

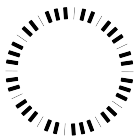
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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

CALENDAR GIRLS

by Tim Firth

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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CALENDAR GIRLS was first produced by David Pugh Ltd in Chichester Festival Theatre on 5th September 2008. The play transferred to the Noël Coward Theatre, London, on 4th April 2009. Directed by Hamish McColl, Designed by Robert Jones, Costume Design by Emma Williams, Lighting Design by Malcolm Rippeth, Music by Steve Parry, Sound Design by John Leonard. The cast was as follows:

CORA Elaine C Smith
CHRIS.....Lynda Bellingham
ANNIE..... Patricia Hodge
JESSIE Siân Phillips
CELIA Gaynor Faye
RUTH..... Julia Hills
MARIE..... Brigit Forsyth
BRENDA HULSE Joan Blackham
JOHN Gary Lilburn
ROD Gerard McDermott
LADY CRAVENSHIRE Joan Blackham
LAWRENCE..... Carl Prekopp
ELAINE Abby Francis
LIAM Carl Prekopp

CHARACTERS

CHRIS – 50, You want Chris at your party. She will talk to people she doesn't know, find things to say to fill silences and generate laughter. Part of this is because Chris is at home in crowds, holding court, being the centre of attention. Without Chris in her life, Annie would be better behaved, her life less fun. The two of them are like naughty schoolgirls. Ideal car—cares, as long as it's a cabriolet. Ideal holiday—Algarve.

ANNIE – 50s, Annie will join in mischief but is at heart more conformist and less confrontational than Chris. After Chris has put a waiter's back up in the restaurant, Annie will go in and pour calm. The mischievousness Chris elicits saves Annie from being a saint. She has enough edge to be interesting, and enough salt not to be too sweet. Ideal car—who cares, as long as it's reliable. Ideal holiday—walking in English countryside.

Together these two are greater than the sum of their parts. They would be lesser humans had they not met each other. Each is spiritual mustard to the other's meat.

CORA – around 40, Cora's past is the most eclectic, her horizons broadened by having gone to college. This caused a tectonic shift with her more parochial parents. She came back to them pregnant and tail-between-legs, but Cora has too much native resilience to be downtrodden. She is the joker in the pack, but never plays the fool. Her wit is deadpan. It raises laughter in others, but rarely in herself. Her relationship with her daughter is more akin to that between Chris and Annie. Cora doesn't need to sing like a diva but must be able to sing well enough to start the show with Jerusalem and sing the snatches of other songs required. The piano keyboard can be marked up to enable her to play basic chords should she not be a player. Ideal car—who cares, as long as the sound system is loud. Ideal holiday—New York.

JESSIE – late 60s/70s, Get on the right side of Jessie as a teacher and she'll be the teacher you remember for life. Get on the wrong side and you will regret every waking hour. A lover of life, Jessie doesn't bother with cosmetics – her elixir of life is bravery. Jessie goes on rollercoasters. Her husband has been with her a long time and is rarely surprised by her actions. Jessie bothers about grammar and will correct stallholders regarding their abuse of the apostrophe "s". Ideal car—strange-looking European thing which is no longer manufactured. Ideal holiday—walking in Switzerland or Angkor Wat.

CELIA – age anything 35–50, The fact that Celia is in the WI is the greatest justification of its existence. A woman more at home in a department store than a church hall, she may be slightly younger than Chris or the same age, but she always feels like she's drifted in from another world. Which she has. She is particularly enamoured of Jessie, and despite the fact Jessie has very little time for most Celias of this world, there is a rebelliousness in Celia to which Jessie responds. It's what sets Celia apart from the vapid materialism of her peer group and made her defect. Ideal car—Porsche, which she has. Ideal holiday—Maldives, where she often goes.

RUTH – 40s, Ruth's journey is from the false self-confidence of the emotionally abused to the genuine self confidence of the woman happy in her own skin. Ruth is eager to please but not a rag doll, and despite being Marie's right-hand woman she is desperate to be the cartilage in the spine of the WI and keep everyone happy. She has spine herself—if she was too wet, no-one would want her around. But they do, and they feel protective of her because they sense there is something better in Ruth than her life is letting out. They are proved right. Ideal car—at the start, whatever Eddie wants; at the end, whatever she wants. Ideal holiday—at the start wherever Eddie is, at the end wherever he isn't. **THE RABBIT COSTUME:** Ruth made this last night. It should be a cocktail of good intention and not enough time.

MARIE – 50s, Marie has gradually built the current 'Marie' around herself over the years as a defence mechanism. She went to her Oz, Cheshire, and found Oz didn't want her. She came back scorched. The WI is a trophy to her, which justifies her entire existence. There is a lingering part of Marie that would love to be on that calendar. Ideal car—something German and well-valeted. Ideal holiday—a quasi-academic tour of somewhere in Persia advertised in a Sunday Supplement which she could then interminably bang on about.

JOHN – Annie's husband, 50s, John is a human sunflower. Not a saint. Not a hero. Just the kind of man you'd want in your car when crossing America. When he dies it feels like someone somewhere turned a light off.

ROD – Chris's husband, 50s, You have to be a certain kind of guy to stick with Chris and Rod loves it. He can give back what he gets, and has a deadpan humour which has always made Chris laugh. He drinks a lot but never so much as to have a problem. He would work every hour to make his shop a success. And John was his mate, even though the relationship was originally channelled through their wives.

LAWRENCE – late 20s, Hesitant without being nerdy, Lawrence is a shy young man with enough wit to make a joke and enough spirit to turn up at the WI hall in the first place. When he arranges the shots he is close to female nudity but sees only the photo.

LADY CRAVENSHIRE – 60s, Lady Cravenshire really doesn't mean to be so patronising. But the WI girls seem from another world. The world of her estate workers. **DRESS:** when she makes an entrance, she must make an entrance. Largely white or cream to outplay the others, with a bigger hat than Marie. She is not a tweed-wearer. She must glide in like a galleon.

ELAINE – 20s, Elaine really doesn't mean to be so patronising. But Jessie seems from another world. The world of her gran. **DRESS:** her clinical whites slice through like a knife. You feel you could cut yourself on that dress.

LIAM – late 20s, Liam would like to be directing other things than photoshoots for washing powders. He's not so unprofessional as to let it show, but we can sense a slight weariness at having to deal with these women. There's a resigned patience to his actions and each smile he makes we feel is professional. For Liam, this photoshoot is a job. And not the job he wanted. **DRESS:** Avoid wearing shades inside a building. If you've gone down that route, you've made the weary boy a wideboy.

ACCENTS

The women of the real calendar in truth came from many parts of the country. Actors should resist the pressure to perform any kind of Yorkshire pyrotechnics. Nothing compromises the truth of comedy like a slavish attention to vowel-sounds and diphthongs. It will become a pebble in the shoe. If you can fatten the "a" so that giraffe no longer rhymes with scarf then that will be more than sufficient; but even that should not be championed over the intrinsic rhythm of the line. People travel. Communities are now gloriously multi-instrumental. We've had accents from Glasgow to Texas make the same part their own.

SETTING

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action takes place in Knapeley village, Yorkshire, in the church hall and on top of a nearby hill (John's hill), and at the annual WI conference in London

ACT I

Scene One	The church hall, autumn
Scene Two	The following winter
Scene Three	The following spring
Scene Four	John's hill, early summer
Scene Five	The church hall, later that summer
Scene Six	Night, a few days later

ACT II

Scene One	The WI conference, London
Scene Two	The church hall, the following day
Scene Three	A few days later
Scene Four	A few days later
Scene Five	Later the same day
Scene Six	The next day
Scene Seven	Late summer
Scene Eight	John's hill, half an hour later

TIME

The present

AUTHOR'S NOTES

A WORD ON NUILITY

As in the best traditions of vaudevillian fan dances, the art of the play's nudity lies in what is withheld. The choreography of this sequence is best described as "fabulous concealment". Should we see anything we oughtn't, the whole scene will deflate like a soufflé on which the oven door has been opened too quickly. Also beware—the music cues in the scene are vital as they maintain the build of euphoria in the room, especially over the set-up of the piano pose.

Tim Firth

REVISIONS TO THE TEXT

This edition of *Calendar Girls* has been revised by the author since its first printing in 2010. Please note that this is the definitive version which should be used in amateur performance.

MUSIC ON HIRE

Please note the music for Act One, Scene Six is mandatory, and available from Concord Theatricals as part of your licence.

Licensees are free to create their own music for the remainder of the underscoring. This can quite happily be the sound of a solo (and often not-too well-tuned) piano such as one that might be found in a village hall. However, if licensees wish to augment with further instrumentation, they should keep the piano as a key musical feature so as always to root the music to the village hall.

A licence to produce *Calendar Girls* does not include a performance licence for any third-party or copyrighted music. Licensees should create original compositions or use music in the public domain..

PRODUCTION NOTE

Where characters speak over the top of one another, a forward slash indicates where the overlapping speech begins.

BILLING REQUIREMENT

The following credits should appear in all programmes for the production:

Based on the Miramax motion picture by

Juliette Towhidi and Tim Firth

Such credit must be no less than 50% of the size of the credit to the Author and shall appear immediately under the Author's credit. Such credit will appear in all programmes and house boards for live stage productions of the Play. Such credit, excluding the writers' names, will also appear in all advertising in which the Author is billed (excluding the appearance of the Author's name in a critic's quote), and excluding award and congratulatory advertisements in which only the honourees are billed.

CALENDAR GIRLS was first presented by David Pugh Ltd at Chichester Festival Theatre on 5th September 2008.

CALENDAR GIRLS transferred to the Noël Coward Theatre, London on 4th April 2009.

Associate Producer: Stoneface Ltd.

Calendar Girls is dedicated to the real Calendar Girls,
Angela Baker, Tricia Stewart, Ros Fawcett, Chris Clancy,
Beryl Bamforth and Lynda Logan.

Also to the real John, John Baker,
the real Lawrence, Terry Logan,
and the real May Wilkinson, May Wilkinson.

ACT I

Scene One

(The church hall, Knapeley Village, Yorkshire. Autumn.)

(There is a piano with a stool next to it and a CD player on top of it, a coat stand with coats hung on it, shot glasses and a covered box. In it are five fir cones sitting on miniature “stools” in white “jackets” with “microphones”, decorated to look like a boyband. A mirror hangs on one wall. There is a front door, a door leading to the kitchen area (off stage) and a serving hatch that open outwards from the kitchen area. There is also a megaphone, a slide projector and six chairs. A badminton court is marked out on the floor.)

(In the blackout, a solo female voice sings [“JERUSALEM”].)

CORA. *(Singing.)*

AND DID THOSE FEET IN ANCIENT TIME
WALK UPON ENGLAND'S MOUNTAINS GREEN
AND WAS THE HOLY LAMB OF GOD
ON ENGLAND'S PLEASANT PASTURES SEEN?

(The lights come up to reveal a gang of women all doing the “Heaven and Earth” t'ai chi motion—following CHRIS, early fifties, at the front.)

AND DID THE COUNTENANCE DIVINE
SHINE FORTH UPON OUR CLOUDED HILLS?
AND WAS JERUSALEM BUILDED HERE
AMONG THOSE DARK SATANIC MILLS?

(Trying with varying success to copy CHRIS are ANNIE (dressed slightly more conservatively), CELIA (dressed very expensively), RUTH (dressed very conservatively) and JESSIE, about fifteen years older, and dressed very nicely—thank-you for her age.)

BRING ME MY BOW OF BURNING GOLD!
BRING ME MY ARROWS OF DESIRE!
BRING ME MY SPEAR! O CLOUDS, UNFOLD!
BRING ME MY CHARIOT OF FIRE!”
WE ARE SUPPOSED TO SING THIS SONG
BUT I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO IS ...

CHRIS. Cora, put a sock in it. You're ruining the atmosphere of Eastern mysticism.

(CORa, an ex rock chick, sighs heavily and joins the others.)

(Attempting “Eastern mysticism.”) And now-w, into t'ai chi position number one. “The Tibetan Archer”. Into position number two. “The Tibetan Yak”. Into position number three. “The Tibetan Yak Being Milked By The Tibetan—”

(At the attempt of this one, the GIRLS abandon ship.)

JESSIE.	} <i>(Together.)</i> {	} Oh for—	
CELIA.			What?
RUTH.			That is NEVER t'ai chi.
CORA.			“Milked”?!

CHRIS. *(Over this.)* Moving into/ the—

ANNIE. (*Louder.*) Moving INTO the “Chris Reading The New Book On T'ai Chi I Bought Her.” (*Doing a t'ai chi move of “throwing a book over shoulder.”*) “Who needs that when I can make it all up?”

CHRIS. I have read that book from cover to cover. On now please into the “Annie, Sharing Her Maltesers With Her Best Friend In The Cinema”.

(**CHRIS** mimes a rugby-style hand-off with her left hand, whilst repeatedly squirrelling mouthfuls from an imaginary pot with her right.)

ANNIE. That is *such* a lie. I *always* let you have some.

(*The GIRLS immediately start yakking.*)

JESSIE. *Girls.*

EVERYONE. (*Ritually uttering.*) Sorry, Miss Raistrick.

JESSIE. Into position number eight. The “Celia, Trophy Wife, Playing Golf.” (*She performs a mystical mime of “drinking from a bottle.”*)

(**CELIA** stops as the others follow **JESSIE**'s mime.)

CELIA. (“*You wanna fight?*”) OK. Well how about the “Jessie, Ex-Respectable Schoolteacher Outside Boots After The Wine Tasting Night”?

JESSIE. I told you that in strictest confidence!

CELIA. (*Miming “hailing and falling into the street.”*) “I’ll get us a taxi.”

JESSIE. *Celia.*

RUTH. How about the “Cora, Single Mother, Taking A ‘Breather’ To Watch The Sunset”?

(In instinctive union, all except CORA mime the act of “covertly smoking a cigarette”.)

CORA. I have not had one for FOUR MONTHS.

(Beat. RUTH looks around.)

RUTH. What about me, then? Go on. Do your worst!

CHRIS. Finally, the “Ruth—Miss Goody Two Shoes, Sucking Up To Her WI Chairman”. *(Putting her hand up.)* “Marie! Marie!”

EVERYONE. *(Putting their hands up, in rhythm.)* “Marie! Marie!”

RUTH. Oh now Chris you ALWAYS say this, and I DON’T. I REALLY—give me one example when I EVER have.

(The door opens, unleashing the stern figure of MARIE, an efficient, uptight early fifties.)

MARIE. Ruth, have you done the apple pies?

RUTH. *(Putting her hand up.)* Yes, Marie. I did four.

CHRIS. *(Immediately.)* Ta-daa.

RUTH. No, why is that—?

MARIE. LADIES!

(Decorum again.)

We are in NO sense ready for our harvest supper. Our guest speaker Brenda Hulse is coming up the path—*(Barking instructions.)*—we have no CHAIRS, Cora. No PROJECTOR, Ruth. Come ON, ladies.

(RUTH moves the projector to the front of stage, facing out to the audience. The other GIRLS take the chairs and arrange them around it.)

Chris, where are the flowers?

CHRIS. Ah. Now.

MARIE. (*Her world collapsing.*) Oh Chris-s.

CHRIS. Marie, the thing is—

MARIE. You said you'd bring in leftover flowers from the shop!

CHRIS. Yes. Well, much against the run of form, this week we actually sold some.

MARIE. Oh/ God—

CHRIS. We're not in a position to turn down any sales at the moment.

MARIE. The thing is you *promise* these things, Chris, and you don't deliver.

(**MARIE** swoops out.)

ANNIE. (*Nodding to CHRIS.*) You could put that on the side of your van. "Harper's Florists—we promise but we don't deliver."

JESSIE. May I just ask, is Brenda Hulse the one who gave us a talk on "the history of the tea towel"? 'Cause if so, I may have to commit hari kiri on my knitting needles.

BRENDA HULSE. (*Offstage.*) ...such a rush, *such* a r—, are we in here?

(**MARIE** returns, suddenly all sweetness and light, with **BRENDA HULSE**, a dull speaker.)

MARIE. Ladies, the slight delay was Brenda double-booked! She's hotfooted it over here from another engagement.

BRENDA HULSE. Yes. That's right. I was actually just down the dale at *another* Women's Institute. High Ghyll.

(*There's a little frisson goes round the room.*)

CHRIS. }
 ANNIE. } (*Together, sotto voce.*) Boo.
 CORA. }

MARIE. (*Frostily.*) Right, well anyway.

BRENDA HULSE. Amazing standard. Some of the autumn poems those ladies came up with were astonishing.

MARIE. As I say/ we—

BRENDA HULSE. Decorated the whole hall with bulrush lanterns.

MARIE. (*Loudly.*) We did that last year. Wherever we lead, High Ghyll tends to follow.

(*That one killed fat. MARIE turns.*)

Ladies. For our talk this harvest we are especially privileged to welcome back Brenda, who last year gave us such a fascinating talk on the history of the tea towel.

(*JESSIE starts to rise and get her coat.*)

JESSIE. Well I'd *love* to stay, but—

(*CELIA and RUTH on either side of her pull her back down.*)

MARIE. Brenda Hulse.

(*Some applause. BRENDA takes the projector controls.*)

ANNIE. (*To CHRIS.*) Now just shut up, OK. Whatever this is, you just shut up. I only laugh 'cause you laugh.

CHRIS. I'm not going to laugh.

ANNIE. No, you say that every time and then you laugh and it's ME that gets into trouble. You have to *promise* me—

CHRIS. (*Dead serious.*) I am not going to laugh.

(RUTH turns off the lights.)

(BRENDA HULSE turns the projector on. A light shines from it on to the audience, as if we are sitting where the screen would be.)

BRENDA HULSE. (*Attempting some theatre.*) Ladies. This harvest come with me, as I invite you into the fascinating world...of broccoli.

(*The light from the projector goes off and on again to indicate the picture changing.*)

(CHRIS instantly starts to twitch in her effort to suppress laughter.)

CHRIS. (*Nodding, mock “serious”.*) Broccoli. Very good.

ANNIE. (*Not moving her lips.*) You promisssssed...

BRENDA HULSE. Broccoli has perhaps one of the most surprising lineages of any vegetable, and yet many persist in ranking it along merely with the carrot.

(*The light from the projector changes to orange.*)

Or sprout.

(*The light changes to green.*)

It is perhaps also the only vegetable rumoured to share a common ancestry with *this* man.

(*The light from the projector changes back to white.*)

James Bond.

(CHRIS controls a spasm of laughter brilliantly. ANNIE is shaking.)

(*Theatrically.*) Yes, “Cubby” Broccoli who produced ALL the James Bond f—

(The projector cuts out with a bang, making some jump. All is darkness.)

MARIE. *Oh for crying out loud—RUTH!*

(RUTH leaps up and turns the lights on.)

Brenda, I'm SO sorry.

BRENDA HULSE. Has it broken?

MARIE. *Ruth?*

RUTH. *(Attending to it.)* I don't know. It might be a fuse. My Eddie always says "fuse first"!

BRENDA HULSE. Well I can't do it without the slides.

CHRIS. *(Feigning despair.)* Oh God DAMMIT.

ANNIE. *(Crying, hand over face.)* Stop it-t...

MARIE. Brenda, I do apologize. Perhaps instead seeing as we have you here, you wouldn't mind judging OUR harvest competition?

BRENDA HULSE. Of course.

MARIE. In which case, can you all bring your entries up?

(There is an instant cross-fire of eyelines.)

CORA. *(Sotto voce.)* Did you...?

(From the faces pulled, it appears no one else did.)

MARIE. This, Brenda, was a *craft* competition which I *always* used to set at my previous WI In Cheshire.

(MARIE looks round the group.)

CORA. Sorry.

ANNIE. Sorry.

CHRIS. Sorry.

CELIA. Sorry.

JESSIE. Sorry.

(RUTH, sitting, with the covered box, puts her arm up. MARIE sees this disaster and battles to carry on.)

MARIE. The theme was “Most creative still life done with a fir cone on a theme of Autumn”.

RUTH. “Still life”? Was it?

MARIE. *(Grittledly.)* Yes.

RUTH. Right. I’ve obviously slightly misunderstood that. I’ve done Westlife. *(She pulls the top off the box to reveal five large fir cones on “stools” in white “jackets” with “microphones”.)*

CHRIS. That is very good, Ruth.

(One of the fir cones drops off.)

Is he the one who left?

RUTH. Marie, I’m so sorry. It’s just my Eddie’s been away/ on—

MARIE. Brenda, I DO apologize.

BRENDA HULSE. Not a lot of point/ carrying on—

MARIE. Indeed. *(Pointedly at the GIRLS.)* Not a lot of point.

BRENDA HULSE. No.

MARIE. Right, well the least I can offer, Brenda, is to lead you out of Knapeley by car so you don’t get lost NEXT time.

(MARIE claps. The GIRLS all follow. BRENDA packs up. MARIE turns her death-ray glare on the GIRLS.)

R-right, ladies. Our final agenda point is next year's calendar, which *this* year you all know is "views of local churches". Next year I thought we could go for the twelve most beautiful views—

CHRIS. (*Privately to ANNIE.*) Of George Clooney.

MARIE. (*Approaching the end of her tether.*) —of Wharfedale Bridges, with—

CHRIS. Eleven fully-clothed with a little "lift-the-fap" for December.

(**CHRIS** capitalizes on *this* to **ANNIE**. **MARIE** advances on **CHRIS**.)

MARIE. Do you have a suggestion for a calendar, Chris?

CHRIS. (*Quietly.*) No.

MARIE. So "Bridges Of Wharfedale" it is then. (*Super-sweetly.*) Brenda?

(**MARIE** shepherds **BRENDA** out.)

(*There is a hangdog pause.*)

CORA. (*Singing.*)

AND DID THOSE FEET
LEAVE IN A HUFF?

CELIA. I think they did.

CHRIS. (*Singing.*)

AS THEY HAVE LEFT SO
OFT BEFORE.

RUTH. (*Starting tidying.*) Oh I feel terrible.

JESSIE. (*Helping her.*) Don't worry, Ruth. It's nothing a little harvest punch won't cure.

CORA. Yeah well what time's it turning up?

CHRIS. Come on, let's get this party started!

CORA. I need about four gallons after the day I've had.

ANNIE. Let's get it *STARTED!*

CELIA. Don't tell me you've had another bust up with Ruby?

CORA. I think I've had the *LAST* bust up with my darling daughter for quite a long time, Ceel. (*Beat.*) She has disappeared into Europe with some of her mates.

ANNIE. What?

RUTH. Ruby's *run away?*

JOHN. (*Offstage.*) Ladies of the WI!

CORA. THE GODS BE PRAISED. IT'S MISTER PUNCH!

(JOHN CLARKE (ANNIE's husband) appears, carrying quite a large glass flagon of home brew.)

(After twenty-eight years of marriage, JOHN's appearance still makes ANNIE smile.)

CHRIS. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MISTER JOHN CLARKE IS IN THE HOUSE.

(CORA does a piano flourish.)

JOHN. Who's upset Marie?

CHRIS. Well I think you should ask your wife that. She has behaved *DESPICABLY*. She deliberately sabotaged the projector so we never got to see the end of "From Russia With Broccoli".

CELIA. I have to say your man's looking *VERY* chiselled these days. (*To JOHN.*) Not got you on a health kick, has she?

(ANNIE and CHRIS make eye contact.)

RUTH. My Eddie's joined a gym, did I tell you? For bodytone? Goes three times a week.

(JOHN presents his lethal brew.)

JOHN. Ladies! This year's vintage. "John Clarke's Knapeley Knee-trembler."

JESSIE. *(With a slight frown.)* Actually John, Celia's right you know? You *have* lost weight. Your *cheeks* are really/looking—

CHRIS. *(Leaping in.)* God I wish y'd have a word with my Rod. He's getting a right old paunch.

ANNIE. *(Putting her arms round JOHN.)* Works too hard, that's his problem.

CHRIS. Well Rod does that. In fact it's gonna get worse. You've heard they're opening a new Tesco up on Craven Park?

CELIA. I know! Isn't it great! *(In ecstasy.)* This town is finally getting a deli!

CHRIS. It's going to be selling flowers, you traitor. That's the LAST thing our shop needs.

CORA. WHY ARE WE NOT DRINKING?

JOHN. INDEED! Get your glasses, get your glasses...

(JOHN, CELIA, CORA, JESSIE and RUTH go to the piano with some shot glasses. ANNIE scoops CHRIS to a moment of privacy.)

ANNIE. Thanks for that.

CHRIS. No, really. He does look good, I wasn't just saying.

ANNIE. Yes. Well.

(CHRIS touches at ANNIE's hair, like she probably did when they were in their twenties.)

CHRIS. When's he due in the doctor's?

ANNIE. We go on Friday.

(The notion of "fingers being crossed" is in the air between these two old mates.)

JOHN. *(Calling.)* Chris, where's me final ingredient?

CHRIS. *(Producing a small paper bag with a fanfare.)* Da da da DA-A!

JOHN. Oh hey he's a good lad, your fella.

CHRIS. *(Holding them up.)* Now then. Rod and I give you these sunflower seeds from our flower shop on ONE condition. That you, John Clarke, come back to this hall and give us a TALK!

(Everyone erupts in agreement. JOHN looks round incredulous.)

JOHN. Me?

CHRIS. Spare us from another "history of broccoli" —

JOHN. Do a talk? What've I ever done except work in the dales?

CHRIS. *(Going to "throw" the seeds.)* Suit yourself.

JOHN. All right, ALL RIGHT! *(Rescuing the seeds from CHRIS.)* This is me *pièce de résistance!* *(Getting some seeds out.)* You take some of these... *(Sprinkling them.)* ...little parcels of sunlight. Then get one of these— *(He takes a gas candle-lighter pen from his pocket and clicks it.)*

CELIA. Good God.

JOHN. Set fire to the top, toast the seeds—turns your mouth into liquid Yorkshire!

RUTH. Oh I've had one of these! My Eddie did some last Christmas. Set fire to the decking.

JESSIE. In light of which, might I suggest we attempt this outside.

CHRIS. Everyone out!

CORA. (*Grabbing the drink with zeal.*) I'm gone, honey, I am already gone.

(**CHRIS, CORA, CELIA, JESSIE** and **RUTH** *bustle out.*)

(**JOHN** *swings ANNIE back.*)

JOHN. Come here, you. (*He kisses her.*) **ANNIE** How was your day?

JOHN. Thrill me. Tell me something I didn't know about broccoli.

ANNIE. Put it this way. I now know as much about broccoli as Chris knows about t'ai chi.

(**JOHN** *laughs.*)

(*Over this.*) The only difference is, I don't try to teach a class on it.

JOHN. Hey. Don't knock it. (*He strokes her hair.*) Thirty years ago if that woman hadn't fallen off a table trying to get a whole Chinese restaurant singing *Jumping Jack Flash*, you and I would never have met. (*He holds her face as if recalling this moment—possibly more heavily than he might normally do.*) I only plucked up courage to ask you to the cinema 'cause I was picking noodles out of your hair.

ANNIE. (*After a beat, stroking his hair back.*) You were up Grizedale?

JOHN. I was. Overseeing junior rangers putting up forest fences. God, they all look about twelve.

ANNIE. I know.

JOHN. (*After a beat.*) This afternoon I nipped in to see ol' Doc Morton.

ANNIE. (*Instantly turning to ice.*) Today?

JOHN. Now don't— (*"Get het up"*.)

ANNIE. I thought you wanted me with you.

JOHN. Mrs Clarke. There isn't a day goes by when I don't. (*Beat.*) I just kind of needed to get the results on me own.

ANNIE. So what did it...? The blood, the cells, what was it in the end? They think it's OK. (*Telling him the answer she wants to hear.*) Fixable. With blood. It's just—transfusion, isn't it? Did he say...? What er—what it'll take?

(**CHRIS** appears in the doorway.)

CHRIS. JOHN! You'd better get out here! Cora's on fire.

JOHN. (*Smiling.*) Oh God.

(**JOHN** heads out, passing **CHRIS** who clings to the door frame in ecstasy.)

CHRIS. (*As JOHN passes.*) That—is one hell of a brew. (*Pointing.*) They've only had one glass—Celia's dancing on her Porsche, Jessie's picking a fight with a "keep left" sign... (*She knows in a micro-second something's wrong.*) What's the matter?

ANNIE. (*Beat, then on autopilot.*) I'm fine.

CHRIS. I have not put up with you for four hundred years to be batted off with an "I'm fine".

(**ANNIE** takes her time.)

ANNIE. John's got his results.

(**CHRIS** doesn't have to ask further. After twenty-nine years "putting up", she doesn't

*need telling. She just goes to her oldest friend
and holds her.)*

(CHRIS guides ANNIE out.)

*(Music starts to play: [“WE PLOUGH THE
FIELDS AND SCATTER”].*)*

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Scene Two

(The church hall. Winter.)

(The music mutates into ["GOD REST YE MERRY, GENTLEMEN"].)*

(MARIE enters, dressed like something out of Dickens, carrying a candle lamp on a stick, shoulders covered in snow.)

MARIE. Come on, Cora *please*.

(No one's in the hall.)

Well where is everyone? Cora!

(CORa skulks in with a 1970s torch half-heartedly taped to an old golf club.)

CORA. Yo ho sodding ho.

MARIE. Did you hear High Ghyll? D'you see what I mean now? THAT is why they've been asked to perform the opening *Jerusalem* at National Conference.

(JESSIE enters with her "lantern", also covered in snow.)

Right. I need to check this fat-bed truck Chris has organized. *(Heading out of the door.)* You two start running through the song.

(MARIE exits.)

JESSIE. May I just ask whose idea was this fake snow?

CORA. Whose d'you think?

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JESSIE. It's already gone down the fappy bit round my gearstick and I know damn well it'll still be there come July.

(RUTH enters with a fake handbell also like something out of Dickens.)

RUTH. Oyez! Oyez! Oh I think it's a nice little touch of Marie's, don't you? All this with the Victorian—you know—kind of "Dickens" —Oyez! *(She clangs her bell.)*

(A long-coated CELIA comes in looking very chic with matching ear muffs and designer shades. And a hangover.)

CELIA. I warn you now, Little Dorrit—one more dong out of that and you are both going in the river.

CORA. Did you hear High Ghyll's *God Rest Ye Merry*? They sound like the sodding Vienna bloody Boys' Choir.

CELIA. I have to say you wouldn't know you were brought up in a vicarage.

RUTH. Marie said her Jenny sang that version with the Cheshire School Choir at Tatton Hall.

CORA. Did she. Well my Ruby sang this version last Christmas Eve in the Ram's Head. *(Singing, in a 1950s rock n' roll style.)*

O LITTLE TOWN—DO DO DOODY DO

(Waving them all to copy.)

OF BETHLEHEM—DO DO—

(Speaking.) Come on

—DOODY DOO

RUTH, JESSIE & CELIA *(Variously.)*

HOW STILL WE SEE—DOO DOO DOODY DOO...

(MARIE races in.)

MARIE. Cora!

CORA. (*Curtsy-ing.*) Hello.

MARIE. What's this?

CORA. The song. You wanted a song for the float.

MARIE. *A carol*, I wanted, Cora. For *Christmas!* For a float that's going to be in full view of *Lord and Lady Cravenshire*—

CORA. Marie, I am sorry I can't offer you a twenty-eight part harmony but High Ghyll have got Enid Richmond who runs Ripon Cathedral bloody Choir.

MARIE. (*Gesturing to her dress.*) I know that! THAT'S why I compensated with the Victorian theme. THAT'S why we need something with a little Victorian decorum.

(CHRIS enters and whips off her coat to reveal a Santa baby doll outfit.)

CHRIS. Well hell—o, Santa!

MARIE. (*Pointing.*) NO.

CHRIS. What?

MARIE. NO, Chris, ABSOLUTELY not. This is a VICTORIAN—

(ROD bursts in.)

ROD. OK! EVERYONE IN THE BACK OF THE VAN!

MARIE. The "VAN"?

(ANNIE enters with a Victorian lantern.)

ANNIE. Good GOD Almighty.

MARIE. NO! Rod! Hold on— (*Pointing accusingly at CHRIS.*) Your wife clearly promised me a fat-bed "truck".

(MARIE races out, past ROD.)

ROD. *(Following.)* What?

(ROD exits.)

ANNIE. That's never the outfit you bought for our Millennium party?

CHRIS. And I'm still in it, babe. I am STILL IN IT!

JOHN. *(Offstage; singing.)*

DECK THE HALLS WITH BOUGHS OF—

(JOHN enters, dressed as Santa.)

(The GIRLS give him a warm welcome.)

YO ho ho—oh NOW then! *(Indicating CHRIS.)* THAT is what I call a stocking filler.

ANNIE. *(Hitting him.)* D'you mind?

JOHN. *(To CHRIS.)* Have you been a good little girl this year?

CHRIS. I have, Santa.

JOHN. Oh that's a shame.

ANNIE. You'll scare the children.

JOHN. Eh I can do that already. *(He removes his hat to reveal a head bald through chemotherapy. Spookily.)*
Wooo...

(ANNIE drags the hat back on.)

ANNIE. It's not scary at all. I actually think it's quite sexy.

CHRIS. *(To CELIA.)* Hey, nice coat, Ceel. Very demure.
D'you want to start a book on who gets most coins in her bucket?

CELIA. Oh Chris, Chris, Chris. Collecting money has nothing to do with your dress. It's about the rapport

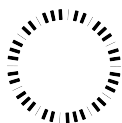
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