

## 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!

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

**CORR.** 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 flat-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?

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**CORA.** Whose d'you think?

**JESSIE.** It's already gone down the flappy 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.** (*Curtsying.*) 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 flat-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 you build up with the public using the spirit of your character.

*(She removes her coat to reveal she has an even shorter Santa baby doll than CHRIS's.)*

I mean the outfit HELPS, but –

**CHRIS.** (*Pointing.*) NO. That is NOT FAIR.

**JOHN.** D'you know what? I *love* Christmas.

*(ROD bursts back in.)*

**ROD.** Someone stop me before I kill that woman. God help me, I only have gladioli but I will find a way –

*(MARIE careers in.)*

**MARIE.** (*Wailing.*) CHRIS ...!

**ROD.** (*Mimicking the intonation, as a "stop me" to JOHN.*) JOH-HN...!

**MARIE.** You promised me a "truck" and that is in NO sense oh – (*Seeing CELIA.*) – oh for GOD'S SAKE.

**JOHN.** WHOA whoa whoa...!'

*(Frenzy all calms.)*

We'll be fine. We'll walk and sing.

**ANNIE.** We can't do that.

**JOHN.** 'Course we can. Long history, isn't there, Cor? (*Putting his arm around CORA.*) New Orleans? Jazz and religion?

**CORA.** Oh god, our band at college – that’s all we did, me and Ruby’s dad. Gospel,/ blues –

**JOHN.** “Gospel”! There you go! We’ll be “The Knapeley Rhythm and Blues Choir”!

**ANNIE.** We can’t.

**MARIE.** We don’t have much CHOICE/ Annie –

**ANNIE.** John *can’t walk that far.*

*(This creates a hole in the room.)*

**JOHN.** Ohh God that’s it. I knew it’d happen. I’ve turned into the third person.

**MARIE.** *(Remembering.)* Right. Sorry. *(Beat.)* How’s the – ?

**JOHN.** My treatment’s going fine, love. And you know what cheers me up? That WI calendar with your lovely photos of Yorkshire churches. *(Putting his arm round MARIE.)* Being able to mark my chemotherapy appointments under images of misty graveyards.

*(CHRIS really smiles. Even ANNIE does.)*

Serious. I’d taken it in and one of the guys at the hospital, porter, Lawrence, great lad, *great* photographer – *(To ANNIE.)* God you should see some of the ones he’s done of his parents –

**ANNIE.** *(Smiling.)* Finish your story.

**JOHN.** *(Nodding at MARIE.)* About your calendar. *Very* complimentary.

**MARIE.** Really?

**JOHN.** *(Putting his arm out.)* Lead on, my little elf. *(For ANNIE’s benefit, wryly.)* Remember “he” can’t walk that fast.

*(MARIE can’t do anything but lead him out.)*

*(The others follow.)*

*(LIAM looks around them, finally understanding the hesitancy.)*

**LIAM.** I mean that's not a problem, is it? Stripping off?  
I mean, that is what you "do"?

*(A beat. CHRIS has to turn to her troops and put on a brave face. None of them were aware this was the score.)*

**CHRIS.** Absolutely!

**LIAM.** Absolutely! *(Into his walkie talkie.)* Andy? Take these lights up forty percent.

*(LIAM goes.)*

*(There is a pause.)*

**CHRIS.** Right. OK. I hadn't realized.

*(Beat. A ferocious key light comes on. Unsympathetic, hard, it is the antithesis of the light the night they took the photos in here. They all wince.)*

OK.

**RUTH.** Right. Well –

*(CHRIS leads from the front and starts to undo her clothing.)*

**ANNIE.** Don't touch a button.

**CHRIS.** Annie/ just –

**ANNIE.** Put your coats on. We're out of here.

*(The GIRLS don't know what to do.)*

Do NOT touch ONE BUTTON.

**CHRIS.** *(Out of the side of her mouth, gesturing "carry on".)*  
Girls...

(**CORA, RUTH, JESSIE** and **CELIA** *de-flower themselves and leave, murmuring “sorry”, slightly on eggshells.*)

Is there a problem?

(**ANNIE** *doesn’t answer. She packs.*)

Yes?

(**ANNIE** *doesn’t answer.*)

Are you going to answer m – ?

**ANNIE.** Please don’t ask me if there’s a problem, Chris, when we’re selling soap wearing dayglo sunflowers.

**CHRIS.** For a photoshoot, I am. For John.

(**ANNIE** *snorts a little laugh.*)

(*Getting narked.*) What?

**ANNIE.** “For John.” That’s good. That you still think that.

**CHRIS.** Yes. I do. And I think John’d think you were acting

–

**ANNIE.** Let me tell you what *I* think John’d think, OK?  
“Annie, you’re a woman who once took her clothes off because of me, and who now takes them off because ‘that’s what she does’.”

**CHRIS.** Is this ’cause I’ve organized it? Got us a sponsor. Finally followed through on something? Finally made this calendar a success?

**ANNIE.** No, y’see what’s actually happened, Chris, what’s *actually* happened is that this calendar’s made **YOU** a success.

(*This hurts.*)

**CHRIS.** And not **YOU** of course? Not bloody – Florence Nightingale. Sleeping in churches. Answering letters.

LOADS of people lose partners to this disease. I bet THEY don't get FAN MAIL. Wouldn't you say THAT's made YOU a "success"? A very successful... "bereaved woman"? A – a – a "celebrity widow"? (*Beat.*) "Saint Annie of Knapeley?" Eh? (*Beat.*) Hey?

**ANNIE.** I'm not a saint. Because I would rob every penny of this calendar to buy one more hour with him. (*Beat.*) And you've still got yours.

*(ANNIE starts to cry. And it's the crying she always needed to do.)*

*(In tears.) And you're here!*

*(CHRIS was the cloudbuster, who now can't go to her because of the Grand Canyon that's opened up between them.)*

*(ANNIE leaves.)*

*(LIAM comes in.)*

**LIAM.** Hello?

**CHRIS.** (*Attempting a brave face.*) I think – might be a problem with some of the er... (*She dries up.*)

*(LIAM assesses the situation.)*

**LIAM.** Right. Well. (*Beat.*) Looks like it's just you. (*He clears the other "sunflower" girdles.*) I'll let the agency know but they'll be cool with that. End of the day all they want is someone from the WI, nude. That's all it's about, isn't it, all this? That's the – *frisson*. ANDY, CAN YOU CLEAR THE KITCHEN? (*To CHRIS.*) Little bit of privacy. (*He hands her the washing powder.*) You cool with it? Being just "you"? (*Smiling.*) Don't mind being the "star"?

*(LIAM goes.)*

*the general lack of achievement of any of his dreams.)*

**LIAM.** Ladies, good-afternoon. My name's Liam, I'm from KPL. You're my six stars for the commercial, yeah?

**ANNIE.** Liam I'm sorry – my make-up! I haven't had a chance/ to –

**LIAM.** No worries. Calm, calm... wardrobe's back here.

*(He checks the ceiling lights which clearly aren't to his satisfaction.)*

**ANNIE.** And it's only five of us. Chris can't make it.

*(This is the first the others have heard of that.)*

**CELIA.** } *(Together.)* { What?  
**RUTH.** } { Seriously?

**CORA.** Chris isn't COMING?

**LIAM.** No worries. Five's enough. I'm just – *(Looking round the ceiling.)* It's not GREAT for lighting, this place, is it?

*(LIAM escorts ANNIE out.)*

*(The others look a bit leaderless.)*

**CORA.** We'll manage! I'll give us a bit of a build-up. Bit of – *(À la Blueberry Hill.)*

And did those feet – do do dooby do...

**RUTH.** Don't mess round with religious songs!

**JESSIE.** *(“Excuse me”.)* Ap-ap. Remember what John said. *(Gesturing at “being part of the same thing”.)* “Religion, blues, they're all...”

**CORA.** Eh it's sodding dangerous though, if you end up a church organist, Jess. Seriously, no word of a lie,

one time, someone's funeral, Dad's in the pulpit, I'm playing on grief autopilot – *(She starts plonking out “Dear Lord And Father Of Mankind” on the piano like a steamhammer. Singing.)*

DEAR LORD AND FATHER OF MANKIND –

*(Speaking.)* Suddenly I look down at Ruby in her carry-cot and honest to God, next thing I know I'm playing –

*(She sings the titular phrase of “Stormy Weather”;* then, *speaking.)* Turned round, the whole congregation are looking at me like “What the HELL – ?”

*(She continues playing, no longer the hymn, but more modern, jazz-influenced chords.\* This causes a slight pause.)*

**CELIA.** Why *did* you lose touch?

*(CORA plays a few more bars.\*)*

Ruby's dad. It always sounds like you loved him.

*(Beat. She did.)*

**CORA.** I lost touch in return for board and lodging. Which is what happens. If you're young and pregnant. And scared. *(Beat.)* And your father's a vicar who professes to love all men but when it comes down to it not actually black Americans that much.

**RUTH.** Have you not just *told* Ruby this?

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\* If licensees choose to perform more than the titular phrase of “STORMY WEATHER” for the music cues following CORA's line “What the HELL – ?”, the publisher and author suggest that the licensee contact PRS to ascertain the music publisher and contact such music publisher to license or acquire permission for performance of the song. A licence to produce CALENDAR GIRLS does not include a performance licence to perform “STORMY WEATHER.” If a licence or permission is unattainable for “STORMY WEATHER”, the licensee may not use the song in CALENDAR GIRLS but should create an original composition in a similar jazz-influenced style. For further information, please see Music Use Note on page iii

**CHRIS.** Lawrence would arrange the photos, leave the room, off comes the dressing gown, one of US would click the shutter.

*(Beat.)*

**ANNIE.** *(Collecting the drawings.)* Look he's done all these, all this thinking about it. At some point we're going to have to commit to giving it a go or not.

*(The GIRLS all look at each other.)*

**JESSIE.** Well. I think I can fairly quickly state MY position.

**CHRIS.** Jessie, look I appreciate for a woman of your –  
*(Searching for “le mot juste”.)*

**JESSIE.** You know, the last time I heard the phrase “a woman of your age” it was my new, young headteacher explaining his reasons why I should retire. The following week I had to take over the school trip halfway up Plover Hill after he collapsed with exhaustion. *(She pulls her coat on.)* I have never had a problem with age, my dear. It has only ever had a problem with me. *(She puts her scarf on.)* Any teacher who has seen the years pass with lengthening legs and shortening skirts has felt old since she was thirty. And the danger, girls, of age, is what you think age expects of you. Witness my mother, who at the age of sixty considered a day when the postman and the gas man called to be one where she was, quote, “run off her feet”. Why? Because the small incidents of life will expand to fill the hours you allot them, and the saddest thing on God's earth is those with the fewest hours left allowing less and less to fill more and more.

*(She heads for the door.)*

**CHRIS.** *(Stopping her.)* S – sorry, Jessie. Just to clarify – ?



**CORA.** Shouldn't've joined a golf club.

**CELIA.** Cora, d'you think I planned to? I was *lured*. I was *lured* to Yorkshire with all this "Ohh come back 'ome, love, let me take you back to live in God's county." I agree, we move... (*Pointing.*) ... Suddenly he comes down with this disease called "Golf". And it's terminal. Suddenly if I want to see him it means spending half my life with a group of women who – sorry, "*ladies*" – who pathologically make rules to make sure *no one* gets upset! Rules for the putting green. And the locker room! And the car park. And the bar. And – God's SAKE – "Conversation Codes for the Captain's dinner" so we don't stray off the subject of golf when all you can basically say about golf is, "I didn't hit it straight so it missed the hole but if I had've hit it straight it would've gone in the hole."

**CORA.** I think you might need some counselling about this, Ceel.

**CELIA.** And of course all the stuff they really want to say still gets said. Just behind people's backs. Usually mine.

(*Beat.*)

**RUTH.** (*Tentatively.*) What kind of/ thing – ?

**CELIA.** That I dress like a tart.

**RUTH.** No.

**CORA.** In fairness, you do a bit, Ceel.

**RUTH.** CORA.

**CORA.** No, I'm just saying – Celia's front is never backwards in coming forwards.

**CELIA.** And DAMN right it isn't. Which is exactly how it should be. Y'r breasts aren't something that should get hidden away for some bloody social – pathetic – whatever – reason but I tell you what, thanks to women like the bloody golf club girls they ARE. And

if my mum hadn't been too mortified to show doctors her breasts when the time came, we'd still have the rest of her. *(Beat.)* Which is why what I'd like to say to the Hermes mafia of the Ladies' Bar is, "Get down to the WI, girls. Come and hang out with the real women of this county and learn a little debauchery before it's too bloody late." Cheers.

*(JESSIE walks in the kitchen doorway with a letter in her hand.)*

**JESSIE.** Has everyone just walked past this that came through the letterbox?

**CORA.** This place has a letterbox?

**JESSIE.** *(Reading it.)* "Alternative WI Calendar, Yorkshire."

**ANNIE.** It never got here addressed like that?

**JESSIE.** *(Reading.)* "Your calendar was the first time I've smiled in fifteen months."

*(Immediately everyone stops.)*

*(Reading.)* "My husband never understood why I joined the WI. But I think if he..." *(She pauses. She hands it to ANNIE.)*

**ANNIE.** *(Reading.)* "But I think if he had lived to see these photographs he would have understood in a second."

*(Music plays. Simple and ethereal.\*)*

*(A piece of paper falls from above in the hall like a fake of snow. As ANNIE continues reading, our focus is drawn to a new letter*

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**RUTH.** Possibly.

**ELAINE.** Absolutely.

**RUTH.** Although I think with me it was likely more finding your underwear in the map pocket of Eddie's Peugeot.

*(Pause. ELAINE stops the beauty treatment.)*

You know? The little red ones? I mean I'm not surprised you didn't notice you hadn't got them on afterwards, they couldn't've provided much insulation. But there was one of these? Little business card. Must've fallen out of your bag in the whole... *(She "smiles".)* ...mêlée, you know? And that's when I thought, "Well maybe he'd see me in a different light if I went and did this calendar!" Pointlessly, as it turns out. 'Cause what I hadn't realized is that a woman who takes her clothes off on a calendar is a "tart" whereas one who does it in a lay-by is a really good sport. But hey. *(She stands.)* What I DID get to realize is that Eddie Reynoldson is one of those guys who wouldn't understand beauty if it was staring him in the face. And you know how I worked that out, love? *(Beat.)* Because it was. Now in fairness fuck off back to him.

*(ELAINE exits in record time.)*

*(To herself, in total disbelief.)* I did it!

*(CELIA bursts in, wearing her new black dress, ahead of CORA, in a swirl of excitement and cross-talk.)*

**CELIA.** No, but they say that, don't they?

**CORA.** That's rubbish.

**CELIA.** Honestly, they say that about television. The camera puts about ten pounds on you.

**CORA.** Let's hope there's only one bloody camera.

**MARIE.** I can't recall – I'm thinkin-ng and n-no, the Lady Lever Gallery does not have any watercolours of middle-aged women obscuring their pudenda with danish pastries.

**ANNIE.** (*Making light.*) It's got some of women who look like they've eaten a few...

*(Some of the **GIRLS** laugh to try and make light too.)*

**MARIE.** Perhaps the Pre-Raphaelites had figured out it might look slightly –

**RUTH.** (*"Aren't we having a lovely time".*) ANYWAY-Y ...

**CHRIS.** (*Frowning slightly.*) Sorry, Marie, do go on.

**MARIE.** – embarrassing.

*(Oo. Game on. The impromptu crowd turns to see how it will be volleyed.)*

**CHRIS.** Is that – “embarrassing” to us, or to you?

**MARIE.** Both.

**ANNIE.** I'll lock up/ anyw –

**CHRIS.** Marie, maybe our calendar sums up the spirit of the WI better than a load of wet bridges.

*(Oo.)*

**MARIE.** More than the natural beauty of this county?

**CHRIS.** Yes. That's Yorkshire by the way. The county you loved so much you went to live in Cheshire.

*(Beat.)*

**MARIE.** And well done for staying here, Chris. Well done for staying put in the flower shop. Which is of course what all this is all about, isn't it? Really? The golden girl who was Dorothy in *The Wizard Of Oz*. The girl

who everyone thought would be a weather girl. The girl who performed in the pencil skirt at the French Evening and got all the lads' tongues lolling and ended up in a flower shop on the Skipton Road and is now just *desperate* for a bit of the front of the stage again? Not a whole play, by the way. Not the hard work, line-learning – God, that takes following things through. No, it's just the little front-of-curtains – (*Putting her arms out.*) “Pow”! The little shot of “look at me, I'm doing t'ai chi!” “Pow! I'm organizing a vodka night.”

*(Every word is true and CHRIS knows it.)*

**CHRIS.** (*Swallowing hard.*) I am doing this –

**MARIE.** TELL me that's not what makes your heart beat faster about this calendar, Chris Harper/ tell –

**CHRIS.** – for John Clarke I am doing this –

**MARIE.** Tell me.

**CHRIS.** – and because of him and because he would have laughed his bloody socks off –

**MARIE.** Tell me.

**CHRIS.** – and because I can hear that laughter now –

**MARIE.** TELL ME!

**RUTH.** (*Shouting.*) CELIA.

*(To stop the fight, RUTH pulls a calendar from her bag. It has a red ribbon on it, tied up ready to give to someone.)*

**CORA.** Christ almighty, Ruth. I thought that was a Kalashnikov.

**RUTH.** It's a calendar. For the man. The Wales man. Outside.

*(Pause.)*

*together. Amid this **CHRIS** curtsies. On stage.  
A little bit of a star.)*

*(We move to a time outside the seasons, a  
space between hall and dale. **ANNIE** wheels  
**JOHN** to a position where he reads his speech  
to the **GIRLS**, off the paper bag which contains  
the sunflower seeds.)*

**JOHN.** *(Reading.)* “The flowers of Yorkshire are like the  
women of Yorkshire. Every stage of their growth has its  
own beauty.

*(The women listen.)*

“But the last phase is always the most glorious.

*(Seeing what we’re seeing, we’d have to agree.)*

“Then, very quickly, they all go to seed.

*(There is gentle laughter amongst the women  
in the room.)*

“Which makes it...”

*(He stops. He gets up out of his wheelchair  
and puts the speech down where he sat. And  
walks out through the **GIRLS**.)*

*(The **GIRLS** don’t notice. They keep looking at  
the wheelchair where he once was.)*

*(**ANNIE** goes over to the wheelchair and picks  
up the bag to read.)*

**ANNIE.** *(Reading.)* “... Which makes it ironic my favourite  
flower isn’t indigenous to the British Isles, let alone  
Yorkshire. I don’t think...”

*(She can’t. She passes it to **CHRIS**.)*



**CHRIS.** (*Reading.*) “I don’t think there’s anything on this planet that more trumpets life than the sunflower. For me, that’s because of the reason behind its name. Not because – ”

*(It’s CHRIS’s turn now to find it impossible to continue.)*

*(As if in understanding at this, JOHN’s own voice [recorded or from a microphone offstage] takes over, in the air above the dales.)*

*(It is those dales which now appear, as the scene change takes place as he speaks.)*

**JOHN.** (*offstage.*) “Not because it ‘looks like’ the sun. Because it *follows* the sun. During the course of the day, the head tracks the journey of the sun across the sky. A satellite dish for sunshine. Sow these seeds on the hill and you’ll see...

*(CHRIS passes the bag round and the GIRLS sow the sunflower seeds. ANNIE lays JOHN’s rug on the ground.)*

...that wherever light is, no matter how weak, these flowers will find it. Which is such an admirable thing. (*Beat.*) And such a lesson in life.”

*(Beat.)*

**ROD.** Right. But at these fairs you're better at all the actual selling, "meeting people" stuff. You're just... *(Feeling awkward in front of ANNIE. He smiles at her.)* She's fantastic at that.

**CHRIS.** Rod! *(As if this explains everything.)* It's TELEVISION!

**ROD.** *(Suddenly hard as nails.)* Chris, we're going to the bridal fair. We don't have the luxury *not* to.

*(CHRIS knows they don't. But she wants that TV so badly.)*

*(CHRIS looks at ROD and his flowers but has no words. So she just leaves. And leaves behind a rather messy silence.)*

*(ANNIE looks at ROD, who is clearly slightly wounded by this.)*

**ANNIE.** We'll be fine, Rod. She doesn't have to be here.

**ROD.** But I want her to be here, Annie. That's the thing. I want her to have all this. *(He just about finds a smile for ANNIE.)* Never make a business out of something you love. I go for a walk now up Grizedale, see all the flowers and I think, "It's you little bastards who are screwing us over." *(He looks to the sunflowers.)* Then again, John managed it, didn't he? *(Beat.)* Worked that park for thirty years, never *stopped* banging on about how beautiful it was. Couldn't bloody shut him up.

*(ANNIE lets this settle. It's true.)*

**ANNIE.** Rod, how bad ARE things with the shop?

*(Pause.)*

**ROD.** Try and keep 'em cool.



**CHRIS.** Sorry about all the subterfuge, having to hang around in the car park. It's just it's our president, Marie. She's a bit like that thing out of *Lord of the Rings*, y'know? The big eye – the big... *(Beat.)* ...actually she's like quite a FEW things out of *Lord of the Rings*...

**ANNIE.** Stop it-t...

**CHRIS.** OK. Lawrence, this is Miss January, February, March and April...

*(CELIA, CORA, RUTH and JESSIE all rise up in arms.)*

<b>CELIA.</b>	} <i>(Together.)</i> {	Whoa whoa whoa
<b>JESSIE.</b>		Hold on...
<b>RUTH.</b>		Annie?
<b>CORA.</b>		Hey let's just take things easy –

**ANNIE.** *(Placating.)* IF – if they decide to go ahead. *(She nods.)* You said on the phone you'd had an idea.

**LAWRENCE.** *(Nervous as hell.)* Right. Well. When you –

*(CHRIS gestures to him to address the group.)*

– when they came in the hospital – Chris and Annie – about this – this calendar what you're wanting to sell at the Yorkshire Show...what it...what they er... *(He swallows.)*

**CORA.** Christ, love, if you're intimidated NOW, what are you gonna be like when Celia takes her blouse off?

**CHRIS.** *Cora.*

**CELIA.** Mesmerized.

**LAWRENCE.** *(Swallowing almost audibly.)* It should be what John said.

*(This quietens them all slightly.)*

When I was pushing him round. Talking to him about what it was you all did in here. He reckoned all the jam-making and knitting was basically a front for a load of respectable middle-aged women to get together and go nuts.

*(There's a beat where the room feels momentarily warmed by JOHN's humour. It gives LAWRENCE some confidence.)*

That's what your calendar should be.

*(He gets the drawings out. They all crowd round.)*

At first glance the photos should look like your classic WI calendar. All your traditional...cakes, jam, sewing an' that. *Everything* y'd expect. Except for one tiny thing. The person doing it is naked.

**EVERYONE.** *(Quietly, variously.)* Nude.

*(He shows the first sketch. We don't see it.)*

*(Pause.)*

**ANNIE.** You're right. John would've loved this.

**LAWRENCE.** *(Warming to his theme.)* See so each month, y'see, y'd get a different girl... *(He hands out pages.)* – painting, knitting, *gardening* here, see...until December when I thought we could do a group one of you all together singing Christmas carols.

*(The last sketch is a double spread. It creates a huge reaction.)*

**CHRIS.** Ohmygod that just... Lawrence that is PERFECT!  
We LOVE it! We AB-solutely –

**CORA.** Except for one small problem. *(Beat.)* He's a *bloke*.

**JESSIE.** I thought the point was we're not actually going to be showing anything.

**CORA.** On the *photographs*. I imagine there's going to be considerably more on display in the actual bloody *room*.

**CHRIS.** Cora, we've BEEN through this. An artist doesn't see a naked woman, he sees a "life model". (To **LAWRENCE**.) Don't you, Lawrence?

*(They all look at LAWRENCE. He loses what bottle he had.)*

**LAWRENCE.** I think... *(He swallows.)*

**CHRIS.** Yes?

**LAWRENCE.** ... I left me bike on a bend.

*(LAWRENCE exits.)*

*(The GIRLS all watch him go.)*

**CHRIS.** (To **CORA**.) Well thank you very much.

**CORA.** Look. I'm sorry, OK, I'm sorry. It's just – Ruby has already...got me down as a woman who makes a habit of *(Waving loosely.)* ... "parading herself in front of men."

**CELIA.** Why?

*(CORA bats it off.)*

**ANNIE.** Cora –

**CELIA.** No, come on you've never done anything like this/ before –

**CORA.** *(Killing it dead.)* Because I lost touch with her dad, Ceel. *(Beat.)* Because I'm the kind of mother who "loses touch" with the father.

**ANNIE.** Look no one's parading ANYTHING.

**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.

*(The slightly supercilious figure of **LADY CRAVENSHIRE** enters, followed by **MARIE**, as predicted in posh-voice mode. **CHRIS** and **CORA** follow on.)*

**LADY CRAVENSHIRE.** Oh now this is *certainly* Victorian...

**MARIE.** ...absolutely it is, I think you're absolutely right, Lady Cravenshire.

**LADY CRAVENSHIRE.** I mean the main church building certainly has the *feel* of Victoria...

**MARIE.** Well Cora will know. Her father used to be vicar here. Cora what is the church?

**CORA.** *(For the benefit of the **GIRLS**.)* In my experience? Intransigent and hypocritical.

**MARIE.** *(Moving swiftly on.)* Thank you so much. And this is Celia, who's only recently joined us!

**CELIA.** Yes! Actually at this fête last year, in fact!

**CORA.** She defected from the old bags of the Royal Yorkshire Golf Club.

**MARIE.** Of which Lady Cravenshire is Chairman. So anyway, that's wonderful. Lady Cravenshire please... *(Gesturing "do go on".)* ... Do er...

**LADY CRAVENSHIRE.** Ladies. Thank you so much for inviting me to be part of your Spring Fête. I do LOVE coming down this part of the dale.

**JESSIE.** *(Mock-doffing a cap.)* And we loves 'avin' you, ma'am.

**LADY CRAVENSHIRE.** As ever it's inspiring to see the amount of enthusiasm on display in all disciplines, especially by those in the "fancy dress" competition, which of course this year is on a theme of "Cowboys and Indians".

*(Everyone looks at **RUTH**. She surreptitiously slides her headgear off. Some **GIRLS** pat her on the back by way of condolence.)*

Some of the baking categories have been judged and I'm pleased to announce that the winner of this year's May Wilkinson trophy for Victoria sponge maximum twelve-inch diameter is Knapelley entry two-one-three.

*(An ecstatic **MARIE** leads the applause, and the other **GIRLS** follow. The horror dawns. People look at each other.)*

*(**CHRIS** doesn't take this in at first, until **CORA** and **CELIA** look at her in horror.)*

**CHRIS.** *(Sotto voce.)* Help me-ee...

**ANNIE.** *(Through her fingers.)* Oh my Godd-d.

**RUTH.** Oh now *that's* interesting.

**JESSIE.** *(Putting her hand up.)* Over here!

**CELIA.** Nice knowing you, Chris.

**CORA.** *(Sotto voce.)* Come on, Chris. This way through. Dead man walking.

*(**CHRIS** goes up to **LADY CRAVENSHIRE** over the applause. **LADY CRAVENSHIRE** gives her a trophy.)*

**CHRIS.** *(Trying to skulk off as quickly as possible.)* Right. Thanks. That's very –

**LADY CRAVENSHIRE.** And I'm ALSO proud to announce...

*(**CHRIS** stops dead in horror.)*

...that this cake also wins the overall...

**ANNIE.** Oh no...



**LIAM.** They certainly are. Do they fit?

*(LIAM hangs one on ANNIE.)*

**EVERYONE.** *(Variously.)* Oh my God/ look at that!

**CORA.** They hang on us!

**LIAM.** Yeah. One for each of you, except Chris who's actually gonna be holding the product.

**ANNIE.** The calendar?

**LIAM.** The washing powder.

*(Pause.)*

**JESSIE.** The "washing powder"?

**CELIA.** What "washing powder"?

**RUTH.** Is this advert not about the calendar?

**CHRIS.** 'Course it is. Long term. Just imagine what it's going to do for the profile – !

**LIAM.** OK I promise this won't take long. *(He smiles.)*  
Once we've cranked up the lights, it'll be off with your kit, couple of clicks, done.

**JESSIE.** *(At CHRIS – "what?".)* Sorry?

**LIAM.** Andy?

*(LIAM is about to go off, as the GIRLS all look in horror at each other.)*

**CHRIS.** Sorry, Liam. You want us – with these, over – ?

**LIAM.** The caption's gonna go over, yeah. "We'd rather go naked than use another..." You know? You get the picture!

*(There is a pause.)*

**CHRIS.** These flowers, but *without* the dresses?



*(LIAM looks around them, finally understanding the hesitancy.)*

**LIAM.** I mean that's not a problem, is it? Stripping off?  
I mean, that is what you "do"?

*(A beat. CHRIS has to turn to her troops and put on a brave face. None of them were aware this was the score.)*

**CHRIS.** Absolutely!

**LIAM.** Absolutely! *(Into his walkie talkie.)* Andy? Take these lights up forty percent.

*(LIAM goes.)*

*(There is a pause.)*

**CHRIS.** Right. OK. I hadn't realized.

*(Beat. A ferocious key light comes on. Unsympathetic, hard, it is the antithesis of the light the night they took the photos in here. They all wince.)*

OK.

**RUTH.** Right. Well –

*(CHRIS leads from the front and starts to undo her clothing.)*

**ANNIE.** Don't touch a button.

**CHRIS.** Annie/ just –

**ANNIE.** Put your coats on. We're out of here.

*(The GIRLS don't know what to do.)*

Do NOT touch ONE BUTTON.

**CHRIS.** *(Out of the side of her mouth, gesturing "carry on".)*  
Girls...

to schoolchildren. (*She rubs RUTH's arm and smiles.*)  
Much softer is our Ruth.

(**ELAINE** returns with her magic box.)

**ELAINE.** Right. HERE we are, ladies-s! How are we *doing*?

**JESSIE.** (*In a gummy senile way.*) Who's moved me television?

**ELAINE.** (*Stopping and frowning.*) What was that?

**JESSIE.** Never mind. (*She nods at RUTH.*) Do her first. I'm going round the back to score some crack.

(**JESSIE** leaves.)

**ELAINE.** (*A little confused.*) Right-t. SO. Let's just pop yourself down on that-t, my love, make you comfy. (*On autopilot she produces a pink business card.*) I'm Elaine from the Craven Health Spa-a... (*She offers RUTH the card.*) There's my card.

**RUTH.** I've already got one.

**ELAINE.** Lovely. What I'm going to be doing for the television is a little basic T-Zone and A-Zone. Have you ever had that done before?

**RUTH.** No.

**ELAINE.** Oh, you'll love it. 'Cause you're the lady – wasn't it the organizer, Chris, wasn't she telling me they were all going to do it and you WEREN'T and then you suddenly changed your mind at the last minute? Is that right?

(**RUTH** doesn't reply.)

Suddenly got the confidence up! It's funny how that happens, isn't it? You know, a lot of ladies find that when they've had our "Dead Sea Salt treatment", they get this (*Gesturing loosely.*) inner kind of – "wha"? To do things!