

# How Many Beans Make Five? - by Stephen Cottage

## Act I Scene 1

Friday evening 6.00pm – Living room

*The action takes place in the communal living area of a shared house. There is a large three-seater comfortable-looking sofa stage left and a compact computer workstation situated in the far corner stage left, and a small kitchen area stage right. **MARY** is sitting on the sofa relaxing after work and **JOHN** is busy at the computer work-station 'relaxing' after work (he is situated so as to face the audience and is wearing distinctive red-striped pyjama trousers). At curtain up, the room is in complete darkness, and silent. Gradually, a small green glow appears on the face of **JOHN** (emanating from his computer) and becomes brighter and brighter until we hear the tapping of the keys on the keyboard and the lights of the living room fade in. **MARY** (who is reading) gets up off of the sofa walks over to the CD player and puts on some music. As she sits back down the music begins (opening of Beethoven's 'Pastoral Symphony'). **LANCE** is quietly polishing his trombone at the back of the room. At **MARY**'s side on a little table is her 'Salvation Army' hat. The music plays for around 30secs to a minute with no dialogue then a faint sound of a motorbike getting louder and louder until it is heard to pull up and stop outside the door revving hard until it is switched off.*

*Enter **GARY** wearing a motorcycle helmet and leathers, stage right (the helmet has a phallic shaped stainless steel horn about 7 or 8 inches long protruding from the front, curving upwards, it has a larger bulbous end, penis-like – it is utterly ridiculous but is loved by **Gary** and **Mary**)*

***LANCE** shakes his head in despair. **JOHN** and **MARY** take no notice. **GARY** walks to the middle of the room. He takes off his helmet and immediately admires himself in the freestanding full-length mirror erected for the purpose.*

**GARY** *(referring to the music, pointing at CD player as he adjusts himself.)* What's thiscrap?

**MARY** *(apologetically)* Oh we were just er... relaxing after work and er...

***MARY** jumps up and turns off music, then returns to her seat.*

**GARY** *(loudly)* Relaxing! You must want your bleeding heads tested!

**LANCE** *(enthusiastically)* It's good stuff... Beethoven.

*Silence as Gary removes his leathers – he continues to look in the mirror. After placing his helmet on a small table (where it becomes the center piece of the room and seems to be revered as such by Mary) he goes over to the CD player and puts another disc on (Bob Marley). The CD starts so that we hear it's Bob Marley but after a few seconds it stops, there is a fault with the player.*

**GARY** Shitty, poxy player.

**LANCE** Try the Beethoven again?

**GARY** Fuck Beethoven – he's dead.

**JOHN** *(still tapping on the keyboard without looking up as Gary sits down on sofa)*  
So is he.

**GARY** *(perturbed)* What?

**JOHN** Dead.

**GARY** Who?

**JOHN** Bob Marley.

**GARY** What about him?

**JOHN** He's dead too.

**GARY** *(to John)* I don't remember asking for your opinion – get back to your poxy box – PERVERT!

**MARY** *(concerned, gentle)* Gary, don't be like that.

**GARY** Well – bloody tosser – all he does all day and half the night is tap tap tap on that poxy thing.....

**MARY** It's part of his job.

**GARY** What? Twenty-four hours a day? He's bloody obsessed.

**MARY** Oh, he's alright.

**GARY** Bollocks – he-is-A.....WANKER.

**MARY** Gary!

**LANCE** (Jovial) Leave him alone, he's not doing any harm.

*Gary picks up a newspaper and sits down on the sofa.*

**GARY** Tapping them keys night and bloody day – gets on my tits.

*Gary reads the paper. Mary gets up and walks to the little kitchen area. She pours tea from a pot.*

**MARY** Cup of tea Lance?

**LANCE** Please. That would be lovely.

**MARY** John?

**GARY** (from behind newspaper) I'll have one.

**MARY** John?

**JOHN** (sheepishly) Er, no thanks Mary.

**MARY** Are you sure love?

**JOHN** Yes, yes thanks.

*Mary makes the tea – takes one to Lance who is still messing around with his trombone, he stops to take tea, then takes over her own and Gary's to Gary.*

**MARY** Your tea Gary.

**GARY** (Without looking up from newspaper) Put it on the table.

*Lance looks over, shaking his head disapprovingly.*

*Silence as they drink.*

Enter **Man-with-can** stage right.

*A man carrying an old galvanised watering can, late fifties, scruffy appearance, looks harassed all the time. He looks at nobody, speaks to nobody, keeps his eyes firmly fixed on the big old high tap at the sink in the kitchen area to which he is walking. When at the sink, he starts to fill his can with water. Gary looks up from his newspaper.*

**GARY** Do we have to put up with that pillock filling his can with water, every day? Doesn't say a bloody word – just fills that poxy can – I mean, look at him –

(shouts over to Man-with-can) Oiy you mate, you with the can.....no more water. Do you hear? No – more – water – sunshine.

*There is, as usual, absolutely no reaction from the Man-with-can. Gary goes back behind his newspaper.*

**MARY** (Gently) Gary – you know very well it's in the agreement.

**GARY** Poxy fucking agreement.

**MARY** It's what the landlord wanted and it saves us money.

**GARY** Oh yeah.....and how do you work that one out?

**MARY** Well, you know he knocked twenty pounds a month off of the rent if we allow the man access to the kitchen for water and.....

**GARY** Big deal!

*Man-with-can turns off tap as can is full. He picks up can and walks toward the door, only looking at the door.*

**GARY** (To the Man-with-Can as he walks) Friend of yours is he...this landlord? Boyfriend? Bum Chum? Having his way with you, hey? Bet you don't even know how many beans make five hey?

*Silence as Man-with-can doesn't acknowledge Gary*

**GARY**(Annoyed) Go on, tell me...How many fucking beans make five?

*Man-with-can exits, gently closing door behind him, without acknowledging Gary.*

**GARY** Cunt!

**MARY** (Concerned) Gary!

**LANCE** (still polishing and now lubricating trombone slide) Strange chap though.

**MARY** Who?

**LANCE** That can-man. I must admit, it's a bit disconcerting that he has his own key to the place.

**GARY** (From behind newspaper) Huh, he's a top tosser.

*Silence as **John** continues tapping on computer keypad. **Mary** goes over to Gary's motorbike helmet – **Gary** looks up from the newspaper concerned as to what she's going to do to his 'precious' belonging – she takes out a cloth from*

*her pocket, leans over, and begins to gently clean the helmet. **Gary** says nothing and returns to his newspaper. **Lance** finishes off lubricating his trombone slide and puts it back together. He puts the instrument to his lips and goes to test-blow it, as he does so, the telephone rings – he looks at the trombone, puzzled, then realizes the noise was the telephone as it rings again. It rings several times.*

**GARY** Is someone going to get that?

***Mary** jumps up and scuttles over to the telephone.*

**MARY** (On telephone) Seven seven two, two two seven, hello?... Yes of course. (To John) John, it's your mother.

**GARY** Oh dear! Catastrophe! Got to leave your poxy box.....Ha!

***John** finishes up and drags himself away to the telephone.*

**MARY** (Handing him the telephone) Here you are John.

**JOHN** (To Mary, taking receiver) Er, thanks. (On telephone, monotone) Hello.....Yes...Yes, I had breakfast....and lunch....well just an orange....but it was all I wanted.....

***Gary** shakes his head disapprovingly*

**JOHN** (On phone)....Tonight, er, just a sandwich....yes but it's Friday night and I have no work tomorrow.....What, tomorrow?.....(despondent) Oh yes, I forgot you were coming round tomorrow....ok, see you tomorrow....yes, I will....I'll eat three....beef.....ok, see you tomorrow.

***John** puts receiver down and walks back to his computer workstation.*

**MARY** (To John, as he's walking) All right John?

**JOHN** Yeah.....

**GARY** (From behind newspaper) For Christ's sake. Has that woman got nothing better to do than keep bothering us about what the fuck you're eating?

**LANCE** (Blows a short note on trombone) Oh it's just mum-stuff.

**GARY** What does it matter whether he eats a sandwich or sticks an apple up his arse – he's twenty-five for fuck's sake.

*Mary has resumed cleaning the helmet. John continues work at the computer, not acknowledging the general conversation. Lance dismantles his trombone and puts it in its case. At the same time Gary throws down newspaper and gets up, stretches, punches the air a few times, then sits back down and picks up the newspaper again and begins to read it.*

**GARY** (From behind newspaper) Any chance of some more tea?

**MARY** Yes Gary, I'll re-boil the kettle. Anyone else?

**LANCE** Oh yes please, pretty dry actually.

**MARY** It's all that tromboning.

*Mary collects cups and goes to the kitchen area to make more tea*

**GARY** (From behind newspaper) Tromboning! He hasn't done any!

**LANCE** But it's the thought of it

**GARY** What do you mean – *thought!*

**LANCE** The thought of playing the trombone makes me dry up! It's all connected with the mind and the mouth, call it the mind-mouth problem – trombonist's dualism, if you will...

**GARY** (Sarcastically) If you will.

**LANCE** ...the saliva tends to dry up you see when you're in performance mode, so to speak.....

**GARY** (Sarcastically) So to speak.

**LANCE** Anyhow, the situation gets even worse when you're nervous as it were.....

**GARY** (Sarcastically) As it were.

**LANCE** And I've even heard it said that the connection between the mind and the playing of a trombone, or any other brass instrument come to think of it....

**GARY** (Sarcastically) Come to think of it.

**LANCE** Yes, come to think of it – probably all woodwind, that’s basically anything you blow...

**GARY** (Excitedly) Blow jobs.

**LANCE** Er, single reed, double reed, holes that you blow across...

**GARY** Now you’re talking.

**LANCE** In fact anything you use your mouth for, you know your embouchure...

**GARY** Orifice.

**LANCE** ...for, well.....

**GARY** Well? Well what? What the fuck are you saying?

**LANCE** Well its just that I’ve heard it said that it is almost impossible to play the said instruments...

**GARY** Said instruments.

**LANCE** ...if someone stands in front of them eating a lemon.

**GARY** (Not amused) God.....a fucking lemon. So that’s what this is about, a fucking lemon...

**LANCE** Not just a lemon. Watching people kiss passionately...

**GARY** Snogging now!.

**LANCE** ...or even kissing passionately oneself just before one plays can also upset the delicate state of one’s embouchure.

**GARY** One’s orifice, lemons, snogging – fucking bollocks!

**MARY** Tea!

*Mary brings over the tea. She gives one to **Lance** and then goes to hand one to **Gary**.*

**GARY** Put it on the table. How many more times do I have to tell you?

*Mary puts the tea carefully on the table and sits down beside **Gary** on the sofa*

*to drink hers. She puts the cup to her mouth and as she goes to take a sip the telephone rings again. She jumps straight up again and walks over to the telephone.*

**GARY** Piggin-Hell!

**MARY** Seven seven two, two two seven, hello?....Er, sorry, who is this?....John who? ....Turtle, (confused) John Turtle?....

**GARY** (Looking up excitedly from newspaper) Aahh! It's the turtle!

**MARY** (Confused) Pardon?

*Gary jumps to his feet and bounds over to the telephone.*

**GARY** (To Mary) Give it to me. It's the firm's delivery driver.

*Mary hands him the receiver and sits back down to drink her tea.*

**GARY** (On phone) Where are you, you little turtle wanker?....You're joking....(to Mary and Lance, covering the receiver) He's stuck in an eight-mile traffic-jam on the M1, fucking brilliant. (Into receiver) You'll be there for god-knows how long won't you?....Four hours!....I bet she is. (To Lance and Mary, covering receiver) His wife's going spare, they've just had a baby – I like it! (into receiver) You want to get your suit of armour ready for when you get in turtle, she be going spare man....too right!....ok....be seeing you, I reckon you'll be back by Monday morning won't you? Ha ha ha ha!....(looks at receiver puzzled) Oops, he's gone.

*Gary replaces receiver and puts his hands up in the air in celebration.*

**GARY** Result! John the Turtle - in a jam - all fucking night - with his wife screaming at him. That has made my day. Fucking brilliant!

**MARY** Poor man.

*Gary sits back down on the sofa beside Mary and picks up the newspaper again.*

**GARY** With disdain) Poor man! We're talking about John the turtle – he's a right little turtle-wanker he is – always worrying about his poxy wife and how she's doing.

**LANCE** What's so bad about that, I mean, she's got a baby and all that?

**GARY** Do you know that little turtle-wanker won't even come down the pub after

work because he just has to *pop in* to see how his stupid mother is before he gets home to precious fucking wifey – and I mean *every* time we ask him.

**LANCE** Oh well, he's got other priorities. Things have changed for him. So what? They change for lots of people.

**GARY** (With some regret in his voice) Hm! Fuck-all's changed for me I can tell you.

*Silence as Gary ponders this and goes back behind newspaper. Mary puts down her tea and goes over to the helmet and takes out her cloth from her pocket. On the helmet is a rather phallic-looking silver horn, about eight-inches long, about the girth of a banana and a bulbous head twice as big as the stem. For Gary it is a symbol, much like the badge on an up-market car. He doesn't like it touched or referred to in any way. Mary moves as to polish the silver horn.*

**GARY** (From behind newspaper) What are you doing?

**MARY** (Embarrassed, fumbling with cloth) Oh, nothing, I was....just....er....

**GARY** Just what?

**MARY** Er just going to remove a fly from your helmet.

**GARY** (Looking around the newspaper) Fly, right. Wipe it off then.

*Mary makes out as if to wipe off a fly.*

**MARY** There. You see – gone.

**GARY** (Retreats back behind paper) Uh-huh.

*Mary walks toward the sofa embarrassed, but turns to look at the silver horn again. Gary notices again and keeps her on edge by a purposeful rustling of the newspaper. Mary immediately gets the message and looks away sharply, returning to the sofa, and her tea. Lance is looking through some music scores. John still taps at the keyboard. The doorbell sounds.*

**GARY** (Annoyed) Who in Christ's name is that?

*Mary goes to the door, out of view.*

**GARY** (Throwing down newspaper) I hate this shit-hole.

**MARY** Oh hello, Reverend Peters.

**GARY** (Really fed up) Fuck!

**REV PETERS** Good evening Mary, and how are you?

**MARY** Fine, thank you. Won't you come in?

**REV PETERS** Er, well – Is Lance at home?

**MARY** Yes. He's in the living room, come through.

**REV PETERS** (Instantaneously eager) Oh good!

*Mary and Rev Peters enter stage right.*

**GARY** Right, that's it. I'm off for a shower.

**REV PETERS** (As Gary walks out) Evening.....Gary Isn't it?

**GARY** (Sarcastically) Is it? (pointing to Lance) He's an atheist!(slams hall door behind him, stage left)

**MARY** (Pointing to kitchen area) Would you like some tea, Reverend?

**REV PETERS** No no, I'm fine thanks.

**MARY** You sure?

**REV PETERS** I've just filled myself with tea at Miss Pink's, thanks all the same.

**MARY** How is Miss Pink these days?

**REV PETERS** Oh, you know, very blue I'm afraid.

*Lance looks up from his scores, puzzled at Rev Peters comment, then looks back and carries on perusing.*

**MARY** (Concerned) Oh dear.

**REV PETERS** Quite. (Looking awkwardly over toward Lance) Could I.....um.....

**MARY** Yes, I'll leave you two alone – I've got to go and get freshened up a little anyhow. Now, you're sure you're ok for tea?

**REV PETERS** (Looking backwards and forwards between Lance and Mary) Absolutely.

**MARY** Right then. I'll be seeing you.

*Mary exits through the hall door, stage left.*

**REV PETERS** (Embarrassed) Bye.....bye.

*Rev Peters stands awkwardly for a moment, shifting from one leg to another, looking at Lance who is so engrossed in his music scores that he is unaware. John gets up and goes over to the kitchen area where he pours himself a glass of water, drinks it straight down, then returns to his workstation. John and Rev Peters do not acknowledge each other.*

**LANCE** (Gradually becoming aware of Rev Peters presence, looking up) Oh, sorry Reverend Peters – I was completely absorbed – you wanted something?

**REV PETERS** (Awkwardly looking sideways at John) Um, well....

**LANCE** Oh don't mind him, he's completely unaware – it's really just the two of us.

**REV PETERS** (Unsure, unsteady) O.....k, ummm.....

**LANCE** Yes?

**REV PETERS** Did you by any chance manage to get hold of that film?

**LANCE** (Loud and excited) Ah yes! You mean the foot-fetish DVD?

*Rev Peters again looks sideways at John. John doesn't react.*

**LANCE** (Rummaging through his bag) Let me see.....I thought it was here somewhere.....(he immediately stops rummaging, puts his index finger up in the air) No! I know where it is. It's in my trombone case!

**REV PETERS** (Slightly excited) Ah!

*Lance opens the case. Rev Peters sidles up behind Lance, looking over his shoulder in eager anticipation. Lance picks up the film and holds it high above his head.*

**LANCE** (Shouts) Here!

*Rev Peters flinches, quickly retreating back a couple of paces before Lance turns around.*

**LANCE** Here you are (passes it to Rev Peters but doesn't let go as he talks about it) It's a good one, so I'm told – the first in the series.....

**REV PETERS** (Awe-struck) The first!

**LANCE** Yes – it’s the one they all want. It’s got the girl with the……

**REV PETERS** (Forgetting himself for a moment) The girl with the really big……  
plump……juicy……big toes oh……

**LANCE** (Letting go of the film) That’s the one.

**REV PETERS** (Gratefully) B……less you!

**LANCE** (Closing trombone case) Oh, it’s no problem. The chaps got most of the series  
if you……

**REV PETERS** (Looking intently at film cover) I do! I do!

*Enter **Man-with can** stage right and **Mary** stage left simultaneously. **Man-with-can** goes to the sink and starts to fill can with water. **Mary** is dressed only in a towel. She is soaking wet with her hair tied up. She now looks voluptuous. She is barefoot, as she walks, her wet feet make a significant slapping sound on the stage. **Rev Peters** only acknowledges, and looks at, **Mary**, he doesn’t notice the presence of the **Man-with-can**. The **Man-with-can** doesn’t acknowledge anyone as usual.*

**REV PETERS** (Surprised, he quickly hides the film inside his overcoat) **Mary**!

***Lance** stands up from his trombone case as **Mary** walks over to him. As **Mary** walks to **Lance**, **Rev Peters** is absolutely transfixed by the sight and sound of her naked wet feet. As she stops to talk to **Lance** she is right in front of **Rev Peters**, sideways on to him.*

**MARY** (To **Lance**) Silly me. Forgotten my shampoo again. Have you some I could borrow?

**LANCE** (Walks to the kitchen area) Yes, hang on.

**MARY** (To **Rev Peters**) Oh, by the way… How’s Mrs Peters?

**REV PETERS** (Still overwhelmed by **Mary**’s feet, staring at them intently) God Almighty!

**MARY** Pardon?

**REV PETERS** (Snapping out of his trance-like state) I mean….God Almighty she’s well, she’s as well as ever!

**MARY** (Puzzled) Good.

*Lance passes Mary his shampoo.*

**LANCE** There you go.

**MARY** Thanks.

*Mary walks back to the hall door and exits. As she does so, Rev Peters is again transfixed, in a trance-like state, looking at her feet as she walks. She closes the door behind her. Rev Peters looks up 'heavenward' for a few seconds and closes his eyes in blissful contemplation of what he's just witnessed. Man with-can exits with his can of water, not acknowledging anyone and unacknowledged by all.*

Blackout.

## ACT 1 Scene 2

Friday evening 7.00pm – Living room

*Lance is dressed as a Morris-man ready to go out on a dance and he is putting his trombone away in its case. Mary (now showered and freshened up) is sitting on the sofa reading a novel. John still sits at the computer tapping the keyboard fervently, hair dishevelled, dressed as he was (he obviously hasn't moved all evening) The Man-with-can is filling his can at the sink. He fills his can and is walking toward the door as Gary enters from taking his shower, he is dressed wide-boy fashion ready to go out' on the pull.'*

**GARY** (To Man-with-can) Thank fuck you're going.

*Man-with-can exits closing door behind him without reacting.*

**GARY** (Shouting toward the front door) You didn't tell us mate. How many beans make five? (Noticing Lance dressed as a morris-man) What the fuck...?...You're not right!

*Lance just smiles to himself and carries on with fixing his bells to his ankles. Gary looks in the mirror and preens his heavily greased hair*

**MARY** (Looking up from her novel, lovingly) Where are you off to tonight Gary?

**LANCE** He's out on the pull, Mary. He's out on the pull. (To Gary) Am I right?

**GARY** (Cocky, still preening) You got it.

**LANCE** Rose and Crown?

**GARY** (Still preening) Yup.

**LANCE** Er, let me guess...with Nobby?

**GARY** Course! (Coarsely) Nobbyyyyyyyyy...

**MARY** (Enthusiastically) Supposed to be nice down the Rose and Crown.

**JOHN** (Without looking away from the computer screen) Real ale too.

**GARY** (Sitting down next to Mary on the sofa) Stuff the real ale and stuff nice, if the pussy's no good then it's shite!

*Lance finishes attaching his bells and makes his way over to the kitchen area.*

*The bells jangle as he walks.*

- GARY** (Pointing to Lance's bells) Those fucking bells – I mean – who would hey?
- MARY** I think they're great, I really do.
- GARY** Well you think anything's great – bloody Salvation Army, the fucking bible (looking at the book she's reading) What ya reading there then, trash?
- MARY** Candide.
- GARY** (Puzzled) Who!
- MARY** Candide, by Voltaire.
- GARY** Where?
- MARY** (Tentatively) It's a book about...
- LANCE** (Pouring a glass of water at the sink) Well, in a nutshell, it's about everything being for the best in a world that's the best of all possible worlds and ...
- GARY** (Shaking his head disapprovingly) Do you know, you're actually doing my nut in– it's more fucking bollocks ain it?
- LANCE** No, not at all...do you read, Gary?
- GARY** (Dismissive) Read! Fuck no!
- MARY** You were reading the paper earlier love?
- GARY** That was the sport section, that's different.
- LANCE** What about the rest of the paper – news, articles that sort of thing – books, magazines - periodicals?
- GARY** (Dismissive) Fucking periods! Look, I know all I need to know...I don't need to read no papers and shit. What the fuck is it with you people – gotta know everything – get your fucking noses stuck up peoples' arseholes and shit...
- MARY** (Gently admonishing) Gary!
- GARY** Well...
- LANCE** Well, I wouldn't put it quite like that Gary old boy.

**GARY** And how would you put it...*old boy*?

**LANCE** (Downing his glass of water nervously) My old teacher always said to me, read as much as you can – books, both fiction and non-fiction, and if you not in the mood to read entire books, then any broadsheet newspaper – and he was right-it's good advice for anyone really.

**GARY** (Downbeat) Really.

**LANCE** Oh yes. It gives you some perspective on the world. Peoples' lives are interesting you know..

**GARY** Oh yeah, how's that then?

**LANCE** Take biographies and autobiographies for example – reading about other peoples' lives helps us to make some sense of our own don't you think?

**GARY** (Downbeat) Be difficult to make much sense of my fucking life.

**MARY** Oh Gary, don't be like that – you're fine.

**GARY** Fine, my arse!

**LANCE** And it's only by reading and mulling over the past that we can possibly think about the way forward – you know – it's what politics is all about really.

**GARY** I hate the past, I hate now, and I'm already hating the future – if there is one.

**LANCE** Come on old boy, you've got to get into a different mindset – otherwise, what is the point?

**GARY** Exactly – What *is* the point. I've never seen the point - there is... *fuck-all...point!*

**LANCE** Surely it depends?

**GARY** Depends! Depends on What?

**LANCE** On what you're doing with your life, you know, you get out of it what you put into and all that?

**GARY** I'm a fucking loader of lorries for Christ's sake – what the fuck am I going to get out of that shit?

**LANCE** Well...

**MARY** There's nothing wrong with that, Gary – it's a decent job.

**GARY** Decent job! But there's nothing fucking interesting about it – it's not exactly *inspiring!*

**LANCE** You know, you can find ways to make any job inspiring.

**GARY** Oh yeah, *you* probably can.

**LANCE** And so can you, Gary.

**GARY** Have you ever done a job like mine, you know, a really shit job, low pay, no prospects, and done it for years with nothing else on the horizon?

**LANCE** Er...

**GARY** Thought so, you haven't have you?

**LANCE** Once in the college vacation...

**GARY** Oh, don't give me that shit about some poncey fucking spell in a holiday job between your college work – it ain't the same. You see, you and me are like chalk and cheese on the inspiration front – I bet your mummy and daddy even helped pay your way, yeah?

**LANCE** Yeh..um...

**GARY** Course they fucking did, I'm right aren't I?

**LANCE** Well, they did but I had to be careful all the same.

**GARY** Huh! Was that by having three pints a night instead of four in the (wild hand gestures) *student bar!*

*Lance shrugs his shoulders in defeat and walks over to his trombone case, his bells fixed on his legs and jangling as he walks.  
There is a loud knock at the door.*

**GARY** (Relieved) That'll be Nobby. Brilliant. The sooner I'm out of here the better.

*Gary jumps up, has one last look in the mirror, preens his hair and makes for the door.*

**MARY** Have a nice evening Gary.

**GARY** (Shrugging, nonchalant) Hm. (Opening door to Nobby) Nobbyyyyyyy!  
(Sniffing loudly) What's that smell? You've pulled your skin back you dirty little bastard! (They both laugh as the door slams behind him, he shouts coarsely) Come on!

*Lance, leaning against the sink, sips his glass of water with his hand on his forehead, sighing with distaste.*

**MARY** (To **Lance**) He'll have a nice evening won't he? (concerned) Do you think he'll get too drunk and do something silly like last time?

**LANCE** (Resigned) Mary, I think we know the answer to those questions – yes, yes, and yes!

**MARY** Oh dear! (She closes her book, and puts it on a small table) He does worry me.

*Mary gets up and starts to make tea at the kitchen alongside Lance.*

**LANCE** You know, he's a big boy now. He can look after himself.

**MARY** I know but...(she sighs deeply)....

**LANCE** You know your problem?

*Mary shrugs and looks a little forlorn and upset.*

**LANCE** (Putting his arm around **Mary** in a genuinely concerned way) I think perhaps you like him rather a lot?

**MARY** (Embarrassed) Who Gary?

**LANCE** (Tongue in cheek) Uh huh.

**MARY** You know I Like Gary? I like everyone in the house.

**LANCE** (Knowingly) Mary!

**MARY** What?

**LANCE** (Playfully) Tell me the truth.

**MARY** (Coyly) There's nothing to tell. (She fiddles with her hands and looks down at them to avoid Lance's gaze) I really don't know what you mean.

**LANCE** (Holding up his hands) Ok Mary – whatever you say.

**MARY** Do you know if he'll be seeing that Justine again tonight – I mean – did he mention anything about her?

**LANCE** (Pointing with his index finger, smiling) Ah, *Justine*. Yes he did mention her as it happens...

**MARY** (Anxiously) Did he? Is he seeing her? I mean, will she be there tonight?

**LANCE** Do I detect a lot of interest in the room about Gary's girlfriend all of a sudden?...

**MARY** Girlfriend? Does he call her that? Is she?

**LANCE** Not sure – it's difficult to tell with Gary at the best of times, don't you think?

**MARY** (Pensive) Mm...mind you...I don't think he really likes her, do you?

**LANCE** I don't actually think he needs to like her... if you see what I mean?

**MARY** (Downcast) Oh.

*Lance picks up Mary's book and flicks through it.*

**LANCE** How are you finding Voltaire then?

**MARY** (Now uninterested, daydreaming) It's...ok.

*Lance flicks through the book some more in an awkward silence before gently putting it back from where he got it. He goes over to his trombone, gets it out of the case and starts to grease the slide in an effort to avoid Mary. Mary icks up the book and starts to read it again.*

**LANCE** (To John, awkwardly, trying to break the silence) You ok then John?

**JOHN** I'm staying in tonight.

**LANCE** (Shaking his head, confused, still greasing his slide) I see.

*Pause. Silence as Lance greases his slide, Mary reads her book, and John taps his keyboard.*

Blackout.

### Act I Scene 3

Friday – 11pm – Living room

*It's 11pm. **Mary** who has been sitting in all evening reading, is on the sofa with her bible open. **John** is back on the computer wearing his distinctive red pin-striped pyjamas. There is a loud over-zealous knock at the door followed by **Gary** who is with his 'pick-up' **Justine** (dressed exceptionally provocatively and tastelessly) and his friend **Nobby**. **Gary** shouts through the letterbox.*

**GARY** (Slightly the worse for drink) I aint got a key, I aint got a watering can, but I know how many fucking beans make five! Open up you bunch of faggots! (raucous laughter).

***Mary** hurries over to the door and lets them in. Enter **Gary** and **Gary's 'pick-up' Justine**. **Mary** quickly returns to her seat and is holding her bible open.*

**GARY** (Turning to say good-bye to Nobby) Ok Nobbyyyyy – time for you to piss off home and pull your skin back you dirty little bastard - We've got work to do (to Justine) hey?

**JUSTINE** (Giggling whilst Gary's hand is up her skirt) Have we?

**GARY** (Slamming the door shut with the back of his foot) Uh huh! (pointing at John, talking to Justine) Now *there's* a pervert if ever there was.

***Justine** giggles stupidly. **Mary** looks up from her bible disapprovingly.*

**JUSTINE** (Pointing stupidly) Is she reading the bible? (Giggles)

**GARY** Oh, yeah – trash – always reading trash this lot – huh!

**MARY** (To John and Justine) Would you like a coffee?

**GARY** (To Justine) Coffee! I think we can find something better than that babe, come on.

***Gary** leads **Justine** over to the sideboard and searches for spirits. **Mary** gets up and begins to make coffee in the kitchen area.*

**MARY** (To John) Would you like a coffee love?

**JOHN** Errr...

**MARY** I'm boiling the kettle anyway.

**JOHN** Er...no thanks.

**MARY** Sure.

**GARY** (Still squatting looking in the sideboard) Of course he's sure – don't pamper the pervert – he's got a fucking mother to do that for Christ's sake. (Finding some scotch) Ah, this is what we want babe.

*Gary removes the bottle of scotch and two glasses. Mary continues making the coffee always with an eye on Gary and Justine, of whom she is slightly jealous. Gary pours the scotch and sits on the sofa with his arm around Justine – they canoodle. Justine wriggles uncomfortably.*

**GARY** What's the matter babe – something got into your knickers?

**JUSTINE** (Still wriggling) Something seems to be digging into my back.

**GARY** (Proudly) That'll be me babe!

**JUSTINE** No, it's...(removing bible) this...

**GARY** (Snatching it from her and throwing it down across the floor) It's Mary's bible shit.

**JUSTINE** (Disdainfully) Er!

**GARY** Never mind babe, it's gone now.

**JUSTINE** (Cuddling up to Gary) Good.

*Mary, finishes making coffee and looks annoyed. She walks out with her coffee stage left without acknowledging anyone.*

**GARY** I've got something else that might dig in your back though.

**JUSTINE** (Giggling) Really!

**GARY** Oh yeah.

**JUSTINE** And what might that be?

**GARY** Do you want to find out?

**JUSTINE** Uh huh.

**GARY** (Teasing) You sure?

**JUSTINE** Oh yeahhhh.

*Gary slides off of the sofa between **Justine's** legs, puts his head onto her skirt just below her crotch.*

**JUSTINE** (Getting turned on) Ooh Gary!

**GARY** (Lifting her legs so that her knees are up to her chest) Would you like me to get all snuffly-wuffly babe?

**JUSTINE** (Throwing her head back in delight) Fuck yes!

**GARY** (Starting to lick his way down her thigh) Mmm...snuffly....wuffly...snuffly...

**JUSTINE** (Rising in excitement) Wuffly...

**GARY** Snuffly...wuffly...snuffly...

**JUSTINE** Wuffly...

**GARY** (Placing his lips on her knickers) Snuffly...wuffly...snuffly...

**JUSTINE** (Rising more) Wuffly...

**GARY** (Shaking his head from side to side with his lips on her knickers) Snuffly wuffly snuffly wuffly snuffly...

**JUSTINE** (Trembling) Ahh....wufflyyyy!...

*Enter **Lance** dressed as a Morris dancer stage right – he bounds in making quite a noise as the bells are still around his shins.*

**LANCE** (As if everything was normal) Evening you people!

**JUSTINE** (Embarrassed) Who...what...oh...

**GARY** (Looking over his shoulder at Lance) For fuck's sake!

***Gary** and **Justine** right themselves as **Lance** puts down his trombone and starts to remove his bells.*

**LANCE** (Removing his bells) You two had a good night then?

**GARY** (Sarcastically) What do you think?

**LANCE** We were jolly lucky with the weather were we not?

**GARY** (Slowly) Jolly lucky.

***Justine** giggles.*

**LANCE** Just started to rain as we finished the last dance – couldn't have been better.

**GARY** Perfect evening all round, hey?

**LANCE** How about that! (Throws his bells down, puts on kettle) Anyone for coffee?

**GARY** (Sarcastically to Justine) Yeah, finish the evening off a treat wouldn't it babe?

**JUSTINE** (Looking puzzled) Hey?

**LANCE** Who takes sugar?

**GARY** (To Justine) Come on babe, lets go to my room – we've got some unfinished business – yeah?

**JUSTINE** (Still confused) Oh...yeah, ok.

**LANCE** (Concerned and oblivious) What about your coffee?

**GARY** (As they exit, stage left) Fucking coffee!

**LANCE** (To himself) Oh! No coffee then – please yourselves.

*Lance pours himself a coffee, takes it over to the sofa, sits down and puts his feet up on a puffy.*

**LANCE** (Breathing a contented sigh of relief and sipping his coffee) Well, that was a good day – well done Lance – see what tomorrow brings, shall we?

Blackout.

## Act I Scene 4

### Friday. Midnight – Living room

*It's midnight and everyone has gone to bed. However, they are now seen in another light as they gradually emerge into their night-world – Gary and Justine are seen on the bed, stage left in Gary's bedroom. Gary keeps all of his clothes on throughout and Justin only removes her knickers and shoes (she has bare legs and feet). Lance is standing at the back of the stage with his back to the audience. He is wearing a dressing gown and is naked underneath except for the morris bells around his shins and he is holding his trombone. Mary is wearing her Salvation Army coat and hat, she is wearing sexy high-heel shoes along with stockings and suspenders but no bra. John is sitting at his computer and completely naked. The Man-with-can is standing by the sink with his watering can. He is wearing only his old boots and dirty underpants. Reverend Peters is naked except for a dog collar and some old boots – he is squatting out of view below the window of Gary's Bedroom*

*The scene opens with the music of Strauss's 'Thunder and Lightning' Polka. During the calmer first part of the polka Gary and Justine are sexually arousing each other, Lance is greasing his trombone slide, Mary is standing by the small table gently dusting the silver horn on Gary's motorbike helmet, John is tapping the keyboard of the computer, and Man-with-can is standing with his right hand gently rubbing the spout of his watering-can. When the music moves into the second fast and furious section, Gary puts Justine's legs over his shoulders with her bare feet in the air prominently, and thrusts with each beat of the music. At this point Reverend Peters appears through the window as he bobs up and down to the music – each time getting a look at the naked feet in the air. Mary has thrown off her coat and is kneeling provocatively in front of Gary's helmet, she is furiously polishing the silver horn in a masturbatory fashion – again to the beat of the music. Lance throws down his grease, throws off his dressing-gown and holds his trombone at 45 degrees aloft whilst pumping his slide back and forth to the music. The Man with-can has now taken the spout of his can with his right hand and is rubbing it in a masturbatory fashion to the music. John is now more frantic, nodding his head to the beat of the music, the light of the computer screen is now more exaggerated and flashing to the beat of the music. This rhythmic sexual action continues to the end of the scene, where, a few bars from the actual end of the polka, the Man-with-can stops rubbing his can spout and starts pouring water from it into the sink with a satisfied expression on his face as everyone else continues in the same manner as the curtain falls.*

## Act II Scene 1

Friday. Midnight – Living room – (Continuation of last scene)

*Before curtain up the last 'chorus' section of the 'Thunder and Lightening' polka plays and after a few seconds the curtain rises to the exact same scenario in the last scene. Everyone continues in the same way until **Gary**, being face down on top of **Justine**, goes very limp as if to have some kind of seizure. At this, **Justine**, reacts with horror and screams as she struggles to free herself from what she perceives is a dying man on top of her. As she is screaming, she picks up her knickers and makes her way to the front door to escape. The music starts to fade away and **Rev Peters** also panics, firstly running toward the front of the stage, then to the back, then to the front, and finally, turns, and is seen running naked, disappearing to the back of the stage. The **Man-with-can** very swiftly and quietly removes himself from the scene with his can. **Lance** puts on a dressing gown. **Mary** puts on her Salvation Army coat looking concerned.*

Blackout.

## Act II Scene 2

Just after midnight – Gary’s bedroom

*Mary enters Gary’s bedroom and finds him half conscious, groaning, and on his back.*

**MARY** (Extremely caring, lovingly and tenderly) Gary, my love..what....what has happened to you?

**GARY** (Still groaning, but coming to) Ohh! I think I’ve had some kind of heart thingy...

**MARY** What! (sitting him up in the bed) Let me help you up – you need to get off of your back if you’ve had any kind of heart problem love.

**GARY** (Sitting up) Ohh!

**MARY** (Emotional) Thought I was going to die Mary.

**MARY** Oh, don’t talk like that. (She turns her head around and shouts) Lance!

**LANCE** (From outside the door of **Gary’s** room, hastily with concern) Yes!

**MARY** Phone for an ambulance right away.

**LANCE** Right away, Mary.

**GARY** Mary, I ....

**MARY** (Tenderly quietening his mouth with her hand) Keep nice and calm Gary you need to rest now...

**GARY** (Protesting) No, I must ask you something, especially if the ambulance is going to take me away...

**MARY** What, my love.

**GARY** Mary, would you undress me and take off the things underneath?

**MARY** What things? I don’t understand Gary.

**GARY** (Pleading) Please Mary, before they get here. (He starts to take off his shirt but is too weak)

**MARY** (Taking over) Here, let me. (She unbuttons his shirt to reveal a silky bra)

**GARY** Take it off please.

**MARY** (Taking it off) Don't worry Gary.

**GARY** (Pointing to his groin) Now my trousers please.

**MARY** (She undoes his trousers to reveal a matching pair of silky knickers and removes them)

**GARY** I feel so embarrassed...

**MARY** (Reassuringly) Gary, it's nothing...really...

**GARY** I'm not gay or anything you know...

**MARY** Shhhsh Gary I know..

**GARY** What do you mean you know? You know that I wear them or...

**MARY** (Intent on lovingly quietening Gary) Shhhsh Gary, none of it matters.

*Lance bursts into the room.*

**LANCE** (Over excitedly) The ambulance is on its way! (Looking at **Gary** and the silky knickers) Crikey! What.....?

**MARY** Best if you leave us until the ambulance arrives...

**LANCE** (Slightly embarrassed) Ye..s .....sure, ok.

*Lance leaves the room and gently shuts the door behind him.*

**GARY** (To Mary, worried and pointing at the underwear) Did he see the...

**MARY** Doesn't matter. (Doing his trousers back up for him) Don't worry yourself about anything Gary, just rest.

**GARY** I wear this stuff underneath because – er...

**MARY** You don't have to explain anything to me Gary...

**GARY** No, I want to. Isn't that funny, I have never wanted to tell anyone about this stuff before. But you, Mary, you feel right and proper.

**MARY** (Putting her arm around him) That's nice, Gary.

**GARY** All this silky women's stuff – it makes me feel comfortable and safe out there(gestures outside with his hands) Mary.

**MARY** That's ok love.

**GARY** (Upbeat) Yes. It's ok innit?

**MARY** (Softly) Yes.

**GARY** (Quietly) I really miss my mum you know – she's never around – never really has been.

*Gary throws his head back against his pillow and lets out a deep sigh. Mary says nothing but comforts him with soft caresses to his brow. Gary is very quiet and emotional.*

**GARY** (With **Mary** still caressing his brow) Mary, I think I love you.

**MARY** (Pleased) Quiet Gary.

**GARY** No, really...I do...I'm just not very good at...

**MARY** (Now holding him to her breast and caressing his brow) You're fine Gary, you're fine.

**GARY** (Weeping into her breast) Thank you. (**Mary** kisses his brow very sweetly and holds him tightly).

*Gradual fade-out to black.*

### Act II Scene 3

#### Continuation of scene 2 – Living room

*Lance is agitated while he waits for the ambulance to arrive. He is pacing up and down. The **Man-with-can** is standing at the sink filling his can. **John** is still at the computer back in his normal clothes. There is a loud knock at the door. **Lance** jumps up and answers it expectantly.*

**AMB. MAN** Ambulance?

**LANCE** Oh yes, er.....(the ambulance man and woman walk straight in)

**AMB. MAN** Where is he?

**LANCE** (Pointing to **Gary's** bedroom door) That door over there.

**AMB. MAN** Ok.

*The door is opened by **Mary** from the inside.*

**MARY** (Beckoning) He's in here.

**AMB. MAN** Righto.

*The ambulance crew disappear into the room. **Lance** again begins to pace up and down. As he is doing so he looks at the **Man-with-can**.*

**LANCE** Don't worry – even I couldn't tell you how many beans make... whatever...at the moment.

*The **Man-with-can** doesn't react, continues filling his can with the tap running painfully slow.*

**LANCE** By the way, what on earth are you doing filling your can at half past midnight anyway? You're not watering at this hour, are you?

***Mary** leaves **Gary's** bedroom and enters living room.*

**LANCE** (To **Mary**) How is it going in there?

**MARY** Oh, ok. They seem to think he's had some kind of heart palpitation rather than anything more serious but they will have to take him off to hospital to be checked over just in case.

**LANCE** Are you going with him?

**MARY** Well, I've said to the ambulance people that I will phone his mother and see if I can go in with her if she's ok with that.

**LANCE** Ok. That's good.

*Mary picks up the phone and dials. She speaks to Gary's mother very quietly so that her conversation cannot be heard.*

**LANCE** (Starting to pace again) (To himself) Crikey! Crikey! CRIKEY! (He blows his cheeks out with some anxiety)

*The Man-with-can still doesn't react but picks up a glass, stops filling his can, and fills it equally slowly. Lance continues to pace until it is full and seems to freeze as he watches the Man-with-can drink it down carefully. All is quiet for a moment. The Man-with-can finishes his water and puts it down on the sink. He picks up his can and stares as Gary's bedroom door is opened. Gary emerges being carried on a stretcher by the ambulance crew, followed by Mary*

**AMB. MAN** (To Lance) Could you open the front door please?

**LANCE** (Running to the door) Certainly old boy.

*As the ambulance crew move towards the door, John takes no notice but the Man-with-can moves closer and just stares*

**GARY** (Weakly and apologetically to the Man-with-can) Don't worry about the beans mate, don't worry about the beans – ok?

*The Man-with-can doesn't react but stares intently.*

**MARY** (To Gary, following the ambulance crew) Save your strength Gary, we want you to get better.

**GARY** You are coming with me, aren't you?

**MARY** Later, Gary.

**GARY** (Panicked) What!

**MARY** I've phoned your mum...

**GARY** (Astonished) Mum!

**MARY** She's coming round to pick me up and we are both coming to the hospital.

**GARY** (Emotional) My mum's coming to see ME! I can't believe that...it's brilliant...thank you Mary...(turning his head as he is stretchered out of the door) Mary...you're wonderful.

*Exit Gary and the ambulance crew through front door, stage right. Both Lance and Mary stand in numbed silence facing the closing front door as well as the Man-with-can. John is still tapping away at his computer.*

**JOHN**

(Without stopping what he's doing or looking up) Is there something wrong with Gary?

*Nobody acknowledges John or his question as they all continue to stare at the door.*

*Gradual fade-out to black.*

## Act II Scene 4

1.00am Saturday morning – Living room

*John has now gone to bed. Lance and Mary are in the living room. Lance is standing at the kitchen area holding a bottle of white wine and Mary is seated on the sofa.*

**LANCE** (To Mary) Would you like to join me with a glass of wine Mary?

**MARY** Yes please – just what I need while I wait for John’s mum.

**LANCE** I say, while I pour the wine, why don’t you try the Pastoral Symphony again –might calm us down a little?

**MARY** (Getting up from sofa) Ok.

*Mary puts on the Pastoral Symphony CD again but it still isn’t playing. Lance pours the wine for both of them and takes Mary’s over to her.*

**MARY** (Taking the wine) Thank you. CD still isn’t playing.

**LANCE** Have you pressed play?

**MARY** (Slightly exasperated) Of course!

**LANCE** (Holding up his glass) Cheers. Is John’s mum actually on her way to pick you up now?

**MARY** Yes. She said she was leaving right away and it’s only about ten miles so she shouldn’t be too long.

**LANCE** No, I’d say – about another few minutes.

**MARY** (Anxiously) Mm.

*They sip their wine in an awkward silence for a while.*

**LANCE and MARY** (Simultaneously) How/Do you...

**LANCE** Sorry you were...

**MARY** No, please, go ahead.

**LANCE** I was going to ask how you were getting on in the Salvation Army actually.

**MARY** Oh, you know – ok.

**LANCE** Although I'm an atheist as you know, I think they genuinely do some good stuff– you know, with the right intentions and all that – a bit like The Quakers I suppose.

**MARY** Thank you – it means a lot to me.

**LANCE** I mean, you really believe in God, and really care about people don't you?

**MARY** Well, yes, I suppose I do.

**LANCE** The thing is, I mean the thing I can't get my head around is, well, there is all this suffering going on in the world and I would find it awfully difficult to accept that whilst also accepting that God, who is omniscient omnibenevolent omnipotent you know, all the omni's – omni MAX! Um, yes, whilst also accepting a God who is omni everything and, quite frankly, ought to know better! Do you know where I'm coming from?

**MARY** I think so.

**LANCE** It's just that, thinking about that book you were reading earlier this evening, er, the Voltaire thingy...

**MARY** Ah, you mean *Candide*...

**LANCE** Ya, *Candide*. Voltaire really points out that despite what the wise Dr Pangloss tells *Candide*, you know, that this, as the philosopher Leibniz pointed out earlier, is, or, because there exists a God that does everything for the best, this is, (throws his hands up in exclamation) *has* to be, the best of all possible worlds is in fact not the case. Do you see?

**MARY** (Tentatively) Yes, I think so...

**LANCE** (Caught by surprise) You do?

**MARY** Absolutely.

**LANCE** Then why haven't you got a problem with it, or...have you?

**MARY** No, not at all.

**LANCE** (Humorously Stuttering as he tries to get to the crux of the matter) Well, er, er, I...

**MARY** (Smiling) Yes?

**LANCE** Um...I...

**MARY** You?

**LANCE** I'm wondering where you're coming from with it, that's all. It just doesn't seem to tally, Mary – just doesn't seem to tally.

**MARY** You don't think so?

**LANCE** (Quietly and seriously) No.

**MARY** Ah.

**LANCE** (Sipping his wine, getting excited) It's like this, think of the suffering inflicted upon totally innocent people in the world, no, not only adults, but children, there, you can't get much more innocent than children, do you agree?

**MARY** Well, obviously...

**LANCE** Quite. Now how can you equate this suffering being inflicted upon such innocence – just you tell me how it equates – was Voltaire wrong to try and establish a premise that said that this wasn't perhaps, the best of all possible worlds after all?

**MARY** Yes, I believe he was wrong.

**LANCE** (Stuttering again) What? But, why how can you...

**MARY** (Lovingly serious) Lance I pray.

**LANCE** (Shrugging his shoulders, rolling his eyes) Oh, you pray!

**MARY** (Slowly and deliberately) Yes, I pray.

**LANCE** Well, isn't that convenient – I mean, it seems to solve everything, doesn't it?

**MARY** Well, as a matter of fact, it does.

**LANCE** Of course, you are going to say that, they all do, it's a cop out, there's nothing much I can say about it, is there?

**MARY** You know, when I'm praying, God, in his wisdom, imparts things to me that I would never conjure up for myself...

**LANCE** So...would you care to enlighten me as to the question of suffering for example?

**MARY** Yes...

**LANCE** I mean that sort of (claws his hands to his head in an exaggerated manner) *really unnecessary* suffering inflicted upon innocents yeah?

**MARY** Yes, I understand.

**LANCE** (Excitedly interrupting) I know all about the aestheticist solution to the problem of evil and all that you know...

**MARY** (Calmly and patiently) Ok...

**LANCE** (Interrupting again) I know that God is supposed to see the (gesticulating wildly) bigger picture...

**MARY** Mm...

**LANCE** ...so that what we see as evil or analogously as a lump of black close up in an oil painting, is in fact wholly right and indeed necessary in the great scheme of things...

**MARY** Yes...

**LANCE** ...or in the case of the oil painting, when viewed from the right perspective, the lump of black becomes... just a part of the picture – in fact, without it, it would lose some of its meaning – (drawing breath) Yes?

**MARY** Well – yes, I know where you're coming from but all I can say is what has been imparted to me during my prayers to God.

**LANCE** (Impatiently excited, bemused and slightly condescending) Right.

**MARY** God sees into everyone's heart and knows everything...

**LANCE** If he's who he says he is I suppose that would be possible, go on.

**MARY** And whatever happens here on earth is down to our own free will.

**LANCE** Do you mean individually or collectively?

**MARY** Both. Everything that happens involves both individual and collective free will and although it pains God to witness our foolishness, he allows us, individually and collectively to exercise our free will.

**LANCE** Ok, I get that, but, how does this system stand up as being the best of all possible choices – what about the suffering that results from this?

**MARY** What we see when anyone suffers is, for us, just a perception...

**LANCE** A perception!

**MARY** Yes. God intervenes at every level in every act of suffering.

**LANCE** Again, if he's God that shouldn't be a problem – it's like occasionalism...

**MARY** (Puzzled) Occasionalism?

**LANCE** Yeah. Basically, occasionalists thought that whatever happened in the world, including anything that seems to be caused by a mind, is actually caused by God so that nothing whatsoever happens without God causing it – including every single action of all mankind.

**MARY** I see...

**LANCE** Now there are some Christians that think this utterly ridiculous and seemingly impossible – that – I find alarming – it's like certain Bishops thinking that the immaculate conception is a little far-fetched...

**MARY** (Laughs in agreement with Lance) I Know...

**LANCE** (Drawn out) Obviously, if he's God and he's done all this stuff like, create the entire universe and so on, he's not going to have much trouble either causing a handful of actions on a tiny spec of a planet in one miniscule corner of a relatively small galaxy or, for that matter, have a major headache over being able to create an immaculate conception – Is he!

**MARY** (Quiet and confident) No!

**LANCE** Anyway, back to suffering and – what was it, perception? You're digressing Mary.

**MARY** Ah yes. Well. It's actually in the bible 1 Corinthians 10:13...

**LANCE** Which is?

**MARY** But God knows how much you can take and he promises he won't give you more than you can bear.

**LANCE** Meaning?

**MARY** Meaning that God allows us to act in ways that are not good for us – people do terrible things to each other and we witness the results.

**LANCE** But why doesn't he intervene when something so obviously nasty is about to happen? After all, he *does* know what's coming next.

**MARY** Firstly, it is to allow us to see the way in which we would act if left to our own devices...

**LANCE** And?

**MARY** Secondly, going back to 1 Corinthians, what we witness when someone is in terrible pain is mainly for our benefit...

**LANCE** (Incredulous) How?

**MARY** When someone dies a painful death at the hands of an aggressor, there is a point at which God knows they can bear no more and he lifts their soul from their body...

**LANCE** Leaving their bodies to appear as though they are still struggling and in pain to the perpetrators and the outside world in general?

**MARY** Exactly. When a little child is apparently murdered, its little soul is already floating up to God, and it's laughing before it's apparently dead in this world. You see, solving the problem of suffering.

**LANCE** Well, I can see how this might work in terms of people never suffering beyond their capabilities for sure but why would God be willing and happy to go down such a convoluted route when he could have done absolutely anything he wanted?

**MARY** He is not happy, only willing – giving us our free will has in fact let us steer our own course.

**LANCE** So, the suffering is all down to us and the way we behave?

**MARY** Exactly.

**LANCE** Of course, being God means that he also knew from the beginning of time that we were going to take that course anyhow, doesn't it?

**MARY** Yes.

**LANCE** (Shaking his head) But still the suffering.

*Lance sits down beside Mary on the sofa. He looks pensive as they sit quiet for a moment.*

**LANCE** You know about the Nazi camp at Terezin?

**MARY** I've heard a little about it.

**LANCE** (With genuine heartfelt emotion) Fifteen thousand children were interned in that camp...fifteen thousand Mary...

**MARY** Yes, I know...

**LANCE** They wrote poems, drew pictures and so on you know – I never saw another butterfly and other things – heartwrenching things – these children, innocent children, were taken from their happy lives and imprisoned into a hellish existence – in an instant their childhood was over. Can you imagine that Mary?

**MARY** It was disgusting.

**LANCE** Do you know how many actually survived?

**MARY** Not very many.

**LANCE** (Angrily) Out of fifteen fucking thousand – about a hundred – that, I’m afraid, would make me very angry with God, if he were to exist.

**MARY** (Lovingly, caressing Lance’s arm) He does exist Lance.

**LANCE** (Genuinely engaged, pensive) Mm, Well...I can tell you that even now, thinking about all those children wrenches my guts out – sometimes when I conceive of the misery it’s so real I can’t feel my legs...

**MARY** (Sympathetic) Lance...

**LANCE** When something like the holocaust happens it’s like the apotheosis of impotence for the rest of the world don’t you think?

**MARY** Its interesting to think about what the holocaust survivor Victor Frankl observed.

**LANCE** (With humility) What was that?

**MARY** ...That God does not waste suffering...

**LANCE** (Putting his arm lovingly around Mary) I hope you’re right Mary. I hope you’re right.

*They both sip their wine in a meditative state for a moment. Then, there is a knock at the door – it is **Gary’s mum**. **Mary** jumps up, putting on her coat.*

**LANCE** That’ll be Gary’s mum, I expect?

**MARY** Yes. (Looks in the mirror briefly) I must go. Thank you Lance.

**LANCE** (To Mary as she approaches the door) No, thank *you*, Mary.

***Mary** leaves via the door and is heard to mumble something to **Gary’s mum**. The stark opening bars of Franz Waxman’s “The Song of Terezin” sound to the end of the scene. **Lance** gets up off the sofa and sips his wine contemplatively, as he wanders over to **Mary’s** bible on the floor. He looks at it for a second, then picks it up and starts to browse through it as he exits stage left.*

Slight pause.

*Enter **John** stage left, wearing his red-striped pyjamas and carrying a length of rope, which he places on his computer chair. He goes to the kitchen area where he opens a lower cupboard under the sink and turns off the water supply, turning the tap on and off to make sure that it's dry. He then goes over to his computer and shuts it down, picks up the rope and stands on the chair, gazing up to a hatch above. The music and the lights fade out to nothing.*

## Act II Scene 5

10.00am Saturday morning – Living room

*It's a very sunny day outside and the birds are heard to be singing. John's legs are dangling from above his work-station together with a piece of rope (he has hanged himself and the top half of his body is out of view through a hatch in the ceiling.) Enter **Man-with-can** from the front door (stage right). He proceeds to the sink for some water and turns on the tap which squeaks but delivers no water as the supply has been turned off by **John**. He turns it on and off several times always expecting water until he just leaves it on with the can underneath waiting for the water. He leans back despondently against the sink, casually looks up to **John's** corpse, then back toward the tap again, expectantly. There is a knock at the door he doesn't react. There is another knock, then through the letter box comes the voice of **John's Mum**.*

**J'S MUM** John. It's mum, John! Are you in there?

*Silence as **Man-with-can** just stares at the letter box.*

**J'S MUM** Are you still in bed John? Listen, if you're tired and in bed don't worry, I'll just pop these sandwiches through the letterbox for you – you **MUST** eat love.

*The sandwiches fall on to the floor.*

**J'S MUM** Bye love, if you can hear me.

***Man-with-can** strolls over to the sandwiches, picks them up (they are in silver foil) and ambles back to the sink. He takes another close look at the dry tap, leans back on the sink and unravels the sandwiches from the foil. He takes a bite from one. Chewing slowly and laboriously, he looks back up toward **John's** corpse as he chews, and then straight ahead toward the roof of the auditorium. He stops chewing suddenly, and, slowly and deliberately, with much concentration and a mouthful of sandwich, to the sound of birdsong...*

**M.W.CAN** A bean, a bean and a half, half a bean, a bean.....and.....another bean. (He begins chewing the sandwich again, this time with a faint hint of a self-satisfied smile)

*Pause. Birdsong. The **Man-with-can** looks over to the CD player as it starts of its own accord, playing from the beginning of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony. The **Man-with-can** goes over to the sofa and lies down flat with one hand behind his head, looking relaxed, with **John's** body now straight above him and directly in his line of sight, as he continues eating the sandwich. The music increases in volume.*

**Curtain.**