

Acting Edition

Step By Step

by Peter Quilter

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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The United States premiere of *STEP BY STEP* was produced at Actors' Playhouse Miracle Theatre, Coral Gables, Florida on July 16 2025. The production was produced by Actors' Playhouse Productions, Inc., Barbara S. Stein Executive Producing Director, Artistic Director and director, David Arisco, lighting design by Eric Nelson, sound design by Reidar Sorensen, costume design by Ellis Tillman, and scenic design by Brandon M. Newton. The cast was as follows:

PAULA Kareema Khouri
SOPHIE Elizabeth Price
MONICA Anna Lise Jensen

STEP BY STEP previously had European premieres in the 2022/2023 season in Norway, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland and Spain. In 2024/2025, the show was presented on two national tours of Holland.

CHARACTERS

The three women are ideally of similar age, in their late 40s, 50s or 60s. But there can be some flexibility over this.

(in order of appearance)

SOPHIE – A little uptight, but organised and efficient, gay, a good friend.

PAULA – More overweight than the others, a jovial woman but with hidden depths.

MONICA – Very attractive and fit, trying desperately to hang onto her lost youth.

SETTING

During the course of the play, the three women will walk up a tall hill in the middle of open countryside. The journey up will take them two days. Scenes take place during breaks in the walk, a site where they sleep in a tent for the night, and the peak of the hill.

TIME

Modern day.

NOTE ON SONGS

The author has suggested that the following songs are used in *Step By Step* as scene change music. Permission to include these songs in a production is not included with a license from Concord Theatricals. If any licensee wishes to use any or all of these songs in their production of *Step By Step*, they must have a venue music license covering incidental music or must acquire the necessary rights from the applicable music publishers. Note that music choices are optional and flexible.

“You’ve Got a Friend in Me”

“I Just Called To Say I Love You”

“With a Little Help From My Friends”

“Hallelujah”

“Too-Ra-Loo-Ra-Loo-Ral”

“I’m Gonna Be (500 Miles)”

“I Don’t Want To Say Goodbye”

“Step by Step”

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Hello and welcome to the play. The original version of this show was *The Hill*, a comedy for three men. Then, a few years later, I decided to adapt it for a female version which I retitled *Step By Step*. Both versions have been very widely produced around Europe, then finally reached the US in 2025.

I did not have any kind of plan when writing this script. It was one of those occasions when I started with a blank page and made it up as I went along, one line at a time, one page at a time. What emerged was a play about friendship and a play about loss. But, as you will read, the show is driven by comedy. That should be remembered in rehearsals – it's a light entertainment, a show that will hopefully make people laugh a lot. I think when plays have serious themes, actors and directors sometimes lean in towards that sadness and put more emphasis on the drama than the comedy. It is the opposite that should happen. It should be played with joy, happiness, joie de vivre and energy. Then, when the sadder moments come, they are more surprising and effective. I think you have to approach it and play it as a funny comedy, but with a river of tragedy gently flowing underneath.

As the play is set outside, up a hill, you can keep the stage quite bare. I mean, a tent, a mound and a few rocks is pretty much all that is demanded. But companies with good designers and set builders have the opportunity to really expand it, with vast skies and natural landscapes, so we feel that we are right there up on the hill with them.

I have suggested incidental music and popular songs for the scene changes. You can make your own music choices here. But the idea is to keep the show moving. So, when the scene ends, some music kicks in to keep the energy going until the next scene starts.

I hope you have fun with it.

PETER QUILTER

ACT ONE

Scene One

(Music plays –)

(A popular upbeat song about friendship.)*

(The bottom of the hill. Lights rise slowly on the scene, like the sun rising early in the morning. SOPHIE is reorganising the contents of her rucksack. PAULA enters, wearing her own rucksack on her back. She is the only one in the group who has a larger/heavier figure. The music fades out.)

PAULA. I knew this would happen. Your rucksack was already packed. So how could you possibly need to empty it all out again?

SOPHIE. It was annoying me. Bits sticking out, the weight was uneven. I'm finding a better system. Redistributing everything. Making it neater.

PAULA. I simply threw everything into mine. It took me three minutes.

SOPHIE. It also only takes you three minutes to clean your apartment – and look how that turns out.

(She continues repacking the rucksack.)

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SOPHIE. ...It would all fit better in a suitcase.

PAULA. You can't carry a suitcase on your back up a hill.

SOPHIE. I could try. Monica would be able to do it – and still manage to look glamorous.

PAULA. We all have our crosses to bear.

SOPHIE. Where is she?

PAULA. She took the opportunity to phone, er – her fiancé.

SOPHIE. His name is Graham.

PAULA. I know that.

SOPHIE. Well, clearly you don't, because you referred to him in the car as 'Gary'.

PAULA. I had a unique moment of confusion.

SOPHIE. You did it twice.

PAULA. I had *two* unique moments of confusion.

SOPHIE. Which would be fine, except that Gary was her "ex". The one that went off with her cousin. So, you know – some mistakes are unfortunate and others are tsunamis. Try and be more careful.

PAULA. Do you think she noticed?

SOPHIE. I had to stop her from driving us into the river!

PAULA. I won't do it again.

SOPHIE. Please.

(The repacking continues.)

PAULA. ...You need a hand with that?

SOPHIE. No, I think I've got it now. This is such a nightmare. I'm starting to get upset.

(The very attractive MONICA enters, with a larger rucksack and also a bag holding a tent.)

MONICA. Upset about what?

PAULA. Her rucksack. She's having one of her 'spectrum' moments.

SOPHIE. Oh, everybody's on the spectrum! I'm just on it a bit extra... (*To MONICA.*) How is he? The fiancé?

MONICA. He's great.

PAULA. Good. And did you give Gary our love? (**SOPHIE** *stares at her in disbelief.*) – I mean – did you give *Graham* our love?

MONICA. Yes, I did give *Graham* your love. I think you'll find that someone else is giving love to Gary...!

PAULA. Yeah, sorry. I get a bit muddled in my head.

MONICA. Then maybe we should have it removed...?

SOPHIE. But he's fine?

MONICA. Of course. It was kind of odd, actually. I only left him yesterday morning, but he's missing me already. Can you believe that?

SOPHIE & PAULA. (*Together.*) No.

MONICA. It's a strange thing to be missed. I suppose I'll have to get used to it. I almost felt guilty.

SOPHIE. Only almost?

MONICA. Well, think about it for a second. This is my final week of freedom.

PAULA. That's very true. Hardly seems possible.

MONICA. You see – dreams do come true after all.

SOPHIE. No, they don't – not in my experience.

MONICA. Oh shut up, you misery. Repack your rucksack for the third time.

SOPHIE. Fourth time, actually.

MONICA. Sophie, if you make things this complicated at the bottom of the hill, how's it going to be at the top of the hill?

SOPHIE. That's why I don't go up hills.

(SOPHIE slots the final item into the bag.)

There, I think that's done it.

MONICA. And we're all thrilled.

PAULA. *(To MONICA.)* So tell me – you nervous about the big day?

MONICA. No, not especially. He's controlling all that, which means the pressure's off. The invites, the music, the guest list, the ceremony, the flowers – he's doing the lot.

PAULA. That's unusual.

MONICA. He's one of the new breed who likes to tackle all the things women used to do in the '50s. I've got him ironing, baking, disinfecting. Men think it makes them hotter.

PAULA. Does it?

MONICA. Hell yes! You ever seen a guy doing the ironing? I almost get pregnant just watching him.

PAULA. So what's your domestic contribution?

MONICA. As little as possible! Same for the wedding. All I have to do is have a nice lie in, throw on my neatly pressed clothes, and then turn up at St Margaret's.

PAULA. How come they're letting you get married in a church?

MONICA. Meaning?

PAULA. With your sexual history, I'm surprised they let you in the door.

MONICA. They don't care. They need the money – you can do it anywhere these days. My niece got married on an airboat in the Everglades. I think she was hoping his mother would get eaten by an alligator.

SOPHIE. Your way is better. In a church, traditional.

MONICA. Yeah, there's still something about it, isn't there. The stained glass windows and the walk down the aisle. I mean, you can get married in your garage and have the reception at KFC, but it's not the same. I think a bit of romance is important. And you only get married once, don't you.

SOPHIE. Well, let's hope so. You have to start behaving yourself.

MONICA. I know that. It's a bit of a relief, to be honest. To finally be forced to settle down, to stop the endless pursuit of sexual conquest. I think that's one of the main reasons I'm doing it. To sign a contract that stops me from endlessly having intercourse with every well hung hunk that crosses my path. You know what I mean?

SOPHIE & PAULA. *(Together.)* No.

MONICA. You two are funny together. You're like an old couple.

SOPHIE & PAULA. *(At the same time, sarcastic.)* Oh, thanks a lot!

(They both look at each other and shrug as if to say "Why did you say that?")

MONICA. So, are we ready to go? Because this is all taking a bit long. We should be walking by now. If it's all the same to you, I would actually like to get back in time for the honeymoon.

SOPHIE. Don't panic. We've got two days.

MONICA. It's taken you longer than that to pack!

PAULA. Where is it you're taking him again?

MONICA. Who?

SOPHIE. Your future husband!

MONICA. Bermuda. Not my choice. Don't know how much fun it will be.

SOPHIE. (*Dryly.*) Yeah, Bermuda is bound to be horrible. Sat in your five-star beach hut overlooking the ocean with twenty-four-hour room service and a horny new partner. How are you going to cope?

MONICA. You can mock, but I'm genuinely nervous about it, to be honest.

SOPHIE. Why?

MONICA. There's nothing to do there. In Bermuda. On the beach. I mean, apart from the obvious. Swimming, food and sex. And you can't do that for eighteen hours a day.

PAULA. You could give it a go.

MONICA. So, in-between, we have to – ...you know – we have to make conversation. A lot. Two whole weeks of talking. I don't know if we've got that much to say to each other.

SOPHIE. But – aren't you in love?

MONICA. I'm confident about us being in love. I'm just not confident about us being in conversation.

SOPHIE. Monica!

MONICA. I'm not saying it's a problem. I'm simply voicing the concern. He might want to know everything about me.

SOPHIE & PAULA. (*Together.*) Don't tell him!

MONICA. Well – there you are – exactly.

SOPHIE. I wouldn't overthink it. You might find it a beautiful thing to be alone together and speaking on an

intimate and deeply honest level. As you tell endless lies to each other. And eventually, you'll arrive at a moment when you don't feel the need to speak at all. When the silence is comfortable. And that's what love and companionship really is – saying bugger all...and when you find it, you have to grip hard and hold onto it. Which is not to say it still won't let go and drop you in the trash can.

MONICA. Is that what you feel happened between you and –

SOPHIE. I don't want to talk about it.

MONICA. I didn't even finish the sentence!

SOPHIE. I know where you were heading.

MONICA. You have to open up about it, Sophie. Break-ups are hard and that's what you need your friends for.

SOPHIE. It's done. It was over six months ago.

MONICA. Yeah, and still you won't talk about it. So it's obviously still bothering you.

SOPHIE. I'm alright, Monica, okay? It takes me a while to move on. And this isn't the right kind of discussion on the first day of the climb.

(SOPHIE puts the rucksack on her back.)

There are far more important things to think about this week.

MONICA. Well, okay, but I want to make sure it gets out of your system before we go home for the wedding. You have a reputation for crying your eyes out at these kind of events.

SOPHIE. I do not!

PAULA. You do.

MONICA. I don't want you suddenly getting all emotional and hysterical at *my* wedding reception. You can't be up at the head table, sobbing and snotting over your foie gras and pork medallions.

PAULA. I'm glad you brought that up – why are we having that for lunch? You've never had anything “medallioned” or “foie” in your life.

MONICA. At weddings, you don't eat the food you prefer – you eat the food you aspire to...

PAULA. Oh...! Really? ...Is it my imagination, or did you suddenly disappear up your own backside? It's a clever trick – we should see if the hotel's running a talent competition.

MONICA. These events are different – it's a posh occasion!

PAULA. How posh? Will there be vodka?

MONICA. After the Pimms and sorbet, there'll be vodka at the bar, Paula, yes.

PAULA. Will there also be *nuts* on the bar? I like nuts with my vodka.

MONICA. No! There'll be olives stuffed with anchovies.

PAULA. Jesus Christ! It's like the world's gone mad.

MONICA. (*Back to SOPHIE.*) Anyway – as I said – try and hold it together. No open weeping over your plate of pork.

SOPHIE. I'm having the fish.

MONICA. Then, don't sob over your trout and almonds either.

PAULA. Hang on – if there's nuts on the fish, why aren't there nuts on the bar...?! Just putting that out there...!

MONICA. (*Raising her voice.*) I didn't organise it, Paula! I'm only the bride!

PAULA. No need to shout!

MONICA. You're getting a free meal, so stop complaining and be grateful.

PAULA. It's not *free* – I bought you a toaster!

MONICA. Thank you – I look forward to the surprise!

SOPHIE. Speaking of which – buy Graham a present while you're here.

MONICA. Why?

SOPHIE. Why!? Because you're away from him during the build up to the wedding and you've got the poor bastard doing bloody everything!

MONICA. I'm not deliberately away – I didn't *choose* the date.

SOPHIE. No, but it's a gesture, isn't it. I'm serious – you should do that.

MONICA. Alright – on the way back, I'll pick up some cheddar and a jar of chutney from the petrol station.

SOPHIE. And they say romance is dead...

PAULA. Are we going, then? Or are we going to stand here all day yapping? I'm not expressing a preference, only asking for a decision.

MONICA. Yes, let's get on with it. Forward into battle. The Three Amigas.

SOPHIE. I liked it better when it was the *four* Amigas.

PAULA. We all did.

MONICA. She's here with us. I know she is.

(They all nod in agreement.)

SOPHIE. ...Okay, so let's quickly check the map before we –

MONICA. We don't have one – we don't need a map.

(Pointing up the hill.)

It's that way!

SOPHIE. You still have to check the map! I can't believe you haven't got a map. We have to have a map. – Shall I go and get a map?

MONICA. As long as you stop saying the word “map”, I don't give a fuck what you do.

SOPHIE. They sell them at the kiosk. I'll be one minute. Better to know exactly where we're going.

(SOPHIE exits to buy a map. PAULA and MONICA sit down for a moment.)

PAULA. ...You sure this is what Rebecca would have wanted?

MONICA. We have to do something. Doing nothing's easier, but it's not always better. We have to mark what's happened. It feels right, doesn't it? I know it's not enough, but it *is* right.

PAULA. ...Help me a bit when it gets hard up there.

MONICA. We will.

PAULA. I mean it. When I need a hand, give me a hand. When I need a push – bloody push.

MONICA. Don't worry about it. This'll be good for you. A steep, two-day climb, fresh air. You'll feel like you're twenty years old.

PAULA. No, I remember being twenty years old – I'm not going through that again.

MONICA. Should I take my engagement ring off?

PAULA. Why? You hoping to get laid halfway up a hill?

MONICA. No – I mean – I don't want to scratch it on the rocks.

PAULA. Rocks?! What rocks? Nobody told me about rocks.

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