

ACT 1 - SCENE 1

AN ELDERLY MAN IS WHEELED IN TO A CORRIDOR AND PARKED NEXT TO A PLASTIC CHAIR; WHICH HIS DAUGHTER SITS ON.

Nurse Robert If you wait here Mr Sands I'll let the doctor know you've arrived.

THE NURSE GOES TO THE DOCTORS OFFICE. BILL LOOKS AT THE BRAKES ON THE WHEELCHAIR.

Bill: Where does she think I'm goin'? She put the handbrake on you know. It's not as if I'm gonna to try and make a break for freedom in my getaway wheelchair.

Caron: I'm sure the nurse did it for your own safety Dad. How are you feeling now, any better?

Bill: Ah a bit worried; I still don't know why I'm here though, I only came in because of backache and now they've got me a bed on the ward.

Caron: Better safe than sorry Dad. I wouldn't want anything happening to you before Christmas; I already bought your presents and they're non-returnable.

Bill: I wouldn't worry about that love. Like a bad penny I'm hard to get rid of. I hope your work didn't mind you taking time off to be with me?

Caron: Work'll be fine with it. Anyway you always held my hand when I had to visit the dentist or the doctor.

Bill: Ay but find me the schoolgirl who isn't afraid of the dentist; especially that National Health buggar you had. His nickname was Arthur Scargill 'cos he used to go at ya' fillings like a bloody coalminer.

Caron: You always told me I was lucky to have such a qualified professional looking after my teeth.

Bill: That's parenting for ya, you can't trust us. I'd rather see your smile in your mouth and not in a glass of Steradent like Aunt Pam. The stars weren't the only thing that came out at night in that house I can tell you. Eh see that chalkboard with all the doctors' names on it? Recognize the third one down Dr Burgess.

Caron: Not really.

Bill: Yes you do, when I had that stroke it was Dr Burgess there who wanted to crack my chest open to have a look round. When I said I didn't fancy him having a root around in my chest he lost all interest. Said if I didn't have the surgery I'd be dead within a year, mind he didn't say which year. Frightened the living daylights out of your aunt

Pam and didn't make me feel much better. I reckon he just wanted to try some of his medical toys out on me.

Caron: Well hopefully it won't be him you see. I bet it'll be a quick test, a few antibiotics and you'll be back home for Sunday dinner.

Bill: (SMILES) Do you remember what they were feeding me to get me weight down after last time.

Caron: (LAUGHS) I remember when me and Aunt Pam came in to share Christmas dinner with you. We had turkey sandwiches and you had a lettuce leaf with a half-ounce of grated carrot on top.

Bill: (SMILING) Ay not one of my better family meals but at least it wasn't me last one. I said to the nurses 'are you fattening me up for Christmas?' Even the doctors didn't think I was gonna to pull through.

Caron: I remember a doctor speaking to Pam at the hospital. When we got home she put the kettle on and made me a cup of tea with her best bone china. Watching that cup and saucer shake in her hands terrified me; more than her saying you might not be coming home.

Bill: Always overreacting that one; but a good woman all the same. I miss her company. Still it'd take more than a bad heart to stop me. I'm like a Timex watch ' takes a lickin' an' keeps on tickin.'

Nurse Robert: Mr Sands the doctor will see you now if you are ready?

BILL GIVES CARON A SMILE AND SQUEEZES HER HAND REASSURINGLY AS THE NURSE COMES OVER AND TAKES THE BRAKES OFF.

Bill: Ready, willing and not quite disabled sister. You'd best go back to work poppet; I'm just going to have some more tests then go back to the ward. I'll see you later.

Caron: But! ...Oh, do you want me to bring anything in tonight?

Bill: The paper and maybe a turkey sarnie or two. *(THEY BOTH SMILE AT THAT COMMENT, THOUGH HERS IS A LITTLE MELANCHOLY).*

CARON IS STOOD IN AN EMPTY CORRIDOR WATCHING HER FATHER GET WHEELED AWAY. CARON LEAVES THE STAGE AS THE LIGHTS BEGIN TO CROSSFADE. BILL IS IN A HOSPITAL WARD LATE AT NIGHT; BEING TUCKED IN BY NURSE ROBERT AS A DOCTOR SPEAKS TO HIM ERNESTLY.

Dr Evans: Hello Mr Sands my name is Dr Evans. I'd like to thank you for your patience first off. We have ran rather a lot of tests on you, but we do like to be thorough.

Bill: Aye I feel like a pin cushion; it's a wonder I've got any blood left in me.

Dr Evans: As I said we do like to be thorough and sometimes there is a need to double check the results. I'm afraid I have some bad news.

Bill: What is it doctor?

Dr Evans: There's no easy way to say this Mr Sands, you have cancer.

Bill : (*SHOCK*) But it can't be; I mean, I don't smoke, I never have. I'm not coughing up blood; I've no trouble breathing, I mean I don't even feel ill. How can I have cancer, I only came in for a bad back? Are you sure you haven't mixed my chart up with someone else?

Dr Evans: I'm very sorry Mr Sands we've checked and rechecked the results to be sure. There's no mistake.

Bill: But how, I don't drink or smoke; I lead an active life, no one in the family smokes that I know of. I don't even drive, I walk everywhere, I'm as fit as a flea. How on earth can I have the smoker's disease?

Dr Evans: Sometime's it may be caused by a work environment issue, say asbestos. Or it may be something hereditary. Passed down generation to generation; lying dormant until something sets it off. Do you have a history of cancer in your family?

Bill: I don't know I was adopted at an early age...Do you know the funny thing; I was always worried if I had anything hereditary it would be Alzheimer's not cancer? How bad is it, can you help me?

Dr Evans: We can ease any discomfort caused by the illness itself.

Bill: Will I have to go in for chemotherapy? At my age I'm not sure how my heart'll cope. I have a heart condition.

Dr Evans: I'm sorry Mr Sands. I thought I had made myself clear. We can help with any discomfort but there is very little we can do about the disease itself...It is terminal I'm afraid.

Bill: What...how long have I got?

Dr Evans: Five weeks; two months at the outside...We'll start you on a course of painkillers and get the hospice to come and see you regarding whether you want homecare or to stay with us. Is there anyone you would like us to call about your condition?

Bill: There's a coupla cousins, one living in America the other in Newfoundland; but really it's only me and me daughter left. What am

I going to tell her; she's expecting me to come home soon and she's already got the Christmas presents. She's not going to be able to cope; not with this. Me dyin', arrangin' the funeral and her first Christmas alone, all in a matter of weeks.

Dr Evans: Mr Sands, William. I can speak to your daughter if you require, and our counselling team will be on hand over the next few days to help the both of you through this difficult time. Right now it's you I am most concerned with. If you will excuse me I need to order some more tests and a course of medication for you. If you need anything Nurse Roberts is on call.

Bill: What's the point of more tests, you've already told me my life can be timed with a stopwatch and not a calendar... *(THE DOCTOR LOOKS VERY UNCOMFORTABLE)* sorry, I know you're only trying to do your best for me.

Dr Evans: That's alright Mr Sands it's understandable, if you'll excuse me now.

DR EVANS LEAVES THE ROOM. THE NURSE ROBERT IS TUCKING IN THE SIDE OF THE BED WITH A LOOK OF CONCERN ON HER FACE.

Bill: I spent twenty years working in a smelting plant, could that be where it came from? All I did was play cards and eat me sandwiches with the lads. The only lead poisoning I ever worried about was getting shot when I did my National Service.

Nurse Robert: No one thinks it could be them. I lost my own father to cancer; he worked down the pits, twelve hours a day, six days a week. Developed a smoker's cough which turned in to emphysema. After that he went downhill quickly and passed away at home.

Bill: Is that what made you become a nurse?

Nurse Robert: Nothing so noble, I did it to spite an ex-boyfriend who said I couldn't stick at anything including him.

Bill: You know my daughter badgered me to see the doctor and all I could say was "stop fussing". No fool like an old fool eh, could I have a glass of water please?

NURSE ROBERT POURS WILLIAM A GLASS FROM THE BEDSIDE PITCHER.

Nurse Robert: Here you go William.

Bill: I don't know how to tell her... she needs to hear this from me, but I'm too scared to tell her. I feel like I have let her down...

Nurse Robert: You've done nothing wrong; and worrying about your daughters' reaction is only natural. Look I'll stay with you when she arrives if

that's any help.

Bill: I don't want to trouble you, you must be very busy.

Nurse Robert Well I am going to do my rounds now but when I have finished (*BAD ARNIE IMPRESSION*) 'I'll be back' with a nice cup of tea or two okay?

Bill: Thank you.

NURSE ROBERT LEAVES THE ROOM, A MOMENT LATER WILLIAM STARTS TO WEEP. NURSE ROBERT RETURNS AND PULLS WILLIAM TO HER AMPLE BOSOM.

Bill: (*THROUGH TEARS*) I am so sorry, no one wants to see an old man cry. Sorry, sorry. You should finish your rounds before you get in to trouble.

Nurse Robert: It's okay, it's okay; you've nothing to be sorry about William (*EMOTIONAL*) your life has completely changed in the last few hours.

Bill: Yeah I haven't got one anymore. (*SOB*) Sorry you're not seeing me at my best. You should go and check that the rest of your patients are still breathing

Nurse Robert: (*STARTING TO WELL UP*) I don't need to, I just plug them up with kazoos and penny whistles and as long as they keep whistling I know they're still breathing. I call them my unconscious philharmonic; I was thinking about entering them for the last night of the London proms, what do you think?

Bill: (*THROUGH TEARS, ALMOST CHILDLIKE*) No you weren't.

Nurse Robert: I know but you have to admit it's a good idea. Look at the pair of us crying. The surgeon general would have a fit at all the germs we're spreading. Let me go and get cleaned up.

NURSE ROBERT PULLS OUT A TISSUE AND WIPES BILLS FACE AND THEN HER OWN; FINALLY BLOWING HER NOSE BEFORE PUTTING AWAY THE TISSUE.

Bill: That's okay you finish your rounds nurse? , I don't even know your name?

Nurse Robert: Nurse Robert but you can call me Alison.

Bill: Alison, thank you...

ALISON GIVES A CROOKED SMILE TO WILLIAM WHICH HE RETURNS, AT

THAT MOMENT CARON ENTERS THE ROOM AND GOES TO GIVE HER FATHER A HUG BUT PAUSES MIDWAY.

Caron: Hi Dad, the buses were a nightmare to get here. *(SHE LOOKS AT NURSE ROBERT AND HER FATHER WITH WORRY)* what's happened?

Bill: I've got some bad news poppet *(SIGH)* come and sit down.

EVERYONE FREEZES IN A TABLEU AS THE LIGHTS QUICKLY FADE TO BLACKOUT; THEN THERE IS A SUDDEN CRY OF 'NO' IN THE DARKNESS FROM CARON.

**END SCENE.
SCENE 2**

LIGHTS FADE UP ON THE EMPTY PART OF THE STAGE. WE CAN HEAR THE BACKGROUND NOISE OF A BUSY AND CROWDED DANCE HALL. IN THE OPEN FLOORSPACE ENTERS A YOUNG MAN IN HIS TWENTIES. BRYLCREAM HAIR, TANK TOP, JACKET, TIE AND BEAUTIFUL SHOES; AS HE STANDS ON ONE SIDE OF THE HALL HIS MATE JIMMY WALKS OVER A CIGARETTE BETWEEN HIS LIPS.

Jimmy: Here you go Bill.

Bill: Thanks Jimmy.

Jimmy: Brenda should be here in a bit and I asked her to bring a friend.

Bill: Oh come on Jimmy, I don't want another blind date, Sharon was the one for me and I messed that up.

Jimmy: You did no such thing she didn't realize what she had mate. Anyway plenty more fish in the sea; get your rod out and see if any of these girls give you a nibble *(FILTHY LAUGH)*.

Bill: I know you mean well but I'm really not interested.

Jimmy: Aw c'mon mate, the only reason Brenda's comin' is because I said I could fix up her friend. If you go Brenda won't stay.

Bill: Oh great, so much for friendship. I bet this blind date looks like Boris Karloff in a dress.

Jimmy: She's a lovely girl, great sense of humour.

Bill: Yeah I bet she needs it. Sometimes you really are a git!

Jimmy: Hey I don't want to die a virgin and if I can get Brenda to drop hers before the Russians drop there's so much the better; but I can't do

anything if her mate's hangin' around all the time. Hence I need your help.

Bill: The Russians ain't gonna start World War III anytime soon and you're not a virgin; unless you've been lying to everyone about your conquests?

Jimmy: I haven't had Brenda and she hasn't had me, yet. So I am a virgin, sort of.

Bill: Are you even sure if Brenda's really interested in you; you've been knocking on that particular door for a while now and no one's answered; maybe she's heard about all your other bits of fluff and doesn't want to be a notch on your bedpost?

Jimmy: I will have you know those other girls are just good friends who help me practice for when Brenda comes to her senses. So are you going to help me get some alone time with her or not?

Bill: *(SIGH)* Alright I'll help.

Jimmy: I knew I could count on you mate; it'll help fix your broken heart *(MAKING PRETEND SAD FACE)*. I'll just go and see if the ladies are here *(HE CHECKS HIS BREATH ON HIS HAND THEN SMOOTHS DOWN HIS HAIR)*.

Bill: You look lovely.

Jimmy: Thanks mum *(LAUGH)*.

JIMMY LEAVES AND IT IS JUST BILL LOOKING ROUND THEN HE SEES HER ENTER. SHE LOOKS CLASSICALLY BEAUTIFUL AS ONLY THOSE YOUNG WOMEN IN THE NINETEEN FIFTIES CAN. BILL LOOKS AT HER ACROSS THE DANCE HALL SUMMONING UP THE COURAGE TO ASK HER TO DANCE. INSTEAD AFTER A MOMENT SHE WALKS UP TO HIM.

Rebecca: Hello.

Bill: Um...hello.

Rebecca: *(HOLDING OUT HER HAND)* I'm Rebecca.

Bill: *(TAKING HAND)* Err I'm William my friends call me Bill.

Rebecca: What should I call you?

Bill: Bill?

Rebecca: Well Bill would you care to dance?

Bill: Yes please, err yes okay.

REBECCA TAKES BILLS HAND AND LEADS HIM TO THE CENTRE OF THE DANCE FLOOR. REBECCA STRIKES A POSE AND STARTS TO DANCE AND BILL DOES LIKEWISE. THIS IS NOT 'CUTTING A RUG'. THIS IS BALLROOM, BALLET. IF THEY WERE SWANS IT WOULD BE A MATING RITUAL. AS DANCERS THEY HAVE NO EQUAL EXCEPT EACH OTHER. THEY INTERTWINE AS THEY DANCE. IN STYLE. IT HAS THE INTIMACY OF SPANISH FLAMENCO DANCING. THEY FINISH PANTING SLIGHTLY AND LOOKING DEEP IN TO EACH OTHERS EYES THEN THEY MOVE APART.

Rebecca: You really are a good dancer.

Bill: So are you, where did you learn to dance I've not seen you round any of the local dance halls?

Rebecca: I'm from Galway, there's not a lot to do there apart from dancing and flirting with the farmhands.

Bill: What brought you over here?

Rebecca: My Dad's work, you have nice eyes.

BILL LOOKS SUPRISED AND SHOCKED BUT IN A GOOD WAY. HE GOES FROM A LITHE DANCER TO A GAWKY TEENAGER WITH MORE ELBOWS AND KNEES THAN ARE STRICTLY NECESSARY.

Bill: Err thank you...would you like a drink?

Rebecca: Yes please, lemonade.

BILL GOES TO WALK OFF TO GET THE DRINKS.

Rebecca: Wait I'll come with you, do you fancy going for a walk later?

Bill: Yes that'd be nice.

REBECCA PUTS HER ARM THROUGH BILLS AND THEY WALK OF ARM IN ARM. A MOMENT AFTER THEY'VE GONE JIMMY RETURNS WITH ANOTHER TWO PINTS LOOKING AROUND FOR BILL.

Jimmy: Oh bugger!

FADE TO BLACKOUT.

END SCENE

SCENE 3

LIGHTS FADE UP ON WILLIAM READING A PAPER IN BED AS FATHER

EDWARDS TAPS ON THE DOOR AND LIKE THE PROVERBIAL 'CHAD' POKES HIS HEAD INTO THE ROOM.

Father Ted: Hello William, I hope it's not inconvenient but I thought you might like some company...

Bill: No Father it's always good to see you and I wanted a word anyway. I take it Caron has already told you about my condition?

Father Ted: Yes, she phoned last night. I am sorry William...

Bill: So am I, but right now I need to start dealing with all those things I have been putting off. Father, I know what's happening to me is only going to get worse. So would you keep an eye on Caron after I've, you know, gone? I don't want her all alone at this time of year. I don't want her contemplating something silly.

Father Ted: I'll keep an eye on her and so will the rest of my parishioners; She won't be alone I can promise you that.

Bill: Thank you father, now I need to sort out my funeral arrangements again. Do you still have the details from last time?

Father Ted: You know me I never chuck anything away; drives the cleaners nuts. I will need to have a search for the documents and grab some new forms from the parish but as soon as I have them we can go through the service together. How are you coping William?

Bill: Some days are good, some bad. With everything that's going on it feels like packing for a holiday; rushing round like a headless chicken, trying to sort everything out before the flight leaves. I always put everything off, thinkin' I could do it tomorrow, an' now it is tomorrow.

Father Ted: William I will oversee all your details myself; you have nothing to worry about on that issue.

Bill: Isn't it funny nobody says death anymore; we all say 'details', 'arrangements', 'final journey' or my favourite 'terminal life'. It happens to all of us; as soon as we're born the return ticket has already been stamped. An' yet we act embarrassed an' ashamed like somebody's pissed in the font at a christenin' whenever the subject is raised.

Father Ted: I agree, over the years I have had to rethink some of my opinions; I think the living don't want to be reminded of their mortality by the not quite deceased; I have seen too many families abandon relatives to care homes. God holds very little sway in a consumerist society.

Bill: ...Father we've known each other for a long time. I regularly attend

church if not every Sunday then most; and you know I have faith, It's gotten me through a great deal but, I'm scared. What do you believe happens to us Father, afterwards?

Father Ted: As a young priest I was as indoctrinated as the next man; although if you had said that to me I would have called you a heretic, not even sure what the word meant. As I have got older I hope I've got wiser. I don't believe in an old man with a white beard, unless you mean Santa Claus and as for spending eternity on a cloud with a harp I suffer terribly with vertigo and can't carry a tune in a bucket. That said I do not believe death is the end; it makes no sense to me. To go through all the trials and tribulations that life has to offer and then be switched of like a light bulb at the end of it all. I don't know what is out there but I know it is; and I choose to believe it is benevolent.

Bill: Thank you father...How are things with you, still arguing with the parish committee?

Father Ted: Less arguing more like intense negotiation. Honestly some days it's like trying to herd cats, as it is I am not the most popular person with the diocese.

Bill: Oh what's happened now?

Father Ted: Well you know we had decided to publish a little cookbook to try and raise funds for the church roof, and that I had settled on a recipe of my mother's for banoffee pie. Well I forgot the recipe so Edith from the committee, you remember her, gammy leg, a lovely woman mind. Well she gave me a recipe for angel pie which I thought fitting for a religious cookbook so I passed that onto Father Lionel of Bristol. He went to one of these internet cafe thingies with Millicent from the W.I. and was emailing the publishers and realized he'd forgotten my recipe so tried to get the it from the internet...Do you know cream pie is a code word for err,(*LOOKS ROUND CONSPIRATORIALLY*) you know a bit of how's your father.

BILL SMILES AT THIS.

Bill: No I did not know that. I wish I'd been there though.

Father Ted: Dear old Lionel wished he hadn't. He was quite overcome with all the images popping up in front of him; in a room full of young mothers having a coffee morning no less. I mean that kind of thing can start rumours, in the end he had to go and have a lie down.

Bill: What about Millicent.

Father Ted: Oh she was fine said it reminded her of her late husband. Anyway as

far as Father Lionel goes I am persona non grata; enough about that though, when would it be convenient for me to return with the papers?

Bill: Anytime really I'm just gonna be sat 'ere watchin the world go by although I shouldn't leave it to long; the doctors seem to think I've got two months at best.

Father Ted: I am sorry I'll be back in a day or two, if you need anything before that let me know...I'll say a prayer and light a candle for you.

Bill: Knowing your luck if you light a candle for me you'll burn the bloody chapel down. Can you do me a favour though, and look in on Caron on your way back?

Father Ted: Everyday, you take care and I'll be back later.

AS FATHER EDWARD LEAVES THE LIGHTS CROSSFADE TO THE BARE SECTION OF THE STAGE.

END OF SCENE