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CHESHIRE CATS

A Play

by Gail Young

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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ISBN 978-0-573-11081-8

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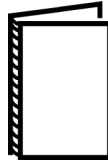


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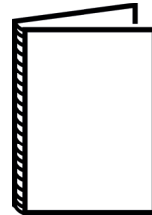
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gail has directed and acted with community theatre groups for many years in the Chester and Wirral area of north-west England. She turned her hand to writing in 2005, and took her first full-length play *Cheshire Cats* to the Edinburgh Fringe in 2006 with Guilden Sutton Players. The production, a 'Fringe Sell Out Show 2006', was published by Samuel French in 2011, and has subsequently been performed worldwide, translated into other languages and toured abroad. Her second full-length play *Bothered and Bewildered* was a sell out at the Forum Studio Theatre in October 2014 with Tip Top Productions, was published by Samuel French in the spring of 2015, and is being performed up and down the UK and abroad. Her latest full-length play, *Bouncing Back*, premiered at The Forum Studio Theatre in June 2016 to enthusiastic full houses, and focuses on the world of women returners to the sport of netball. All three plays are full-length comedy dramas with a social conscience, and focus on problems and issues that face women, families and friends in modern times. See www.gailyoungplaywright.com for more information on all of Gail's work.

INTRODUCTION

Grown women, aching feet and heaving bosoms! Follow the girls' emotional journey as they aim to speedwalk their way to fundraising success in the London Moonwalk while also enjoying a girly weekend away in the capital. Trainers and wildly decorated bras are in, high heels and designer labels out – but a last-minute substitute to the team doesn't meet the physical criteria! This play is a comic tribute to all those who participate in and marshal the Moonwalk and other charity walking events everywhere. As so many people nowadays participate in such events worldwide, audiences identify very quickly with both the story and the characters.

The play has been successfully staged with minimal setting and props in both small village halls and much larger venues. It was originally written and performed as an ensemble piece for eleven people, but to accommodate smaller casts, and to allow for the financial constraints that often face professional theatrical productions, the script has been revised so that it can be performed either as an ensemble piece or with a cast of just six with some doubling and trebling of parts. To accommodate both cast sizes there are two versions of Act III in the script. I love the ensemble version as it is more fun for all!

The original title of *Cheshire Cats* echoed the name of the walking team in the script, and I directed and acted alongside fellow members of Guilden Sutton Players in the very first performances in Guilden Sutton Village Hall (near Chester) in November 2005. The Players were a fundraising tour de force, and we took it to the Edinburgh Fringe in August 2006 to raise funds for Walk the Walk and to support their launch of the Edinburgh Moonwalk that summer. The play was a 'Fringe Sell Out Show 2006' with Claire Black reviewing it in *The Scotsman*, stating that "this is a genuinely funny and even touching ensemble piece".

To date all performing groups have admirably raised considerable funds to donate to a cancer-related charity or hospice of their choice. My sincere hope is that this charitable approach will continue in all future productions. I know that you will have a lot of fun with the play.

Break a leg,

Gail Young

For more information visit www.cheshirecats.org.uk

Samuel French has been asked by Walk the Walk Worldwide to include this notice with copies sold and productions licensed of *Cheshire Cats* by Gail Young.

Walk the Walk Worldwide (WTW) is a charity registered in Scotland which operates throughout the world, raising money and awarding grants in relation to medical research and care. WTW runs a number of fundraising events, most notably the MoonWalk and the SunWalk.

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As the MoonWalk provided the original inspiration for *Cheshire Cats* it would be wonderful if performing groups followed the playwright's example by making a donation to the Walk the Walk charity. Do check out the WTW website for further information and really great ideas on how to maximise the fundraising potential of your production.

WTW can also provide a wonderful handy hire box of props that will make your production look absolutely authentic and save your Director and props folks a lot of time!

The following link will take you directly to the play specific page and contact information:

walkthewalk.org/CheshireCats



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CHESHIRE CATS

First performed by Guilden Sutton Players at Guilden Sutton village hall in November 2005, and subsequently performed at the Edinburgh Fringe in August 2006 and the Gateway Theatre, Chester, November 2006. Performed in the published ensemble format at the Forum Studio Theatre, Chester, by Tip Top Productions, April 2011, with the following cast of characters:

VICKY	Gwen Cowan
MAGGIE	Emma Careless
HILARY	Pippa Redmayne
SIOBHAN	Alison Pritchard
YVONNE	Tiz Corcoran
ANDREW	Richard Cannon
AEROBICS INSTRUCTOR	Jessica Martin
RON	Martin Fraser
MADGE	Maureen Shakeshaft
HANDSOME DRUNK	Richard Taylor
POLICEMAN	Richard Taylor
RADIO VOICE	Eric Jones
STATION ANNOUNCER	Simon Johnson
MARSHALS	Eric Jones, Dave Pearce, Olivia Gough, Fiona Paterson

Directed by Gail Young
Produced by Sarah Green

CHARACTERS

HILARY, bombastic, middle-aged team leader/organiser.

SIOBHAN, caring and diplomatic. Old friend of Hilary.

YVONNE, overworked/overweight stressed-out mum and friend of Hilary.

MAGGIE, overweight younger mum.

VICKY, artistic, fit, glamorous middle-aged divorcee.

ANDREW, trim toyboy.

AEROBICS INSTRUCTOR, may be played by person playing

Andrew in the version of the play for six characters.

HANDSOME DRUNK, may be played by person playing Andrew in the version of the play for six characters.

MADGE, elderly cockney marshal, can double up with the person playing Siobhan or Hilary in the version of the play for six characters.

ETHEL, elderly cockney marshal, can double up with the person playing Siobhan or Hilary in the version of the play for six characters.

Additional characters for the ensemble version of the play:

POLICEMAN, can double with **HANDSOME DRUNK** if required.

RON, elderly cockney marshal, married to Madge.

MARSHALS, between two and five needed.

PHOTOGRAPHERS, at least two needed, preferably male.

RADIO VOICE

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I Training: A park.

ACT II Travelling: Chester train station/a train.

ACT III Walking: London.

ACT IV Returning: Chester train station.

Time – the present

ACT I – TRAINING

A rural area.

The only items on stage are four pink chairs representing a park bench set centrally. Traffic noise in the background and birdsong can be heard.

The lights come up on MAGGIE and VICKY jogging gently on the spot and performing stretching exercises. VICKY is dressed to kill in tight sporting Lycra; MAGGIE is dressed in a baggy t-shirt and tracky bottoms to hide her bulges.

VICKY (*exercising confidently and expansively as she talks*) The others should be here soon, Maggie. They did promise firmly that they would be here at this time. Ten a.m., Hilary said. The last time I met them here I arrived— (*Pointing to her watch*) —on the dot, and had to put up with truck drivers whistling at me... (*She stops as she fondly remembers the attention*) ...Amongst other things... (*She resumes exercising*) ...while I was warming up for half an hour, while waiting for them all to arrive.

MAGGIE (*tentatively copying VICKY's stretching exercises*) I was so pleased when your sister Chloe rang and asked me if I wanted to be in the team, Vicky. I told her how much I want to lose weight since I've had the baby! I thought she would be here today – is everything all right with her little one?

VICKY Teething problems with the baby, that's all – she'll be at the next practise walk so don't worry. Anyway – I'll look after you today...

MAGGIE I don't think I've ever been in a team for anything, you know. Sport was never my strong subject at school...
(She laughs nervously)

VICKY *(carrying on with a variety of seductive-looking stretching exercises)* Well – I knew you wanted to get into better shape – and with this you can get fit, lose weight—and raise money for a good cause at the same time. Are you still going to the Pilates classes at the leisure centre?

MAGGIE *(still copying VICKY and exercising as best she can)* Not so much now...it all got a bit confusing. What with all that clenching your buttocks and concentrating on your front, middle and back bottoms, I just couldn't get my head round it half the time, never mind me muscles... I mean to say – the things you were asked to clench. I found it all a bit distracting. And it was difficult to keep it up at home with the kids jumping all over me while I was in the middle of a pelvic floor exercise...

VICKY Well – never mind that now – forget all that clenching and get stretching! The stretching is very important, you know. It doesn't matter how fit you are, if you don't warm up properly then you can really have problems later in the walk. Now come on, I haven't seen you stretch your spine yet. *(She demonstrates as she talks MAGGIE through the exercise)* Bend down ever so slowly – stretching those finger tips all the way down, just touch your toes, and then come up very slowly. Just try and stretch your back a little bit – loosen up your spine.

MAGGIE *(on her way slowly down)* I do tend to find this difficult, you know. I suffer terribly from a bad back since I've had the baby. I know the walking helps it, but... It can just go, you know – just like that... *(Her head reaches her knees)*

VICKY *lowers her head to her own knees for the second time.*

VICKY *(looking across at MAGGIE)* Really? You'd never know.

MAGGIE *(with her head still down; solemnly)* Thank you.

VICKY Now come up slowly. *(She straightens up like a trained dancer)*

MAGGIE *remains static with her head between her knees.*

Well, perhaps not that slowly.

Pause. MAGGIE does not move.

You can straighten up a bit faster, you know...

MAGGIE I would if I could... *(She stays down - her back has gone)*

VICKY Don't tell me...

MAGGIE *(with her head still down)* Yes - just like that.

VICKY Oh dear - let me help you straighten up...

She helps MAGGIE to straighten her back up. The back clicks into place.

MAGGIE Aaah, that's better...

VICKY *(speed - walking around with an exaggerated technique to encourage MAGGIE to move)* Just walk around a bit. That's it... Get your arms moving...that's right.

MAGGIE *follows with a less than impressive technique.*

VICKY *stops and observes.*

Now - there's a definite technique to how you should use your arms when you're speed-walking, you know. It's all to do with the blood flow. It stops your fingers getting fat while you walk...

MAGGIE *(with a nervous laugh that should become a behavioural tic when she is nervous)* Sounds good to me - slim fingers to start with and then hopefully the rest of me will follow suit...

VICKY Tell you what - we'll have a little practice at speed-walking before the others get here. Just copy me - you'll soon get the hang of it - a good pace - here we go.

VICKY *carries on briskly demonstrating the speed-walking technique. Maggie struggles behind her to both keep up and master the technique. VICKY is unaware of this.*

MAGGIE *(walking, talking, and struggling for breath)* I'll be fine on the walk. Honestly. Walking is fine. It's just when I have to bend down or sit for a long time. I must admit I am a bit nervous, though, thirteen miles is a long way – you know – walking the equivalent of half a marathon. It's not something I do every day! *(She gives a nervous laugh that turns into a struggle for breath)*

VICKY *(speed-walking)* Neither do I! But it's all in a good cause, all for charity isn't it? We'll all stick together on the night, you'll see. And look on the bright side. We're only doing the half marathon in London. A lot of people do the full one – I just don't know how they manage it.

MAGGIE *(very out of breath now but still gamely following VICKY)* I'm just a bit concerned that I won't keep up with the team, that's all. After all, London is a big place isn't it? I'm just afraid I'll get left behind on the embankment. *(Laughing nervously)* I don't mind walking the streets for charity, but if I get left behind some folk might think I'm walking them for some other reason... *(She gives an exhausted attempt to laugh again as she collapses in a heap on the bench, completely shattered by the warm up)*

VICKY *(stopping)* Look – it's not a race – it's a walk for charity. It doesn't matter how long the team takes as long as we all finish. That's what our team is all about, looking after each other, all pulling together.

MAGGIE *(standing)* Thanks, Vicky... I'm really looking forward to meeting all the others now. You're right, we'll be just one big team all pulling together. Oh, it's going to be great. Really fun... *(She starts to laugh but visibly jumps as she hears Hilary's voice bellowing offstage)*

HILARY (*offstage; shouting*) COME ON, SIOBHAN, FOR GOD'S SAKE KEEP UP WILL YOU, IT'S IMPORTANT WE—

HILARY *strides into view at this point, not noticing VICKY and MAGGIE.*

– ALL KEEP ON TARGET, YOU KNOW. REMEMBER. I'M THE PACEMAKER FOR THIS TEAM AND I DON'T WANT ANY STRAGGLERS! WE'RE NOT IN THIS JUST FOR FUN, WE'RE IN IT TO WIN!

HILARY *turns and strides to VICKY, checking her own watch as she does so. The constant checking of her watch for her walking speed is a behavioural tic of HILARY's.*

Hi, Vicky, sorry we're a little later than promised but we decided to walk to the meeting point today rather than drive – an extra couple of miles a day at this stage of the game really helps to reduce those overall minutes per mile.

VICKY (*diplomatically*) Hi, Hilary. This is Maggie – remember? Replacing Veronica in the team...

HILARY *enthusiastically turns to MAGGIE, firmly shakes her hand, very jolly hockey sticks.*

HILARY Oh, Maggie. It's great to meet you at last. Vicky said you'd agreed to be in the team when Veronica dropped out due to gout. It is so good of you to fill in for her at this late stage of the training. You know Vicky's sister Chloe don't you? She said you might be interested.

MAGGIE (*timidly*) Yes, that's right. We've kept in touch since we had our babies.

HILARY (*proudly*) Well, I'm Hilary, Team organizer. (*She smiles at MAGGIE, suddenly checks her watch, lets go of MAGGIE's hand abruptly, and marches to shout off stage again*) GET A BLOODY MOVE ON! I KNOW IT'S UPHILL BUT COME ON, WILL YOU!

SIOBHAN *enters at a good walking pace, with an excellent speed-walking technique, but sweaty and out of breath.*

SIOBHAN (*collapsing on the bench*) I'm here, I'm here. You can stop bellowing now.

VICKY Hilary! Calm down. You sound like a flaming sergeant major. I know you're the team organiser but for goodness' sake, tone it down a bit will you?

SIOBHAN The pace is a bit quick today, I'm knackered already.

HILARY Oh all right, all right, less of the whingeing. Oh, by the way, Siobhan, have you met Maggie? She's a friend of Chloe's, and she's kindly agreed to take Veronica's place in the team.

MAGGIE *shyly waves to* **SIOBHAN**.

SIOBHAN (*waving, exhausted*) Hello there, Maggie. Glad you could make it.

There is a quick mental head count by **HILARY** *and she interrupts* **SIOBHAN**.

HILARY Hold on, hold on...we're one short. Where's Yvonne? I thought she was behind you, Siobhan.

SIOBHAN So did I. Mind you, it was all a bit of a blur because I was marching that bloody fast to keep up with you.

VICKY, SIOBHAN and MAGGIE *all go and look off stage into the distance for* **YVONNE**.

VICKY Can you see her?

MAGGIE God, where do you think she's got to?

SIOBHAN I think she must have turned right when I turned left at the crossroads. She's never had a strong sense of direction.

HILARY *is visibly impatient as the girls continue to look for* **YVONNE**.

(gently calling) Yvonne, Yvonne!

VICKY I'm a bit worried about her. These country lanes can be really lonely.

MAGGIE I know, I know.

SIOBHAN Do you think we should go back to that last T-junction, Hilary?

VICKY (*louder*) Yvonne, Yvonne.

VICKY }
 SIOBHAN } (*slightly louder; together*) Yvonne, Yvonne...
 MAGGIE }

HILARY (*bellowing*) YVONNE ... YVONNE!

The others wince at the volume.

YVONNE limps on unnoticed from the opposite side of the stage. She sits down on the bench and gingerly takes off her shoe and sock on her foot. She has a blister on her heel. She calmly observes the others shouting for her.

SIOBHAN }
 MAGGIE } (*together*) Yvonne, Yvonne...
 VICKY }

HILARY YVONNE. YVONNE!

SIOBHAN We might have to shout a little bit louder. She could be some way away—

HILARY (*interrupting and deafening SIOBHAN*) YVONNE! Oh for Christ's sake, she must be able to bloody well hear us.

YVONNE (*calmly interrupting*) All right, all right! I can bloody well hear you. So much for walking round some (*quoting HILARY*) "quiet country lanes". (*She examines the blister, wincing*) My heel is absolutely killing me...

All except HILARY are relieved to see YVONNE, and gather round her clucking like mother hens.

SIOBHAN (*chief mother hen, sitting alongside YVONNE on the bench*) You poor thing. Now come on, Yvonne, let's have a look at that. My God, look at the size of the blister! How long has that been hurting you? That's right, hold your foot right up so I can see the damage.

VICKY That does look ever so sore.

YVONNE It is.

HILARY looks impatient, and she checks her watch yet again.

SIOBHAN You should have shouted up that you had a blister and couldn't keep up. We're all in this together, remember. We're a team.

MAGGIE Blisters. Ugh! They can be really nasty can't they?

VICKY (*dramatically*) Do you know, I can remember the last time I had a blister. I wore new shoes for a day out at the races – killer heels! I was on my feet the whole time, and I was absolutely crucified by the end of the day by an awful blister just like that one.

SIOBHAN Has anyone got any plasters with them at all?

MAGGIE (*eager to please her new companions*) Yes, I've got some in my bum bag – hang on – just let me get them out for you. I thought I'd be the one getting a blister today. (*Laughing nervously*) What size do you need? (*She produces an astonishing array of plasters of differing sizes from her bum bag*). We haven't met have we, Yvonne? My name's Maggie, I'm a friend of Chloe's, Vicky's sister. I'm new to the team.

VICKY She's taking Veronica's place.

YVONNE Oh yes, that's right. Well, it's nice to meet you, Maggie, and thanks for coming so well prepared today. I've never seen so many plasters.

YVONNE *selects the biggest plaster and hands it to*
SIOBHAN.

That one will do nicely.

SIOBHAN It looks miles too big.

YVONNE It's not for me, you fool, just do me a favour and stick it over Hilary's big gob will you?

MAGGIE giggles nervously. **HILARY** glares at **YVONNE**. **SIOBHAN** diplomatically ignores **YVONNE**'s request and solemnly assesses the size of the plasters by holding them up against **YVONNE**'s heel.

SIOBHAN Mmm, no, no. That's still too big.

The rest of the girls - except HILARY - echo SIOBHAN's assessment of the plasters by murmuring "too big, yes too big".

Nooooo, that's too small.

Again the others echo agreement "too small - yes - far too small".

(pleased) Yes...now that one looks just—

HILARY *(loudly interrupting)* "Yes, that one looks just right!" It's like Goldilocks and the Three Bears. For God's sake, it is just a blister. She hasn't broken her foot or anything!

VICKY Oh, Hilary! You wouldn't like it if you had a blister like that, would you?

SIOBHAN *applies the plaster to YVONNE's heel.*

HILARY No I would not, and neither did you, Vicky, when you wore your new shoes to the races did you? There is a price to be paid when you're breaking new shoes in, isn't there? *(She snatches up YVONNE's discarded trainer from the floor)* Because the problem with new shoes is that they do rub, and so do new trainers, don't they, Yvonne?

HILARY *turns and stares pointedly at YVONNE, holding the new trainer aloft like a piece of evidence in a court case.* **SIOBHAN** and **VICKY** *gasp loudly as an unwritten law has been broken.* **MAGGIE** *looks confused.*

YVONNE Guilty as charged, me lud! I know we agreed that all new trainers must be broken in at least a month before the walk in London but my old ones are so naff, and I want

to look good. I don't go to London every week, and I just want to look nice.

YVONNE looks to HILARY for forgiveness which is not forthcoming.

It's not a crime is it?

HILARY No, it is not a crime, Yvonne, but it means we have incidents like this. *(She points to her watch)* We have now lost at least ten minutes, and we were aiming for a personal best today. But look on the bright side, at least it has happened today and not in London.

HILARY *dismissively tosses the trainer to YVONNE.*
YVONNE *scrabbles to catch it.*

SIOBHAN Yvonne, don't worry. I don't know about everyone else but I needed a breather just then.

VICKY Hilary, I think you're losing sight of the fact that this walk is about raising money for a breast cancer charity. I know it's a power walk, but it's the taking part and raising the money that is important, not how fast we walk.

SIOBHAN Vicky is right. The target should really be how much money we can raise as a team. It's been great that you've got us all so fit doing all these walks, but the real objective is to raise money.

YVONNE And it's a girlie weekend away in London for us all as well. A bit of fun. We agreed that when we decided to do it after doing the Race for Life and the Starlight walk last year. You said yourself that it would be good for us all to get away for a weekend. I know that it's nice to get some personal satisfaction from a fast time, but it's not the be-all and end-all is it? I just want to have a good time and look nice as well. I don't go to London every day...

She runs out of steam and looks to the group for support. They all loudly agree and glare at HILARY accusingly.

HILARY (*peevied*) All right, ladies. I've got the message, I have got the message! I know I'm only the group organiser. I know I'm only the one who has completed all the paperwork, booked the hotel in London, sorted out the team training programme and the train tickets...but hey, what do I know? Obviously nothing!

She stomps away, turns her back on the others and folds her arms. The rest of the group exchange looks. There is an awkward silence. The rest of the group silently encourage YVONNE to mend the rift. YVONNE rises to her feet and limps to HILARY, still minus one shoe and sock.

YVONNE (*soothingly*) Now come on, Hilary – don't get in a strop. This is all my fault, I just couldn't resist these trainers, and you have to admit— (*She holds the offending trainer up to HILARY's face*) —they are quite snazzy!

HILARY Well, considering they are new, they absolutely stink.

YVONNE (*sniffing the trainer*) Yes, they can pong a bit on a hot day, can't they?

HILARY shows no sign of softening. YVONNE looks anxiously back at the others who silently encourage her to persevere.

Oh come on, Hilary, you know we all appreciate the effort you've put into this, we really do.

YVONNE raises her hand behind HILARY's back to encourage the others to verbally agree. The group loudly voice their agreement.

SIOBHAN Of course we do.

VICKY We couldn't have managed all the training without you.

HILARY visibly relaxes momentarily.

YVONNE But you can be a bit of a hard taskmaster sometimes.

HILARY's back stiffens and she folds her arms again. **YVONNE** looks furtively at the group for silent advice. **VICKY** mimes putting her arm round **SIOBHAN**, hugging her in a comradely manner and silently urges **YVONNE** to do the same to **HILARY**.

(grasping **HILARY** round the shoulder as best she can) Look, we have all got a lot further to walk today, and we need you to...well...show us the way, for starters. I've got a terrible sense of direction, and you are our team leader, aren't you? All groups need a leader and you're ours. After all – you told us all you were at the initial team meeting, didn't you?

HILARY nods in agreement. She is weakening now. The tension drops. She smiles at **YVONNE**.

Great. Now come on, you explain the rest of the route for today while I put my trainer back on.

HILARY (returning to leader mode) Now, we have got another eight miles to walk today.

YVONNE winces and pauses at this thought as she limps back to the group.

So, if that is going to be a problem for you, Yvonne, please say so now, and we will come up with another route for this morning.

YVONNE (sitting back down on the bench to put on her shoe and sock again) No. No. The plaster will help a lot, I know. Perhaps if I walk at a slightly slower pace with...say... Maggie, as she is new to the training?

MAGGIE (thrilled to be asked to walk at a slower pace, nodding agreement vigorously and rushing to **YVONNE's** side) Yes, yes, that's a great idea, Yvonne. A great idea. I don't think I could manage the full pace this morning. (Laughing nervously) A stroll to the paper shop is more my style normally. So, yes, yes, yes please Yvonne, that's fine with me. Wonderful. Absolutely fine! (She laughs nervously)

VICKY (*placing herself alongside MAGGIE*) I'll walk at Yvonne's pace as well, and give her a lift home afterwards when I drop Maggie off. So don't worry about us lot, Hilary, just tell me the rest of the route.

HILARY (*appeased*) OK, OK. Now, the route we are doing today is the same as we did on Tuesday morning. The circular route that ends up back here. Can you all remember that?

SIOBHAN Oh yes, I remember. The one that goes past those lovely new barn conversions, and then you turn right at the T-junction, and then left after the bridge over the canal? (*She is off on a tangent now, and chats away in a leisurely manner to the group*)

HILARY *looks on.*

Do you know, those barns have such great kerb appeal. The landscaping is *soooo* inventive. And they are very reasonably priced, and beautifully finished inside. Lovely internal doors. The worktops are all granite in the kitchen, oak wood floors throughout, gorgeous bathrooms, and the landscaping is first class, really imaginative, beautiful decking and—

All the group except HILARY are totally engrossed in this welcome diversion from speed walking and are murmuring interest.

HILARY (*interrupting loudly*) Oh, for God's sake, Siobhan. Since you got that part-time job at that estate agent's your life is just a series of new property developments. Can we get back to the route, please? Yvonne. Have you got your mobile on you?

YVONNE Yes.

HILARY OK – so if you get lost again give me a buzz on mine straight away and I will redirect you.

YVONNE Fine, fine.

HILARY Right, folks, that sorts out the team split for this morning. So now it's time for the fun bit of the morning – the team strip!

Excited girly noises from the group. VICKY purposefully steps up alongside HILARY.

We all know that Vicky came up with the idea for this outfit when the team name was agreed, so hopefully it's going to reflect the name—

SIOBHAN (*interrupting HILARY's flow*) I bet it's good, Vicky, you're soooo creative.

MAGGIE Yes. That last art exhibition you staged at the village hall was absolutely fantastic. (*Bashfully*) When I went to see it with Chloe it inspired me to sign up for the Access course in art that I'm doing now...

VICKY (*touched by MAGGIE's admiration*) Really, Maggie? You never mentioned that before.

MAGGIE I know. (*Clasping her hands together and looking at VICKY adoringly*) Well, it's true. I'd really love to be an art teacher like you, it must be so satisfying.

VICKY Aaah, Maggie. (*She goes to MAGGIE and gives her a hug*) I feel really honoured that you've told me that. It's so sweet.

HILARY (*utterly exasperated at this further turn in the conversation, dragging VICKY away from MAGGIE*) For goodness' sake, can we have the mutual art appreciation session another time please! Right...the team strip for the walk...now girls, it is really important that we all wear the same outfit on the day as it will help us keep tabs on where we are in the crowd. Remember this is a huge event – with masses of other walkers, there will be thousands of them...

VICKY returns to HILARY's side to resume her role as model for the team strip. The others sit like an appreciative audience.

You'll all remember that we wrote our suggestions for the team name on a piece of paper and put it in a hat didn't we, ladies? And the name that was drawn out was...?

HILARY looks towards the main group like a primary school teacher expecting a group response.

ALL (*enthusiastically*) The Cheshire Cats!

HILARY Well done, girls. Very appropriate as we—

VICKY (*interrupting HILARY*) As we're all dead catty!

The girls all laugh, except HILARY.

HILARY (*in a matter-of-fact tone of voice*) Well, I was going to say as we all live in Cheshire, but if the cap fits!

VICKY is now bowing to the others in true luvvy style. There is good-natured heckling from the others, e.g. "Can't wait to see it", "Get your baps out", etc. HILARY is unimpressed and hushes them.

Vicky will try the team strip out today to make sure it is practical.

Group comments and noises start again.

After all, we will be wearing it while walking a half marathon through the streets of London, and it is really important that it's comfortable and...

The rest of the group are now shouting encouraging but lewd remarks to VICKY. VICKY is loving every minute and strutting centre stage like a seasoned stripper.

(*giving up trying to control the group at this point*) Oh, I give up. Here for your approval is Vicky's design.

The stripper theme tune plays with the group joining in. VICKY obliges by doing a comic strip that ends in her taking the tracksuit top off to much whooping and hollering. She also has a tail and ears in her bum bag and long slinky black gloves to add to the outfit and

her bra has been dressed up to look like a cat's face – she is Catwoman personified. SIOBHAN jumps up and goes to VICKY to admire the costume. The others fall about laughing, except HILARY who sits stunned and bemused.

SIOBHAN God, Vicky. That is *sooooo* cool, really feminine. You look fantastic – just like Catwoman!

VICKY Thanks, Siobhan. It's not expensive. I've bought enough of all the bits for everyone – so I thought we could have a girly night at my house and all bring our bras, and have a few glasses of wine while we have a joint sewing night. You know, a bit of a team bonding session.

HILARY (*standing up, looking horrified*) More like team bloody bondage you mean! We'll end up looking like a load of hookers if we wear that through the streets of London at midnight.

SIOBHAN Oh don't be such a flaming prude, Hilary. There will be loads of marshals and security guards along the route, and all the other teams will be wearing suggestive outfits as well. It is to raise cash for a breast cancer charity after all. My sex life could do with a bit of spicing up at the moment anyway. My hubby is away on business such a lot lately – if I get mistaken for a hooker I'll just consider it my lucky night.

YVONNE, MAGGIE, SIOBHAN and VICKY all chat. HILARY sits down and takes a local map from her bumbag, a small book, and a pen to check out the route and mileage for the day and to add it to her diary of walks.

YVONNE I'll have to get scaffolding put in my bra – I'll need it welded together to look as good as Vicky...

MAGGIE Do you know, I'll have to tone up my tummy muscles if we're wearing that on the night. I don't think I can get away with that outfit, folks – too much flab on show! (*She looks concerned*)

VICKY (*reassuringly*) Now don't worry – there's always a solution to disguising the flab. I'll give you a buzz to organize the group sewing night and we'll get it sorted.

MAGGIE (*appreciatively*) Thanks.

SIOBHAN (*still maternally checking VICKY's outfit over*) Now, are you sure that it won't chafe on the skin, Vicky? You are going to have to really check your boobs and your shoulders over at the end of this walk today to see whether or not those eyes and whiskers have rubbed on your skin or not.

VICKY I have used the softest of materials because of that, Siobhan, and... (*She pauses dramatically, minces over to HILARY; in a suggestive tone of voice*) ...loads of Vaseline... in all the right places.

HILARY (*looking up from her map of the area*) Oh shut up, will you. Bloody nymphomaniac...

VICKY I wish.

YVONNE Vicky! You have become sex-mad since you got divorced.

VICKY Do you know, the truth is that I can't remember the last time I had sex, so all of my frustrated sexual tension has gone into *this*. (*She dramatically indicates her outfit*)

YVONNE Still no man on the scene then?

VICKY (*coyly*) No. Well, I say no, but I did meet a really nice guy recently.

SIOBHAN You sly thing not telling us! Where? Where? Come on, tell all!

VICKY At my little niece's christening of all things. He's an old school friend of Terry, my brother-in-law. It was a big event – Chloe and Terry's first baby and all that. And there he was.

Lighting changes to a pool of light on one side of the stage where ANDREW will enter. The rest of the cast freeze. There is the sound of the christening party going on in the background.

ANDREW enters with two flutes of champagne.

VICKY walks over to ANDREW – still in her Catwoman outfit.

ANDREW Hi.

VICKY Hi.

ANDREW Sorry I took so long to fetch you a drink. I've just been having my ear bent by Terry's mum. She hasn't seen me since Terry and I shared a house together at university, so we've just had a bit of a catch up. Time flies doesn't it?

VICKY Oh don't worry. Thanks for offering to fight your way to the drinks table for me.

She takes a glass from ANDREW. They sip the champagne and there is a pause while they eye each other up.

ANDREW Chloe didn't tell me she had such a gorgeous older sister.

VICKY I'm not surprised. She never liked me meeting her men friends.

ANDREW No?

VICKY No. Well, I had bigger boobs than her in our youth and she's never got over it really.

ANDREW stares at VICKY's bust and hastily corrects his line of vision.

ANDREW Sorry.

VICKY For what?

ANDREW Well, you know, now that you've mentioned it, I've gone and...erm...stared.

VICKY At what?

ANDREW Your boobs, I mean cleavage – sorry – dress. Christ, I can't believe I've just said that! You'll have to forgive me.

I'm out of practise, chatting up women. It's been a while. Sorry... Well, I'd better go and mingle then. It's...er...been nice to meet you, Vicky. Apologies again for the boob—sorry, I mean gaffe...yes, well...perhaps we'll bump into each other again some time. *(He turns to go)*

VICKY When's that, then?

ANDREW Pardon?

VICKY "Some time". If you're asking a girl out you'll have to be more specific than that.

ANDREW Oh...really? Yes...you're right. I will. Well...if it's OK with you I'll give you a buzz when I'm next in town.

VICKY I'll look forward to it. *(She hands him her empty glass)*
In the meantime make yourself useful and get me a refill, will you. All this talk about my body has made me quite thirsty.

ANDREW *(laughing)* Bossy little thing, aren't you? It's a good job that I like dominant women.

ANDREW *walks offstage.*

VICKY *watches him go intently - she is still standing in the spotlight.*

VICKY *(turning to the audience she smiles and confides in them, speaking in verse).*

He is sooo cute, a handsome guy!

A bit too young? But tell me why

Am I hung up about his youth?

I think the time has finally come to face the truth

And say I really *really* fancy younger men,

And I don't want to be a flaming mother hen!

But folk would talk...and say I'm bad...

A naughty girl...a little sad...

And all because I want a bit of fun
 With someone young enough to be my son!
 You know – an older man would really see no harm
 In having a young chick upon his arm
 A little minx, a bright young thing...
 That really rings his ding-a-ling.

She thinks and then growls to herself seductively.

Equality for all, that's what I say,
 For I do feel the older man has had his day
 And younger men are sooo sublime—
 I actually think it's cougar time!
 Youths of today love older vamps,
 So I'll allow my inner tramp
 To surface at long last – in a *nice* way
 – and ask that buff young man if he can play
 A big cat game...and if he's sure...
 Well then we'll find a place where we can really roar!
 Equality for all, that's what I say,
 For I do feel the older man has had his day
 Why waste my time?
 I really really know it's cougar time!

She thinks to herself and growls.

And that young man is soooooo sublime!
 This definitely is my cougar time!

She growls to herself.

The lights snap back up on the scene with the girls.

HILARY (*loudly breaking the moment*) Talking of your sister,
 where is she today? This is the second training walk she's

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