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# BILLY LIAR

A Comedy

by Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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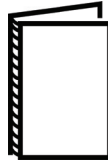


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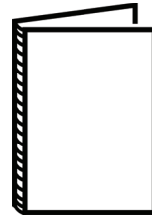
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## **BILLY LIAR**

This play was first presented at the Cambridge Theatre, London, on 13th September 1960, with the following cast:

<b>FLORENCE BOOTHROYD</b>	Ethel Griffies
<b>GEOFFREY FISHER</b>	George A. Cooper
<b>ALICE FISHER</b>	Mona Washbourne
<b>BILLY FISHER</b>	Albert Finney
<b>ARTHUR CRABTREE</b>	Trevor Bannister
<b>BARBARA</b>	Ann Beach
<b>RITA</b>	Juliet Cooke
<b>LIZ</b>	Jennifer Jayne

Directed by Lindsay Anderson

The play is set in Stradhoughton, an industrial town in the north of England in 1960

### **ACT I**

Saturday morning

### **ACT II**

Afternoon of the same day

### **ACT III**

Later the same evening

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

The running time of this play, excluding intervals, is two hours and ten minutes

## PRODUCTION NOTE

Taken at its face value, *Billy Liar* could be produced as a simple comedy about a boy who tells lies. There is, however, much more in it than this and the rewarding production will be the one that realises the strong dramatic theme which lies below the surface. Beneath the comedy runs the story of an imaginative youth fighting to get out of his complacent, cliché-ridden background. The director should not regard Billy as being a freak or a buffoon; the life of fantasy which he lives exists in most people but perhaps Billy's fantasies are nearer to the surface than most. The snatches of fantasy-life which are seen in the play should be directed for reality rather than comedy, and with subtlety rather than with the heavy hand which would take it dangerously near to farce. A production in which Billy is directed purely for laughs in the first two acts will find its audience unprepared to accept the serious content of the third act when Billy, for a time, sheds his final skins of make-believe.

Although Billy is the central character, his importance in the play can be seen only in contrast to his stolid family, and so it is important that his father, his mother and his grandmother should be seen as real persons and not as feeds. Similarly with the three girls it is necessary that Barbara and Rita should not be caricatures but should, in fact, be as real as Liz. On first reading of the text it will be seen that many of the lines are very funny – it must be appreciated however that the same lines are carefully naturalistic. It is this naturalism that the director should aim for in production. It may help the director to read the original novel on which the play was based.

Billy must remember that although he is very different from the rest of his family he is still a member of it. He has the family accent and the family mannerisms. Even when falling into fantasy his accent should not change all that much. For example, in the officer fantasy in Act III, Billy will find that he will get a better effect by being a northern boy trying to

imitate officer-class accents than by being the accomplished actor giving a skilful imitation of an officer. Billy will find that the overall balance of the play hangs largely upon himself and it will be up to him to carry over the difficult transition of the play from Act II to Act III. It is important therefore that Billy's early fantasy scenes are not played as a kind of vaudeville act in an attempt to get as many laughs as possible. Billy must always remember that the purpose of all his fantasy scenes is to give the audience a key to what is going on in his mind.

Geoffrey is a more complex person than the blustering character who appears in Act I. The actor playing Geoffrey might find it helpful to study first the scene in Act II in which Geoffrey tries to make some contact with Billy; he could then build up the character from this point rather than superimpose this facet of Geoffrey's character on a standard blustering performance. The word "bloody" – which Geoffrey uses repeatedly – may give some trouble if it is used as an expletive and not as an unconscious punctuation mark in Geoffrey's dialogue. In the case of some amateur societies where the use of the word at all is likely to give offence, the authors give permission for it to be deleted completely – but not for the substitution of euphemisms such as "ruddy" "blooming", etc.

Alice is probably the least difficult of the characters to assess. She is a simple uncomplicated woman who has set her values many years ago and never re-examines them, not even in the most extraordinary circumstances. In her evaluation of other people's character she can see no further than the externals – personal appearance, manner of speech, etc. But it will be found that the role of Alice is very important for she is, so to speak, the hub of the circle of people we see in this play. All the arguments revolve around her; nothing takes place in the play that will not affect her in one way or another. Alice, for all her soft-centred, self-indulgent outlook is in fact a strong woman and should be cast as such.

Florence is a role which could easily tempt an actress to play a comic cameo without reference to the play at large. Little of Florence's dialogue is sparked off by other characters; she spends most of her time rambling to herself. This is not to say, however, that Florence does not react to what is going on around her. We must feel all the time that she belongs in the family

and we should get the impression that she hears a great deal more than she appears to do. We must not get the impression that her daydreams bear any similarity to Billy's fantasies, for when Florence goes into musings they are confined only to the hard realities of her past.

Barbara, although on one level a stolid, bovine character, is in her own way a fantasist just as much as Billy, for she lives in a woman's magazine world of thatched cottages and tweedy pipe-smoking heroes. Her reaction to Rita arises not too much out of jealousy at a rival as out of revulsion at having to face a side of life not normally on view through her rose-coloured spectacles.

Rita is a difficult character to play in that she has been written deliberately on one note, and a high note at that. The fact is that Rita is a simple, extrovert girl who does not change radically in any given situation. The way in which the actress playing this part should use her skill is in reproducing as accurately as possible the raucous irreverence of this type of working-class girl.

Liz, as can easily be seen, is the character closest to Billy in outlook and temperament. In spite of what we hear about her habits of flitting off from time to time she is not in any way a fey character, but has a down-to-earth quality which she tries to transmit to Billy. Although economically a member of the same class as Billy and his family, she has an outlook transcending its narrow boundaries and lower middle-class traits are not as apparent in her. The most important thing about Liz is that she should radiate warmth and generosity; but in playing her scene with Billy she should remember – as indeed Billy should remember – that this is a scene not about two people in love but two people who are trying to get love from each other.

Arthur is more than a feed for Billy. All ample study of the part will reveal that there is a strong character change in Arthur as the play progresses. He begins in sympathy with Billy and his ideas but, lacking Billy's majestic sweep of vision, he grows jealous and impatient as the play moves along.

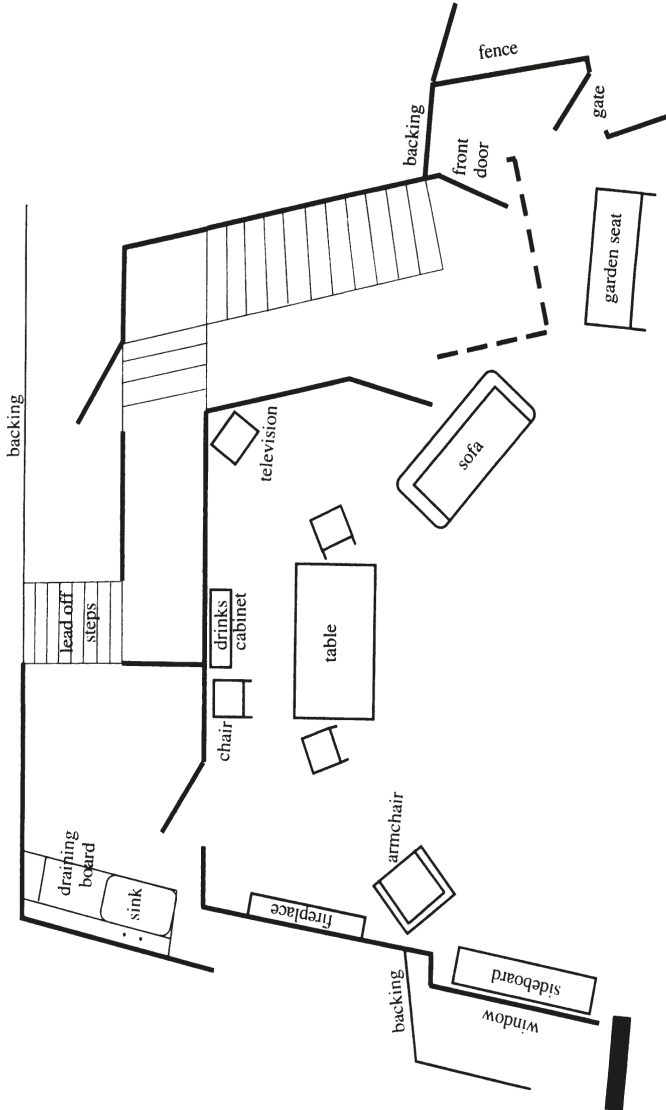
The characters in *Billy Liar* – with the exception of working-class Rita – come from a lower middle-class background in an industrial town. They should not have the broad “Ee bah goom”

accents of a mill town, mining town, or other closed northern community, but the simple broad accents of the provinces.

The lighting of the play is very important, especially in the third act. The lighting follows two conventions: the living room is lit with complete naturalism – standard lamps, overhead light, etc.; but Billy’s garden scene in Act III, where the only natural light is that from the street lamp, gives the producer the opportunity to use his lighting to underline Billy’s escape into a world of fantasy. The best effect, when Billy is discovered alone in the garden, is probably to start the scene in the naturalistic evening light of the garden and then, as Billy begins his “officers and gentlemen” soliloquy, to diminish the lighting gradually until, when we come to the Last Post, Billy is standing in the light of a single spot.

The large set of living room, hall and garden may pose something of a problem on smaller stages. In such cases it is suggested that the garden scenes be played on the bare stage in front of the living room, and the garden seat dispensed with. The lighting, of course, should be appropriately changed.

Keith Waterhouse    Willis Hall





## ACT I

*The set consists of a living room, entrance hall and a section of the garden of **GEOFFREY FISHER**'s house. It is a typical lower middle-class detached house in an industrial town in the north of England. To the left of the stage is the garden containing a small garden seat. The entrance to the house from the garden leads directly into the hallway with stairs going up to the bedrooms. Through the hallway is the living room where most of the action of the play takes place. There is also a door in the living room right, leading into the kitchen. The room is furnished with an uncut moquette three-piece suite and a dining room suite in dark oak. The furniture is quite new, but in dreadful taste – as are also the plaster ornaments and the wall plaques with which the room is over-dressed. Above the fireplace is the usual collection of family photographs on the mantelpiece and above the mantelpiece is a large brass-studded circular mirror. The room also contains a cheap and flashy cocktail cabinet, a large television set and also a sideboard with two cupboards.*

*As the curtain rises we discover **FLORENCE BOOTHROYD** sitting on the couch. She is **ALICE FISHER**'s mother, an old lady in her eighties, who finds it impossible to accustom herself to the modern way of life. She continually talks to herself and when she cannot be heard her lips continue to move. She is in the habit of addressing her remarks to inanimate objects. At the moment she is going through the contents of her large handbag. The handbag is open on her knee and as she takes out each object she examines it and then puts it down on the couch beside her, making*

*a neat display. She has already taken out a few odd possessions and, at the moment, she is holding her old-age pension book. She addresses the sideboard.*

**FLORENCE** I don't know... They haven't stamped my book now... They haven't sent it up. It should have gone up last week but they haven't sent it up. *(She puts down the pension book and takes a white hospital appointment card from her handbag)* That's not right, either. Doctor Blakemore? I've never seen Doctor Blakemore. Which is Doctor Blakemore? I bet it's that black doctor. Else it's the lady doctor. I'm not seeing her. Tuesday? They know I never go on Tuesdays. I've never been on Tuesday yet. Doctor Thorpe said...

*It comes to her that she is alone in the room. Putting down the handbag she rises and crosses slowly and flat-footed to the sideboard. She attempts to open the right-hand cupboard but, discovering it is locked, returns to the couch and again takes up her handbag.*

He's as bad. And she encourages him. He lives in that bed. *(Noting the appointment card on the couch she picks it up)* And where's that crepe bandage they were going to get me. *(She puts down the card)* What's he always keep it locked up for, anyroad? There's neither sense nor reason in that. And she never tells you anything.

**ALICE FISHER, GEOFFREY's wife, enters from the kitchen.** *She is a woman in her middle forties. Both ALICE and her husband have had working-class upbringings, but GEOFFREY's success as a garage owner has moved them up into this new stratum of society. At the moment ALICE is caught up in the normal day-to-day rush of breakfast-time. She is speaking to her husband who is in the kitchen.*

**ALICE** Well, you do what you think fit, Geoffrey. Do what you like – it's no good me saying anything. But I know what I'd do. He still owes you for that last job you did for him.

*ALICE crosses the room towards the hall, ignoring her mother who speaks to her as she passes.*

**FLORENCE** Who's Doctor Blakemore? Which one is that, then? Is that the one you went to?

**ALICE** (*entering the hall, calling up the stairs*) It's time we were having you down, my lad. That bedroom clock's not fast, you know. It's half-past nine turned.

*ALICE turns and enters the living room.*

**FLORENCE** I'll bet it's that black doctor, isn't it? I'll bet it's him.

**ALICE** Who? Blakemore? Yes, I think it is.

**FLORENCE** I'm not seeing him. I shan't go. I shall stop at home.

**ALICE** If they say you've got to see him – you've got to see him, Mother. It's no good arguing. That's all there is to it.

*GEOFFREY FISHER enters from the kitchen. He is a tall man in his early fifties. He is carrying a few invoices and, crossing and seating himself in an armchair, he begins to go through them.*

**FLORENCE** They caused all that bother on the buses in Birmingham. And Egypt. Mau-Mau. I make no wonder Eden's always so badly. And him upstairs. He's just as bad. I think it's time his father talked to him. I don't know why he puts up with it. I can't understand why he lets him carry on like that.

**GEOFFREY** (*looking up from the invoices he speaks to ALICE. In his speech he uses the adjective "bloody" so frequently that it becomes completely meaningless*) It's all right you talking, Alice, you don't understand. I've got no bloody choice. I can't turn work away.

**ALICE** I've said what I've got to say. I'm not saying anything. I'm keeping out of it.

FLORENCE They let him carry on just as he likes. I wouldn't. I'd see to him.

GEOFFREY Where's his bloody lordship, then?

FLORENCE I'd tell her. She lets him lead her on. She wants to go up to him with a wet dish-cloth and wring it over his face. That'll get him up.

GEOFFREY He wants a bloody good hiding.

FLORENCE ...that'd move him...

ALICE I've shouted him three times.

FLORENCE ...that'd shift him...

GEOFFREY It's every morning alike.

FLORENCE ...he'd have to get up then.

GEOFFREY You let him do just as he likes!

*ALICE takes up the poker and a small shovel from the fireplace and crosses into the hall.*

ALICE (*calling up the stairs*) Billy! ...Billy! (*She bangs the poker against the shovel*) I shan't tell you again. If I come up there you'll know about it! I suppose you know what time it is! Your boiled egg's stone cold and I'm not cooking another.

FLORENCE She lets him do just as he likes.

GEOFFREY Go up to him. Go up and kick him out. He's bloody idle!

*ALICE returns into the living room and places the poker and shovel back into the fireplace.*

ALICE It's all right you sitting there. You don't stand need to talk. You haven't emptied them ashes yet.

FLORENCE She wants to go up to him. I would. (*She is now returning the objects to her handbag and pauses when she comes to the appointment card*) It's a mystery to me

about that crepe bandage. I know I had it. It's in this house somewhere.

**GEOFFREY** You can't put anything down in this house. Not without somebody bloody shifting it. And who keeps taking my invoices out of that vase? Somebody bloody does.

**FLORENCE** He ought to see that window's properly locked every night. He never bolts that back door properly. It wants doing. There's all sorts moving around when it gets dark.

**BILLY FISHER** *begins to come down the bedroom stairs. He is nineteen years old and slightly built. He is wearing an old raincoat over his pyjamas. He is smoking a cigarette.*

**ALICE** Is that him? He's stirred himself at last, then. I'll see what his breakfast is doing.

*ALICE goes out to the kitchen as BILLY reaches the foot of the stairs. BILLY takes the morning paper from behind the door and enters the living room.*

**FLORENCE** She lets him do just as he likes.

**BILLY** *(reading aloud from the paper)* Cabinet Changes Imminent.

**GEOFFREY** Yes, and you'll be bloody imminent if you don't start getting up on a morning.

**BILLY** Good morning, Father.

**GEOFFREY** Never mind bloody good mornings. It's bloody afternoon more like. If you think your mother's got nothing better to do than go round cooking six breakfasts every morning you've got another think coming.

**FLORENCE** She lets him do what he wants.

**BILLY** *(ignoring his father he turns and bows, acting out the situation to his grandmother)* Your servant, ma'am.

**GEOFFREY** And you stop that bloody game. I'm talking to you. You're bloody hopeless. And you can start getting bloody well dressed before you come down in the morning.

**FLORENCE** He wants to burn that raincoat. He wants to burn it. Sling it on the fire-back. Then he'll have to get dressed whether or no.

**BILLY** I gather that he who would burn the raincoat is Father and he who should get dressed of a morning is my good self. Why do you always address all your remarks to the sideboard, Grandmother?

**GEOFFREY** (*almost rising from his chair*) Here, here, here! Who do you think you're bloody talking to? You're not out with your daft mates now. And what time did you get in last night? If it was night. This bloody morning, more like.

*ALICE enters from the kitchen.*

**BILLY** I really couldn't say. 'bout half-past eleven, quarter to twelve. Good morning, Mother.

**GEOFFREY** More like one o'clock, with your bloody half-past eleven! Well, you can bloody well start coming in of a night-time. I'm not having you gallivanting round at all hours, not at your bloody age.

**BILLY** Who are you having gallivanting around, then?

**GEOFFREY** And I'm not having any of your bloody lip. I'll tell you that, for a start.

**ALICE** What were you doing down at Foley Bottoms at nine o'clock last night?

**BILLY** Who says I was down at Foley Bottoms?

**ALICE** Never mind who says, or who doesn't say. That's got nothing to do with it. You were there - somebody saw you. And it wasn't that Barbara you were with, either.

**FLORENCE** He wants to make up his mind who he is going with.

**GEOFFREY** He knocks about with too many lasses. He's out with a different one every night. He's like a bloody lass himself.

**BILLY** Well, you want to tell whoever saw me to mind their own fizzing business.

**ALICE** It is our business – and don't you be so cheeky. You're not old enough for that.

**FLORENCE** If she's coming for her tea this afternoon she wants to tell her. If she doesn't I will.

**BILLY** I suppose that she who's coming for her tea is Barbara and she who wants to tell her is Mother and—

**ALICE** I've told you – shut up. I'm going to tell her, don't you fret yourself. You've never played fair with that girl. Carrying on. I'm surprised she bothers with you. You shouldn't mess her about like that. One and then the other. That's no way to carry on. I know where you'll finish up – you'll finish up with none of them – that's where you'll finish up.

**GEOFFREY** He'll finish up on his bloody ear-hole. I'm not having him staying out half the night. Not at his age. He's not old enough. He'll wait till he's twenty-one before he starts them bloody tricks. I've told him before, he can start coming in of a night or else go and live somewhere else.

**BILLY** Perhaps I will do.

**ALICE** (*ignoring him*) I can't understand that Barbara – why she does bother with you. Are you supposed to be getting engaged to her or aren't you?

**GEOFFREY** He doesn't know who he's bloody getting engaged to.

**FLORENCE** He wants to make his mind up.

**ALICE** (*ignoring GEOFFREY and FLORENCE*) Because she's not like these others, you know. That time I saw you in the arcade with her she looked respectable to me. Not like that Liz or whatever her name is. That scruffy one you reckoned to be going about with. Her in that mucky skirt. Do you ever see anything of her still?

**GEOFFREY** He sees so many bloody lasses he doesn't know who he does see.

**FLORENCE** He wants to make his mind up – once and for all. He wants to make his mind up who he is going with.

**BILLY** I haven't seen Liz for three months.

**ALICE** Well, who were you with then? Down at Foley Bottoms? Last night?

**BILLY** Rita.

**GEOFFREY** Who the bloody hell's Rita?

**FLORENCE** She wants to see that he makes his mind up.

**ALICE** I shall tell Barbara this afternoon – I shall tell her, make no mistake about that.

**GEOFFREY** He's never satisfied with what he has got – that's his bloody trouble. He never has been. It's ever since he left school. It's ever since he took that job – clerking. Clerking for that undertaker – what kind of a bloody job's that

**BILLY** Perhaps I might not be doing it much longer.

**GEOFFREY** You what?

**ALICE** What do you mean?

**BILLY** I've been offered a job in London.

**GEOFFREY** (*turning away in disgust*) Don't talk bloody wet.

**ALICE** How do you mean? A job in London? What job in London?

**BILLY** (*taking a crumpled envelope from his raincoat pocket*) What I say, I've been offered a job in London. Script-writing.

**GEOFFREY** Bloody script-writing.

**ALICE** What script-writing?

**GEOFFREY** Script-writing! He can't write his bloody name so you can read it. Who'd set him on?

**BILLY** (*proudly*) Danny Boon.

ALICE Danny who?

BILLY (*going into a slow, exasperated explanation*) I told you before. Boon. Danny Boon. I told you. He was on at the Empire the week before last. When he was there I told you. I went to see him. I went to his dressing-room. I took him some of my scripts. Well, he's read them. He's read them and he likes them. And he's sent me this letter. He's offered me a job in London. Script-writing. Danny Boon. The comedian. He's been on television.

FLORENCE (*addressing the television*) It's always boxing; boxing and horse shows.

ALICE (*ignoring her*) Danny Boon? I don't remember ever seeing him.

GEOFFREY No, and neither does anybody else. It's another of his tales. Danny Boon! He's made him up.

ALICE What kind of a job?

BILLY I've told you. Script-writing.

GEOFFREY It's like all these other tales he comes home with. He can't say two words to anybody without it's a bloody lie. And what's he been telling that woman in the fish shop about me having my leg off? Do I look as though I've had my leg off?

BILLY It wasn't you. It was Barbara's uncle. She gets everything wrong - that woman in the fish shop.

ALICE You'll have to stop all this making things up, Billy. There's no sense in it at your age. We never know where we are with you. I mean, you're too old for things like that now.

BILLY (*displaying the letter*) Look - all right then. I've got the letter - here. He wants me to go down to see him. In London. To fix things up. I'm going to ring up this morning and give them my notice.

ALICE You can't do things like that, Billy. You can't just go dashing off to London on spec.

**GEOFFREY** (*disparagingly*) He's not going to no bloody London. It's them that'll be ringing him up, more like. You'll get the sack – I'll tell you what you'll get. What time are you supposed to be going in there this morning, anyroad?

**BILLY** I'm not. It's my Saturday off this week.

**GEOFFREY** You said that last bloody week. That's three bloody weeks in a row.

**BILLY** I got mixed up.

**GEOFFREY** I've no patience with you. (*He places the invoices in his pocket and rises from his chair*) Anyway, I've got some work to do if you haven't.

**ALICE** Are you going in towards town, Geoffrey?

**GEOFFREY** I'm going in that direction.

**ALICE** You can drop me off. I'm going down as far as the shops.

**GEOFFREY** I can if you're not going to be all bloody day getting ready. I'm late now.

**ALICE** (*crossing towards the hall*) I'm ready now. I've only to slip my coat on.

*ALICE goes out into the hall and puts on a coat which is hanging on the rack. GEOFFREY turns to BILLY.*

**GEOFFREY** And you can get your mucky self washed – and get bloody dressed. And keep your bloody hands off my razor else you'll know about it.

**FLORENCE** (*raising her voice*) Is she going past Driver's? 'Cause there's that pork pie to pick up for this afternoon's tea.

**ALICE** (*entering the living room*) I'm ready. I'll call in for that pie. (*To BILLY*) Your breakfast's on the kitchen table. It'll be clap cold by now.

**GEOFFREY** (*crossing towards the door; turning for a final sally at BILLY*) And you can wash them pots up when you've finished. Don't leave it all for your mother.

ALICE I shan't be above an hour, Mother.

*ALICE and GEOFFREY go out through the hall and into the garden. BILLY goes into the kitchen.*

FLORENCE I shouldn't be left on my own. She's not said anything now about the insurance man. I don't know what to give him if he comes.

*ALICE and GEOFFREY are moving down the garden.*

GEOFFREY I'm only going as far as the lane, you know. I don't know why you can't get the bloody bus.

*ALICE and GEOFFREY exit.*

*BILLY enters from the kitchen He is carrying a cup and a teapot.*

BILLY I can't eat that egg. It's stone cold.

FLORENCE There's too much waste in this house. It's all goodness just thrown down the sink. We had it to eat. When I was his age we couldn't leave nothing. If we didn't eat it then it was put out the next meal. When we had eggs, that was. We were lucky to get them. You had to make do with what there was. Bread and dripping.

BILLY *(sitting down, pouring himself a cup of tea)* Do you want a cup of tea?

FLORENCE And if you weren't down at six o'clock of a morning you didn't get that.

*BILLY drinks and grimaces.*

BILLY They don't drink tea in London at this time of a morning. It's all coffee. That's what I'll be doing this time next week.

FLORENCE Sundays was just the same. No lying-in then.

*BILLY and his grandmother are now in their own separate dream-worlds.*

**BILLY** Sitting in a coffee-bar. Espresso. With a girl. Art student. Duffel coat and dirty toe-nails. I discovered her the night before. Contemplating suicide.

**FLORENCE** If you had a job in them days you had to stick to it. You couldn't get another.

**BILLY** (*addressing his imaginary companion*) Nothing is as bad as it seems, my dear. Less than a week ago my father felt the same as you. Suicidal. He came round after the operation and looked down where his legs should have been. Nothing.

**FLORENCE** We couldn't go traipsing off to London or anywhere else. If we got as far as Scarborough we were lucky.

**BILLY** Just an empty space in the bed. Well, he'll never be World Champion now. A broken man on two tin legs.

***BILLY** slowly levers himself out of his chair and limps slowly and painfully around the room leaning heavily against the furniture.*

**FLORENCE** (*addressing **BILLY** in the third person*) He's not right in the head.

***BILLY** realises he is being watched and comes out of his fantasy.*

I wouldn't care, but it makes me poorly watching him.

**BILLY** (*rubbing his leg and by way of explanation*) Cramp.

**FLORENCE** He wants to get his-self dressed.

***ARTHUR CRABTREE** enters the garden and approaches the front door. He is about the same age as **BILLY**. He is wearing flannels, a sports coat and a loud checked shirt. He pushes the doorbell which rings out in two tones in the hall.*

*As **BILLY** crosses to answer the bell.*

He shouldn't be going to the door dressed like that.

**BILLY** *opens the door and, together with ARTHUR, goes into a routine – their usual way of greeting each other. ARTHUR holds up an imaginary lantern and peers into an imaginary darkness.*

**ARTHUR** *(in a thick north-country accent)* There's trouble up at the mill.

**BILLY** *(also in a thick north-country accent)* What's afoot, Ned Leather? Is Willy Arkwright smashing up my looms again?

**ARTHUR** It's the men! They'll not stand for that lad of yours down from Oxford and Cambridge.

**BILLY** They'll stand for him and lump it. There's allus been an Oldroyd at Oldroyd's mill and there allus will be.

**ARTHUR** Nay, Josiah! He's upsetting them with his fancy college ways and they'll have none of it. They're on the march! They're coming up the drive!

**BILLY** Into the house, Ned, and bar the door! We've got to remember our Sal's condition.

*They enter together and march into the living room where they both dissolve into laughter.*

**FLORENCE** Carrying on and making a commotion. It's worse than Bedlam. Carrying on and all that noise. They want to make less noise, the pair of them.

**ARTHUR** Good morning, Mrs Boothroyd.

**FLORENCE** He wants to make less noise and get his-self dressed.

**BILLY** Do you want a cup of tea, Arthur? I'm just having my breakfast.

**ARTHUR** You rotten idle crow! Some of us have done a day's work already, you lazy get.

**BILLY** Why aren't you at work now?

**ARTHUR** Why aren't you at rotten work, that's why I'm not at work. Come to see where you are. They're going bonkers at the office. You never turned in last Saturday either.

**BILLY** Isn't it my Saturday off this week?

**ARTHUR** You know rotten well it isn't.

**FLORENCE** (*getting up from the couch*) They're all idle. They're all the same. They make me badly.

**FLORENCE** *crosses the room and disappears up the stairs into the bedroom.*

**BILLY** I could say I forgot and thought it was.

**ARTHUR** You can hellers like. You said that last week.

**BILLY** Tell them my grandad's had his leg off.

**ARTHUR** You haven't got a rotten grandad. Anyroad, I can't tell them anything. I'm not supposed to have seen you. I've come up in my break. I'm supposed to be having my coffee. I'm not telling them anything. I'm having enough bother as it is with our old lady. What with you and your lousy stories. Telling everybody she was in the family way. She's heard about it. She says she's going to come up here and see your father.

**BILLY** Cripes, she can't do that! It was only last night I told him she'd just had a miscarriage. She's not supposed to be up yet.

**ARTHUR** What the hell did you tell him that for?

**BILLY** I hadn't any choice. My mother was going to send a present round for the baby.

**ARTHUR** The trouble with you, cocker, is you're just a rotten pathological liar. Anyway, you've done it this time. You've dropped yourself right in with not coming in this morning.

**BILLY** I can get out of that. I'll think of some excuse.

**ARTHUR** There's more to it than that, matey. Shadrack's been going through your postage book.

**BILLY** When?

**ARTHUR** This morning, when do you think? There's nearly three rotten quid short. All there is in the book is one stinking lousy rotten threepenny stamp and he says he gave you two pound ten stamp money on Wednesday.

**BILLY** Fizzing hell! Has he been through the petty cash as well?

**ARTHUR** Not when I left. No. Why, have you been fiddling that as well?

**BILLY** No, no... I haven't filled the book up, though.

**ARTHUR** And he was going on about some calendars – I don't know what he meant.

**BILLY** *(crossing to the sideboard)* I do. *(He takes a small key from his raincoat pocket and opens the right-hand cupboard. As he does so a pile of large envelopes fall out on to the carpet followed by a few odds and ends)* There you are, Tosh, two hundred and sixty of the bastards.

**ARTHUR** What?

**BILLY** Maring calendars.

**ARTHUR** *(crossing and picking up an envelope from the floor)* What do you want with two rotten hundred and sixty calendars? *(Reading the address on the front of the envelope)* "The Mother Superior, The Convent of the Sacred Heart!" *(He tears open the envelope and takes out a large wall calendar illustrated with a colourful painting of a kitten and a dog. Reading the inscription)* "Shadrack and Duxbury, Funeral Furnishers". These are the firm's! "Taste, Tact and Economy". You skiving nit! You should have posted these last Christmas.

**BILLY** Yes.

**ARTHUR** Well, what are they doing in your sideboard cupboard?

**BILLY** I never had enough stamps in the postage book.

**ARTHUR** You think that postage money's part of your bloody wages, don't you? (*He bends down and sorts through the pile of papers on the floor*) Why do you keep them in there?

**BILLY** It's where I keep all my private things.

**ARTHUR** (*picking up a small package*) Private things! A naffing crepe bandage! (*He throws down the package and picks up a piece of blue notepaper*) What's this then?

**BILLY** (*making a grab for the letter*) Gerroff, man! Give us that here! That's personal!

**ARTHUR** (*evading BILLY's hand*) What the hell are you writing to Godfrey Winn for?

**BILLY** It's not me. It's my mother.

**ARTHUR** (*reading the letter*) "Dear Sir, Just a few lines to let you know how much I enjoy "Housewives' Choice" every day, I always listen no matter what I am doing, could you play 'Just a Song at Twilight' for me." That's a turn-up for the top ten! She isn't half with it, your old lady! (*Reading*) "I don't suppose you get time to play everyone that writes to you, but this is my favourite song. You see my husband often used to sing it when we were a bit younger than we are now. I will quite understand if you cannot play. Yours respectfully Mrs A. Fisher." So why didn't you post this then?

**BILLY** I couldn't be bothered. (*He makes a further attempt to grab the letter*) Give us it here!

**ARTHUR** (*holding him off*) "P.S. My son also writes songs, but I suppose there is not much chance for him as he has not had the training. We are just ordinary folk."

**BILLY** (*snatching the letter and tossing it into the cupboard*) I'm not ordinary folk even if she is. (*He crams the envelopes containing the calendars back into the cupboard*) I keep trying to get rid of them. It was bad enough getting them out of the office.

**ARTHUR** How long have they been here?

**BILLY** Not long. I used to keep them in that coffin in the basement at work. You can't get rid of the fizzing things! It's like a bloody nightmare. They won't burn. I've tried tearing them up and pushing them down the lavatory – all they do is float.

**ARTHUR** Makes no difference what you do with them. Duxbury's on to you. He knows about them.

**BILLY** (*stuffing the last of the calendars into the cupboard and locking the door*) Oh well...so what. He knows what he can do with his calendars. I don't give a monkey's. I'm leaving. I've got another job.

**ARTHUR** Leaving?

**BILLY** I'm going to ring him up this morning and give him my notice.

**ARTHUR** Yes, and we've heard that one before.

**BILLY** No, straight up. I'm going to London.

**ARTHUR** What as – road-sweeper?

**BILLY** (*grandiloquently*) Ay road sweepah on the road – to fame! (*He returns to his normal voice*) I've got that job with Danny Boon.

**ARTHUR** You haven't!

**BILLY** Yes – script-writer. Start next week.

**ARTHUR** You jammy burk! Have you though, honest?

**BILLY** Yeh – course I have. It's all fixed up. He sent me a letter. Asking me to work for him.

**ARTHUR** What's he paying you?

**BILLY** A cowing sight more than I get from Shadrack and flaming Duxbury's.

**ARTHUR** What? Counting the postage?

**BILLY** What's it to you? This is it for me, boy! Success! "Saturday Night Spectacular!" "Sunday Night at the Palladium!" Script by!

**ARTHUR** Ta-ra-ra-raaaa!

**BILLY** Billy Fisher! Directed by!

**ARTHUR** Ta-ra-ra-raaaa!

**BILLY** William Fisher! Produced by!

**ARTHUR** Ta-ra-ra-raaaa!

**BILLY** William S. Fisher!

**ARTHUR** Ta-ra-ra-raaaa!

**BILLY** A W. S. Fisher Presentation! "Mr Fisher, on behalf of the British Television Industry, serving the needs of twenty million viewers, it gives me great pleasure to present you with this award, this evening, in recognition of the fact that you have been voted Television Script-writer of the Year - for the seventh year running."

**ARTHUR** (*picking up a vase from the sideboard he places it in BILLY's hands*) Big-head.

**BILLY** (*returning the vase to the sideboard*) Rot off. You wait and see.

**ARTHUR** (*taking a small bottle of tablets from his trouser pocket*) So you won't be needing these now, then, will you?

**BILLY** What's them?

**ARTHUR** Passion pills. What I said I'd get for you.

**BILLY** (*taking the bottle incredulously*) Let's have a look, mate. (*He opens the bottle and is about to swallow one of the tablets*) What do they taste like?

**ARTHUR** Here, go steady on, man! They'll give you the screaming ab-dabs.

**BILLY** (*returning the tablet to the bottle*) How did you get hold of them?

**ARTHUR** From a mate of mine who got demobbed. He brought them back from Singapore.

**BILLY** I'll bet they're bloody aspirins.

**ARTHUR** Do you want to bet? You want to ask this bloke, tosher.

**BILLY** How many do you give them?

**ARTHUR** Just one. Two two-and-nines at the Regal, a bag of chips and one of these and you're away. Who's it for anyway?

**BILLY** Barbara... Bloody hell!

**ARTHUR** What's up?

**BILLY** She's supposed to be coming round this morning.

**ARTHUR** I thought it was this afternoon? For her tea?

**BILLY** (*placing the bottle of tablets on the sideboard*) No, I've got to see her first. Our old man'll go bald if he sees her before I've had a word with her. She thinks he's in the Merchant Navy.

**ARTHUR** You what?

**BILLY** (*crossing hurriedly towards the hall*) On petrol tankers. (*He indicates the tea things*) Shift them into the kitchen for me. Shan't be a tick.

*BILLY runs up the stairs in the hall and into his bedroom.*

*ARTHUR picks up the teapot and goes into the kitchen. He re-enters and crosses to the sideboard where he picks up the bottle of tablets.*

*BILLY appears at the top of the stairs with his clothes in his hands.*

*BILLY moves down the stairs and enters the living room.*

*ARTHUR replaces the tablets on the sideboard.*

ARTHUR What time's she supposed to be coming?

BILLY (*dressing hastily*) Quarter of an hour since. Where's them passion pills?

ARTHUR On the sideboard. You're not going to slip her one this morning are you?

BILLY Why not? I'm pressed for time, man. I'm going out with Rita tonight.

ARTHUR Well, what about your grandmother?

BILLY Oh, she's spark out till dinner time.

ARTHUR I've lost track of your rotten sex life. Which one are you supposed to be engaged to, anyway?

BILLY That's what they call an academic question.

ARTHUR Well, you can't be engaged to both of them at once, for God's sake.

BILLY Do you want to bet?

ARTHUR Crikey! Well, which one of them's got the naffing engagement ring?

BILLY Well, that's the trouble. That's partly the reason why Barbara's coming round this morning—if she did but know it. She's got it. I've got to get it off her. For Rita.

ARTHUR What for?

BILLY Ah, well... You see, she had it first – Rita. Only I got it from her to give to Barbara. Now she wants it back. I told her it was at the jeweller's – getting the stone fixed. There'll be hell to pay if she doesn't get it.

ARTHUR The sooner you get to London the better.

BILLY (*tucking his shirt in his trousers and slipping on his jacket*) Are you sure them passion pills'll work on Barbara? She's dead from the neck down.

ARTHUR You haven't tried.

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