
Community Spirit

a play
by

David Muncaster

Community Spirit

Cast (in order of appearance)

Mel – Self conscious Local Government Officer. Female 25+

Mike – Pompous Chair of Choral Group. 30+

Chris – Not Mike's best friend. Male 30+

Sam – C of E vicar. Male 40+

Pat – RC Priest. Possibly Irish. Male 40+

Hilary – Amdram Luvvess. Female 30+

Jim – Amdram Luvvee. Male 30+

Wendy – Mumsey scout leader. Female 40+

Brian – Quietly devious. Male 40+

Charlie – Slightly seedy. Male 40+

Caretaker – Put upon. Male 60+

Mayor/Mayoress - Probably 40+. Non speaking role.

Dignitaries - Two or more of either gender. Non speaking.

Production note

The painting *Eyes Without a Face* is left to the directors imagination. Perhaps something like the back cover of this script?

ACT I

Scene 1

We are in the old community hall which is little more than a glorified shed. There is a large table, set ready for a committee meeting. MEL is pacing up and down looking at her watch when MIKE enters.

MEL: Oh thank goodness. I was beginning to think that no one was coming.

MIKE: What do you mean? I'm not late. It's bang on the hour.

MEL: Yes, I know Mike, but, well, I was hoping that people might come a little early really. We have so much to get through we really must start on time. I think I did say six forty-five for seven at the end of the last meeting and...

MIKE: When have I ever been late?

MEL: You? Er, I don't think I can remember an occasion...

MIKE: Exactly. Timing is crucial in a choral society. No good coming in late, eh? Or early for that matter. You see what I'm saying? I mean you wouldn't want your lachrymose in the middle of your dies irae would you? No, timing is everything. It is a rule I apply to life as well as music.

MEL: Er. yes.

MIKE: I just wish the am dramers understood that. They couldn't time a gag to save their lives. They seem to be so delighted, or should I say, surprised, that they have actually managed to remember their line that they just blurt it out without a thought to timing at all. If they understood just a tiny bit about timing it might make one of their performances bearable.

MEL: Mike, I...

MIKE: Sorry. Went a bit far there. On second thoughts I don't think timing sponsored by Accurist could make me want to sit through one of their shows.

MEL: Oh, they are not that bad.

MIKE: Come off it Mel. I know that it is your job on the council to encourage *all* the community groups, regardless of ability, but even you have to admit that

Snickerton Players are beyond help. Talk about making a drama out of a crisis.
They make a crisis out of a drama!

MEL: Shush. Someone is coming.

CHRIS enters.

CHRIS: Evening all.

MEL: Hi Chris. Did you see anyone else arriving perhaps?

CHRIS: Yes, there were a couple of cars pulling in to the car park behind me.
Should be a full house tonight.

MEL: I hope so. We have lots to get through and there are lots of important
decisions to be made tonight.

CHRIS: Well, I have to say, you've done us proud Mel. Not many villages getting
brand new community halls these days.

MIKE: I thought it was lottery money.

CHRIS: But who filled in all the forms? Who argued our case? Who made sure we
got planning permission? Who contacted the builders, etcetera, etcetera?

MIKE: Hmm. Let's hope it will be worth the effort.

CHRIS: Well, it can hardly be any worse than what we've got now.

MIKE: Oh, I don't know. Actually, I've got used to this old place you know. And it
has terrific acoustics. Best in the county. I think it must be the woodworm.

MEL: Eh?

MIKE: All them little holes. Tunnels. Same principle as Bose speakers you know.
Perhaps they nicked the idea from here.

MEL: The woodworm?

MIKE: Bose. The people at Bose. (*MEL is blank.*) They make speakers. Perhaps
they got the idea for their design by studying the woodworm in old community
halls. (*Nope*) Never mind.

CHRIS: Well, I for one will be happy to consign this place to history. Eh? Ha, ha.

MIKE: Hmm.

CHRIS: You see? Of interest only to the History Society.

MIKE: Yes, Chris. I realised you were making a joke, or trying to, but I just couldn't bring myself to smile.

SAM and PAT enter.

SAM: Hello everyone.

MIKE: Good heavens. Christian Churches Together, arrive together! Things are looking up.

SAM: We thought it silly not to share cars when I practically drive past St Hilda's. Room in the MG for two.

PAT: Only just.

CHRIS: Are you all right Pat? You look a little pale.

PAT: Fine. I'm just not used to travelling at such a speed through the village with my bottom two inches off the tarmac.

SAM: I told you, I wasn't speeding. It's because you are low down. It makes it feel as though you are going faster than you actually are.

PAT: Mind if I stand up on the way back?

MEL: Well, I know that there are more to come yet but as we are quorate I think we can make a start.

HILARY enters.

HILARY: Oh no you don't. Not without me.

MIKE: Ah! Hilary. Um, how long have you been lurking behind the door?

HILARY: I wasn't lurking. I was waiting for Jim.

JIM, WENDY and BRIAN enter.

MEL: My Goodness! A positive stampede! Now, please be seated everyone and we'll make a start.

MIKE: The paparazzi haven't arrived yet.

MEL: Who?

CHRIS: He means Charlie.

MIKE: I know what I mean. The Snickerton Creeper. Sneaking around behind the hedgerows, camera at the ready.

MEL: I believe that Snickerton Photographic Society is currently engaged in a project to capture wildlife in its natural habitat.

MIKE: That's what they'll have you believe, but if I catch that pervert at the bottom of my garden when my wife is taking a shower...

MEL: When was this?

MIKE: Well he hasn't yet, not that I know of anyway, but if he does...

CHRIS: Grow up Mike.

MEL: Yes, well, as I was saying. Let's make a start. The usual thing then, introductions and apologies.

WENDY: I'm Wendy and I'm sorry.

MEL: Ha, ha, very good Wendy.

MIKE: Yes, very funny Wendy. It always makes me smile, even though you say it at every bloody meeting.

MEL: Um, I'll start us off then, as usual Mel Walker, Snickerton Council, Community Representative.

MIKE: Do we have to do this? We all know each other anyway.

MEL: For the record.

MIKE: (*Sighs.*) Michael Upton. Snickerton Choral Society.

CHRIS: Chris. Snickerton History Society.

HILARY: Hilary and Jim. Snickerton Players.

JIM: I can speak for myself you know.

MIKE: I think you missed your cue Jim. As usual.

JIM: Eh?

HILARY: He was being sarcastic.

MIKE: Just a joke Jim.

JIM: Very bloody funny.

MEL: Ahem. Introductions. Sam?

SAM: Yes?

MEL: We're doing introductions.

SAM: Yes I know.

MEL: So. Would you like to introduce yourself?

SAM: But you already did it Mel. You just said my name.

MEL: I mean for the record. Where are you from?

SAM: Snickerton.

PAT: She means which organisation. I'll do it for both of us shall I?

SAM: Certainly not.

PAT: OK. Well, go after me. Pat Chur...

SAM: Why should I go after you? It was my turn.

PAT: How do you make that out?

SAM: Mel asked me.

PAT: Strictly speaking I should go before you.

SAM: Why?

PAT: For historical reasons. We were established before you.

SAM: What rot. What has that got to do with it?

PAT: Rather a lot in my opinion.

SAM: I could just as well say I go first for alphabetical reasons. A before C.

PAT: It's hardly the same thing is it?

MIKE: It doesn't matter, for God's sake. Just bloody introduce yourself before the world ends.

SAM: Sam...

PAT: And Pat.

SAM:
} Churches Together.

PAT:

WENDY: Wendy, Cubs and Beavers.

BRIAN: And I'm Brian. Talking Newspaper.

MEL: Right. Well, that's everyone so we'll get started.

CHARLIE enters.

CHARLIE: I'm really sorry everyone. Red squirrel just outside. Just had to capture him.

PAT: Isn't that illegal?

CHARLIE: I mean photograph him.

MEL: For the record, Charlie from the Photographic Society has joined the meeting.

MIKE: Why do you do this Mel?

MEL: I sometimes wonder.

MIKE: All this formality. No one is taking minutes so what is the point?

MEL: Things have to be done properly. I'll write up the notes later. I can't take minutes and chair the meeting at the same time.

WENDY: What happened to that girl who used to come to take notes? What was her name?

MEL: Monica. She hasn't been able to make the last few meetings.

MIKE: I wonder why.

MEL: Otherwise engaged.

MIKE: Nothing to do with not wanting to be in the same room as someone then?

MEL: Shall we move on?

MIKE: He should be ashamed of himself.

CHARLIE: If you are referring to me, I would rather you just came out and said it.

MIKE: Oh, I'll say it all right. Taking advantage of the girl like that.

CHARLIE: I was not taking advantage. I offered to shoot a portfolio. She wanted to have one and it would have cost her a fortune to have it done professionally.

MIKE: Professionals don't try to strip their clients naked.

CHARLIE: Nothing of the sort. I was merely trying to help her overcome her shyness.

MIKE: By pulling her jumper off!

CHARLIE: I did not lay a finger on her. You had better watch what you are saying. There are witnesses!

MIKE: Unlike that evening in your studio, eh?

MEL: If you would care to continue your, er, discussion after the meeting. We have a lot to get through.

CHRIS: Yes, come on chaps. This isn't the place.

MEL: Thank you Chris. Now, as you all know, the new community centre will be throwing open its doors in just two weeks time and we have still to decide on the details of the opening ceremony.

JIM: If I might interject with a modicum of caution here.

WENDY: Come again.

JIM: Do you honestly believe it will be opening in two weeks?

MEL: Of course. Why not?

JIM: Have you been in there?

MEL: There's few little jobs need doing.

JIM: A few little jobs! There's no water in the toilets, none of the doors close properly, the community garden looks like London during the blitz and I don't know who has done the wiring but when you turn on the light in the kitchen sparks fly out of the fridge!

MEL: I'm sure it'll all be put right.

JIM: It's a health and safety nightmare.

MEL: You wouldn't tell them would you?

JIM: What?

HILARY: Jim, you surely wouldn't prefer to stay in here. There's no room to swing a cat.

JIM: Of course not, but I am concerned about the quality of workmanship on the new building.

HILARY: Without the new hall we would have to carry on doing our bigger productions in St Hilda's church hall and you know what the acoustics are like in there. I have great difficulty in making myself heard.

MIKE: It has its good points then.

JIM: Well, yes. Mind you, Peter never had any trouble making himself heard. You remember Peter don't you Wendy? He was the butler in Lady Windermere's Fan. Such a big voice. And you know it was so funny when he...

HILARY: Have you heard from him?

JIM: Hmm?

HILARY: Have you heard from Peter since he emigrated?

JIM: He didn't emigrate.

HILARY: Yes he did. He went to live in Australia.

JIM: No, he went to live with his mother in Bridlington.

HILARY: That was Lionel silly.

JIM: Was it?

HILARY: Yes, Lionel's mother lives in Bridlington. Peter's mother doesn't live in Bridlington.

JIM: Where does Peter's mother live then?

HILARY: I haven't the faintest idea.

WENDY: *What* was funny?

JIM: What?

WENDY: In Lady Windermere's Fan.

JIM: Oh yes, well he has this big booming voice you see and the church hall is so big there's an echo. So when he announced the guests arriving at the party the names rang around the hall. It had me in stitches I can tell you. Lady Windermere, Lady Windermere, Lady Windermere, Lord Darlington, Lord Darlington, Lord Darlington, Lord Darlington. Ha, ha, ha. People were afraid to say their line in case their own voice was drowned out by the echo!

WENDY: Why would he announce Lady Windermere?

JIM: What?

WENDY: If he was announcing the guests why he would announce Lady Windermere. It's her party.

JIM: Because. Oh. Hilary explain.

HILARY: Why would I know?

JIM: You do remember it don't you?

HILARY: Should I?

JIM: Well, you were in it.

HILARY: Was I?

MEL: If we could perhaps return to the business in hand. It's always a delight to hear the reminiscences of Snickerton Players, but we are a bit pushed for time so if...

WENDY: Well, they'll have to sort the toilets out.

MEL: Yes, they will.

WENDY: You can't have little ones in there without proper facilities. It's a wonder that the authorities have allowed us to use this place for so long. Having to escort the poor little things out to the one in the yard.

MEL: Yes, well. I suppose if worse comes to worse we do still have the outside toilets to fall back on.

JIM: You will fall back on them, or fall into them more like, the bulbs keep blowing in there ever since they turned the electricity on in the new hall.

WENDY: There you go then.

HILARY: Ha, ha. There you go! Do you get it? There you *go!*

MIKE: Can't they just go behind a bush?

WENDY: You can't have little children going behind a bush.

BRIAN: Would you please stop talking about toilets. I think I might have to go behind a bush in a minute.

WENDY: That's just it. You tell them that there's no toilet facilities and they'll want to go all the more.

BRIAN: Oh.

WENDY: It's the power of suggestion. Once you've planted the thought in their minds they can't help themselves.

BRIAN: Oh.

WENDY: You'll end up with puddles on the floor.

BRIAN: Oh.

WENDY: Tell them to try and hold it in and it just makes it worse.

BRIAN: Excuse me.

BRIAN rushes from the room.

MIKE: Pathetic.

PAT, SAM, HILARY and JIM all exit hurriedly.

CHRIS: They've got two weeks to fix the toilets. It's not a problem is it Mel?

MEL: *(Who has drifted off into a world of her own.)* Hmm.

CHRIS: I said, they'll have the toilets working before we open.

MEL: Oh yes, sure to. Er. Where is everyone?

MIKE: Gone to use the toilet.

MEL: Oh. Of course. I think I might have missed something.

CHRIS: Don't worry. Nothing important.

MEL: But, the notes.

CHRIS: I think in terms of official business we are still on item one, introductions.

MEL: Right. OK. Item two. The opening ceremony. Now, of course the mayor will be there to cut the tape and we are hoping to have some visiting dignitaries from Bavaria.

WENDY: Germans?

MEL: Well yes, the borough is of course twinned with Winkl in Bechtesgaden and..

WENDY: With what?

MEL: Winkl

WENDY: What?

MIKE: Winkl! Winkl!

BRIAN had returned and was about to take his seat when he heard MIKE. He checks his flies, then sits just as the others return.

MEL: Oh there you all are. Just in time, we need to decide what activities will be held in the new hall immediately after the cutting of the tape.

CHRIS: Well, I think all the groups should have stalls showcasing their contribution to the community.

MIKE: I have to say it Chris. That's a good idea. We may be able to drum up a few new members as well.

CHRIS: Silly to let the opportunity go by.

HILARY: Well, we never have any trouble drumming up new members, but then we are not elitist like some.

MIKE: Snickerton Choral Society is not elitist.

HILARY: No, of course not.

MIKE: Well, you do have to be able to sing, if that is what you call elitist. You certainly don't seem to have any similar entry requirements in the am dram. If being able to act was a requirement you wouldn't have very many members.

MEL: Yes, I think stalls are an excellent idea.

BRIAN: (*Who hasn't been listening, more concerned with his flies.*) Stalls? Are we still on toilets?

MEL: Like market stalls Brian.

BRIAN: Oh. Selling what? Fruit and veg?

MEL: Not selling anything. Putting up posters to promote your organisation.

BRIAN: What's the point in that? The people who receive the talking newspaper are blind. That is, kind of, the whole point. They wouldn't be able to see any posters that I put up.

MEL: Not just you, all the societies, But maybe you could use it as an opportunity to raise awareness of your organisation, maybe get someone to help you, so you don't have to do it all yourself.

MIKE: Oh he's not going to want that. They might object to disseminating his version of the news.

BRIAN: And what, precisely, do you mean by that?

MIKE: I've heard your tapes. Your version of what is going on in the world doesn't always tally what is actually written in the papers.

BRIAN: I hope you not suggesting that I mis-represent the news.

MIKE: Mis-represent? It is hardly recognisable most of the time!

MEL: Yes. If we could perhaps move on. We do have rather a lot to get through.

MIKE: You should hear what he said about you Mel!

MEL: About me?

MIKE: According to 'The Voice Of Snickerton' here, the fact that we are getting a new community hall is down to the persistence of certain members of the community and despite the bumbling inefficiencies of local council representatives.

BRIAN: I never said that!

MIKE: You said that the lottery money was only forthcoming after the representatives of the oldest community groups interjected to rescue the claim. The aforementioned reps being, of course, yourself and Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor here.

BRIAN: Well, we did write to the lottery people in support of the application. I didn't report anything that wasn't true.

MIKE: But you are supposed to be just reading what it says in the paper, not adding your own embellishments.

BRIAN: A bit of background doesn't do any harm.

MEL: You wrote to the lottery people?

BRIAN: Well, yes.

MEL: All communication was supposed to be through me.

BRIAN: Well, we were just trying to help.

HILARY: We?

BRIAN: Er...

HILARY: Do you know anything about this Jim?

JIM: Well...

HILARY: Jim?

JIM: Brian just asked if we'd be willing to put our names to a letter in support of the application. I just forgot to mention it.

HILARY: When you say “we”, you mean Snickerton Players?

JIM: Yes.

HILARY: If you were acting in an official capacity, as a representative of Snickerton Players, then it should have been approved by the committee.

JIM: Ah, yes. But according to our resolution a committee member is entitled to act on behalf of the committee under certain circumstances, such as a decision being required on a matter between committee meetings when it is not possible to assemble a quorate.

HILARY: And why was it not possible to assemble a quorate?

JIM: Brian needed to catch the post.

HILARY: Is that it?

JIM: He explained that timing was of the essence...

MIKE: And you understood him? What would you know about timing?

JIM: And so I decided that the circumstances were appropriate for me to represent the committee.

HILARY: But according to our resolution, that matter should have been brought up at the next meeting and approved retrospectively.

JIM: I forgot.

HILARY: Very convenient.

JIM: It doesn't matter does it? It all worked out well in the end. We have new community hall.

MEL: What exactly did the letter say?

BRIAN: We just pointed out what a boon to the community the new hall would be.

MEL: I had already done that.

BRIAN: Look, everyone knows that to get lottery money these days you have to tick all the boxes: the boxes being kids, disability and ethnic minorities. We already had kids covered, thanks to Wendy, so we...

HILARY: You.

BRIAN: ...I made sure that the lottery people were aware of the, er, diversity, of Snickerton.

MIKE: What diversity?

BRIAN: And the fact that our community association includes an outreach project that ensures that people with disabilities, or who are from ethnic minorities, feel fully integrated into the community.

MEL: Do we have anyone from an ethnic minority in Snickerton?

HILARY: Well, there's Mr Chan from the takeaway but, as I understand it, he is originally from Droitwich.

BRIAN: Would anyone here exclude ethnic minorities or people with disability from their organisations?

ALL: No, of course not. (*etc.*)

HILARY: I wish we did have a bit of diversity. I so long to play Desdemona but having a blacked up Othello just isn't the done thing any more.

MIKE: You! Desdemona?

BRIAN: So there you are then. All the organisations in Snickerton are fully inclusive, therefore, we tick all the boxes.

MEL: But what if the inspectors come to check?

BRIAN: They won't. And if they do, we'll just have to play it by ear. They've signed the cheque and we've spent it. They can hardly take the money back now.

MEL: This is very worrying.

CHRIS: Don't worry Mel. If there is any trouble there are witnesses here that will all say you had nothing to do with it.

HILARY: And neither did I.

BRIAN: I can't believe this. You should all be thanking me.

MIKE: Of course. Thank you Brian, for committing fraud on behalf of the whole community.

BRIAN: Take that back.

MIKE: I most certainly will not.

BRIAN: I had the interests of the whole community at heart. Even your bloody choral society.

MIKE: We don't need your help thank you very much.

BRIAN: Last time I heard you singing it sounded like you needed all the help you can get.

MEL: PLEASE! Can we get back to the agenda. We can settle all this at a later stage but we have a number of things to cover and we haven't even made a start yet.

CHRIS: Yes Mel. Where were we?

MEL: Item two. Opening ceremony.

CHARLIE: Well, my main problem is that, whilst I would love to be part of anything that you might have planned, I also need to capture the event for prosperity. Can't be in two places at the same time you see?

MEL: Can't one of your members take the photos?

MIKE: Didn't you know Mel? Snickerton Photographic Society only has one member.

MEL: But when you applied for that grant that you got from the council...

MIKE: Eh?

MEL: Er, nothing.

MIKE: He's had a grant? My taxes are being used so he can take dirty pictures!

CHARLIE: I do not take dirty pictures, nor am I the sole member of the society.

MIKE: So who else is there then?

CHARLIE: We have almost fifty members on our books.

MIKE: Fifty! There's not fifty people in Snickerton who own a camera!

CHARLIE: As usual you have no idea what you are talking about.

MIKE: So who are there members then? Name me some names.

CHARLIE: That information is confidential.

MIKE: I'm sure I could find out. Just need to check the police register of local perverts.

CHARLIE: (*Standing.*) Right! That's it. I will not stand for this any longer.

MIKE: Then sit down before you blow an aperture.

CHRIS: Gentlemen. If I can remind you, we do need to get on with the agenda.

MEL: Thank you Chris.

CHRIS: Perhaps you could continue your discussion later.

MIKE: With pleasure.

WENDY: The thing that bothers me is the spirits.

All stare at WENDY.

CHRIS: Eh?

HILARY: Yes, I had heard Wendy. Very honest of you to be so open about it.

WENDY: I beg your pardon?

HILARY: But none of the mums have ever complained, so you obviously don't let it affect your duties with the kids.

WENDY: What are you talking about?

HILARY: I have to admit that I like a sherry after a stressful day. Who doesn't? There are ways to get help though you know dear.

WENDY: What are you talking about?

HILARY: Have a chat with your doctor. They have special services available for people who have a drinking problem.

WENDY: I don't have a drinking problem!

HILARY: You don't?

WENDY: I'm talking about the spooks. The ghostly ghoulies.

MIKE: Oh Christ!

WENDY: The Snickerton Ghost!

MIKE: We're not in the kindergarten now.

CHRIS: Wendy, this isn't really relevant to the matters we need to discuss.

WENDY: How will the spirits react to the new hall?

MIKE: Depends on whether they need the loo.

WENDY: It's no joking matter. It is a matter of record that this old hall is haunted...

MIKE: Ha!

WENDY: ...and whilst the ghost or ghosts seem fairly benevolent, how will they react to their old hall being pulled down? That is a question no one has asked.

MIKE: I wonder why?

WENDY: You might mock, but you haven't been on your own here, after midnight?

MIKE: Have you?

WENDY: I have indeed.

MIKE: Why? Or shouldn't I ask?

WENDY: There's lots to do after the little ones go home you know Mike. There's planning the activities, creating things to keep the little minds busy.

MIKE: (*Not interested.*) Is that right?

WENDY: Oh yes. Right now we are learning all about wildlife. Each one of my groups has adopted an animal as their mascot. My scouts have adopted the badger for example.

JIM: Yes, and I've heard that your Beavers like a hedgehog.

HILARY: Jim!

WENDY: Sorry Jim, what was that?

HILARY: Ignore him Wendy.

WENDY: I didn't catch what he said.

HILARY: It was nothing, really. He was clearing his throat.

WENDY: Anyway. The point is that late at night, when there is no one about, the spirits awake!

MIKE: Yeah, right. When you say that it is a matter of record, who exactly recorded it?

WENDY: I did of course.

MIKE: I thought so. And where did you record it?

WENDY: In my diary.

MIKE: Is that a public document?

WENDY: Of course not. It doesn't matter. I was here and I know what I saw.

MIKE: Which was?

WENDY: First, there was a faint rustle.

MIKE: You saw a faint rustle?

WENDY: I *heard* a faint rustle. I thought it was just leaves blowing in the yard, but then I thought, 'It's not Autumn, there shouldn't be any leaves'. So I went to the window and then I saw it! My blood froze in my veins, I couldn't move from the spot though I wanted to flee. Staring back at me through the window were the two saddest eyes I have ever seen. We stood for what seemed like an eternity, peering at each other through the glass. Finally I managed to speak 'What is it that you want?' I said, 'Please tell me, I want to help you.' The eyes just stared back at me. They were so intense I was forced to avert my gaze. Then, when I looked back, they were gone.

There is silence for a few moments.

MIKE: Did it ever occur to you that it might have just been someone using our bog on the way home from the pub?

WENDY: I didn't say anything about a body Mike. I didn't mention a face, because there was none. Just the eyes.

HILARY: What did you do?

WENDY: Nothing. I just stood there unable to believe what I had seen. Eventually I managed to drag myself away from the window. It was an hour before I dared open the door to go home. And that was only after a sip from my hip flask to give me the strength.

MIKE: Are you sure you hadn't had the odd sip from your hip flask before you saw this apparition?

SAM: Why have you never come to me with this Wendy?

WENDY: It's not really your department is it reverend?

SAM: I'm always available for spiritual guidance.

MIKE: Taking more water with it is all she needs.

WENDY: Perhaps you can do something for me reverend. Please say a prayer for Mike. May he not regret his words to me tonight.

MIKE: Not much danger of that.

CHRIS: Mike. What has got into you tonight? Calm down for goodness sake.

MIKE: What do you mean 'calm down'?

CHRIS: You've had a go at Charlie, you've had a go at Brian, now you've had a go at Wendy. What is it with you?

MIKE: It's not me. Can I help it if I am surrounded by idiots?

CHRIS: Treating people with a bit of respect would go a long way you know?

MIKE: People have to earn respect in my book.

CHRIS: That's your problem then, isn't it? You treat people like dirt unless proved otherwise.

MIKE: Rubbish! I am always perfectly civil.

CHRIS: Civil! You haven't got a good word for anyone. And you run that bloody choral society like you are the Fuhrer. No one is allowed to have an opinion about anything; you choose all the music; you say who is going to do the solos, which is usually you, I might add; you bring people to tears if they don't meet your exacting standards and yet you are probably the worst tenor I've ever heard in my life.

MIKE: Oh, I get it, now I understand what this is all about. Just because you couldn't hack it.

CHRIS: I'm a better bloody singer than you, any day.

MIKE: So why did you leave then?

CHRIS: Haven't I made that clear? You! You are the reason why everybody leaves. The reason why Snickerton Choral Society can't even form a committee, nobody wants to sit around a table with you.

MIKE: We have a committee.

CHRIS: Only since you changed the rules to say that a committee consisted of just two people, the chair and the treasurer, that being you and your bloody wife.

MIKE: Don't you dare mention Margaret in that tone. And you have no idea what you are talking about.

CHRIS: No? Don't forget I was a member of that choral society long before you arrived on the scene. We were an important organisation then, known and respected throughout the county. You arrived and things started to change. People began to drift away, join other groups. I always found you difficult but I realised too late that you were the cause of all the trouble.

MIKE: If this is true why didn't you kick me out? Eh? If I was the problem why not boot me off? You can't answer that can you? You're pathetic. Just showing off in front of Mel!

CHRIS: We didn't kick you out because it was too late. The damage was already done. I would have happily kicked you out to save the society but by that time there was no society to save.

MIKE: Is that so? Well I've got some news for you. There are still plenty of us in the group. We are not short of members, in fact, membership grew after you left. I wonder why that would be?

CHRIS: It's because you started bringing your cronies in, that's why. How many of Snickerton Choral Society actually live in Snickerton?

MIKE: We don't impose petty geographical restrictions on our membership. Talent is the important thing, not where you live.

CHRIS: Yeah, being related to you or your missus seems to help as well!

PAT: Gentlemen! This has gone on long enough. I have sat here and hardly said a word all evening because there has been nothing for me to say. Why? Because we haven't actually discussed anything that we came here to talk about. You two can have your little scrap in your own time, and that goes for anyone else that Mike might want to pick a fight with...

MIKE: He started it!

PAT: ... but we really must get on with the business. Now then, Mel. Where were we?

MEL: What's the point?

PAT: Ah, come on Mel, don't be like that.

MEL: It's always the same. It's me. I just don't have the necessary skills. I'm sorry.

HILARY: Oh Mel. Don't be silly.

MEL begins to sniff.

MEL: I thought Communities Officer sounded like a nice job. Bringing people together, helping them get more out of the community. And, once a month, chair a meeting with representatives from the various groups. How hard can that be? Anyone could do it. But not me. Monica refuses to come because she says it's impossible to record the minutes of a free for all.

CHARLIE: There! You see? Nothing to do with me.

MEL: I can't even hold a meeting.

PAT: Mel, you do a brilliant job.

HILARY: Yes, Where would we be without you?

JIM: That's right Mel.

MEL: But we've been here all night and I've just...

CHRIS: Sorry Mel. It's not your fault.

SAM: No, it's all of us. Don't be hard on yourself. Things kind of got out of hand tonight that's all. You are not to blame.

WENDY: I'm sorry Mel. I went off on a tangent.

CHARLIE: We all did. It's all our fault.

All look at MIKE.

MIKE: What? Oh all right. Sorry Mel. Your meeting. Please carry on.

MEL: I can't even remember where we were.

CHRIS: Opening Day events.

MEL: Oh. Right. Well, what I thought was we could come up with a list of ideas and then put it to the vote. If that's all right?

ALL: Of course, yes, etc.

MEL: Right. Well, perhaps we could do a bit of brainstorming. Um, if people just shout out ideas.

The CARETAKER has entered.

CARETAKER: Right you lot. Out you go!

MEL: What?

CARETAKER: Time's up. You're over time in fact. Come on, I have to lock up.

MEL: Couldn't we just have five minutes?

CARETAKER: Sorry love. It's the insurance you see.

People have started to make for the door. There is general chatter. MEL shouts over the hubbub.

MEL: Look we'll have to have an emergency meeting next week. *(To CARETAKER.)* That's all right isn't it? *(The CARETAKER shrugs.)* Same time next Tuesday. *(People are walking out of the door. MIKE and CHRIS eyeing each other for a fight.)* OK? We still have to sort out the opening day. Next week everyone! *(Everyone has gone except MEL and the CARETAKER who is standing by the door swinging the key in his hand.)* Right, well. Not as productive as I had hoped. Next week then.

BLACKOUT

Scene 2

MEL is again on her own, nervously glancing at her watch. WENDY enters.

WENDY: Hiya!

MEL: Oh, hello Wendy. You remembered then?

WENDY: Of course. Can't afford to miss this. There is some very important business to be discussed.

MEL: Quite.

WENDY: I mean, you said so yourself didn't you? 'We need to have an emergency meeting.'

MEL: Precisely.

WENDY: I'm glad that you were taking me seriously anyway.

MEL: Er. Yes. Of course.

WENDY: I know it is easy to mock.

MEL: Yes.

WENDY: People like to shut away things they don't understand. Ignore it and it might go away.

MEL: They do. That is very true.

WENDY: But we have to face up to our fears. Meet them head on.

MEL: Oh, absolutely.

WENDY: And I've been doing some research. So long as we follow some simple procedures everything should be OK.

MEL: Er. Procedures?

WENDY: Of course, human sacrifice is the number one, but I don't think we need to go that far.

MEL: I'm sorry?

WENDY: It would make the headlines though wouldn't it? One story Brian wouldn't need to embellish.

MEL: Did you just say sacrifice?

WENDY: Well, yes. You know. Appeasing the spirits. The important thing is to include them in the day's events.

MEL: The spirits?

WENDY: Our little ghostly friends. And that's how we should regard them. Treat them as our friends and we will come to no harm.

MEL: Er. What were you planning to do?

WENDY: Just make them an offering.

MEL: You mean, a sacrifice?

WENDY: Yes. If you like.

MEL: No, I do not like. Wendy. What are you proposing?

WENDY: Don't worry. As I said, it doesn't have to be human. We just offer up to them something that we would have had ourselves.

MEL: Like what?

WENDY: Well, I think food is traditional. Sometimes, according to what I've read, they would offer up livestock.

MEL: Like goats or chickens?

WENDY: Yes, that sort of thing.

MEL: Absolutely not! I am not having animals running round my new community hall.

WENDY: Oh, they wouldn't be running round. They will have had their throats cut.

MEL: Oh my God. You're serious.

WENDY: Oh, I'm not going to use livestock, silly. No, I'll just save something from the buffet.

MEL: You mean we can just set aside a vol-a-vent or something?

WENDY: Yes, that sort of thing.

MEL: Really? Well, OK. If it makes you happy.

CHARLIE enters.

CHARLIE: Greetings. Have we started?

MEL: We are not quorate yet.

CHARLIE: Oh, of course. By the way you heard about Mike did you?

MEL: Mike? No.

CHARLIE: Ah! He met with an accident.

MEL: An accident?

CHARLIE: Yes. He fell off the bridge.

MEL: Oh my God!

CHARLIE: He's OK. His arm is in plaster but I think it is healing OK. It's lucky that Chris broke his fall.

MEL: What?

CHARLIE: He fell off the bridge as well. They, er, fell off together. But, the water was only a few inches deep, so no chance of drowning.

MEL: I don't believe it!

CHARLIE: Oh, it's usually quite shallow at this time of year.

MEL: They fell off the bridge?

CHARLIE: Wait until you see the Snickerton Weekly Post tomorrow. I managed to capture the event very successfully.

MEL: You were there as well?

CHARLIE: Oh yes. We all were.

MEL: And how is Chris?

CHARLIE: He must be made of sturdy stuff. Imagine that weight landing on you. He'll be laid up for a few days, done something to his leg, but he'll be up and about for the opening ceremony I expect.

MEL: How? Um. How did Mike and Chris manage to fall off the bridge?

CHARLIE: Well. Spirits were a bit high when we left here last week, as you know, and Mike and Chris carried on their argument into the car park, and then onto the road, then up the road and when they reached the bridge there was a bit of jostling going on.

MEL: Jostling?

CHARLIE: A bit of push and shove, you know. Not very becoming in a nice village like Snickerton.

MEL: Didn't anyone intervene?

CHARLIE: Of course. Well. I would have done, but, well, I'd had a bit of a run in with Mike myself, if you remember, and I thought that you were bound to put a stop to it, but when you came out of the car park you went off in the opposite direction.

MEL: Er. Yes. I thought I might take the scenic route.

CHARLIE: Past the sewage works?

MEL: Um, well actually, I saw Sam trying to get Pat into his car and thought I had better give them a wide berth.

CHARLIE: Good job you did. Sam came tearing out of the car park just after you left and Pat was standing up on the passenger seat yelling, 'Get out of the way.' at

the pair of them. They saw the car, leapt to the side and tipped over the wall. Hand in hand. It was like a lovers leap.

MEL: Good grief!

CHARLIE: Of course Mike is not one to let things go when there is a chance to apportion blame, so he filed a complaint. It looks as though Sam will be done for dangerous driving and Pat for travelling in a car without a seat belt. They are not speaking now. Bit of a rift with Churches Together, I'm afraid. Not that they were best pals anyway, but Sam says he didn't notice them on the bridge because he was trying to get Pat to sit down and Pat claims that he was only standing up because he was preparing to leap from the car for his life.

MEL: Right. So no Mike or Chris tonight. I suppose we might still see Pat and Sam.

CHARLIE: I wouldn't have thought so. They are probably both staying away to avoid seeing each other.

WENDY: To be honest, I don't know how many even heard you say that we were having an emergency meeting. There was such a racket going on when we left last time.

MEL: But it is essential. We have so much to discuss and we are still not quorate.

CHARLIE: Let me call Jim. See if they are coming. *(He takes out his mobile and punches a few buttons. After a while the call is answered.)* Jim it's Charlie. I'm just calling to see... What? What on earth are you talking about? Are you coming to the meeting? I'm not the undertaker, it's Charlie. It's just that we're not quorate and... What? Bring the police? What are you... The lady of the manor has been poisoned! Jim, have you gone... Oh! Oh my God! Sorry Jim. Sorry. *(He ends the call.)*

MEL: What in heaven's name is going on?

CHARLIE: I think I just rang Jim in the middle of a performance at the church hall.

MEL: What?

CHARLIE: They are doing a murder mystery. I think tonight is the opening night.

WENDY: Oh yes. I forgot to mention it.

CHARLIE: You knew?

WENDY: Sorry.

MEL: Great, so Jim and Hilary are out too. We'll just have to rely on Brian to make up the four.

WENDY: Oh, he won't be coming. He never misses an opening night of a Snickerton Players production.

MEL: I didn't know he was such a fan.

WENDY: He isn't, but he's got a thing for Mrs Booth, the prompt. She's usually got more lines than anyone else, especially on opening night.

MEL: I see. Well, we might as well pack up and go home then. I don't know why I bother.

The CARETAKER enters.

CARETAKER: Will you be here right up until ten o'clock because I have to set up for tomorrow's art class.

MEL: No, we are just about to... hang on. Would you mind sitting in?

CARETAKER: Me?

MEL: Yes. If you make up the four we can get this over and done with.

CARETAKER: I'm not interested in what you lot get up to.

MEL: It would save us having to come back again.

CARETAKER: Ah. Well put like that. What are you talking about then?

MEL: We have to decide on the activities on the opening day for the new hall.

CARETAKER: Well, that's easy enough. I reckon the main activity will be putting out fires, the state of the electrics in there.

CHARLIE: I thought it had been given a safety certificate.

CARETAKER: It has.

MEL: Really? That was quick.

CARETAKER: I got it sorted as soon as I received your note.

MEL: Well, that's brilliant. Thank you, er...

CARETAKER: No problem.

CHARLIE: Am I missing something here?

MEL: Er, no, no. Just council business. Anyway, let's get on. Apologies I think we have had, so introductions. Mel Walker, Snickerton Council, Community Representative.

WENDY: Wendy, Cubs and Beavers.

CHARLIE: Charlie. Snickerton Photographic Society.

CARETAKER: Caretaker.

MEL: Your name?

CARETAKER: Why?

MEL: For the record.

CARETAKER: Is it necessary?

MEL: It's just a formality. Anyway, it's a bit embarrassing not knowing your name.

CARETAKER: Why? Can't you just put 'Caretaker'? That's what everyone calls me.

MEL: Not really. We have to be able to identify the attendees if necessary.

CHARLIE: He's a bit embarrassed by his name, aren't you Tarquin?

MEL: Tarquin! Er, I mean, that's a lovely name.

CARETAKER: No it not, it's daft. I hate it. That's why everyone calls me Caretaker.

MEL: I could just put down your surname if you prefer.

CHARLIE: Yes, How about it big balls?

CARETAKER: Just shut it.

CHARLIE: Oh come on, it's such a distinguished name.

CARETAKER: I'm not joking.

CHARLIE: Just put that down Mel. Mr Big Balls, Caretaker.

CARETAKER: It's not Big Balls.

MEL: Charlie! Please behave yourself. I'm sorry Tarquin. What is your surname.

CARETAKER: Grosseteste.

CHARLIE: You see.

CARETAKER: It doesn't mean big balls.

CHARLIE: Oh, come on. It obviously does.

CARETAKER: It's an old English name. It's just not very common these days that's all.

MEL: Wasn't he the Bishop of Lincoln or something? Bishop Grosseteste.

CHARLIE: Big balls, big balls.

CARETAKER: Maybe the folk of Lincoln don't have the sparkling wit of Charlie here.

MEL: You can change your name you know. By deed poll.

CARETAKER: It would upset my old Dad. Anyway, I've been called Caretaker for forty years and that'll do me, thanks.

CHARLIE: It's a song by AC/DC isn't it? I've got big balls, oh I've got big balls, but Tarquin's got the biggest balls of them all.

CARETAKER: I'll have you. I mean it!

MEL: I think 'Caretaker' will be fine. Events on the opening day. We've already decided on have some stalls, and a buffet, so any other suggestions?

Silence.

MEL: Anything at all?

WENDY: Well, I will be engaged in certain activities, as discussed, but I'm happy to go along with any other suggestions.

CHARLIE: I think it should be as colourful as possible. It's a big event in the history of Snickerton and we want to make sure that the photos capture the celebration.

MEL: Well, yes, I suppose we'll have balloons and streamers and that sort of thing.

CHARLIE: How about something to celebrate our twining with Winkl in Bavaria? Make our German visitors feel at home.

MEL: Well, yes. So long as it isn't anything too tacky of course.

WENDY: Ooh sounds like fun. I like dressing up.

MEL: Of course, we have to avoid stereotyping.

CHARLIE: I can just see Jim in lederhosen!

MEL: We don't want to offend our visitors.

WENDY: There's nothing like bit of thigh slapping to get a party going!

MEL: Well, I'm not sure that...

CHARLIE: Right then. That's settled. A Bavarian themed event.

MEL: I'm really not ...

CHARLIE: Of course we will have to vote on it.

MEL: Ah.

CHARLIE: That's why it was important to be quorate, eh Mel?

MEL: I guess so. OK. All those for?

CHARLIE and WENDY put their hands up.

MEL: Um. Tarquin? I mean Caretaker. Would you like to vote? Are you for or against this, er, idea?

CARETAKER: Can't say I'm bothered so long as you don't make a mess.

MEL: But you have to vote.

CARETAKER: Why?

MEL: Because if you were to vote against it, then it would be two for and one against and I'd have to let my opinion be known and, if it should be tied, we would have to discuss the matter further.

CARETAKER: Right. So if the vote is tied we could be here all night?

MEL: Theoretically, yes

CARETAKER: Oh well, if it means we can go home, I'll vote for it then.

MEL: Oh.

CHARLIE: Nice one Big Balls.

MEL: Well, I suppose that is carried then. Perhaps if we can discuss the details a bit. Just to make sure that we don't do anything to offend, I mean, this is a council event after all, so we have to act within certain guidelines and...

CHARLIE: Don't worry. Me and Wendy will sort everything won't we?

WENDY: Yeah, if you like. You could come round to mine tomorrow if you fancy. We could go through it all.

CHARLIE: Sounds good to me. About Eight?

WENDY: Lovely. I'll do us a few snacks. I don't eat anything substantial in the evenings.

CHARLIE: Great. I'll bring some wine, shall I? Or maybe not, sorry I forgot.

WENDY: Eh?

CHARLIE: I assume you don't drink now

WENDY: Of course I do.

CHARLIE: You do?

WENDY: Wine gets me a bit tipsy though. Especially that red one they have in the pub next door.

CHARLIE: Really?

WENDY: I am, literally, anybody's after a glass of that.

CHARLIE: Are you doing anything after this?

WENDY: Er no. I don't think so.

MEL: Right. The er, ceremony.

CHARLIE: What have we got so far?

MEL: Well, stalls promoting our organisations, a buffet and er, a cultural theme.

CHARLIE: That will do I reckon.

WENDY: Yes, I'll take care of my side of things on my own. You know the, er, offering.

MEL: Right.

CHARLIE: So. That's the meeting closed is it?

MEL: I suppose so.

CARETAKER: Brilliant does that mean I can lock up?

MEL: Yes. Um. I'll just need a minute to write up the notes.

CARETAKER: Right ho. I need to set up for the art class anyway.

CARETAKER, WENDY and CHARLIE all exit. MEL is writing in her notebook. We hear a rustling sound. MEL hears it too and goes to the window. Suddenly two eyes are staring back at her. Mel faints to the ground. The lights dim and Billy Idol's song 'Eyes Without a Face' is played.

ACT 2

Scene 1

The new community hall. It is the day before the opening ceremony. Four tables are arranged at the rear of the hall. On one is a tea urn which Wendy intends to use to serve teas and coffees. WENDY and the CARETAKER are involved in a discussion.

WENDY: What do you mean you can't find them?

CARETAKER: They must have got thrown away with all the junk from the old hall.

WENDY: Well, I can't serve tea and coffee without cups and saucers. Can't you get them back?

CARETAKER: No chance. They'll be in the bottom of the skip by now. Besides, I've got more important things to do.

WENDY: But this is important. It won't take you long.

CARETAKER: You are welcome to jump in the skip yourself and have a root around.

WENDY: Why should I have to do that? It was your responsibility to make sure that everything that needed to be kept, was kept.

CARETAKER: I had a thousand other things to do. I can't keep an eye on everything.

WENDY: That's just not good enough.

CARETAKER: Hang on. Who do you think you are talking to?

WENDY: Tarquin isn't it?

CARETAKER: I don't have to take any nonsense you know. Not from the likes of you.

WENDY: And what is that supposed to mean?

CARETAKER: If it wasn't for me there'd be no opening ceremony. Just remember that.

WENDY: I have no idea what you are talking about. I just want my cups.

MEL enters.

MEL: Hiya.

WENDY: Mel, tell him. He's lost the cups and saucers.

MEL: Oh dear.

WENDY: We agreed that I could sell tea and coffee to raise money for my Beavers, but I can't do that without cups and saucers.

MEL: Can't you use Styrofoam ones?

WENDY: It's not the same as having a proper cup and saucer and anyway, they cost money. The whole point is to raise a bit of cash not spend it!

CARETAKER: All right, all right. I'll go and empty the skip. See if I can find your precious cups and saucers. *(He exits.)*

MEL: Oh dear. I'm not sure if we can use them if they have been in the skip.

WENDY: I'll give them a good clean.

MEL: I think they might need more than that. I dread to think what is in that skip along side them. The smell from it is enough to turn your stomach.

HILARY and JIM enter carrying a display board which they place on one of the free tables. They open it up to reveal 'Snickerton Players through the ages' with photos etc. HILARY drapes some fairy lights across the top of the board.

JIM: What do you reckon?

MEL: Very nice Jim. Just the sort of thing I had in mind.

JIM: See here. A picture of Hilary when she was in the Snickerton Players Junior Section. Amazing to think that they had colour photography back then.

HILARY: Oi! I heard that.

JIM: Only joking dear. You don't look a day over seventy-five.

HILARY: Ha ha. Very funny. As I remember my first lead with the Juniors was as Cinderella and you were one of the ugly sisters.

JIM: I remember it like it was yesterday.

HILARY: You only got the part because make-up was scarce and you didn't need any.

JIM: Ooh, you bitch!

HILARY: You didn't need any padding either. You always were plump.

JIM: What do you mean plump?

HILARY: Look, make yourself useful and plug this in.

JIM plugs in the fairy lights and switches them on. There is a bang and the stage is plunged into darkness.

JIM: What the?

MEL: Oh Crikey! Tarquin!

JIM: Who?

MEL: Um. Caretaker.

JIM: Tarquin!

MEL: I think a fuse has gone.

CARETAKER: *(Off.)* What have you done?

MEL: Sorry.

CARETAKER: *(Off.)* Bloody hell.

MEL: We just plugged in some fairy lights.

JIM: Did you just call him Tarquin?

WENDY: That's him. Tarquin Big Balls.

MEL: Never mind what I called him. Oh dear, I didn't realise the electricians were so delicate.

The main lights, but not the fairy lights, come on. The CARETAKER enters.

CARETAKER: Don't plug anything in all right?

JIM: I thought this place has a safety certificate.

CARETAKER: It has.

HILARY: Well there's nothing wrong with my fairy lights. I've had them plugged in at home.

CARETAKER: Just do what I say. Don't plug anything in. All right? It's simple. Leave the electricians alone.

MEL: I think we had better follow his advice (*She exchanges a look with Hilary who understands the situation.*)

JIM: It's going to be a bit difficult staging a play without using electricity you know?

MEL: It is only temporary.

JIM: Or do you intend us to use lime light like the old days? Perhaps you would like to stand in the wings with two coconut halves and a thin sheet of metal so that you can do all the sound effects.

MEL: It will all be sorted very shortly, but for the sake of us having our opening ceremony tomorrow, please exercise a bit of caution.

JIM: How very shortly? Or did you say shortly. Eh? Do you get it? Shortly, as in short circuit.

HILARY: Shut up Jim

JIM: Don't call me shortly!

MEL: Look. We don't want to have to delay the opening ceremony do we? We have people coming from Germany.

JIM: Yes, but what sort of a safety certificate...

HILARY: Ahem!

JIM: If we can't plug anything...

HILARY: AHEM!

JIM: Oh. You mean it's a bent, sorry, temporary certificate.

CARETAKER: I have a mate in Health and Safety.

JIM: I see. OK then Mel. Whatever you say.

MEL: Just between us OK? I could lose my job over this.

JIM: I won't say a word.

WENDY: What about my teas and coffees?

CARETAKER: That bloody woman is obsessed.

WENDY: How am I going to heat up the water?

MEL: I think the urn is OK.

CARETAKER: Yeah. Had it on this morning.

MEL: There you are then Wendy. Nothing to worry about.

WENDY: If he finds my cups and saucers.

CARETAKER: I'm doing it OK? I would have got them out by now if people weren't messing around. Remember what I said. (*He exits.*)

JIM: Thanks Tarquin.

HILARY: So. No fairy lights.

CHRIS enters on crutches and puts up display board on one of the tables highlighting the activities of the History Society (old photos etc). He hobbles over to join the others.

CHRIS: Hi folks.

MEL: Ah, Chris. I heard about your, er, accident.

CHRIS: Least said, soonest mended.

MEL: How is Mike?

CHRIS: You'll see for yourself in a minute. He gave me a lift.

MEL: That was nice of him.

CHRIS: Well, he needed someone to change gear for him.

MEL: Eh?

CHRIS: Me with one leg, him with one arm, we can only drive if we work as a team.

MEL: Ah.

CHRIS: Everything seems to be coming together.

WENDY: Well it will be, when I get my cups and saucers.

CHRIS: Cups and saucers?

WENDY: In the skip, apparently.

CHRIS: What are they doing in there?

WENDY: You tell me.

MIKE enters with one arm in a plaster cast. He plonks a CD player down on the remaining table. He proceeds to plug it into a mains socket.

HILARY: What are they doing in the skip?

WENDY: That idiot caretaker let them get thrown away. For someone who insists on being called Caretaker he doesn't seem to take care of much.

JIM: Who? Tarquin?

HILARY: Well, that was silly. It would cost a lot of money to replace them.

WENDY: Exactly. And Styrofoam isn't the same.

MEL: (*Seeing MIKE plug the CD player in.*) NO!

Gilbert and Sullivan, as sung by Snickerton Choral Society, comes from the CD player.

MIKE: Eh?

MEL: Turn it off! Quick!

CHRIS: Don't think that I'm disagreeing with you Mel, but I didn't expect you to be such a zealous defender of good music.

MEL: We're not supposed to plug anything into the electrics.

CHRIS: Ah. I see.

MEL: Temporarily.

CHRIS: Better turn it off Mike.

MIKE: Why?

HILARY: We are supposed to have display stands, not CD players.

MIKE: What better way to display the talents of Snickerton Choral Society than to hear them sing.

CHRIS: Well Mike, for once I agree with you. (*He exits grinning.*)

WENDY: You are not going to be able to use it anyway. We already have the music sorted for tomorrow.

MIKE: (*Turning off the CD player.*) What was that?

WENDY: If you had bothered to turn up to the last meeting you would know. We are having a theme.

MIKE: A theme?

WENDY: Yes.

MIKE: What sort of a theme?

WENDY: To honour our Bavarian visitors.

MIKE: Oh God. Please tell me that you are not going to be wearing lederhosen.

JIM: Sounds like fun.

MIKE: Listen. I don't know whose idea it was to invite these people and I don't care, but one thing for sure is that the opening of this new community centre is an important event for Snickerton, and if we are having a theme it should be celebrating the history of the parish, not dressing up like a load of extras from the Sound of Music and prancing about to oompah music. In short, it should be a British celebration.

WENDY: Well, you're too late. We put it to the vote and it was carried. If you wanted to make your feelings known you should have been at the last meeting.

MIKE: Well, I don't know if you have noticed, but I have been a little incapacitated of late.

WENDY: Well that's not my fault. Anyway, we already have the costumes.

MIKE: We'll see about that!

MEL: Perhaps, we can combine the themes. After all, we are twinned with Winkl and they are coming all the way to see us. I'm not so sure on the lederhosen but we could, perhaps have some traditional Bavarian music to welcome our guests. I mean, we know that we can plug in a CD player without blowing the electrics, so it wouldn't do any harm to have something playing in the background.

MIKE: Aha. No! We know that we can plug in that CD player. My CD player. The CD player that I brought that belongs to me. If you get my meaning.

The CARETAKER enters carrying a large box which he deposits at the feet of the others.

CARETAKER: There you go. Cups and saucers. Happy now?

WENDY takes one cup from the box.

WENDY: Urrgh. They're filthy.

CARETAKER: I'm not surprised. They've been in the bottom of the skip. What do you expect? I don't know.

The CARETAKER exits nodding to PAT and SAM as they enter. MIKE has returned to his table and he stops them as they pass. The action now takes place on two separate parts of the stage with neither group able to hear what is being said by the other.

PAT: Here we are. Doesn't it look grand?

SAM: There you are. I told you, we need a display. People have got displays.

PAT: What would we want a display for?

SAM: To tell people that we exist.

MIKE: Aren't you supposed to be telling people that God exists?

PAT: Well, we have a perfectly good display at St Hilda's. If people want to see a display they can see it there. You can't miss it. Big building - looks a bit like a church.

SAM: Yes, of course, but it can't do any harm to do a bit of recruiting.

PAT: No Sam. We should take a passive role here. The church is always there if you need it but we don't need to force it down people's throats.

SAM: That doesn't sound like your lot.

PAT: I thought we had agreed on a truce.

SAM: On a certain subject, yes. Doesn't mean I have to agree with you on everything.

PAT: A truce is a truce.

SAM: Have I mentioned three points on my licence and a sixty pound fine thanks to you?

MIKE: But you weren't charged.

SAM: No thanks to you. You were barely out of the water before you were calling the police on your mobile.

MIKE: I didn't press charges though did I? For the sake of the community.

SAM: Big of you I'm sure.

MIKE: So where do the points on your licence and the sixty pound fine come in?

SAM: That's what I would have got, thanks to your vigilante attitude to road traffic offences.

PAT: Oh come on Sam, be fair. You did nearly run them down after all.

SAM: Yes and why was that?

PAT: Why did you want to run them down? I couldn't say.

SAM: I didn't want to run them down.

PAT: Well, if you didn't want to, then it must have been dangerous driving.

SAM: Only because I was being distracted by some idiot acting like he was in a Pope-mobile.

MIKE: Listen you two. I thought you had a truce.

PAT: We do.

MIKE: Good. So stop arguing. I need you to help me with something.

SAM: Help you?

PAT: No problem Mike. How is your arm?

MIKE: Never mind my arm. I need you to help me with tomorrow's theme.

PAT: Theme?

MIKE: Traditional British village life.

PAT: Ah!

HILARY: Don't worry Wendy. I'll take the cups and saucers home and bung them all in the dishwasher.

WENDY: Oh, would you? That would be a great help.

HILARY: They'll be sparkling clean in no time.

WENDY: Dishwashers are so useful aren't they?

JIM: Not sure it will be much use in this case. I reckon you will need industrial cleaner to get this lot clean.

WENDY: Industrial cleaner?

JIM: Yeah, you know the proper stuff to kill all the germs. The council must have it.

MIKE: The ceremony should be a celebration. Celebrating everything that is great about England.

SAM: Such as?

MIKE: I don't know, er, tea and scones, Gilbert and Sullivan, cricket!

SAM: Cricket! Lovely though this new hall is I don't think it is voluminous enough for a cricket match.

MEL: Oh, I don't think we can use industrial cleaner. Not on cups and saucers.

JIM: It depends on the type you use.

MIKE: Well. Beer then. Yes that's it. We'll give these Germans a taste of proper English beer. That will give them something to talk about when they get home.

SAM: I don't think we have a licence.

MIKE: We don't need a licence. We won't be selling it. (*He shouts across to MEL.*) Hey Mel. Order two dozen bottles of IPA for tomorrow.

MEL: Two dozen of what?

MIKE: Or more if the council can afford it.

CHARLIE enters from MEL's side.

MEL: *(To Jim.)* What's IPA?

CHARLIE: Isopropyl Alcohol. I use it to clean lenses.

MEL: Why would Mike need some?

CHARLIE: Mike? I don't know but it's used for all sorts of things. Cleaning CDs for example. Or dissolving oil.

JIM: Funny. We were just talking about cleaning solvents.

MEL: He must have been listening.

CHARLIE: Well, it wouldn't do any harm to have some in the store cupboard.

MEL: You don't think he wants to use it on the cups and saucers.

JIM: Oh, I doubt it. I don't think Mike is bothered about the cups and saucers.

WENDY: I don't think anyone is bothered about the cups and saucers. Apart from me.

MEL: Oh well. I suppose I'd better get onto supplies. I've so many things to worry about I can't be bothered with getting into a discussion with Mike about why he needs a quantity of Iso whatsit. *(She exits signalling to MIKE that she is going to make a telephone call.)*

PAT: You'll never get the council to pay for alcohol.

MIKE: It looks like I just have done.

PAT: Well, knock me down with a feather.

CHRIS enters on crutches and adds a further embellishment to his display. He approaches MIKE's group.

PAT: Hi Chris. How's the leg?

CHRIS: Getting there. Are we all mates again then?

PAT: I think so. Eh Sam?

SAM: I suppose.

PAT: If these two can forgive and forget, surely we can.

SAM: Yes, OK.

MIKE: Look, now we're all friends we can work together. The four of us will show them lot. We're working on a theme for tomorrow's ceremony. Everything that's great about Britain. Any suggestions?

CHRIS: I don't know. Tea and Scones?

MIKE: Cubs and Beavers seem to have that covered.

CHRIS: Shakespeare.

MIKE: Do me a favour. Can you imagine them two as Romeo and Juliet?

CHRIS: Tolerance. Acceptance of different cultures.

MIKE: The only different culture in Snickerton is Yakult.

CHRIS: What about these two? (*PAT and SAM*) Different religions but committed to working together.

PAT: I sometimes think I should be committed.

MIKE: OK, we've got churches together, but I was thinking of something more... physical. More of a performance.

CHRIS: You're not thinking of getting the choir down here? No Mike. It is too early to put our new friendship to such a stern test.

MIKE: No, I'm not talking about the choir.

CHARLIE: So. How are the preparations for tomorrow's theme?

WENDY: A bit of a problem with the cups and saucers. They're filthy.

CHARLIE: How come?

WENDY: That idiot caretaker put them in the skip

CHARLIE: Who Big Balls? What a clown. But I meant the Bavarian stuff.

WENDY: Oh, All sorted. I've got the costumes. Just us four, I don't think Mike and Chris are in any condition for thigh slapping even if they were willing to go along with it, which I doubt, seeing as they were not there when the decision was made, even though that is their own fault.

CHARLIE: What about Churches Together? Lederhosen with a dog collar?

WENDY: I can't see it. Can you?

CHARLIE: I suppose not. I don't think them two would recognise a good time if it slapped them in the face.

WENDY: Mel's going to be too busy with the dignitaries and I've seen nothing of Brian for weeks, so that's us I'm afraid.

CHARLIE: Oh, well. I was hoping to spend the day taking photographs but I suppose I can join in with a bit of dancing.

JIM: Come off it Charlie. You can't wait to get into the lederhosen. Come on. Admit it.

CHARLIE: Well, yes. It will be fun won't it?

MIKE: I've got a few ideas. Tell you what. To celebrate the fact that we are all friends again, how about retiring to the Rose and Crown to discuss the options for tomorrow over a pint.

PAT: Sounds good to me. *(And he's away.)*

MIKE: He's keen.

SAM: You said the magic word. Funny thing is, although he was the first to leave, I'll bet he will be the last to reach the bar.

CHRIS: How come?

SAM: I think he hides in the car park. Once he is sure someone else has got their wallet out he'll stride in and you'll hear 'A pint of Guinness for me.' coming from the doorway.

MIKE: Ah well. I'll get a round in.

CHRIS: Wow!

MIKE: Just this once. Don't let it go to your head.

SAM, MIKE and CHRIS exit.

CHARLIE: Where are the costumes Wendy?

WENDY: In the old hall. Hanging on the coat hooks.

CHARLIE: Come on then Jim, let's go and try them on. *(They exit.)*

WENDY: Boys!

HILARY: Well, Jim has always enjoyed dressing up, that's the only reason he does an dram.

WENDY: Oh, that's why you do all those historic plays then.

HILARY: Yeah. I mean, Elizabethan pauper, Victorian pauper – same costume. Plus the fact that we don't have to pay to do the plays. You don't have to pay the dead a licence fee.

WENDY: True. Well, I'm not complaining. Jim looks good in a cod piece.

HILARY: Yes, well. It's more of a sock piece in Jim's case.

MEL enters.

MEL: Hello. Where's everyone?

HILARY: Jim and Charlie have just nipped into the old hall. I can fetch them if you like.

MEL: No, actually, whilst it is just us, I wanted to ask you something Wendy.

WENDY: Oh yes?

MEL: It's about that vision you saw. The ghost.

WENDY: Oh, don't remind me.

MEL: It's just that, after the last meeting, I saw...

WENDY: You saw it as well?

MEL: Well, I don't believe in anything like that. There has to be a logical explanation for it I'm sure but, well, something gave me a fright. The caretaker came in and found me lying on the floor. I told him that I'd just had a bit of a hot flush, women's troubles, but there was something outside of the window.

WENDY: Just these two eyes. No face, just eyes.

HILARY: Is that what you saw Mel?

MEL: Yes, well. I think so. Very odd. What can it be? A trick of the light do you think?

WENDY: It has to be supernatural. I don't care if you 'don't believe in anything like that', you have no other explanation for it do you?

MEL: Well, no. Not at the moment anyway.

WENDY: So, fortunately, I have been busy and a small selection of cakes and fancies will be offered to the spirits.

HILARY: Along with a nice cup of tea. How civilised.

WENDY: Well why not? There is no reason to suspect that the ghost is anything but local and if it is from Snickerton it is going to enjoy a cup of tea and a slice of Madeira.

MEL: Well, I suppose it is OK. But keep it discreet and don't let the Mayor see any of it.

WENDY: Don't worry. I'll get here early and perform a little ceremony before anyone else arrives. You can leave everything to me.

JIM and CHARLIE enter dressed in lederhosen. They do what they imagine is traditional Bavarian dance humming a traditional Bavarian folk tune.

HILARY: I'm loving this.

MEL: You don't think it's a little, tacky?

HILARY: Oh come on Mel. It will be fine. The Germans are renowned for their sense of humour.

JIM, CHARLIE, WENDY and HILARY pair up, link arms and dance. The CARETAKER enters.

CARETAKER: God help us.

CHARLIE: Aye up Big Balls. Hear you dropped a bollock with the crockery. Well, don't just stand there, join in.

The CARETAKER and MEL are unwillingly gathered up into the dance as CHARLIE sings.

CHARLIE: I've got big balls, Oh I've got big balls, I've got big balls, dirty big balls, I've got big balls, she's got big balls but Tarquin's got the biggest balls of them all.

The lights dim as AC/DC's Big Balls is played.

Scene 2

WENDY is centre stage lit by a single light. The rest of the stage is in darkness. On a table in front of her is a cake stand containing an assortment of fancies.

WENDY: Fair fa' your honest eyes without face, great chieftain o' this community place, Eccles Cake and Bakewell Tart, I give to you with all my heart. This groaning platter take ye fill, 'tis yours to eat as you will. With this offering I hope we merit, a benign and friendly community spirit.

WENDY lifts the cake stand as if offering it to the gods. In the darkness the CARETAKER enters carrying the painting (see production note.) The painting is placed behind WENDY facing the audience. Hilary enters in the darkness carrying the box of cups and saucers.

HILARY: Are you there Wendy? Why is it so dark?

WENDY turns and sees the painting, She screams. Hilary screams and drops the box which crashes to the ground smashing the contents. The CARETAKER turns on the lights.

CARETAKER: Who turned the bloody lights off? What's going on?

WENDY: (*Pointing at the picture.*) But that's, that's, that's...

CARETAKER: Oh that. 'Eyes Without a Face' it's called. One of the Art Group did it. I thought I'd put a few of their pictures up around the place.

HILARY: Bugger. Sorry Wendy, looks like all the crockery has got smashed.

WENDY: How, how, how long? I mean where er...

CARETAKER: Are you OK?

WENDY: Where do you store the art class paintings?

CARETAKER: In the lean-to next to the toilets. Why?

WENDY: So you would carry it past the windows to take it into the old hall?

CARETAKER: I suppose so. Why?

WENDY: Oh no!

CARETAKER: Well, yes, you're right I suppose. It is a bit damp in there. That's why I thought I better to hang them on the walls.

WENDY: Oh Christ!

CARETAKER: So where do you think this one should go?

HILARY: In the skip.

CARETAKER: I can't do that. I can't go chucking away their work.

HILARY: Whoever did that needs chucking away them self. Or locking up. One of the two.

CARETAKER: I take it you don't like it.

HILARY: Not my cup of tea. Oh. Sorry Wendy. I'm afraid no one is going to get a cup of tea now.

CARETAKER: You what?

HILARY: I think I've just broken all the cups

CARETAKER: After I went to all that trouble to get them out of the skip!

HILARY: Sorry.

WENDY: If you don't mind, I would prefer it if you took that picture away.

CARETAKER: Whatever you say. Don't mind me, I'm just a lacky around here. (*Looking at the picture.*) I don't see why you don't like it. I think it is quite spiritual. (*He exits with the painting.*)

WENDY: I feel like a right idiot.

HILARY: So that is what you saw through the window then. Oh well, at least it has been explained at last.

WENDY: But I made such a fool of myself in that meeting. Telling everyone that the old hall was haunted.

HILARY: I'm sure it will blow over. No one will remember after all the excitement we are going to have today.

WENDY: And this sacrifice.

HILARY: This what?

WENDY: Oh. Nothing.

HILARY: Did you say sacrifice?

WENDY: Er...

HILARY: I thought you said it was an offering. I thought you meant it was like leaving a mince pie for Santa. A Sacrifice! That's a whole new kettle of fish. Or plate of Eccles cakes anyway.

WENDY: Don't mock me Hilary.

HILARY: Is that what you were doing in the dark? Isn't it supposed to be eye of newt, tongue of frog and that sort of thing?

WENDY: Please. I feel foolish enough as it is.

HILARY: Oh no, that's witches isn't. Virgins. That's what you need. I suppose if the Eccles Cakes were untouched...

WENDY: Hilary, please.

HILARY: Not so sure about the Bakewell Tarts though.

WENDY: If you breathe a word of this...

HILARY: Don't worry, I won't tell anyone. Apart from Mel of course. You almost had her believing the place was haunted. Does she know about this 'sacrifice'?

WENDY: I mentioned it to her. She just said to have it over with before anyone else arrived.

HILARY: Yes. I was there. I didn't realise that she knew you were going to this extent. I didn't think she was so gullible. Well, she was sure that there would be a rational explanation anyway. I have to say Wendy, you did have us going.

WENDY: Are you saying that I am gullible?

HILARY: No Wendy, just, well, sensitive.

WENDY: What a grotesque picture though. Why would anyone paint such a thing?

HILARY: Well, I know nothing about art, but I know what I don't like.

WENDY: Well, I didn't like that.

HILARY: Me neither.

WENDY: You don't think...

HILARY: What?

WENDY: Well, Maybe someone painted that because they saw it themselves.

HILARY: You are not making a lot of sense now Wendy.

WENDY: What if the ghost really does exist. And someone from the art class has also seen it and painted that from memory.

HILARY: Wendy, I think it is probably best to forget about the whole thing.

The CARETAKER enters carrying a box.

CARETAKER: Who the bloody hell ordered this?

HILARY: What is it?

CARETAKER: A dozen bottles of bloody cleaning solvent.

HILARY: Oh, that was Mel. Mike wants it for something. Not sure what.

CARETAKER: I've got nowhere to keep it, this stuff is highly flammable. One spark and we could have an explosion. It's madness having it in here with the state of the electrics.

WENDY: Where should it be kept?

CARETAKER: In a metal container preferably.

WENDY: Why not put the bottles inside the tea urn? I can't use it now anyway.

CARETAKER: Inside the tea urn?

WENDY: Why not? It's metal, it has a lid.

CARETAKER: I suppose it will do for now.

They put all the bottles inside the urn.

CARETAKER: Wait until I see that Mike. I can't imagine why he needs so much Isopropyl Alcohol. Unless he is going into the drug making business. Make sure no one turns that on, the fumes would kill us. *(He exits.)*

HILARY: I suppose it will be all right in here.

WENDY: Well, we've no other use for the tea urn now have we?

HILARY: Yes, sorry about that Wendy. You don't think the fumes *would* kill us do you?

WENDY: I doubt it. Type of alcohol isn't it? We probably all get hammered.

HILARY: Well that would be some compensation I suppose. How did I manage to smash every single cup?

WENDY: Oh, it's not your fault. Such a shame though, It's always a struggle trying to raise funds.

HILARY: At least we still have the cakes to sell. You're starting to look a bit more human.

WENDY: Yes, well. Obviously you are right. There is no ghost. It's all just a misunderstanding.

HILARY: Of course it is. Look, why don't we go and get changed? Cheer ourselves up a bit.

WENDY: Yes, all right then.

WENDY and HILARY exit. MEL enters from the opposite side.

MEL: Hello. Anyone here?

BRIAN enters.

BRIAN: (*Spookily*) Is there anybody there?

MEL: Oh don't Brian. You haven't heard the latest.

BRIAN: Don't tell me our resident ghost has put in another appearance.

MEL: Well, I'm not sure, but best not to joke about it.

BRIAN: You don't believe in all that clap trap do you?

MEL: No, of course not, but I'd rather steer clear of the subject if you don't mind.

BRIAN: Whatever you say. So the big day is here at last.

MEL: Yes, Oh good, someone has got the tea urn out. I wonder if it has been filled. (*She lifts it a few inches of the table.*) Yes, it feels full. I'll just switch it on. (*She does so.*)

BRIAN: Yum. Bakewell Tart.

MEL: I think you had better leave them. I think Wendy has brought them down for a purpose.

BRIAN: To sell them knowing her. You're right. Better not touch the merchandise.

MEL: Listen Brian. About this lottery funding. You don't think that they will come and check up on us do you?

BRIAN: Not a chance. We're small fry to them. A drop in the ocean.

MEL: I hope so. I put my neck out for this and I can't afford any trouble.

BRIAN: There's nothing for you to worry about. You'll probably get promoted. I understand that the Mayor is coming today.

MEL: Yes. Together with some visitors from Winkl. Oh God, I hope that they are not offended.

BRIAN: Offended?

MEL: I keep checking my email, hoping that I'm going to get a message that they haven't been able to come after all.

BRIAN: Why should they be offended?

MEL: Wendy and Charlie came up with this idea of a theme to today's events. Oh God, it's a disaster.

JIM and CHARLIE enter wearing ledenhosen. JIM is carrying a CD player.

BRIAN: (*Seeing them.*) No reason why anyone should be offended! You're not serious!

JIM: Guten Morgen.

BRIAN: Oh my God.

JIM: Mein Name ist Jim und das ist mein Freund Charlie. Wir möchten für Sie tanzen.

CHARLIE: Mit den Damen

JIM: Ja. Mit den Damen, wenn sie er, get here.

MEL: I could ring the Mayor. Tell him it's been postponed. Problem with the electrics. Yes, that's it.

WENDY and HILARY enter in their version of traditional Bavarian costumes.

JIM: Aha. Die Damen.

HILARY: Guten Morgen, Jim. Guten Morgen, Charlie.

JIM plugs in the CD player.

MEL: Oh, I wouldn't do that...

Bavarian folk music plays. The four of them perform a thigh slapping dance too awful for words. As they are doing so MIKE, CHRIS, PAT and SAM enter wearing Morris Men costumes with bells on their fingers and toes (except CHRIS who has bells on his crutches.) MIKE has his own CD player. He turns off the music.

MIKE: I hope you realise how ridiculous you look.

JIM: I look ridiculous? What about you?

MIKE: We are dressed in costume befitting the occasion. We are in an English village, and this is an English celebration. I don't know what possessed you to dress up like rejects from the Hitler youth but I can't imagine it going down well with our visitors.

CHARLIE: Oh, you're too sensitive. We're only having a laugh. They'll love it. Remind them of home.

CHRIS: I do think Mike has a point you know. People do get offended by stereotyping. Are you sure about this Mel?

MEL: Am I sure about this? Do I look like I am sure about this? I haven't slept for a week.

CHRIS: Ah Mel. This is your big day.

MEL: No. It isn't about me. It never was about me. It is about Snickerton. About the community. I don't want a promotion, I just want to see the community come together and benefit from this sparkling...

CHARLIE: Or sparking.

MEL: ...new community hall. But the community hasn't come together, if anything it is more divided. And, although I'm not looking for promotion, I would like to hang on to my job and the chances of that are looking increasingly unlikely. Oh God, it wasn't supposed to be like this.

Since the music stopped, Wendy has been sitting close to the tea urn. When she speaks she sounds quite drunk. The fumes from the tea urn will gradually affect everyone.

WENDY: I don't know about anyone else but I'm starting to feel a bit light headed. *(She looks at the tea urn curiously.)*

HILARY: Now that you mention it, so do I. Not used to all this thigh slapping you know.

MEL: Right. I'm putting my foot down. No lederhosen. No Bavarian music. My job's on the line here. I know you think it would be great fun to take the Michael

out of our guests, but there is such a thing as decency and respectability and, most importantly, dignity. These are very important people who are coming here today, they have never done us any harm, and I am determined that we will treat them with respect.

JIM: Ah Mel!

MIKE: Quite right. Well said Mel.

MEL: And no bloody bells on your fingers and bells on your bloody toes either.

MIKE: What? Why not?

WENDY: What's good for the goose is good for the... chicken or whatever the bloody thing is.

MEL: I am not going to lose my job just because you lot want to dress up and behave like children.

BRIAN: Well said, Mel.

MIKE: Can I say one thing? Don't knock it until you've seen it.

MIKE presses play on his CD player and starts dancing, very earnestly, to a jig. CHRIS, PAT and SAM look on amused. JIM presses play on his CD player and the Bavarian music competes with the jig. JIM and CHARLIE do the link arms type dance. The chaos lasts for a few moments until there is a bang, the music stops and they are plunged into darkness.

WENDY: Who turned the bloody lights out?

CHARLIE: What the bloody hell is that?

CHRIS: It's my crutch you idiot. You're sitting on my crutch.

CHARLIE: What's that sticking in my... Oh get off me you bloody pervert.

CHRIS: Not my crotch, my crutch you bloody fool.

MIKE: Who are you calling a pervert? There's only one pervert around here. Ah, that's my arm, get of my arm!

CHARLIE: Sorry old man, complete accident.

MIKE: Ow!

CHARLIE: Sorry.

MIKE: Ow! Stop it!

CHARLIE: Sorry again.

PAT: Will everyone just calm down.

CARETAKER: *(Entering.)* Can't I leave you lot alone for five minutes?

The CARETAKER turns on the lights to reveal JIM, PAT, SAM, MIKE, CHARLIE and CHRIS sitting in a neat line.

JIM: *(Affected by the fumes.)* Ha, ha. You know what we should do? I said oops upside your head, I said oops upside your head. Oops upside your head, I said oops upside your head. *(He does the rowing action. PAT and SAM join in.)*

MEL: What the hell has got into everyone? Get up for God's sake.

WENDY: *(Slurred.)* I think there's something in the air.

JIM: *(Singing.)* Call out the instigators, cos there's something in the air.

PAT: *(Singing.)* I can feel it coming in the air tonight. *(He does the Phil Collins drum solo on SAM's back making the appropriate sounds.)*

SAM: Here, get off me.

JIM and PAT collapse in fits of giggles.

MEL: Just get up will you!

CHARLIE: Here, don't tell Chris to get it up. He's already tried it on with me once.

MEL: For God's sake. People will be here in a minute.

CHARLIE: All right, all right. Come on Big Balls, give us a hand.

The CARETAKER and CHARLIE get CHRIS and MIKE upright. The others struggle to their feet with the exception of WENDY who is becoming seriously intoxicated.

MEL: Right. First things first. Everyone out of those costumes.

JIM: Fair enough. You're the boss.

WENDY: Do you know? I feel a little tipsy.

JIM has dropped his leather shorts.

MEL: Not in here!

JIM: Aw, come on Mel. Give us a smile.

WENDY: Yeah, go on Mel. Show us your teeth!

CHARLIE: Teeth out for the lads!

MEL: I don't see that there is anything to smile about. There could be an international incident the way you are dressed, Mike's setting himself up for another fight and everyone seems to be half pissed.

JIM: Me! Drinking? I haven't been drinking. Have you been drinking Wendy?

WENDY: Not a drop. And anyway I object to being described as half pissed. I'm as pissed as a newt!

JIM: Me too.

CHRIS: *(To Mike.)* The atmosphere is rather intoxicating isn't it? I feel, well, happy. Mike, I think that's it's time we kissed and made up. What's the point in being enemies eh? Come on, give us a kiss.

MIKE: Get off me you idiot.

MEL: Well if you haven't been drinking why are...

It suddenly dawns on MEL that the fumes are coming from the tea urn. She lifts the lid and is knocked back by the fumes.

MEL: Jesus!

PAT: No, but close.

MEL: That's quite pungent.

CARETAKER: Turn it off.

MEL does so.

MIKE: What is it?

CARETAKER: It's that bloody solvent you ordered.

MIKE: Solvent?

CHARLIE: The IPA.

MEL: Wow, that's strong stuff! I feel quite... Why is the room going round?

MIKE: I didn't want to order solvent, I wanted beer. IPA. India Pale Ale!

MEL starts to giggle.

MIKE: You mean that there's bloody solvent in the tea urn!

MEL: Round and round.

CHARLIE: India Pale Ale? Not Isopropyl Alcohol?

MEL: IPA! India Pale Ale! Ha ha. He said it was solvent. Charlie. Ha, ha, IPA is Isotope Pill Alcohol or something he said. You wanted beer! Ha, ha, ha. Beer! I'm going to be sacked. Ha, ha.

JIM, with his trousers still around his ankles attempts to walk over to MEL but falls flat on his face.

PAT: I'll have what he's having. Oh, ha, ha. I am.

JIM: An international incident! Yeah! We're going to have an international incident!

SAM: (*Singing*) Glory Glory Hallelujah

PAT: *(Singing)* Teacher Hit Me with a ruler

SAM: }

So I punched her in the belly, and she wobbled like a jelly, and I ain't going to school no more!

PAT: }

The fumes are affecting everyone except MIKE and the CARETAKER now. All are laughing and acting drunk. From his prone position JIM does a Nazi salute and uses one finger to imitate a moustache.

JIM: *(Singing)* Deutschland, Deutschland über alles, Über alles in der Welt.

The Mayor and foreign dignitaries enter.

MEL: Hello Mayor. How are you doing you old fart? See you've got the Krauts with you then. Welcome to Snickerton. Twinned with Willy.

JIM: *(Singing)* Hitler, has only got one ball, the other, is in the Albert Hall, da da, da da da da da...

With the exception of MIKE and the CARETAKER everyone joins in. They start to march around the hall singing and miming playing brass band instruments. The MAYOR is aghast. The Germans are puzzled. MIKE and the CARETAKER look at each other, shrug their shoulders and join the end of the marching band. The lights dim and the music 'Colonel Bogey' fades up.

Curtain