode) Yes, sweetie, baby.

LAURA: (disgusted) I may hurl at any moment.

AMBER: How do you... like... feel?

ALAN: Fine. I feel absolutely finey winey.

AMBER: But, do, you feel ...like... all wonderful?

ALAN: I just said I did.

AMBER: No. You said you felt finey winey.

ALAN: Well, I meant wonderful.

AMBER: But you feel wonderful a lot, don’t you?

ALAN: No, I wouldn’t say a lot.
AMBER: Like …how much?

ALAN: Some.

AMBER: So this isn’t some kind of …like … new thing for you. Y’know feeling all wonderful and stuff.

ALAN: No.

LAURA: But I’d say this conversation is.

AMBER: Don’t you want to know how I feel?

ALAN: Oh, sure… Yeah… How do you feel.

AMBER: Like… really good… Yknow?

ALAN: Oh, I know.

AMBER: And I don’t, y’know… feel… like… bad about it. Feeling good.

LAURA: You might want to explain to her that one usually cancels out the other.

AMBER: Y’see feeling good always makes me feel like totally bummed. I mean every time I feel happy, I begin to… like… think about all the people around the world, y’know, who aren’t happy and then I feel… like… all guilty and then I get… like… all depressed, y’know.

ALAN: But you’re not depressed now?

AMBER: Oh, no.

LAURA: Then how does she know she’s happy?

ALAN: (to Laura) Will you but out. (to Amber) You were actually expecting to feel bad because you felt good?

AMBER: Well, like, yeah.

ALAN: But, why, dumpling?

AMBER: Because I had all those… y’know… orgasms last night.

ALAN: (proudly) Oh, I know.

… and I keep thinking about all the women around the world waking up this morning who had like only one or two.

LAURA: (to Alan) You’re making this up, aren’t you?
ALAN: (to Amber) God, you're incredible. (He puts his arms around Amber and begins to rub) Have I mentioned your thighs in the last five minutes?

SUSAN: (horrified, Susan responds) My thighs? I knew it. You think I'm getting fat.

ALAN: I don't think you're getting fat.

SUSAN: Then why are you fixating on my thighs?

ALAN: I'm not fixating. I wasn't even...

SUSAN: Even what?

ALAN: Nothing.

LAURA: Does... uh? (indicates Amber)

ALAN: Amber... Her name is Amber.

LAURA: Amber. Of course... Does Amber know she's just a...?

ALAN: (quickly cutting in) Memory. Memory... Just like you... Only, she's a good memory. A pleasant memory. A memory I fondly remember.

AMBER: Alan... Honey....

ALAN: What is it sweetie cakes?

AMBER: You wanna... like, y'know... do it again?

ALAN: You've been reading my mind.

LAURA: Just the big print version.

AMBER: Last night was... like ...the best sex I ever had.

LAURA: Have you ever considered fiction writing as an alternate career?

ALAN: I could make love to you forever.

SUSAN: You just said you were tired.

LAURA: You are a bundle of contradictions, aren't you? One minute you can't light the old fire, and the next you're a late blooming nymphomaniac.

ALAN: For your information only women are nymphomaniacs.

LAURA: Another piece of sexist propaganda.

ALAN: Men are "satyrs."
LAURA: Oh, sure... Women are maniacs while men are characters from Greek mythology.

ALAN: *(to Amber)* Am I really the best lover you've ever had?

SUSAN: I thought we agreed not to delve into each other's past.

ALAN: Because you're the best I've ever had.

SUSAN: *(pleased)* Really?

LAURA: The best?

ALAN: Yes, the best.

LAURA: *(cracks her whip)* The best?

ALAN: *(nervously)* Okay... Maybe the second best.

LAURA: That's better.

SUSAN: If you really feel that I'm... Well, maybe we could give it another...

AMBER: You're like the hottest dude I've ever balled.

ALAN: *(modestly)* I try.

LAURA: Hey, "dude." Fantasy is one thing. Mental illness is another.

ALAN: *(to Laura)* You just can't stand the fact that I'm happy, can you?

LAURA: Happy? You're hallucinating.

ALAN: Isn't that the clinical definition of happy?

LAURA: You're a very sick man. You know that, don't you?

ALAN: And you know you're free to go anytime.

LAURA: And you know I can't do that, until you stop thinking about me. And that raises another question... Why are you thinking about me?

ALAN: Maybe I like watching you squirm.

LAURA: You think I'm jealous?

ALAN: You are, aren't you?

LAURA: No.

ALAN: Of course you are.
LAURA: If I am, it's only because you want to think I am.

ALAN: Hey, that's good enough for me. (*He puts his arms around Susan and Amber*)

LAURA: Don't push me Alan.

ALAN: Why not?

LAURA: Just don't do it.

ALAN: You can't threaten me. I'm in control here. Not you. Me. This is my mind we're in. If I want two women to be in love with me, I only have to think it. If I want you to be jealous, I just think it and you're jealous. And if I want you to stand there and watch me make love to two women who are younger than you, then you're going to stand there and...

LAURA: (*to Susan and Amber*) Girls.

ALAN: What are you doing?

LAURA: Can I have your attention please?

ALAN: It won't work. They don't know you're here.

LAURA: There's something both of you need to know.

ALAN: You're wasting your time.

SUSAN: (*to Laura*) Who are you?

LAURA: We'll get to that in a minute.

SUSAN: (*to Alan*) Who is she?

ALAN: Who?

SUSAN: (*points to Laura*) Her. (*disgustedly*) This.

ALAN: There's no one there. Are you feeling alright? Maybe if you lied down.

AMBER: Alan, who are these people?

ALAN: What people?

AMBER: (*indicates Susan*) Well, like her and like her.

SUSAN: I'm Susan... Alan's fiancee.

AMBER: (*stunned*) Fiancée?

ALAN: (*to Laura*) Stop this right now.
AMBER: You're engaged?

SUSAN: The wedding's in a month... Who may I ask are you?

AMBER: You never said anything about getting married.

LAURA: Shame on you Alan.

SUSAN: Alan, who is this woman?

ALAN: What woman? I don't see any woman.

LAURA: It won't work Alan. The cat's...like...out of the bag.

SUSAN: (to Amber) And just what is your relation to my fiancee?

AMBER: Let's just say I'm the woman he's given like more climaxes than a Stephen King novel.

LAURA: (to Alan) Delusional doesn't even come close to describing your state of mind.

SUSAN: (astonished) You're having an affair!

ALAN: I'm not having an affair.

SUSAN: You had sex with her. She just said so.

ALAN: Okay... But only up here in my mind.

SUSAN: Is that supposed to make me feel better?

AMBER: (to Alan) What do you mean, only up here in your mind?

LAURA: Maybe, I can explain.

ALAN: You stay out of this.

SUSAN: And did you sleep with her too?

LAURA: Many times. Many times.

SUSAN: Right. But only up here in your mind.

LAURA: No. Never in his mind. At least, not that I'm aware of.

AMBER: Will someone tell me what's going on.

LAURA: (to Amber) Sure... First of all you need to know that Alan, here, has just a teensy weensy little problem with reality.

AMBER: What does that mean, a problem with reality?
LAURA: Take you for instance.
AMBER: Me?
LAURA: You and Alan get along well, don't you?
AMBER: Yeah. Sure. He's the best lay I've....
LAURA: I think we've covered that. There's a reason that you and Alan get along so well. So much better than he and I or even he and Susan.
AMBER: Well, Sure... I'm hotter than you two.
LAURA: You're also not real.
AMBER: Of course, I'm real.
LAURA: I know this is difficult to understand, but, trust me on this. You don't really exist.
AMBER: That's crazy... I'm here. I exist.
LAURA: No, you don't. You never have.
AMBER: Alan, tell her to stop saying that. Tell her I exist.
ALAN: Well...
LAURA: (to Amber) Sorry.
AMBER: I'm confused.
LAURA: A relationship with Alan will do that to you.
AMBER: How can I not exist?
LAURA: You're a fantasy. A figment of Alan's imagination. Girls like you don't really exist except in the fevered minds of middle aged men like the Big Kahuna here.
ALAN: Don't listen to her. She likes to make me miserable. That's why she married me. That's also why she divorced me.
SUSAN: You were married to her?
LAURA: Nice to meet you. I'm Laura Bedford. In real life I'm a much nicer woman with much smaller breasts. But this is how Alan likes to think of me. (sizes Susan up) And I guess this is how like likes to think of you.
SUSAN: I don't know what you mean?
LAURA: You can't really be this much of a tight ass in reality. No one can.
SUSAN: I beg your pardon.

LAURA: Sorry. I'm sure you're a very lovely, caring woman. But Alan has a habit of recreating the women in his life to suit his own purposes.

SUSAN: Is she right, Alan? Do you really think of me as a... a...

LAURA: Tight. Ass. It's okay, you can say it.

AMBER: Is it true, Alan? What she said. I don't really exist? I'm like a fantasy?

ALAN: You do exist. In my mind you exist. You're my fantasy. That has to count for something.

SUSAN: I can't believe this. You're getting married in a month. Men who are getting married in a month are not supposed to be having fantasies about... about "hussies."

LAURA: Oh come on, Alan. Give the woman a break. Hussies? What is this the Roaring Twenties?

AMBER: What did she just call me?

LAURA: A hussy. It's anal retentive for tramp, bimbo, slut...

AMBER: (advances on Susan) Who are you calling a slut, you... (looks to Laura for the word)

LAURA: Ball buster?

SUSAN: (to Amber) How dare you call me a... a...

LAURA: Come on, Susie. You can say it. Ball buster.

(Susan lunges at Amber. Alan tries to separate them and takes an elbow in the stomach that drops him to his knees. Susan and Amber get into a knock down, drag out fight)

LAURA: Alan, I think we all understand the symbolism of what's going on here... The inner conflict. The struggle between responsibility and escape. But don't you think you're carrying it a little too far? If you don't stop this, it could do permanent damage to your psyche, not to mention a few internal organs.

(ALAN, still in pain, struggles to his feet… He tries to break up the fight without getting punched again)

ALAN: Susan… Amber

(He ducks as a punch sails by his ear. He finally grabs Susan around the waist, lifts her in the air and pulls her away still punching and kicking)

ALAN: Behave yourselves… Both of you.
(He puts Susan down)

ALAN: You oughta be ashamed of yourselves. Carrying on like this.

LAURA: Take it from me, ladies… he’s not worth it.

ALAN: Now, listen to me… All of you. I want you all to go away. I’m going to close my eyes and when I open them you’ll all be gone. (Closes his eyes. When he opens them, the three women are still there, arms folded, waiting for an explanation.) Will you all please go away.

LAURA: Stop thinking of us.

ALAN: I’m trying.

LAURA: Try harder.

(Alan closes his eyes again. When he opens them, the women are still there.)

ALAN: I’m haunted.

LAURA: You’re troubled.

ALAN: I’m not troubled.

LAURA: You’re very troubled… That’s why you can’t get rid of us. You’re filled with doubt and remorse and guilt and whole bunch of other wonderful things that allow me to make your life a living hell.

ALAN: There’s nothing wrong with me that a good night’s sleep won’t cure.

LAURA: Alan, you can lie to us all you want. We’re just figments of your imagination. But, you are completely incapable of lying to yourself. It’s a very endearing quality, actually. And, one I might add, that makes it so easy to torture you. Susan… You were right when you guessed that Alan was having second thoughts.

SUSAN: I never said Alan was having second thoughts. I said men who are getting married in a month don’t have fantasies about…

(Can’t bring herself to say the word. Amber starts to move on Susan. Alan holds her back.)

LAURA: What the hell do you think those fantasies are, if not second thoughts.

SUSAN: It’s her fault… The little tramp.

(Amber lunges as Susan and the fight starts all over again. Alan throws up his hands in resignation and walks downstage. Amber and Susan freeze in place, still locked in battle.)

ALAN: (To Laura) Do you remember the day I asked you to marry me?
LAURA: You never asked me to marry you.
ALAN: Of course, I did. It was on a Tuesday.
LAURA: You never asked me to marry you.
ALAN: Then why do I still have alimony payments?
LAURA: Because I asked you for a divorce.
ALAN: Okay.
LAURA: Okay, what?
ALAN: Proves my point.
LAURA: What point?
ALAN: That I asked you to marry me.
LAURA: It doesn’t prove anything.
ALAN: If I didn’t ask, you couldn’t answer.
LAURA: So?
ALAN: And if you didn’t answer then we would never have gotten married.
LAURA: What's your point?
ALAN: We’re divorced.
LAURA: I know that.
ALAN: Which means we were once married which means I asked you to marry me.
LAURA: You never asked me to marry you, Alan.
ALAN: Didn't we just cover this?
LAURA: You left out a ring where I would find it.
ALAN: Okay.
LAURA: And when I asked you if you were asking me to marry you…
ALAN: Yeah?
LAURA: You asked me what I would say if you were asking me. You never asked me to marry you, Alan… You simply tested the waters.
ALAN: Why did you divorce me?

LAURA: Is that why you dredged me up from the recesses of this cluttered attic you call a mind?

ALAN: I need to know.

LAURA: I told you.

ALAN: You said you needed space... To find yourself.

LAURA: I typed you out a three page list, single spaced.

ALAN: I don’t remember that.

LAURA: That’s because you only remember what you want to remember.

ALAN: You really think that’s true?

LAURA: Alan, why am I here?

ALAN: You think I only remember what I want to remember?

LAURA: I don’t know, Alan... I only think what you think.

ALAN: You’ve always had a mind of your own.

LAURA: And now I have a mind of your own.

ALAN: Just because you’re not flesh and blood, doesn’t mean you can’t think for yourself.

LAURA: I’m a fiction. Alan... Fictions don’t have minds. They’re only reflections.

ALAN: I give you complete freedom to think anyway you want to.

LAURA: It doesn’t work that way.

ALAN: What if I say it does? You’re my fiction.

LAURA: Exactly.

ALAN: Here you are.

LAURA: Oh yes. Here I am.

ALAN: Arguing with me... Disagreeing with me... It that isn’t a mind of your own...

LAURA: I’m sure I’m only doing it because you want me to do it.

ALAN: That’s my point.
LAURA: I’m only disagreeing because you want me to disagree. If you wanted me to tell you the moon and stars set over your shoulder, I’d probably be doing that.

ALAN: Every conscience has a mind of its own. That’s the nature of a conscience.

LAURA: Is that what you think I am? Your conscience?

ALAN: What else would it be?

LAURA: Well, if I am your conscience then I must be one of those early twenty first century types that doesn’t like to get involved.

ALAN: Of course you’re my conscience. You annoy me… You plague me… You nag me.

LAURA: I never nagged you.

ALAN: You always complained I was too conservative… Too careful.

LAURA: That wasn’t nagging. That was simply pointing out the obvious.

ALAN: I’m beginning to think you were right.

LAURA: Really?

ALAN: Really… Feel better?

LAURA: I don’t feel anything, actually. It’s one of the benefits of being a delusion.

ALAN: You’re not a delusion.

LAURA: Then what am I? And don’t say your conscience, again. I’m not buying that.

ALAN: You’re a manifestation.

LAURA: I see… A manifestation… Of what? A manifestation of what?

ALAN: The part of me that knows the truth.

LAURA: Your version of the truth. Look at you, Alan. You’re so internalized you can only hold arguments with yourself.

ALAN: Don’t you understand why you’re resisting?

LAURA: Because I don’t want to be here. Can you understand that?

ALAN: The reason you don’t want to be here is because I’m trying to suppress the part of me you represent.

LAURA: Then suppress… Please suppress.
ALAN: I can’t, anymore… That’s my problem.

LAURA: Well, then work on that problem. With help and counseling you could learn to eliminate, altogether, that part of your personality I represent. Think how easy things would be if you could just drift through life completely unaware of yourself. Imagine how much you could accomplish if you didn’t have to agonize over the consequences.

ALAN: I recognize I have a few shortcomings.

LAURA: I could have told you that.

ALAN: Where do you think I learned it?

LAURA: Do you enjoy punishing yourself like this?

ALAN: No, of course not.

LAURA: Then dismiss me from your mind.

ALAN: No pain, no gain.

LAURA: And please find yourself another manifestation.

ALAN: Everyone has a conscience, whether they want to admit it or not. I’m just willing to embrace mine. (Starts to hug her)

LAURA: Don’t embrace me.

ALAN: (Backs away) Sorry… You always told me I should act more on impulse. I’d find life more enjoyable.

LAURA: That was then.

ALAN: I followed your advice.

LAURA: Good… Are you enjoying life more?

ALAN: I don’t know when I’ve been more miserable.

LAURA: I’m sorry… I guess being fully alive doesn’t work for everybody.

ALAN: I led with my heart when I should’ve led with my mind. And now I’m in trouble.

LAURA: This is your attempt to lay a guilt trip on me, isn’t it? You’re saying I’m responsible for your problem and now I have to help you resolve it.

ALAN: I’m only stating the facts. If you choose to interpret it…

LAURA: Well, this should make one helluva headline. Man lays guilt trip on own conscience.
ALAN: If I can’t turn to my own conscience, who can I turn to?

LAURA: Call your shrink.

ALAN: She doesn’t understand me.

LAURA: Then talk to the real Laura.

ALAN: She wouldn’t give me the sweat off her brow if I was drowning.

LAURA: Hey… You’re talking about someone I share… What do I share with her?

ALAN: An annoying habit of being right. Otherwise, not much.

LAURA: You don’t want to marry Susan, do you?

ALAN: I don’t know… You tell me… You have all the answers.

LAURA: I just have questions. Can I go now?

ALAN: Help me or I won’t stop thinking of you.

LAURA: That’s blackmail.

ALAN: I’m a desperate man. If I have to blackmail my conscience into helping me, I’ll do it.

LAURA: I am not your conscience. Stop calling me that. At best I’m a neuroses. What other answer is there? I mean, a healthy person does not conjure up the image of his ex-wife to help solve his romantic problems.

ALAN: I’m unorthodox.

LAURA: That’s not the first word that comes to mind when someone thinks about Alan Bedford.

ALAN: That’s only because they don’t know me.

LAURA: No one knows you Alan. You don't know you. I don’t want to do this.

ALAN: Of course you don’t, because I don’t want to do this. You’re just expressing what I’m feeling. I’d rather just hide out. Forget what happened.

LAURA: That’s what I’d recommend. Take the easy way out.

ALAN: I can’t. Not this time.

LAURA: Why do I have the feeling it’s not up to me?

ALAN: I suppose if you turn me down it means I am taking the easy way out.
LAURA: It was difficult living with you as your wife… It’s impossible as…

ALAN: My conscience?

LAURA: I’m out of here.

ALAN: Where are you going?

LAURA: You don’t need me anymore.

ALAN: You can’t go… I still haven’t resolved anything. You’re the only one I can talk to.

LAURA: Boy, you’re more fucked up than I thought you were.

ALAN: What am I going to do?

LAURA: If as you say… I’m your conscience… Then my job is not to provide answers. It’s only to annoy the shit out of you.

ALAN: Fine… Go.

LAURA: Do you love Susan?

ALAN: I don’t know… What difference does it make? I once loved you.

LAURA: In your own neurotic way, I suppose you did.

ALAN: And look where it got me.

LAURA: Life is choices, Alan.

ALAN: I know… To be or not to be. *(He turns upstage to look at Susan and Amber)*

Look at them.

LAURA: What’s it going to be?

ALAN: God, I hate reality. It makes so many demands on you.

*(He turns away from Susan and Amber)*

LAURA: Then go with Amber.

ALAN: How can I? She’s a fantasy.

LAURA: She thinks you’re the hottest stud in seven states.

ALAN: You think it’s possible to have a really meaningful relationship with a complete fabrication?

LAURA: If anyone can, it’s you.
ALAN: Tell me what to do.

LAURA: The right thing.

ALAN: You’re no help.

LAURA: Can I go now?

ALAN: Do you have to?

LAURA: I think so. (She starts to go)

ALAN: You know you’re the only woman I ever really loved.

LAURA: Really?

ALAN: No.

LAURA: Good, honest answer.

ALAN: (surprised) That was a good, honest answer. (proudly) How about that? I must be making progress.

LAURA: You must be. You’ve already moved up one step on the self-esteem ladder.

ALAN: What if we gave it another shot? You and me. What do you say?

LAURA: You’d still be running away from reality.

ALAN: Is that such a bad thing? Reality is highly overrated as far as I’m concerned.

LAURA: Not being real myself, I wouldn’t know.

ALAN: But, you do know that if I wanted us to get back together, all I’d have to do is think of it. (Laura cracks her whip) Okay… Okay… It was just a thought. Sometimes you can be a real bitch.

LAURA: Isn’t that the clinical definition of a conscience? (starts to go)

ALAN: Will I see you again?

LAURA: Count on it.

(Laura exits. Alan watches her go then turns and walks upstage. Susan and Amber resume their battle. Alan looks from one to the other and back again, trying to decide… as the lights fade.)

CURTAIN