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Roots

A Play

Arnold Wesker

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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Roots

This play was first produced at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, on 25th May 1959, and subsequently by the English Stage Company, with the Belgrade, Theatre Company, at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on 30th June, 1959, with the following cast:

JENNY BEALES	*Patsy Byrne*
JIMMY BEALES	*Charles Kay*
BEATIE BRYANT	*Joan Plowright*
STAN MANN	*Patrick O'Connell*
MRS. BRYANT	*Gwen Nelson*
MR. BRYANT	*Jack Rodney*
MR. HEALEY	*Richard Martin*
FRANKIE BRYANT	*Alan Howard*
PEARL BRYANT	*Brenda Peters*

The play was directed by JOHN DEXTER *with décor by* JOCELYN HERBERT

ACT ONE

An isolated cottage in Norfolk, the house of the Beales'.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1. The kitchen at the cottage of Mr. and Mrs. Bryant. Two days later.

SCENE 2. The same. Two hours later.

ACT THREE

The front room of the Bryants' cottage. Two weeks later.

No character in this play is intended to portray any specific person, alive or dead.

Running time of this play, excluding intervals, is approximately one hour and forty minutes.

PRODUCTION NOTE

THIS play deals, fundamentally, with the problem of communication, or the lack of it. Because the people it concerns have little knowledge of the power and use of words, of language, they can be imposed on and cheated, are unable to develop and inadequate to deal with a crisis even when it occurs in their own intimate circle. They are the gullible prey of catch-penny advertisers and purveyors of cheap shoddy goods, whether for body or mind. They are not unhappy. They have no feeling of self-pity: it might be better if they had and it led to a discontent which caused them to pull themselves out of their pleasant rut, their easy acceptance of a life which is so much poorer than it might be. The author offers no easy solution to a problem which may well have none, merely leaving us with a ray of hope that here and there one of them may become, in all the word implies, "articulate". He presents his characters without sentiment, almost harshly, but with all the deeper sympathy and understanding because of his uncompromising approach.

The cast is rich in acting opportunites. First and foremost Beatie—a long and exacting part making considerable demands on the player, but fully repaying all the time and work spent on it. Beatie overflows with health, vigour and, above all, enthusiasm. It is this, more than any real superiority of intelligence, which forms the contrast to her more stolid and undemonstrative family. We feel that she has broken through some boundary in which they are still enclosed. It is these qualities also which prevent her from any appearance of patronage in her attitude to them. She never talks down to them, never bosses them about even when, in the first act, she starts to clean up Jenny's house. She has made, through Ronnie, a wonderful discovery—the power of language and all it entails—and with all her heart she longs to pass this on to her own people. Her enthusiasm enables us to see him through her eyes, and perhaps, unconsciously, through eyes rather more critical than her own. Her collapse on hearing of her betrayal is short-lived. Ronnie may have let her down but he has, though with little credit to himself, left her a legacy which will transform her life.

Jenny is a pleasant-natured, easy-going young housewife. She is not a sloven. If her house is an untidy mess, this is because she simply has not the time to get around to cleaning it up. She accepts life as she finds

it, as she no doubt accepted her illegitimate baby, without rancour. Her references to the favoured treatment her sister used to receive when they were children are statements of fact rather than expressions of past resentment. Her rather pathetic pride in her bread baking perhaps affords us a glimpse of a creative impulse which in different circumstances might have developed, but she is already firmly settled in the family groove and it will take more than speeches from Beatie to dig her out of it.

Jimmy appears a wholy unexceptionable (and unexceptional) young workman, who earns his wage and looks after his family, but he has probably never had an original thought in his head, and his pride in his uniform, together with his unthinking acceptance of any orders he may receive while wearing it, suggests less desirable attributes. He would be ready, one feels, to swallow any slogan rather than worry out the purpose behind it and one can picture him in a pre-war Germany proudly displaying a swastika on his sleeve.

Mrs. Bryant is a devastatingly true portrait of a type of woman most of us come across at one time or another. She may in this instance talk with a Norfolk accent but her prototypes, allowing for regional differences, may be met with anywhere. The part is a magnificent one but calling for careful handling and discipline. It must never degenerate into caricature or be played for the cheap laugh.

Mr. Bryant, in contrast to his wife who, narrow and uninformed though she may be, has at least a character which can make itself felt, is a small man in every way, physically, mentally and spiritually. Even his meanness is a small one. Insignificant and feckless, complaining about his work conditions and at the same time unable to bother opening "that old thing" the Union Magazine—he yet fathered Beatie—who breaks free.

The smaller parts, Stan Mann, Mr. Healy, Frank and Pearl, are written, and should be played, with as much subtlety and truth as the others.

Stan Mann might be regarded as the end product of the system—placidly undergoing in public the indignities of senility, lost in an allegedly happier past like any elderly West End club bore, collapsing at last in a heap almost undistinguishable, one feels, from the earth close to which he has lived and worked.

Frank Bryant is a pleasant enough young man with a line in cheap wit which, excusable now, may in time turn him into a prize bore, as his pretty, opinionated wife may finish up an embittered nagger. One feels that it is at their gullible heads that the specious claims of

mass advertisements are mainly directed, as the recruiting posters and political slogans are aimed at Jimmy's.

Even the brief glimpse we have of Mr. Healey is a telling one. Sympathetic and considerate he may be, but Mr. Bryant is demoted just the same.

The settings for the play can be either elaborately built or quite simple. It would be a great pity if any company or society were to be frightened off attempting a production by the fact that there are three different scenes. With a certain amount of ingenuity from the scenic designer the sets can be erected and struck in a relatively small space, and the use of one or two small boat-trucks will help towards making the changes quick and smooth. The main object should be to make the rooms appear real, actual homes lived in by the intensely real characters who inhabit them. Act One is a real clutter of domestic and other articles so that one feels the rubbish of years has collected in the less accessible holes and corners. Act Two is much tidier, but still the main living-room of the house. Absence of children and more time to spare for housework are both evident. Act Three is neater still, a room rarely used though much decorated and polished for the party. One wonders, rather apprehensively, what sort of books the swivel bookcase contains!

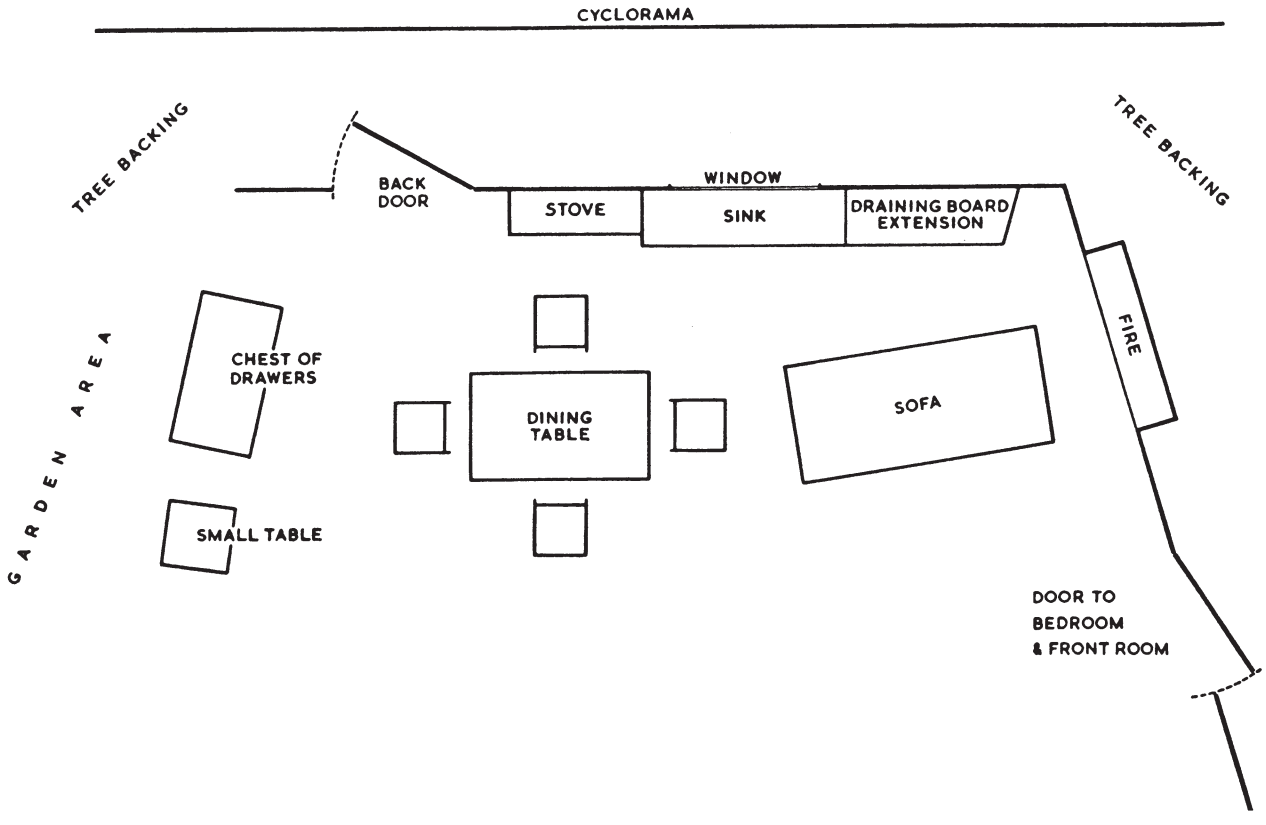
Lighting is quite straightforward, with only a few simple cues in Act One. The general effect should be colder and greyer in Act Three than in the previous two.

A note on the Norfolk dialect is to be found on page 71.

Variety of pace and mood throughout is important. In several places—the meal in Act One for instance—it will be found that pieces of business have not many lines to cover them. This is quite deliberate, and the silences which fall are necessary and intentional; the action should not be hurried in order to fill them.

The play is an exciting and richly satisfying one to produce. It will repay all the care and attention which can be devoted to it and give an audience not only enjoyment and stimulation, but something to think about and to remember.

IVAN BUTLER


CYCLORAMA
TREE BACKING
BACK DOOR
WINDOW
STOVE
SINK
DRAINING BOARD EXTENSION
TREE BACKING
FIRE
GARDEN AREA
CHEST OF DRAWERS
DINING TABLE
SOFA
SMALL TABLE
DOOR TO BEDROOM & FRONT ROOM

ROOTS

ACT ONE

A rather ramshackled house in Norfolk where there is no water laid on nor electricity, nor gas. Everything rambles and the furniture is cheap and old. If it is untidy, it is because there is a child in the house and few amenities so that the mother is too overworked to take much care.

An assortment of clobber lies around: papers and washing, coats and basins, a tin wash tub with shirts and underwear to be cleaned, tilly lamps and primus stoves. Washing hangs on a line in the room. It is September.

JENNY BEALES *is by the sink washing up. She is singing a recent pop song. She is short, fat, and friendly and wears glasses. A child's voice is heard from the bedroom off* L. *crying,* "Sweet, mamma, sweet". JENNY *crosses to stove to test potatoes.*

JENNY (*good naturedly*). Shut you up, Daphne, and get you to sleep now. (*Moves to get a dishcloth.*)

CHILD'S VOICE. Daphy wan sweet, sweet, sweet.

JENNY (*going to sideboard* R. *to get sweet*). My word, child, father come home and find you awake he'll be after you. (*Disappears off* L. *to bedroom with sweet.*) There—now sleep, gal; don't wan you grumpy wi' me in mornin'.

(*Enter* JIMMY BEALES, U.R. *Also short, chubby, blond though hardly any hair left, ruddy complexion. He is a garage mechanic. Wears blue dungarees and an army pack slung over his shoulder. He wheels his bike in and lays it by the wall,* U.R. *Seems to be in some sort of pain—around his back.* JENNY *returns.*)

Waas matter wi' you then? (*Crosses to sideboard to replace sweets.*)

JIMMY. I don' know, gal. There's a pain in my guts and one a'tween my shoulder blades I can hardly stand up.

JENNY. Sit you down then an' I'll git you your supper on the table.

JIMMY (*to sofa,* U.L.). Blust gal! I can't eat yit.

(JIMMY *picks up sofa pillow and lays down on the sofa—holding pillow to stomach.* JENNY *watches him a while.*)

JENNY (*up to cooker*). Don't you know what t'is yit? (*Strains potatoes.*)

JIMMY. Well, how should I know what t'is?

JENNY (*mashing potatoes*). I told Mother about the pain and she say it's indigestion.

JIMMY. What the hell's indigestion doin' a'tween my shoulder blades then?

JENNY. She say some people get indigestion so bad it go right through their stomach to the back.

JIMMY. Don't be daft.

JENNY. That's what I say. Blust Mother, I say, you don't git indigestion in the back. Don't you tell me, she say, I hed it! (*Stirs onions in frying pan on stove.*)

JIMMY. What hevn't she hed?

(JENNY *returns to washing up while* JIMMY *struggles awhile on the sofa.* JENNY *hums. No word. Then—*)

JENNY. Who d'you see today?

JIMMY. Only Doctor Gallagher.

JENNY (*wheeling round*). You see who?

JIMMY. Gallagher. His wife driv him up in the ole Armstrong.

JENNY (*taking two plates from oven*). Well I go t'hell if that ent a rum thing.

JIMMY (*rising and going to table. Pain has eased*). What's that then?

JENNY (*moving to get him supper from oven*). We was down at the whist drive in the village and that Judy Maitland say he were dead. Cos you know he've hed a cancer this last year and they don't give him no longer'n three weeks, don't you?

JIMMY. Ole crows. They don' wan' nothin' less than a death to wake them up.

JENNY. No. No longer'n three weeks.

GIRL'S VOICE (*off*). Yoo-hoo! Yoo-hoo!

JIMMY. There's your sister.

JENNY. That's her.

GIRL'S VOICE (*off*). Yoo-hoo! Any one home?

JENNY (*calling*). Come you on in, gal, don't you worry about yoo-hoo.

(*Enter* BEATIE BRYANT, U.R., *an ample, blonde, healthy-faced young woman of twenty-two years. She is carrying a case, which she puts down below sideboard,* R.C.)

JIMMY. Here she is. (*Sits at table.*)

JENNY (*with reserve, but pleased*). Hello, Beatrice—how are you? (*Serving potatoes to* JIMMY.)

BEATIE (*with reserve, but pleased*). Hello, Jenny—how are you? What's that lovely smell I smell?

JENNY. Onions for supper and bread for the harvest festival.

BEATIE. Watcha Jimmy Beales, how you doin', bor?

JIMMY. Not so bad, gal, how's yourself?

BEATIE. All right you know. (*To below table and* L. *of it.*) When you comin' to London again for a football match?

JIMMY. O blust, gal, I don' wanna go to any more o' those things. Ole father Bryant was there in the middle of that crowd and he turn round an' he say (*Imitating.*) stop you a pushin' there, he say, stop you a pushin'.

JENNIE. Where's Ronnie? (*Serves her own plate.*)

BEATIE. He's comin' down at the end of two weeks. (*Takes off coat and puts it on sofa.*)

JIMMY. Ent you married yit?

BEATIE. No.

JIMMY. You wanna hurry then, gal, a long engagement don't do the ole legs any good.

JENNY. Now shut you up, Jimmy Beales, and get that food down you. Every time you talk, look, you miss a mouthful! That's why you complain of pain in your shoulder blades.

BEATIE. You bin hevin' pains then, Jimmy?

JIMMY. Blust yes! Right a'tween my shoulder blades.

JENNY. Mother says it's indigestion.

BEATIE. What the hell's indigestion doin' a'tween his shoulder blades?

JENNY. Mother reckon some people get indigestion so bad that go right through their stomach to the back.

BEATIE. Don't talk daft! (*Sits on sofa and glances at comic which she picks up from under cushion.*)

JENNY. That's what I say. Blust Mother, I say, you don' git indigestion in the back. Don't you tell me, she say, I hed it! (*Still busy serving.*)

BEATIE. What hevn't she hed? How is she?

JENNY. Still the same you know. How long you staying this time?

BEATIE. Two days here—two weeks at home.

JENNY. Hungry, gal? (*Back to stove.*)

BEATIE. Watcha got?

JENNY. Watcha see.

BEATIE. Liver? I'll hev it! (*She makes herself comfortable.*)

(*Nearby are a pile of comics.* BEATIE *picks one up and reads.*)

JENNY (*dishing up* BEATIE'S *plate*). We got some ice cream after.

BEATIE (*absorbed*). Yerp.

JENNY. Look at her. No sooner she's in than she's at them ole comics. You still read them ole things?

JIMMY. She don't change much do she?

BEATIE. Funny that! Soon ever I'm home again I'm like I always was —it don' even seem I bin away. I do the same lazy things an' I talk the same. Funny that!

JENNY. What do Ronnie say to it?

BEATIE. He don't mind. He don't even know though. He ent never bin here. Not in the three years I known him. But I'll tell you, (*She jumps up and moves around as she talks.*) I used to read the comics he bought for his nephews and he used to get riled.

(*Now* BEATIE *begins to quote* RONNIE, *and when she does she imitates him so well in both manner and intonation that in fact, as the play progresses, we see a picture of him through her.*)

(*Crosses to sit at table,* L. *side.*) "Hell, woman, what can they give you that you can *be* so absorbed?" So you know what I used to do? I used to get a copy of the "Manchester Guardian" and sit with that wide open—and a comic behind!

JIMMY. "Manchester Guardian"? Blimey Joe—he don' believe in hevin' much fun then?

BEATIE. That's what I used to tell him. "Fun?" he say, "fun? Playing an instrument is fun, painting is fun, reading a book is fun, talking with friends is fun—but a comic? A comic? For a young woman of twenty-two?"

JENNY (*handing out meal and sitting down herself*). He sound a queer bor to me. You eat, gal.

BEATIE (*enthusiastically*). He's alive though.

JIMMY. Alive? Alive you say? What's alive about someone who can't read a comic? What's alive about a person that reads books and looks at paintings and listens to classical music?

(*There is a silence at this, as though the question answers itself—reluctantly:*

JENNY *fetches ice cream for* JIMMY.)

JIMMY. Well, it's all right for some, I suppose.

BEATIE. And then he'd sneak the comic away from me and read it his-self!

JENNY (*giving* JIMMY *his ice-cream*). Oh, he didn't really mind then? (*Sits and continues eating.*)

BEATIE. No—'cos sometimes I read books as well. "There's nothing wrong with comics," he'd cry—he stand up on a chair when he want to preach but don't wanna sound too dramatic.

JIMMY. Eh?

BEATIE. Like this look. (*Stands on her chair.*) "There's nothing wrong with comics only there's something wrong with comics all the time. There's nothing wrong with football, only there's something wrong with only football. There's nothing wrong with rock'n rolling, only God preserve me from the girl that can do nothing else!" (*She half sits down and then stands up again, remembering something else.*) Oh, yes "and there's nothing wrong with talking about the weather, only don't talk to me about it!" (*Sits down.*)

(JIMMY *and* JENNY *look at each other as though she, and no doubt Ronnie, is a little barmy.* JIMMY *rises and gets coat from sofa and gaiters from mantel.*)

JENNY. He never really row with you then?

BEATIE. We used to. There was a time when he handled all official things for me you know. Once I was in between jobs and I didn't think to ask for my unemployment benefit. He told me to. But when I asked they told me I was short on stamps and so I wasn't entitled to benefit. I didn't know what to say but he did. He went up and argued for me—he's just like his mother, she argue with everyone—and I got it. I didn't know how to talk see, it was all foreign to me. Think of it! An English girl born and bred and I couldn't talk the language—except for to buy food and clothes. And so sometimes when he were in a black mood he'd start on me. "What can you talk of?" he'd ask. "Go on, pick a subject. Talk. Use the language. Do you know what language is?" Well, I'd never thought before—hev you?—it's automatic to you—isn't it? —like walking. "Well, language is words" he'd say, as though he were telling me a secret. "It's bridges, so that you can get safely from one place to another. And the more bridges you know about the more places you can see!" (*To* JIMMY.) And do you know what happens when you can see a place but you don't know where the bridge is?

JIMMY (*angrily*). Blust gal, what the hell are you on about? (*Sits on chair below table to fasten gaiters.*)

BEATIE. Exactly! You see, you hev a row! Still, rows is all right. I like a row. So then he'd say: "Bridges! Bridges! Bridges! Use

your bridges, woman. It took thousands of years to build them, use them!" And that riled me. "Blust your bridges," I'd say. "Blust you and your bridges—I want a row." Then he'd grin at me. "You want a row?" he'd ask. "No bridges this time?" "No bridges," I'd say—and we'd row. Sometimes he hurt me but then, slowly, he'd built the bridge up for me—and then we'd make love! (*Innocently finishing her meal.*)

JENNY. You'd what, did you say?

(JENNY *rises, collects* JIMMY'S *and* BEATIE'S *plates and crosses up to sink for three sweets.*)

BEATIE. Make love. Love in the afternoon, gal. Ever had it? It's the only time for it. Go out or entertain in the evenings; sleep at night, study, work and chores in the mornings but love—alert and fresh, when you got most energy—love in the afternoon.

JIMMY. I suppose you take time off from work every afternoon to do it?

BEATIE. I'm talking about weekends and holidays—daft.

JENNY. Oh, Beatie, go on wi' you!

BEATIE. Well, go t'hell, Jenny Beales, you're blushin'. Ent you never had love in the afternoon? Ask Jimmy then.

JENNY (*returning with sweets*). Shut you up gal and get on wi' your ice-cream. It's strawberry flavour. (*Sits* R. *of table.*) Wan't some more vanilla, James?

JIMMY (*taking it in the middle of lacing up boots*). Yes, please. (*Eating.*) Good cream, ent it? Made from the white milk of a Jersey cow.

BEATIE. This is good, too—made from pink milk, ent it?

(*Pause.*)

JIMMY. Yerp! (*Pause.*) Come from a pink cow!

(*Pause. They are all enjoying the cream.*)

JENNY (*eating*). You remember Dickie Smart, Beatie?

BEATIE (*eating*). Who?

JENNY (*eating*). We hed a drink wi' him in the Storks when you was down last.

BEATIE (*eating*). Yerp.

JENNY (*eating*). Well, he got gored by a bull last Thursday. His left ear was nearly off, his knee were gored, his ribs bruised and the ligament of his legs torn.

(*Pause as they finish eating.*)

BEATIE (*euphemistically*). He hed a rough time then!

JENNY. Yerp. (*To* JIMMY *who has risen.*) You off now?

JIMMY. Mm.

(JIMMY *crosses* U.R. *for reap hook and then to sideboard for sharpening stone.* JENNY *collects dishes and moves up to sink.*)

BEATIE. Still got your allotment, Jimmy?

JIMMY (*resuming his seat*). Yerp.

BEATIE. Bit heavy going this weather.

JIMMY. That ent too bad just yit—few more weeks an' the old mowld'll cling.

BEATIE. Watcha got this year?

JIMMY (*starts to sharpen reap hook*). Hed spuds, carrots, cabbages, you know. Beetroot, lettuces, onions, and peas. But me runners let me down this year though.

JENNY. I don't go much on them old things.

BEATIE. You got a fair owle turn then?

JIMMY. Yerp.

BEATIE (*jumping up*). I'll help you wash.

JENNY. That's all right, gal.

BEATIE. Where's the cloth?

JENNY. Here t'is.

(BEATIE *helps collect dishes from table and proceeds to help wash up. This is a silence that needs organizing. Throughout the play there is no sign of intense living from any of the characters*—BEATIE'S *bursts are the exception. They continue in a routine rural manner. The day comes, one sleeps at night, there is always the winter, the spring, the autumn and the summer—little amazes them. They talk in fits and starts mainly as a sort of gossip and they talk quickly, too, enacting as though for an audience what they say. Their sense of humour is keen and dry. They show no affection for each other—though this does not mean they would not be upset were one of them to die. The silences are important—as important as the way they speak if we are to know them.*)

JENNY. What about that strike in London? Whaas London like wi'out the buses?

BEATIE. Lovely! No noise—and the streets, you should see the streets, flowing with people—the city looks human.

JIMMY. They wanna call us territorials out—we'd soon break the strike.

BEATIE. That's a soft thing for a worker to say for his mates.

JIMMY. Soft be buggered, soft you say? What they earnin' those busmen, what they earnin'? And what's the farm workers' wage? Do you know it, gal?

BEATIE (*to sideboard with cutlery*). Well, let the farm workers go on strike too then! It don't help a farm labourer if a busman don't go on strike, do it now?

JENNY. You know they've got a rise though. Father Bryant's go up by six and six a week as a pigman and Frank goes up seven'n six a week for driving a tractor.

JIMMY. But you watch the Hall sack some on 'em.

JENNY. Thaas true, Beatie. They're such cods, honest to God they are. Every time there's bin a rise someone get sacked. Without fail. You watch it—you ask Father Bryant when you get home, ask him who's bin sacked since the rise.

BEATIE. One person they 'ont sack is him though. They 'ont find many men'd tend to pigs seven days a week and stay up the hours he do.

JENNY. Bloody fool! (*Pause.*) Did Jimmy tell you he've bin chosen for the Territorials' Jubilee in London this year?

BEATIE. What's this then? What'll you do there?

JIMMY. Demonstrate and parade wi' arms and such like.

BEATIE. Won't do you any good.

JIMMY. Don't you reckon? Gotta show we can defend the country, you know. Demonstrate arms and you prevent war.

BEATIE (*she has finished putting cutlery away*). Won't demonstrate anything, bor. (*Goes to undo her case.*) Present for the house! (*Gives present to* JENNY *who crosses with it to* L. *of table.*) Have a hydrogen bomb fall on you and you'll find them things silly in your hands. (*Searches for other parcels.*)

JIMMY. So you say, gal? So you say? That'll frighten them other bastards though.

BEATIE. Frighten yourself y'mean. (*Finds parcels.*) Presents for the kid. (*Crosses to* R. *of table.*)

JIMMY. And what do you know about this all of a sudden?

JENNY (*revealing a tablecloth*). Thank you very much, Beatie. Just what I need.

BEATIE. You're not interested in defending your country, Jimmy, you just enjoy playing soldiers.

JIMMY. What did I do in the last war then—sing in the trenches?

BEATIE. Ever heard of Chaucer, Jimmy?

JIMMY. No.

BEATIE (*sitting on* D.R. *end of table*). Do you know the M.P. for this constituency?

JIMMY. What are you drivin' at, gal—don't give me no riddles.

BEATIE. Do you know how the British Trade Union Movement started? And do you believe in strike action?

JIMMY. No to both those.

BEATIE. What you goin' to war to defend then?

JIMMY (*he is annoyed now*). Beatie—you bin away from us a long time now—you got a boy who's educated an that and he's taught you a lot maybe. (*To sideboard with sharpening stone.*) But don't you come pushin' ideas across at us—we're all right as we are. You can come when you like an' welcome but don't bring no discussion of politics in the house wi' you 'cos that'll only cause trouble. I'm telling you.

(*He goes off* U.R.)

JENNY. Blust gal, if you hevn't touched him on a sore spot. He live for them territorials he do—that's half his life.

BEATIE (*she is upset now*). What's he afraid of talking for?

JENNY. He ent afraid of talking, Beatie—blust he can do that gal.

BEATIE. But not talk, not really talk, not use bridges. I sit with Ronnie and his friends sometimes and I listen to them talk about things and you know I've never heard half of the words before.

JENNY (*crossing to sideboard with presents and wrapping.*) Don't he tell you what they mean?

BEATIE (*sitting chair* R. *of table*). I get annoyed when he keep tellin' me —and he want me to ask. (*Imitates him half-heartedly now.*) "Always ask, people love to tell you what they know, always ask and people will respect you."

JENNY. And do you?

BEATIE. No! I don't! An' you know why? Because I'm stubborn, I'm like mother, I'm stubborn. Somehow I just can't bring myself to ask, and you know what? I go mad when I listen to them. As soon as they start to talk about things I don't know about or I can't understand I get mad. They sit there, casually talking, and suddenly they turn on you, abrupt. "Don't you think?" they say. Like at school, pick on you and ask a question you ent ready for. Sometimes I don't say anything, sometimes I go to bed or leave the room. Like Jimmy—just like Jimmy.

JENNY. And what do Ronnie say to that then?

BEATIE. He get mad, too. "Why don't you ask me, woman, for God's sake, why don't you ask me? Aren't I dying to tell you about things? Only ask!"

JENNY. And he's goin' to marry you? (*Up to sink to tidy plates.*)

BEATIE. Why not?

JENNY. Well I'm sorry, gal, you mustn't mind me saying this, but it don't seem to me like you two got much in common.

BEATIE (*loudly*). It's not true! We're in love!

JENNY. Well, you know.

BEATIE (*softly*). No, I don't know. I won't know till he come here. From the first day I went to work as waitress in the Dell Hotel and saw him working in the kitchen I fell in love—and I thought it was easy. I thought everything was easy. I chased him for three months with compliments and presents until I finally give myself to him. He never said he love me nor I didn't care but once he had taken me he seemed to think he was responsible for me and I told him no different. I'd make him love me I thought. I didn't know much about him except he was different and used to write most of the time. And then he went back to London and I followed him there. (*Rising and crossing slowly* D.L.) I've never moved far from home but I did for him and he felt all the time he couldn't leave me and I didn't tell him no different. And then I got to know more about him. He was interested in all the things I never ever thought about. About politics and art and all that, and he tried to teach me. He's a socialist and he used to say you couldn't bring socialism to a country by making speeches, but perhaps you could pass it on to someone who was near you. So I pretended I was interested—but I didn't understand much. All the time he's trying to teach me but I can't take it, Jenny. And yet, at the same time, I want to show I'm willing. I'm not used to learning. Learning was at school and that's finished with.

JENNY (*moves to table and brushes off crumbs*). Blust gal, you don't seem like you're going to be happy then. Like I said.

BEATIE. But I love him.

JENNY. Then you're not right in the head then.

BEATIE. I couldn't have any other life now.

JENNY. Well I don't know and that's a fact.

BEATIE (*playfully mocking her*). Well I don't know and that's a fact! (*Suddenly.*) Come on, gal, I'll teach you how to bake some pastries. (*Crosses to case for apron.*)

JENNY. Pastries?

BEATIE. Ronnie taught me.

JENNY. Oh, you learnt that much then?

BEATIE. But he don't know. I always got annoyed when he tried to teach me to cook as well—Hell! I had to know something—but it sank in all the same.

(*By this time it has become quite dark and* JENNY *proceeds to light a tilly lamp at the table.*)

JENNY. He use a sledge hammer for that?

BEATIE (*moving to* R. *of table*). Oh don't you worry, gal, it'll be all right once we're married. Once we're married and I got babies I won't need to be interested in half the things I got to be interested in now.

JENNY. No you won't, will you! Don't need no education for babies.

BEATIE. Nope. Babies is babies—you just have 'em.

JENNY. Little cods!

BEATIE. You gonna hev another, Jenny?

JENNY. Well, course I am. What you on about? Think Jimmy don't want none of his own?

BEATIE (*sitting* R. *of table*). He's a good man, Jenny.

JENNY. Yerp.

BEATIE. Not many men'd marry you after you had a baby.

JENNY (*pumping the lamp*). No.

BEATIE. He didn't ask you any questions? Who was the father? Nor nothing?

JENNY. No.

BEATIE. You hevn't told no one, hev you, Jenny?

JENNY. No, that I hevn't.

BEATIE. Well, that's it, gal, don't you tell me then!

(JENNY *has finished pumping the tilly lamp and we are in brightness.*)

JENNY (*severely*). Now Beatie, stop it. Every time you come home you ask me that question and I hed enough. (*Crosses quickly to sink and continues to tidy up.*) It's finished with and over. No one don't say nothing and no one know. You hear me?

BEATIE (*rising and moving* D.L.). Are you in love with Jimmy?

JENNY. Love? I don't believe in any of that squit—we just got married, that's that.

BEATIE (*suddenly looking around the room at the general chaos*). Jenny Beales, just look at this house. Look at it!

JENNY. I'm looking. What's wrong?

BEATIE. Let's clean it up.

JENNY. Clean what up?

BEATIE. Are you going to live in this house all your life?

JENNY. You gonna buy us another?

BEATIE. Stuck out here in the wilds with only ole Stan Mann and his missus as a neighbour and sand pits all around. Every time it rain look you're stranded.

JENNY. Jimmy don't earn enough for much more'n we got.

BEATIE. But it's so dirty.

JENNY. You wait till you got a two year old kid.

BEATIE. Let's make some order—I love tidying up.

JENNY. What about the pastries? Pastries! Oh my sainted aunt, the bread!

(JENNY *dashes to the oven and brings out a most beautiful looking plaited loaf of bread.*)

(*Admiring it.*) Well, no one wanna complain after that. Isn't that beautiful, Beatie?

BEATIE. I could eat it now.

JENNY. You hungry again?

BEATIE (*making an attack on the clothes that are lying around, folding them, and putting them on the table*). I'm always hungry again. Ronnie say I eat more'n I need. "If you get fat, woman, I'll leave you—without even a discussion!"

JENNY (*placing bread on large oval plate to put away*). Well, there ent nothin' wrong in bein' fat.

BEATIE. You ent got no choice, gal. (*Seeing bike standing* U.R.) A bike! What's a bike doin' in a livin' room—I'm putting it outside.

JENNY. Jimmy 'ont know where it is.

BEATIE. Don't be daft, you can't miss a bike. (*Wheels it off* U.R. *and calls from there.*) Jenny! Start puttin' the clothes away.

JENNY (*places bread on sideboard*). Blust gal, I ent got nowhere to put them.

BEATIE (*from outside*). You got drawers—you got cupboards.

JENNY. They're full already.

BEATIE (*entering—energy sparks from her*). Come here—let's look. (*Looks.*) Oh, go away—you got enough room for ten families. You just bung it all in with no order, that's why. Here—help me.

(*They drag out all manner of clothes from the drawers of the sideboard and begin to fold them up at table.*)

BEATIE. How's my Frankie and Pearl?

JENNY. They're all right. You know she and Mother don't talk to each other?

BEATIE. What, again? Who's fault is it this time?

JENNY. Well, Mother she say it's Pearl's fault and Pearl she say it's Mother.

BEATIE. Well, they wanna get together quick and find whose fault it is 'cos I'm going to call the whole family together for tea to meet Ronnie.

JENNY. Well, Susan and Mother don't talk neither so you got a lot of peace making to do.

BEATIE. Well go t'hell, what's broken them two up?

JENNY. Susan hev never bin struck on her mother, you know that, don't you?—well, it seems that Susan bought something off the club from Pearl and Pearl give it to Mother and Mother sent it to Susan through the fishmonger what live next door her in the council houses. And of course Susan were riled 'cos she didn't want her neighbours to know that she bought anything off the club. So they don't speak.

BEATIE. Kids! It makes me mad.

JENNY. And you know what t'is with Pearl, don't you?—it's 'cos Mother hev never thought she was good enough for her son Frankie.

BEATIE. No more she wasn't neither!

JENNY. What's wrong wi' her then? I get on all right.

BEATIE. Nothing's wrong wi' her, she just wasn't good enough for our Frankie, that's all.

JENNY. Who's being small minded now?

BEATIE. Always wantin' more'n he can give her.

(BEATIE *stands on sofa, gets clothes from line and takes them to table.*)

JENNY. An' I know someone else who always wanted more'n she got.

BEATIE (*sulkily*). It's not the same thing.

JENNY. Oh yes t'is.

BEATIE. T'ent.

JENNY. T'is, my gal. (*Mimicking the child* BEATIE.) I wan a 'nana, a 'nana, a 'nana. Frankie's got my 'nana, 'nana, 'nana.

(*They move to sideboard and start putting clothes away in drawers.*)

BEATIE. Well, I liked bananas.

JENNY. You liked anything you could get your hands on and Mother

used to give in to you 'cos you were the youngest. Me and Susan and Frankie never got nothing 'cos o' you—'cept a clout round the ear.

BEATIE. T'ent so likely. You got everything and I got nothing.

JENNY. All we got was what we pinched out the larder and then you used to go and tell tales to Mother.

BEATIE. I never did.

JENNY. Oh, didn't you, my gal? Many's the time I'd've willingly strangled you—with no prayers—there you are, no prayers whatsoever. Strangled you till you was dead.

BEATIE. Oh go on wi' you, Jenny Beales.

(By now they have finished folding the clothes and have put away most of the laundry and garments that have till this moment cluttered up the room. BEATIE *says* "there", *stands up and looks around, finds some coats sprawled helter skelter and hangs them up behind the door.)*

I'll buy you some coat hangers.

JENNY (*finishing at sideboard*). You get me a couple o' coats to hang on 'em first please.

BEATIE (*looking around*). What next? Bottles, jars, nicknacks, saucepans, cups, papers—everything anywhere. Look at it! Come on!

(BEATIE *attempts to get these things into either their proper place or out of sight.*)

JENNY (*watching her*). You hit this place like a bloody whirlwind you do, like a bloody whirlwind. Jimmy'll think he've come into the wrong house and I shan't be able to find a thing.

BEATIE. Where's the broom? (*She finds it beside the stove and is now gurgling with sort of animal noises signifying excitement. Her joy is childlike.*) How's Poppy?

JENNY. Tight as ever.

BEATIE (*sweeping floor*). What won't he give you now?

JENNY. T'ent nothing wi' me gal. Nothing he do don't affect me. It's Mother I'm referring to.

BEATIE. Don't he still give her much money?

JENNY. Money? She hev to struggle and skint all the time—all the time. Well it ent never bin no different from when we was kids, hev it?

BEATIE. No.

(During next speech JENNY *takes milk bottles from sink off* U.R. *then returns to sink to put plates in rack.)*

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