

Act 1

- FRANCIS** *(Francis is pacing back and forth, he's a snob and has an anal personality; as his character Eddie, he's dressed in a tight fitting t-shirt and jeans)* I knew this would happen sooner rather than later and I think it's an absolute disgrace, disgrace, how dare they place us in this humiliating position!
- ARTHUR** *(Arthur is quite childlike and not overly bright but he means well; as his character Dad, he is well wrapped up in layers of winter clothes)* Calm down Francis, it will work out okay in the end.
- POPPY** *(also pacing but faster, Poppy is always happy, excitable and a dependable friend, she is wearing a t-shirt and dungarees)* As stage manager I have to step in for anyone who's taken ill. I'm pretty sure I know all of Daniel's lines but someone else might have to fill in for Monty if he doesn't...
- CYNTHIA** *(sniffing/sobbing, Cynthia is a clairvoyant; she is miserable a lot of the time but has excitable moments especially when talking to the spirits; as her character Audrey, she is overdone with make-up, big hairdo and dressed too young in a short skirt and fishnets)* This has been a dreadful play from start to finish, I just want to go home. It's very stressful acting when your heart's not in it.
- POPPY** Stay positive Cynthia and keep smiling. I think I should start putting on Daniel's clothes; it doesn't look like he's going to turn up.
- IRIS** *(sat down, Iris is very quiet, reserved and kind; as her character Mary, she is immaculately dressed in an expensive suit)* Try and be patient Poppy, give them a couple more minutes.
- ARTHUR** You're so relaxed Iris, I wish I was like you. Not having the director and lead part could be a problem though.
- DAISY** *(due to a turbulent life, Daisy is rather mixed up, she's a tough cookie but vulnerable with men. She shouts from off SR)* Are they here yet?
- EVERYONE** No Daisy!
- DAISY** *(off SR)* Oh... Fudge it!
- FRANCIS** That's the final straw I've had enough, I'm not waiting a second longer I am going home. Even if they do get here, he'll never be ready to go on stage in five minutes. *(starts to gather his things)*
- MONTY** *(walks in, Monty is an old rocker, quite blunt with people and drinks more than he should, he's wearing a leather jacket, t-shirt, bandana and jeans)* No need to panic the star of the show is here, cor that last pint's gone right through me. I'd better not relieve myself just yet; you know what it's like once you break the seal. *(starts changing and drinking wine; his character Brian looks bedraggled wearing a tatty suit, bow tie and no shoes or socks)*

POPPY Oh hi Monty, are you alright? I'm so happy you're here I do hope that Daniel...

JOSEPHINE comes in dragging DANIEL

JOSEPHINE *(Josephine comes over as a dragon and self-assured, she is wearing smart clothes)* Come on Daniel hurry up and get dressed, you really are the limit at times. I've poured my heart and soul into this production and I'm positive that you're trying to sabotage it. *(she gets changed into her character Nicola's costume and puts on garish earrings, necklace, high heels and a summer dress)*

DANIEL *(Daniel is intelligent and mild-mannered, he is wearing trousers and a shirt)* But Josephine, I keep telling you I feel terribly sick, I must go home to bed.

JOSEPHINE Rubbish, you can't let everyone down you're just getting nervous. Although most people get first night nerves, but you would have to be different and get them on the last night. Just pull yourself together.

DANIEL starts to get changed into a smart suit

FRANCIS *(sits down with a crossword)* Professional actors like myself won't let sickness get in the way. So, are you going to offer any type of explanation or apology?

JOSEPHINE I most certainly am not apologising, I've had to drag him all the way here. I don't know, and don't particularly care, what tomfoolery Daniel got up to in the public house last night, but he's got bruises all over him.

POPPY Josephine, I hope you don't mind me saying but Daniel really doesn't look very well, are you sure he's fit enough to go on stage?

JOSEPHINE Yes Poppy, he will be absolutely fine. Now then, I've just heard there are fifteen people in the audience but we should imagine that it's a full house of three hundred. You must all stay focused. My vision of how I wanted this to look and feel must carry on until the very end.

CYNTHIA This ridiculous play was so obviously written by a man, the female parts are pathetic and small. There's no substance or proper storyline. *(blows her nose)*

JOSEPHINE I will take some responsibility for not directing to my full potential because of acting in the play as well. Obviously, I wasn't expecting to be in it.

CYNTHIA It's so sad that Camilla left; I could sense how troubled she was when I read her palm. I'm certain there was more to it than just her goldfish dying.

MONTY You know Caroline Patterson, don't you? *(drinks from a bottle)* Well she was asked to take the part but she heard that Josephine was directing and said no.

ARTHUR *(fiddles with a pair of spectacles and snaps them)* Whoops a daisy.

FRANCIS *(to Arthur)* For goodness sake Arthur, are there any props or pieces of scenery that you haven't yet demolished this week?

JOSEPHINE I would like to say that the success of this production was due to all of you but there is no doubt that it's because of my energy and nurturing. Also, whatever present you give me; can you leave the receipt in case I need to take it back?

They all look blankly at each other

POPPY *(claps)* You must all be buzzing I wish I could go on stage; I will one day. I'm so envious of you, you're all amazingly talented and...

JOSEPHINE Never mind all that rubbish, you've given them far too much praise this week. Now presumably as stage manager you're in this dressing room for a reason?

POPPY I'm just all hyper as it's the last night, I've loved every minute of it.

JOSEPHINE *(barks at her)* Well?

POPPY Oh, sorry yes. *(coughs)* All beginners on stage in three minutes please. I'll repeat that, all beginners on stage in three minutes.

JOSEPHINE Just time for some quick notes from last night.

They all groan

JOSEPHINE Daniel you must keep the pace up, you were flagging last night, your character 'Adrian' would be spent by the end.

DANIEL ignores her as he's in his own world

JOSEPHINE Francis I've told you countless times that 'Eddie' is a heavyweight boxer, so he wouldn't sound like Noel Coward. Just remember this is a farce.

FRANCIS Humph, you're telling me! I agree whole heartedly that this is a farce!

JOSEPHINE Monty cut back on the sauce, 'Brian' may be an alcoholic but you only have to act being drunk. Cynthia your character 'Audrey' is sexy and flirty; she shouldn't be on the verge of tears all the time. Iris I know you wouldn't say boo to a goose, but elevate Mary's OCD issues. Arthur, let's try and get through tonight without any more accidents.

FRANCIS I've absolutely detested playing this ghastly part, I should never have accepted it.

CYNTHIA Typical man never satisfied! At least your character has got some depth to him I just want to go back to my normal life.

MONTY What, being depressed and living with your parents? *(drinks)*

CYNTHIA And you wonder why I divorced you? *(blows her nose)* Do you think I enjoy being like this? It's because of you that our only son has moved to France and wants nothing to do with us. *(sniffing)*

MONTY I could cope with your dark times but it was all that medium nonsense that I couldn't take. Ever since you reckoned that your Aunt Connie spoke to you from beyond the grave, you went a bit mental saying that you could talk to spirits.

JOSEPHINE Oh for goodness sake, come on Cynthia let's get your make-up redone.

JOSEPHINE and CYNTHIA go out

ARTHUR I'd better have another widdle just to be on the safe side. *(goes out)*

POPPY *(sits next to Daniel away from the others)* Hi Daniel, you look like you've got the weight of the world on your shoulders. Show me your lovely smile.

JOSEPHINE *(sticks her head back in)* Poppy for heaven's sake, you are the stage manager which, correct me if I'm wrong, entails managing the stage and not hanging around the dressing room gossiping with the cast.

POPPY Yes I know boss, I won't let you down I promise, you can rely on me and...

JOSEPHINE *(brusque)* Make sure that you do! *(goes out)*

DANIEL *(to Poppy)* I can't go on Poppy I just can't, everything is such a mess. Yesterday I found contraceptive pills in our bathroom cupboard. I was so shocked as Josephine and I agreed over a year ago to try for a family.

POPPY Oh I'm really sorry, that's so tricky. Have you spoken to her about it?

DANIEL No, because I feel desperately confused and now I've made things a million times worse by going to the Dolphin last night after the play. I basically drank whisky until I couldn't stand up and then... that's when it happened.

POPPY When what happened?

DANIEL You know Daisy, your assistant stage manager? Well she's an ex-girlfriend of mine, Josephine went home after one drink and I got talking to her.

POPPY There's nothing wrong with you catching up, obviously you're married to Josephine but surely she wouldn't mind you talking to your ex.

DANIEL No, but she would mind me kissing her for quite a long time.

POPPY *(Wide-eyed)* Daniel, tell me you didn't?

DANIEL We both staggered into the graveyard of St Mary's Church and got reacquainted. I'm bruised all over because I fell into an open grave.

POPPY How long did you go out with Daisy for?

DANIEL We only went out briefly but had nothing in common, so I split up with her. Daisy insisted that we were still together and for the week after, she set up a tent in my front garden.

POPPY I know she's got some funny habits but she seems so nice and really innocent.

DANIEL That was the last time I spoke to her. She is lovely but not when you're on the receiving end of her anger. How was I to know she was helping backstage?

JOESPHINE comes back in with CYNTHIA

JOESPHINE Daniel unless you've forgotten, you are the lead character and you're on stage first so get off your backside and get warmed up.

FRANCIS Don't we all know that he's got the lead role, it's such a crying shame that he can't act! He's so wooden on stage; it's frankly embarrassing.

DANIEL *(To Poppy)* I'm absolutely terrified, it's like waiting for a ticking bomb to go off. *(sighs)* I've got to keep her away from Josephine. I just need to get through tonight then speak to Daisy to clear the air and apologise for being an idiot.

POPPY I'm sure Daisy wouldn't do anything intentionally to disrupt the show and...

DAISY *(from offstage)* Daniel, Daniel, where are you?

DANIEL *(together)* Daisy!

POPPY *(together)* Daisy!

DANIEL runs out SL, POPPY runs out SR, intro music starts offstage

DAISY *(from off SR)* In case I run out, has anyone got any baked beans?

EVERYONE No Daisy!

FRANCIS *(starts doing a strange physical and vocal warm-up)* La, la, la, la, la, la, la. La, la, la, la, la, la, la. La, la, la, la, la, la, la. La, la, la, la, la, la, la.

MONTY *(laughs)* I'm going to miss his warm-up routine, it's more entertaining than the play. You're not young anymore Francis, you might do yourself a mischief.

FRANCIS Sticks and stones Monty, sticks and stones. At least I take my craft seriously!

CYNTHIA Are you alright Iris? I hope you've enjoyed this week more than I have.

IRIS Yes, thank you Cynthia.

ARTHUR *(comes back in with a sopping wig)* I had a little accident, my wig fell off in the toilet.

JOSEPHINE For goodness sake Arthur we haven't got any more. Iris, take his wig and give it to Hilda in the costumes and make-up room, she'll have a hairdryer.

IRIS Of course, please don't go fretting Arthur I'll soon be back. *(goes out)*

CYNTHIA I can't believe we've had to share with the men, it's so uncivilized. Surely we could've used the other dressing room; they must have cleared it up by now.

MONTY When I was a roadie for 3 Colours Red, the singer Pete did exactly the same thing but then again he had been drinking for four days solid.

ARTHUR Sometimes my mind wanders off somewhere else. I was only washing the make-up off my face.

FRANCIS It is common knowledge that if you leave the plug in with water gushing from the tap, the sink will overflow. Nobody banked on Arthur leaving the tap turned on all night after the dress rehearsal.

JOSEPHINE Now listen, you need to stay focused and true to my vision with...

FRANCIS Your views about your meaningless vision quite frankly bore me to tears. I for one can definitely say that an educated baboon could direct us better than you; or even Arthur.

ARTHUR Yeah, you're right there.

JOSEPHINE *(to Francis)* When you've quite finished... Mr Softy.

FRANCIS How dare you say that, take it back immediately, immediately.

JOSEPHINE I can't listen to your verbal diarrhoea, I'm on stage in a minute. *(goes out)*

CYNTHIA Well I know one thing, I won't miss wearing these fishnets I've felt terribly out of my comfort zone this week.

FRANCIS You're an actor darling, you're not supposed to be in your comfort zone.

ARTHUR I think you look quite nice... for an older woman.

CYNTHIA I look like a cheap tart in these clothes and... What do you mean "for an older woman"? I'm not that old you know I can still be sexy. *(blows her nose)*

ARTHUR *(fiddles with his zip)* I think I've just broken the zip on my trousers.

MONTY Come here butterfingers, I'll sort it. *(fiddles with the zip)*

ARTHUR Ouch, you've just caught my winkle.

MONTY Don't be such a big girl's blouse. *(still working on the zip)*

IRIS *(comes back in)* There you are Arthur, it's as good as new. *(gives him the wig and sits down)*

MONTY Nah, your zip's definitely broken. *(drinks wine and sits down)*

FRANCIS Good Lord, you're so typecast as the cartoon alcoholic.

MONTY That's bang out of order mate, this is for dutch courage and improves my singing voice.

CYNTHIA But you don't sing in this play and when you do sing, it's out of tune.

MONTY It's got nothing to do with you, so wind your neck in.

ARTHUR *(to Monty)* Don't be mean to Cynthia, she's had a rough time after divorcing you. Then she was kicked out of the flat and had to live in her car.

CYNTHIA The council threw me out because they assumed I was running a brothel. I can do reiki, a healing technique that channel's energy. One client misunderstood and thought I could help him overcome his erectile dysfunction.

ARTHUR Then Cynthia moved back in with her parents and I found her with the rope; the branch broke on the tree and...

CYNTHIA Shut up Arthur, you stupid, stupid man. *(sobs)*

ARTHUR Umm... my zip is still broken.

FRANCIS You're like an adolescent, it's beyond me how you look after your wife and child. I suppose I'd better sort you out. *(gets on his knees in front of Arthur)*

POPPY *(comes in)* Oh hello, what's going on in here then?

FRANCIS You've well and truly broken it, you'll have to put on a different pair of trousers. *(sits back down)*

ARTHUR takes the trousers off and sits down

POPPY They're a fantastic audience for the last night, absolutely brilliant. *(to Iris)* I'm so glad we became stepsisters and you asked me to join this theatre group. What's the latest animal you're working on at 'Top and Tails'?

FRANCIS Do you actually have to converse about taxidermy?

IRIS We're working on a Yorkshire terrier at the moment; sadly it drowned.

POPPY Oh that's horrible, did the poor thing fall in a pond or something?

IRIS No, it was killed by a seagull that swooped down, took it and dropped the dog in the Bristol Channel. Unfortunately it got tangled up with a paddle steamer.

CYNTHIA Right, it's time to be sexy again. *(blows her nose loudly and goes out)*

POPPY Good luck Cynthia enjoy your last night, you'll love every minute of it.

FRANCIS You do not mumble good luck, you say break a leg. It's beyond me why people want to observe a play about a therapist whose love life is shambolic. It's hardly Shakespeare. *(breaks into Love Sonnet 18)* 'Shall I compare thee to a...'

MONTY Don't start all that drivel again. I think this play's alright, makes a change to some of the rubbish we've put on.

FRANCIS *(carries on)* 'Rough winds do shake the darling buds of...'

MONTY Yeah, I get rough wind quite a lot.

ARTHUR Umm... I think I should be on the stage now. *(goes out with no trousers on)*

POPPY Hey Monty, why were you so late getting here tonight?

MONTY Well, I just had to pop into the Dolphin to see a good customer of mine, I've unblocked loads of his drains over the years. Anyway, he insisted on buying me a couple pints you know how it is.

FRANCIS Oh yes indeed, we all know how it is with you and public houses.

MONTY If you've got something to say, then just say it you pompous...

IRIS Please don't argue with each other, you'll only regret it.

JOSEPHINE frogmarches ARTHUR in

JOSEPHINE *(shouts)* Quick Arthur, find a pair of trousers and put them on pronto. *(to the others)* He just walked on stage with no trousers and carried on as normal.

MONTY takes off his trousers and gives them to ARTHUR who pulls them on

POPPY Oh, these are the moments you'll laugh about in years to come.

JOSEPHINE I most certainly will not, this is a total shambles and he's let us all down.

FRANCIS For once I am in full agreement with you. I cannot tolerate working with amateurs much longer.

JOSEPHINE Right, now you've got them on get going, go go go go go. Poppy, make sure he gets on stage!

POPPY Okey dokey boss, roger, over and out. Come on Arthur.

POPPY and ARTHUR go out

FRANCIS Monty, forgive me for asking but where are your trousers?

MONTY Surely that's obvious, I gave them to Arthur in his hour of need. No need to thank me I'm only too happy to help in a crisis. *(drinks from bottle)*

JOSEPHINE For heaven's sake I presumed he'd got them off the clothes rail, find yourself some trousers to wear. I am surrounded by incompetent halfwits.

IRIS I'll help you, there must some trousers here that are your size. *(looks on the clothes rail and finds some trousers)*

MONTY It's a shame your Frank isn't helping backstage, I'm missing all the banter we normally have. *(puts trousers on with Iris's help)*

IRIS Yes I know, he's really missing all of you this year. He's just got so much going on at the moment. *(sits down)*

CYNTHIA *(comes in)* That was so humiliating, Daniel and I just stood there looking gormless. It all got too much and I burst into tears and walked off.

MONTY That's the joys of theatre, you have to be professional and deal with the unexpected.

JOSEPHINE Don't you dare start with one of your domestics.

CYNTHIA It's not helping matters whatsoever that your tart, Daisy, is on the side of the stage.

MONTY They were looking for help so I simply offered her services.

CYNTHIA Yes, apparently she offers her services to anything with a pulse.

FRANCIS Will you both kindly put a sock in it, I'm sick to death of your constant bickering. I can feel one of my migraines coming on. *(starts to eat prunes)*

MONTY Oh hello, feeling a bit uptight are you? He's on the prunes diet again. *(laughs)*

FRANCIS I'm astounded and deflated by the utter claptrap that comes out of your mouth.

JOSEPHINE You're only in a foul mood because I gave the lead part to Daniel.

FRANCIS That's complete nonsense; however I find it somewhat curious that he's your husband, not that I'm saying it's favouritism but perhaps we should all fornicate with the director to get better parts.

JOSEPHINE How dare you, he was right for the part it's as simple as that. Anyway, do I detect a green-eyed monster? You had your chance with me ten years ago.

DANIEL *(walks in carrying Poppy; he has some wet marks on his top)* Josephine, you're on in a minute.

JOSEPHINE Just marvellous, how long has she been asleep for this time? And what is that on your top?

DANIEL About five minutes so far, we found her slumped on the floor. Can someone look after her please? I've got to get changed out of these clothes, I warned you I felt unwell Josephine. *(sits Poppy down and then changes his top)*

JOSEPHINE goes out and IRIS sits by Poppy

FRANCIS Personally speaking I think it's absolutely wonderful having a stage manager with narcolepsy.

IRIS Please be patient, it's not her fault she'll wake up in a minute.

DANIEL occasionally looks out the door worriedly

FRANCIS The crossword in 'The Times' is ludicrously undemanding today.

MONTY Yeah, the one in the Beano was pretty easy.

CYNTHIA *(to Daniel)* So how long have you been married to Josephine?

DANIEL Oh, it's nearly three years now.

CYNTHIA Why haven't you started a family then?

DANIEL *(guarded)* Umm, I do want children but it just hasn't happened yet.

FRANCIS Is this twenty questions? What's so interesting about him anyway?

MONTY Oh steady on diva, someone got out the wrong side of the bed. *(drinks wine)*

CYNTHIA *(to Daniel)* So what was your profession before you started the 'Deli-Shack'?

DANIEL I was a doctor for a few years but hit a point where I needed a change in my life.

FRANCIS What a devastating comedown... selling cheese.

CYNTHIA *(to Monty)* So, are you and that creature Daisy, together or not? And isn't it true that she only eats baked beans? How weird is that?

MONTY Don't take the mickey with the baked beans. As for us going out, well we've been apart for a few months... She'd got sick of me smelling of drains.

DANIEL (*alarmed*) I didn't, I didn't know that you and Daisy had been an item?

MONTY Oh yeah mate, we've been on and off for a couple years or so. She was a customer and was well pleased when I gave her channel a good rodding.

CYNTHIA Our marriage disintegrated after I caught them in the garden doing disgusting things... in our son's wendy house.

DANIEL Surely you mean, your *daughter's* wendy...

MONTY Seriously mate, don't even go there!

CYNTHIA Don't you ever belittle my darling Julian. I don't care what clothes he chooses to wear as long as he's happy in life.

FRANCIS Oh dear Lord, I've heard it all now.

CYNTHIA (*to Francis*) You are a fine one to mock. You're not even mature enough to settle down in a relationship with anyone; typical man.

FRANCIS Maybe so, but you couldn't prevent your drunk husband from wandering.

MONTY Some of you have expressed your disapproval of my drinking, but has it ever occurred to you to consider why I started? Cynthia was in a constant trance talking to Aunt Connie, so while she was talking to the spirits... I drank them.

CYNTHIA Aunt Connie is the only one who understands me.

MONTY If you accepted that you had your dark days and got some help instead of talking to ghosts, I might have been more sympathetic.

DAISY (*offstage*) Daniel, you should be up here by now. It's rude to mess people about and you should have warned us that you were going to be sick.

DANIEL Oh no, I'm late again and you guys are on as well. (*runs out*)

FRANCIS and MONTY go out, IRIS lies Poppy down and follows them