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All In Good Time

A Comedy

Bill Naughton

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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ALL IN GOOD TIME

First produced by The Mermaid Theatre Trust Ltd at The Mermaid Theatre, London, on the 6th March 1963, and subsequently, on the 18th April 1963, at The Phoenix Theatre, London, with the following cast of characters:

(in the order of their appearance)

LUCY FITTON, Arthur's mother	<i>Marjorie Rhodes</i>
EZRA FITTON, her husband	<i>Bernard Miles</i>
GEOFFREY FITTON, their younger son	<i>Edward Petherbridge</i>
JOE THOMPSON, Arthur's boss	<i>Peter Welch</i>
LIZ PIPER, Violet's mother	<i>Maureen Pryor</i>
MOLLY THOMPSON, Joe's wife	<i>Mary Quinn</i>
FRED STANFIELD, Violet's uncle	<i>John McKelvey</i>
ARTHUR FITTON, the bridegroom, Geoffrey's elder brother	<i>John Pickles</i>
EDDIE TAYLOR	<i>Bunny May</i>
VIOLET FITTON, the bride	<i>Lois Daine</i>
LESLIE PIPER, Violet's father	<i>Donald Eccles</i>

Directed by JOSEPHINE WILSON

Designed by DAVID MYERSCOUGH JONES

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

- SCENE 1 The Fittons' home in Bolton. The night of the wedding.
Spring.
- SCENE 2 The same. Thursday night. Six weeks later.
- SCENE 3 The same. The following morning

ACT II

- SCENE 1 The same. The evening of the same day
- SCENE 2 Fred's garden. The following morning
- SCENE 3 A piece of waste ground. A few hours later
- SCENE 4 The Fittons' home. That evening

} For alternative
setting see section
at end of play

Time—the present

*The song in Act I is "Roses" by F. E. Weatherly and Stephen Adams,
published by Boosey and Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd, 295 Regent Street,
London, W.1*

ACT I

SCENE I

SCENE—*The Fittons' home in Bolton. The night of the wedding. Spring.*

The Fittons' home is a cottage house in an industrial street. The setting shows the living-room with a bedroom above. It is furnished in a homely mixture of old and new, with a prosperous and cosy appearance, and has signs of having been newly decorated for the wedding and has a warm, festive air, with simple touches of a house-proud wife here and there. In the living-room, a door L leads to the street. An arch up R leads to the kitchen and stairs. The fireplace is down R with a window above it. In the bedroom, the door, with a curtained glass panel, is up L and leads first into another bedroom and thence to the stairs. There is a small window L. In the living-room, below the fireplace, there is a fireside stool and a pouffe, and above the fireplace is a small table with a TV set. A comfortable old leather armchair stands above the fireplace. A sideboard, L of the door up R is loaded with wedding presents, a bottle of port, some glasses, a plate of cakes, boxes, and ornaments, etc. An upright piano is up L with a chair in front of it. Another chair stands R of the piano. On top of the piano there are glasses, beer, sandwiches, a jug of spring flowers and a concertina. Along the wall L, above the street door, there is a row of pegs loaded with coats and hats. Below the street door there is a small table with a record player on top, and on the lower shelf, books and a transistor radio. In the corner down L, there is a piano stool and a keg of beer resting on two crates, a large jug of ale and some glasses. A square dining-table covered with a red plush cloth, is C. Three chairs, one R, one L, and one above the table, are well tucked in. At night, the room is lit by a pendant light C, and a table-lamp on the piano. In the bedroom, the bed is R, along the back wall, the head of the bed R. Violet's nightdress and Arthur's pyjamas are on the pillow and Violet's wedding veil is over the foot of the bed. The left end of the bed is so constructed that it will collapse when Arthur sits on it, after Joe has loosened the bolts. A box ottoman is at the foot of the bed, set to conceal the "collapsing" legs. Below the bed, R, is a bookcase with books and on the top a bedside lamp and a bunch of roses. Below the bed is a small chair and a rug. Up L.C., against the back wall, there is an enamel bowl on a washstand with a water carafe in it. A towel hangs on the rail of the washstand. There is a shelf fixed to the wall over the washstand with a tumbler, shaving-brush, shaving-stick, etc. The washstand is concealed by a folding screen covered with portraits of composers, soloists and reprints of famous art treasures, etc. Arthur's dressing-gown hangs on a hook behind the door. A small dressing-table and mirror stands in front of the window, with a lace cover and a few toilet articles. A rug covers the floor area L.C. Below the ottoman stands a small table with a tape-recorder on it.

Before the CURTAIN rises, soft, muted Irish jig music is heard.

The CURTAIN rises on a lively scene at the end of a wedding party, and it is after midnight. The lights are on in the living-room and the bedroom is in darkness. The record player is blaring out a brisk Irish jig. EZRA FITTON is dancing with MOLLY THOMPSON above the table C. EZRA, aged fifty, the bridegroom's father, is a gasworks labourer. He appears to be a stubborn and loud-mouthed man on first sight. Later, however, he reveals unsuspected depths of character and feeling, and it becomes evident that he is a more complex person than he would have anyone know. MOLLY, aged thirty-six, is lively and gay. GEOFFREY FITTON and EDDIE TAYLOR are "twisting" up L. GEOFFREY, aged twenty-four, is Arthur's younger brother, a mechanic, big and cheery. EDDIE, aged eighteen, is a simple young lad who works with Arthur. FRED STANFIELD is standing L of the table, with a glass of beer, laughing and keeping time. FRED, Violet's uncle, is aged fifty-two. He is a physiotherapist, and is a rather earnest man. JOE THOMPSON and LIZ PIPER are dancing down L. JOE is a cinema manager, aged forty. He is Arthur's boss. He is fond of a joke. LIZ, aged forty-five, is Leslie's wife. She is fussy, and a bit fancy, but no fool. LUCY FITTON is standing at the arch up R. LUCY, aged fifty, is a shrewd, unfussy working-class mother, with a dry humour and a good heart beneath her tough front. VIOLET FITTON and LESLIE PIPER are standing up R. VIOLET is aged twenty, simple, attractive and genuine. She wears a short length bridal dress. LESLIE, aged forty-eight, is an insurance collector. He is rather measured, but under pressure reveals what conflict has been going on underneath. ARTHUR FITTON, the bridegroom is seated on the stool down R, reading a book and taking no notice of the din. He is aged twenty-five and is a cinema projectionist with a natural taste for good music and reading, and is often at a loss amongst his own folk. JOE and LIZ dance L of the table, then above it, and stop. VIOLET and LESLIE exit to the kitchen. EZRA and MOLLY dance down R. EZRA swings MOLLY round from side to side and the others, all except ARTHUR, egg him on, forming a semicircle of spectators, L of the table. There is shouting and laughter, all rather "merry". After a moment, LUCY calls to Geoffrey.

LUCY. Hey, turn that thing down.

(GEOFFREY goes to the record player and unwillingly turns down the volume. LUCY just avoids being bowled over by the dancing EZRA, gives a snort and exits to the kitchen. EZRA becomes aware that the music has gone down and stops dancing)

EZRA. Hey, who's turned that music down?

GEOFFREY. My mum said . . .

EZRA. Never mind what your mum said—turn it up again. I'm the boss in this house.

JOE. Good old Ezra—that's the spirit.

(GEOFFREY turns up the volume)

LIZ. You've got to think of the neighbours, Mr Fitton.

EZRA. To hell with the neighbours—we owe 'em nowt.

(The music is lively and gay. EZRA swirls off again with MOLLY. The shouts and yells restart. EZRA has not gone more than a few steps when the

pouffe gets in the way and he falls headlong towards the armchair, taking MOLLY with him. ARTHUR rises. FRED crosses and helps EZRA to rise. JOE picks up MOLLY and they move to the sideboard. The others help, with shouts of sympathy. EDDIE turns off the record player and there is a sudden silence. After his brief glory, EZRA looks like a man who has come a cropper)

LIZ. Ee, are you all right, Mr Fitton?

MOLLY. He let with such a bang.

FRED. Yes—a heavy fall. How do you feel?

(They are all concerned but EZRA shakes them off)

GEOFFREY. Are you all right, Dad?

EZRA *(dazedly rubbing his head)* Yes, I'm all right.

LIZ. Are you sure you're all right?

JOE. He went ass over tip.

EZRA *(shouting)* I tell you I'm all right. Leave me alone.

(FRED moves up R)

GEOFFREY *(whispering)* Leave him alone if he says so.

EZRA *(staring at Arthur)* Hy, did you trip me up deliberate?

ARTHUR. Me? I didn't trip you at all.

EZRA. I fell over somebody's foot.

ARTHUR. Then it must have been your own. I didn't even see you.

EZRA. I'm not a chap to fall over my own foot.

MOLLY. You fell over the pouffe.

EZRA. I coulda swore I saw a foot stuck out as I was coming round.

ARTHUR *(sitting on the stool)* I tell you I wasn't even looking.

EDDIE. Arthur was reading, Mr Fitton. *(He sits on the chair up L)*

EZRA. Readin' on his weddin' night—a son of mine! I never thought I'd live to see the day. *(He crosses to L, takes a glass of beer from the table L and sits on the piano stool)*

MOLLY *(friendly)* Happen he's readin' it up, eh, y'know . . .

(There is general laughter)

LIZ. He's left it bit late.

JOE. It's one of them jobs, the more y'know about it the worse you are at it. *(He cackles. He has a way of breaking off suddenly)*

MOLLY. It's certainly true in your case.

FRED. She's got you there, mate—she should know.

(The others laugh at Joe. ARTHUR, put off by this talk, turns back to his book with some annoyance)

EZRA *(rising and moving above the table)* Hy, are you readin' that book again?

ARTHUR. What about it if I am?

EZRA *(crossing to RC and turning to the others)* Look at him—he's like a flamin' ghost at his own weddin'.

ARTHUR. What would you like me to do—stand on my bloody head?

LIZ. Arthur! Language! Talking like that to your father!

EZRA. Thank you, Mrs Piper. (*He moves closer to Arthur*) No, but I expect you to make a bit of jollification on your weddin' night. (*In a loud whisper*) These folks is your guests—Joe Thomson your boss here.

ARTHUR (*rising; to the others*) I'm sorry, everybody. (*He smiles*) I just thought you could manage better without me.

FRED. It's all right, lad. I dare say you're tired.

EDDIE. Aye, he's been married, hasn't he?

GEOFFREY. It's a tiring job.

MOLLY. It's been a long day for you, love.

ARTHUR. It's all right. It's just that I can't stand all that din.

(*JOE crosses to the barrel down L and helps himself to beer*)

EZRA (*shouting*) Din! We were dancing, and he has the cheek to call it din. An' put that bloody book down when folk are talkin' to you.

(*FRED moves and sits on the stool down R*)

ARTHUR. Can't you speak without shouting?

EZRA. I'll speak as I think fit in my own house.

GEOFFREY. Don't excite yourself, Dad. I'll handle him. (*He crosses to R of Arthur; big and confident*) Giss that book.

ARTHUR (*with elder brother authority*) You keep off!

GEOFFREY. The trouble he's caused in this house with his reading.

EDDIE (*rising*) Be careful, Geoff . . .

EZRA. Look at him—a book in his hand on his weddin' night. Who ever heard of such a thing.

ARTHUR. Oh, dry up!

LIZ. Arthur, that's no way to speak to your father.

EZRA. Thank you, Mrs Piper. (*He prods Arthur*) Until you get a place of your own, my boy, don't forget I'm the boss in this house.

ARTHUR (*meaning it*) I'll go now if it'll suit you. I can pack my things in five minutes—and be out of here. (*He calls*) Violet! Come on!

GEOFFREY. Don't be daft, Arthur. (*To Ezra*) You'll catch it from my mum if he does go.

EZRA. Harken him! (*He moves c*) See how he turned on me. What have I said? (*He is thoroughly discomfited at the way things are turning out. He knows he will get into trouble with his wife for one thing, and also, he likes Arthur*)

EDDIE (*crossing to L of Arthur*) Don't worry, Mr Fitton. Leave him to me.

(*EDDIE and GEOFFREY restrain Arthur*)

EZRA. There y'are, you say a word to them and they threaten to walk out. I'd never have spoke to my dad like that. But that's a

son's gratitude these days. *(He is such a mixture of the braggart and the genuine that you are never quite sure of him)*

ARTHUR. You don't want me to be grateful to you for being born, do you?

EZRA *(quietly)* You might be grateful to me for a lot of things one day—if truth were known.

(ARTHUR senses a deep meaning behind Ezra's words and father and son stare at each other in silence for a moment. The others watch silently.)

LUCY *enters from the kitchen, carrying a tray of tea which she puts on the table c)*

LUCY. If what truth were known? *(She moves to R of Ezra)*

(An odd, sad look comes over EZRA. He remains silent, crosses to the piano stool L and sits)

MOLLY *(crossing to EZRA)* He's saying nothing. Are you, Mr Fitton? *(She puts a comforting hand on Ezra's shoulder)*

LUCY. Happen it's as well. *(She sits R of the table c and sets out the tea things)*

(LESLIE and VIOLET enter from the kitchen, breaking the tension.)

LESLIE *is carrying the wedding cake. The cake already has a piece cut out of it. VIOLET carries a plate and knife. LIZ reacts irritably at the sight of father and daughter together)*

LIZ *(moving to L of Leslie)* I wondered where you two had got to.

LESLIE. I was just having a little last chat to our Violet. *(He looks for somewhere to put the cake, but is in no hurry to put it down)*

(GEOFFREY and EDDIE cross above the others and stand up L. FRED rises and moves to the fireplace.)

MOLLY *crosses and exits to the kitchen)*

LIZ. You do nothing but chat, you two. What're you walkin' about with that in your hands for? Put it down.

(ARTHUR sits on the stool down R. VIOLET puts the plate and knife on the sideboard. EDDIE sits on the chair up L)

LESLIE. I will if you'll show me where.

LIZ. The way you're takin' things on yourselves, anybody would think it was your wedding.

(GEOFFREY joins Fred at the fireplace. JOE moves up L)

LESLIE. It's my daughter's.

LIZ. She's my daughter, too. Put it down.

VIOLET *(turning to Liz)* Mum, love, don't keep pickin' at Dad.

LIZ. Nobody's pickin' at him, love. But look at him—the way he's actin' with that weddin' cake anybody would think he was goin' to take it home with him an' put it under his bloomin' pillow.

LESLIE. Where can I put it?

LIZ. I'd love to tell you!

VIOLET. Mum, Dad was only helping me.

LESLIE. It's all right, Violet. Don't argue with your mother.

VIOLET. Here, Dad, put it over here on the dresser.

(LESLIE puts the cake on the sideboard.)

MOLLY enters from the kitchen, carrying a jug of hot water. She puts the jug on the table then assists LUCY to serve the tea)

LESLIE. Will it be all right here, Mrs Fitton?

LUCY. Yes, it won't get knocked off there. Tea, Molly? (To Ezra) What's bitten you?

MOLLY. It was to do with your Arthur.

EZRA. Aye, your son there was readin' a flamin' book.

LUCY. He's your son as well as mine. Why shouldn't he read? Tea for you, Mrs Piper? He's doing nobody any 'arm.

LIZ. Yes, please. (She sits L of the table c)

EZRA. Readin' a book at his own bloomin' weddin'—who ever heard of it.

LUCY. Why shouldn't he? Tea, Mr Piper?

LESLIE. Yes, please, Mrs Fitton.

EZRA. I was never brought up to read at weddin's.

LUCY. You! You couldn't see on your weddin' night. Sugar, Mr Piper?

LESLIE. Two, please. He only meant it for the lad's good.

EZRA. 'Course I did, I only wanted to see the lad happy.

LUCY. He's always on at our Arthur.

ARTHUR. Mother, do be quiet! Please!

EZRA. I hardly ever speak to him. It's you, you've spoilt him—marded him. Since he were that high.

ARTHUR. Here we go again.

LUCY. You don't notice yourself doin' it. Tea, Mr Thompson? But others do.

EZRA. You've made a mardarse out of him. That's what you've done.

MOLLY. Mr Fitton, that's not true. He's a right good lad is your Arthur.

VIOLET. Thank you, Molly. I agree. (She cuts the cake)

ARTHUR. Please leave me out of it.

LUCY. Even on the lad's weddin' night, you've got to pick on him.

(VIOLET puts a plate of cut cake on the table c)

Help yourselves to cake.

EZRA. I didn't pick on the lad. He picked on me. He tripped me up.

EDDIE. Excuse me, but he did not. You fell over the pouffe, Mr Fitton. I saw you.

FRED. And so did I.

EZRA. I'm not a chap to fall. I'm too nimble on my feet.

LUCY. He's about as nimble as a baby elephant.

GEOFFREY. Let's change the bloomin' subject.

ARTHUR. I should think so.

JOE. Heah! Heah! Two sugars for me, Mrs Fitton. Eddie, get me a cup of tea, will you?

(EDDIE rises, gets a cup of tea and hands it to Joe, then collects a cup for himself and resumes his seat on the chair up L)

EZRA (*reasonably*) All this sittin' readin' and thinkin' can't be any good for anybody. It's not natural.

ARTHUR (*rising*) Oh, blimey—off we go again. (*He collects a cup of tea and stands up c*)

(VIOLET collects her tea and joins Arthur up c)

EZRA (*striving to be reasonable*) It's not—I tell you it's not.

LUCY. I wish you'd try it for a change. Have you all got tea?

EZRA. My dad used to say, if a thing's natural you'll see animals doin' it. I've yet to see a horse readin' a flamin' book.

(*The others laugh*)

LUCY. You might—if you live long enough.

EZRA. Or a dog with a newspaper. Then suppose one day he should overstrain his brain—eh?

LUCY. That's something you'll never do. (*She indicates the cake*) Help yourselves, everybody. (*She sips her tea*)

FRED. Speaking as a physiotherapist—I don't think you can overstrain the brain that easy.

EZRA. Oh, don't you? Well, speaking as a gasworks labourer I beg to differ. What about that chap in the paper whose brain busted?

LUCY. I know where you'll bust if ever you do—an' it won't be your brain.

LESLIE. If it's in Arthur's nature to read you've got to give way to it—or it'll come out some other road.

ARTHUR. I tell you, leave me out of it, please.

LIZ. I think Mr Fitton only meant it for Arthur's good.

EZRA (*rising and crossing down R*) 'Course I did. I want to see the lad havin' a good time. It gripes me to see anybody struggling with the printed word. (*He sits on the stool down R*)

LUCY. More tea, anyone. (*To Arthur*) What about you, love?

ARTHUR. Yes, Mum. (*He moves to the table c*)

(LUCY refills Arthur's cup)

EZRA (*to Arthur*) Are you havin' a pint with me, lad, a pint of ale? Eh, come on. (*He rises*)

ARTHUR. All right, Dad—I will.

EZRA. Good lad—I'll draw a pint for you myself.

ARTHUR. Oh, sorry, Dad—I'd rather have a cup of tea, if you don't mind. Ale gives me a headache at this time of night.

EZRA (*rebuffed*) Harken him—I'd rather have a cup of tea. I'm suppin' no tea whilst there's ale in the barrel. Who's for ale? What about you, Joe? (*To Geoffrey*) An' you? (*To Fred*) An' you?

JOE (*collecting his glass*) Aye, ale for me. (*He crosses to the barrel, refills his glass then moves up L*)

GEOFFREY. Me, too. What about you, Fred?

FRED. I'll stick to tea.

EZRA. Come on, Geoff, hand 'um out. My old father 'ud turn in his grave at the idea of a Fitton preferring tea to ale.

EDDIE. I'll have ale. (*He rises*)

(GEOFFREY and EDDIE *put their cups on the table C, collect their glasses, move down L and refill their glasses with ale. They then take a piece of cake each and move up L. MOLLY moves L*)

LESLIE. I think I'll have a drop of port. (*He helps himself from the bottle on the sideboard*)

FRED (*moving to R of Arthur*) I hear you're going in for joining the police force, Arthur?

VIOLET (*moving and sitting above the table C, L of Arthur*) Yes, won't it be nice.

JOE. Aye, he'd be as well—our little cinema might close down any day. Then he'll be looking for a job.

(MOLLY *takes the plate of cake to Ezra and offers it to him. EZRA takes a piece of cake*)

ARTHUR. Aye—I fancy an open-air life.

EZRA. Ale gives him a headache—ale never gave anybody a headache.

LUCY. Once he gets a thing on his mind he never lets go.

GEOFFREY. They've sent him back twice—he's half an inch short.

LESLIE. No telling what marriage might do.

LIZ. Marriage—why you seem to have shrunk since I wed you.

VIOLET. Not surprising—eh, Dad?

LIZ. Don't be cheeky. They're a pair these two are.

FRED (*crossing up L*) There's a good pension after twenty-five years. You could retire at fifty.

ARTHUR. Aye, I suppose you could. I never thought of that—you could have another job on top of your pension.

EZRA. Harken him—he's talkin' of bloody retirin' before he's even started on the job.

ARTHUR. I never talked of it—I only agreed with Fred here.

LUCY. 'Course you did, love.

FRED. To be sure he did.

EZRA. That's the youth of today all over—they ask about pension afore they get the bloody job.

VIOLET. He didn't, Mr Fitton. He only said . . .

EZRA (*crossing up L*) There's never been a one of my family joined the police force—I can say that.

LUCY. If they were anything like you they couldn't join the library.

EZRA. I could get him a job alongside me at the gasworks. He won't come, will he?

(ARTHUR moves to the stool down R and sits)

LESLIE. Young men don't go into labouring jobs these days.

FRED. A spade is a thing of the past.

EZRA. It'll be the end of this country once a chap can't use a spade. Who ever heard of a navy with a headache? Projectionist! Policeman!

FRED. If he fancies the police I can't think why he shouldn't join.

EDDIE. Aye, it's no joke with all the hoodlums about these days.

LUCY. No use talking—he won't listen.

(MOLLY moves and stands R of Violet)

ARTHUR. Keep me out of it, Eddie.

GEOFFREY. They've not taken him on yet.

EZRA (to Fred) You don't see my side of it. Suppose it gets out amongst my mates at the gasworks as it certainly will, a copper in the family. Eh? I'd never live it down.

GEOFFREY. He's not on the force yet, Dad.

EZRA. That's even worse—a bloody failed copper in the family. Come on, chaps, gather round for more ale.

JOE. Did I tell you the tale about the twin Chinamen on their honeymoon?

EZRA. I'll bet there were a right mix-up there. Ha! Ha! Who ever heard of ale giving you a headache, eh?

(ARTHUR sits alone as the MEN gather up L, whispering and laughing. The WOMEN are around the table)

VIOLET. Ee, Mum, it'll seem funny, saying good night to you and Dad and seeing you off.

LIZ (dabbing her eyes) My little girl.

(The MEN whisper and laugh together)

VIOLET. What's up with you, Mum?

LUCY. It's a big moment for a mother, love, her daughter's first night.

LIZ. It brings it all back. Look at her. I can't believe she's married.

MOLLY. She does look young for her age, bless her.

LIZ. I feel there's so much I could have told her, but somehow I never got round to it.

LUCY. It's all there—but you can't get yourself to say it.

VIOLET. It's all in detail in that book I got.

MOLLY. Book! Why, one proper encounter with a chap will tell you more than a dozen books.

LUCY. Aye, there's all the difference in the world between theory and practice in that field, love.

LIZ. It's the hints that count, love—hints that only a mother can give.

MOLLY (whispering to Violet) I'll give you two now—never show pleasure—men are such prudes, see—every one of 'em . . .

LIZ. Not that there ever is much.

MOLLY. Spoken from the heart.

LUCY. Hush up—you're making little Violet embarrassed with your talk.

MOLLY. But never refuse a man point-blank—they take it out of your housekeeping money.

LIZ. That's never been one of my problems.

MOLLY. I see what you mean.

LUCY. Shame on you—you're shocking the little girl.

MOLLY (*looking at Violet*) Ee, doesn't she look bonny when she blushes?

LIZ. She's innocent—although I say it myself as shouldn't. Her dad wouldn't let the *News of the World* into the house.

VIOLET. Mum! You know I can't stand all this sort of talk.

MOLLY. Arthur—you're one of the lucky ones—you've got an innocent wife.

(*ARTHUR decides to join the Men and rises, but a big belly laugh from the group at that moment puts him off. EDDIE sees him react and looks regretful. ARTHUR crosses to the front door L, turns there and catches VIOLET's eye and beckons her to follow him.*)

ARTHUR *exits by the front door. JOE starts to sing "I Wish I Were Single Again"*)

LIZ. See—men don't like to hear it.

MOLLY. It's just that Arthur's way.

LUCY. He's a good lad and he'll make a good husband. I shall miss him when he goes.

(*VIOLET rises and exits quietly by the front door*)

LIZ. She's a good girl—but I'll be glad to see her go. Her and her dad, see, they're on the same wavelength, they have their little jokes together.

(*The MEN join in the singing and it reaches a loud pitch*)

MOLLY. I heard 'em back there. It can make you feel shut out when they play that game.

MEN (*singing*)

"My wife got the fever, Oh then, Oh then,

My wife got the fever, Oh then.

Oh my wife got the fever

And I had to leave her

And I wished I were single again.

Oh I wish I were single again

I wish I were single again.

I wish I were single

My pockets would jingle

My pockets would jingle again.

My wife she did die, Oh then, Oh then . . ."

(*Etc.*)

LUCY. Hy, stop it.

LIZ. Turn it up.

(The singing stops)

EZRA. What's up?

MOLLY. Can't you find a better song for a wedding night?

LIZ. You've driven the poor bridal pair out in the street.

(JOE whispers to Geoffrey and indicates the door up R. GEOFFREY shakes his head)

LUCY. Ezra, sing us one of the old songs—like you used when we were first married.

LIZ. Yes, Mr Fitton, let's hear you sing for a change.

MOLLY. Yes, love, and I'll accompany you.

EZRA. Can you play *Roses*?

MOLLY. I can play owt if you can sing it. *(She crosses to the piano, sits at it and plays the air)*

JOE. I told you she was a good girl at a party.

EZRA. That was my old mate's favourite song. I'll sing it in memory of our friendship. Don't pitch it too high.

(MOLLY plays the introduction clear and well. EZRA stands ready to sing. JOE takes Geoffrey by the sleeve, whispers to him and leads him up R. GEOFFREY nods)

GEOFFREY. I'll turn the light off, Dad—it'll sound sweeter.

FRED. Aye, it's nice is a song in the firelight glow.

EZRA. Help me out, everybody—when I get stuck.

(GEOFFREY switches off the lights and the room is lit by the glow of the fire)

(He sings in an unexpectedly clear tenor voice)

“I'll send thee red, red roses
To tell thee of the morn,
When first amongst the roses
Our happy love was born,
Our happy love was born.
I'll send thee white, white roses,

(JOE and GEOFFREY sneak out of the room and go up the stairs into the bedroom)

To tell thee of the night
The night in all its beauty
With all its dreams and light
The night with all its beauty
With all its dreams and light
With all its dreams and light.

(There is clapping and applause from the others.)

EDDIE follows Joe and Geoffrey up the stairs. JOE and GEOFFREY appear in the bedroom. JOE switches on the lights in the bedroom. The following scene, over the singing, is a silhouetted blend of ballet and mime,

punctuated by shrieks and guffaws from JOE. He picks up the bridal veil and puts it on his head. He takes a flimsy nightdress off the bed and mimics a shy bride with GEOFFREY. The cover is flung off the bed and the mattress is pulled back, then a spanner is waved and they begin to unfasten the bolts on the bed, making signals of silence at their lips. EDDIE enters the room and creeps up on the conspirators. They jump back in alarm. EDDIE tries in vain to prevent them from fixing the bed. During all this the song swells up from below with strong old-fashioned sentiment, the others joining in)

LESLIE. Another verse—and we'll all join in.

ALL. And when thou seest the roses
This will the roses say,
There is no day without thee,
No night when thou'rt away,
No night when thou'rt away.
No day I do not love thee
No night I do not pray
That God will bless and guard thee,
For ever night and day,
That God will bless and guard thee
For ever night and day,
For ever night and day.

(During this last chorus, JOE, GEOFFREY and EDDIE come from the bedroom and into the living-room. EDDIE is last out of the bedroom and switches off the lights. They join in loudly in the song and the cheering and clapping which follows at the end of it)

GEOFFREY. I'll put the light on, Dad. *(He switches on the living-room lights)*

EDDIE. You've a right good voice, Mr Fitton.

EZRA. I had once, lad, in my young days—I'd a fair singing voice, and me and my old mate, Billy Stringfellow, we'd go into any pub in town and challenge the best pair in the place to a singing match.

GEOFFREY. What—sing 'um, Dad, not fight 'em?

FRED. Folk were civilized in them days.

EZRA *(crossing down R)* Billy always wanted to sing 'um first—for pints—but if they were the fighting sort he'd fight 'em just as happily. What a mate! He'd fight whilst he'd breath in his body—or he'd sing.

LUCY *(sharply)* Do we have to bring Billy up tonight?

EZRA. Why shouldn't I bring him up?

LUCY. Because nobody knows him and nobody wants to hear about him.

(MOLLY collects the cup and saucers and puts them on the tray)

GEOFFREY. Who were Billy, Dad?

LUCY. Nobody.

EZRA. Don't say that, Lucy.

GEOFFREY. I was talking to my dad.

LUCY. Yes, and I'm answering for him.

EZRA. Not for the first time, either. I bloody knew him, didn't I?

(EZRA and LUCY look at each other with a certain deep significance.

ARTHUR and VIOLET enter L. VIOLET moves down L. ARTHUR closes the door)

(He looks across and stares at Arthur. To Lucy) And so did you.

LUCY *(rising)* Don't drive me too far—I'm warning you.

(LUCY picks up the tray and exits to the kitchen)

GEOFFREY. He sounds a rum 'un, does Billy.

(LIZ rises and exits to the kitchen.

MOLLY follows her off)

EZRA. A decenter lad never wore shoe leather. And he were the all-time champion at the elbow game.

EDDIE. What's the elbow game, Mr Fitton?

EZRA. A lad of nineteen and he doesn't know the elbow game.
(He rises and moves above the table) Sit thee down, lad, opposite me.
(He sits above the table)

(EDDIE moves and sits R of the table)

Left arm behind. Now take hold of my hand. *(He puts his left arm behind him and rests his right elbow on the table)* Ready?

(EDDIE grabs Ezra's hand and starts forcing with all his might)

(He laughs out loud) It's like a flea pushing.

(EZRA puts on the pressure and EDDIE's hand goes right down. A sudden gay youthfulness has come over EZRA)

EDDIE. Ee, you are strong, Mr Fitton—where do you get it from?

EZRA. Forty years of bloody hard work, lad—that's where I get it from. I'll challenge any of you to the elbow game.

EDDIE. Go on, Geoff—have a go with your dad.

GEOFFREY. Not likely—look at them maulers, they look like a couple of number nine shovels.

EZRA. They kept you for many a year, lad.

(LUCY, LIZ and MOLLY enter from the kitchen. MOLLY moves down R. LUCY goes up C and LIZ stands up R)

EDDIE *(rising)* Your Arthur will lick you, Mr Fitton.

GEOFFREY. Him! Don't talk daft.

JOE. How could Arthur lick him?

ARTHUR *(moving to L of the table)* What's up now?

GEOFFREY. My dad wants to challenge you at the elbow game.

ARTHUR. I don't feel like taking on any challenges tonight.

FRED. 'Course you don't.

GEOFFREY. What, are you chicken?

JOE. He's got enough on his plate.

EDDIE. I bet you could lick him, Arthur.

LIZ. Don't be daft, love, Arthur wouldn't stand a chance with his dad.

EDDIE. He would! I know Arthur's strength—I've wrestled with him.

VIOLET. How do you know he wouldn't have a chance, Mum?

LIZ. He's not got his dad's strength.

VIOLET. Who says he hasn't?

EDDIE. He's got wrists like steel.

EZRA (*rising and looking pointedly at Arthur*) I can't find any challengers.

LUCY. Stop showing off.

(*There is an expectant silence. LESLIE and FRED move to the fireplace*)

LIZ (*breaking it up*) Well, we'll have to be going now, Leslie. Look at the time. (*She crosses to the clothes pegs L*)

LESLIE. Aye, let's be off.

ARTHUR (*nettled*) Come on, I'll take you on.

LUCY. Now don't be silly, the pair of you.

EZRA. I knew you'd stop him.

ARTHUR (*confident*) I'm not stopping. Come on.

EDDIE. Nobody stops Arthur once he sets his mind on something. You lot are going to get a shock.

(*There are supporting murmurs from either side. GEOFF, JOE and LIZ support Ezra. LUCY, VIOLET, MOLLY and EDDIE support Arthur. EZRA sits L of the table. ARTHUR crosses, hangs his jacket on the chair R of the table, and sits*)

GEOFFREY (*moving up L of the table*) Two-to-one on the old chap.

VIOLET (*moving to L of Geoffrey*) I'll take you on.

GEOFFREY. I'll bet you a level half dollar.

EDDIE (*moving behind Arthur's chair*) You've soon brought the odds down.

VIOLET. I'll bet you half a dollar.

EZRA. You'll lose, love.

VIOLET. I won't.

GEOFFREY. Where's your half dollar?

VIOLET (*crossing to Leslie*) Lend me half a crown, Dad. I'll give it to you back after.

LESLIE. Yes, love, but you're backing second favourite. (*He gives Violet half a crown and moves up R of the table*)

(*VIOLET crosses and gives the half crown to Geoffrey*)

FRED. A good young 'un'll always lick a good old 'un.

EZRA. Not this old 'un.

GEOFFREY. Here, Fred, you hold the stakes. (*He takes half a crown from his pocket*)

(*FRED crosses to L of Geoffrey and takes the coins*)

LUCY (*to Arthur*) Don't bother, love.

GEOFFREY. It's only a bit of fun, Mum. Don't interfere.

LUCY. No good ever comes of any challenges between father and son.

EZRA. Are you frightened I'll lick him?

LUCY (*snorting*) Stop showing off! (*She moves to Molly down R*)

EZRA. Gaah!

(ARTHUR and EZRA face each other and set their elbows on the table)

What about a referee?

GEOFFREY. I'll be referee.

EZRA. You will hell as like. (*He sweeps Geoffrey away with a sweep of his hand*)

LESLIE. Here, Fred, you be referee.

FRED. Right. Move back. Let the dog see the rabbit.

(FRED moves above the table and crouches down. The others move in for a better view. VIOLET stands up R of the table. LESLIE stands behind Violet. JOE leans over Fred. LIZ stands L of Joe. GEOFFREY is behind Ezra. EDDIE is behind Arthur. FRED supervises the position of the elbows and grips)

ARTHUR. Steady on, you've got my hand gripped tight already.

EZRA. Well, grip mine.

ARTHUR. How can I? It's buried in your mitt. Here, let me take a proper hold.

EZRA. You've got a proper hold.

LUCY. Let go, can't you! Play fair, bighead.

EZRA. D'you mind—non-players off the green.

FRED. Let go, Mr Fitton. Fair's fair. Right, take an even grip. Are you both satisfied?

(ARTHUR and EZRA take a fresh grip)

EZRA (*to Fred*) Whose side are you on?

FRED. I'm impartial.

EZRA. See as you stay that way.

FRED. What about you, Arthur?

ARTHUR. I'll do.

FRED. Elbows in position? Both ready?

EZRA. Cut the cackle an' let's get on with the contest.

FRED. When I count three you go. One, two, three—go!

(At the word "Go" ARTHUR starts pressing. He forces EZRA's hand down to the table almost at once. There are loud excited cries)

JOE. That was quick!

EDDIE. He's done it! Arthur's won!

EZRA (*grunting*) Not yet, he hasn't. (*But he is set back*)

LUCY. The lad's won.

FRED (*peering*) His knuckles are not touching the table.

EDDIE. Come on, Arthur.

JOE. It's not over yet.

MOLLY. Just that extra bit, Arthur.

GEOFFREY. Hold on a bit, he's not got it touching. (*He peers over Ezra's chair*)

EDDIE (*yelling*) Go on! Go on! Arthur! What did I tell you.

LESLIE. He's won all right.

GEOFFREY. Hold your water. It's not over yet.

LIZ. Go on, Mr Fitton.

LUCY. He can't. He's licked. Right, big show off!

EZRA (*grunting; riled*) I am hell as like. Watch this.

(*The onlookers go silent as EZRA very slowly, with tremendous effort, starts to force ARTHUR's arm upwards. He only just does it*)

JOE (*bursting out*) He's getting up. He's rising.

GEOFFREY. Come on, Dad. Come on.

LESLIE. A new favourite.

VIOLET. Shut up, Dad!

EDDIE. Quick, Arthur, force him down again.

(*LUCY and MOLLY move behind Arthur*)

GEOFFREY. He can't! He can't! He's only a six furlonger.

EDDIE. Wait for it.

(*They all get very excited as the contest evens up. Finally EZRA begins to force ARTHUR's hand back. There is renewed shouting*)

VIOLET. Come on, Arthur—don't let him beat you.

EZRA. He can't help it. He's licked and he knows it.

MOLLY. He's not, you know. Not yet. Come on, Arthur.

JOE. He's going red in the face.

EDDIE. He's turning the tables, Mr Fitton.

FRED. Yes, he's coming back.

LUCY. Go on, Arthur, love.

LIZ. Come on, Mr Fitton.

VIOLET. Arthur! Arthur! Arthur!

(*ARTHUR suddenly gains extra strength and forces EZRA's hand backwards and downwards. There is a breathless pause, broken by LUCY who turns in excitement to Molly*)

LUCY (*with a shout*) Good lad, Arthur. He's won!

EDDIE. Arthur! Come on—come on.

(*EZRA, needled by Lucy's remark, makes a supreme effort. Putting on all his strength he resists the pressure and slowly starts to force ARTHUR's arm towards the table*)

FRED (*shouting*) He's not touching.

(*There are more shouts of encouragement from the onlookers as EZRA puts on more pressure and finally forces ARTHUR's arm down. The knuckles hit the table with a crack. ARTHUR lets out a little cry of pain. There are shouts of approval or sympathy, as the case may be*)

EZRA. You're bloody well licked now!

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