

Characters

- Stanley (M)** - The titular 'Dad'
- Barney (M)** - Stanley's best friend
- Gertrude (F)** - Stanley's daughter-in-law
- Henry (M)** - Stanley's son
- Florence (F)** - Gertrude's friend
- Tommy (M)** - Florence's husband
- Pastor John (M)** - Local pastor

Act 1

Scene 1 – Sitting room

(Tabs open. Lights up to a stage set as a sitting room with a writer's desk on the left of the stage with a settee opposite. There are also two deep winged-back chairs, one facing the audience and the other with its back to the audience with a small side table beside the two. Centre upstage is the main living room door and down stage left there are French doors leading to the garden. Enter Stanley upstage through main living room doors. Stanley walks in excitedly waving a letter calling to his son as he enters. He doesn't notice the audience at first and talks to his friend Barney who is in his imagination)

Stanley: Yes, yes, yes. Finally, Harry, it's arrived; look it's my... Oh! No-one's home! Ah, so much for surprising them eh Barney, what-what? Ah well, it's their loss; at least we can celebrate what? I feel a glass of scotch... or two coming on Barney, how about you? No! Still on the dry are you old friend, what-what? **(Laughing, he makes for the whiskey decanter on the desk and fills a glass and proffers the bottle to the 'person' to his right)** What, not even a small one? Well, well. All the more for me Barney old chap, cheers! **(He is about to leave the stage when he spots the audience for the first time. Grinning apologetically he holds up his hands and laughs)** I am so rude. My apologies for not introducing myself and my good friend here... My name is Stanley Lawton and this... **(He gestures to his right)** ...this is Barney Brewster. Sargent, First Airborne Division, best friend a man could have what-what! Well except that he has decided to go off the drink... **(Patting his imaginary friend on the back)**...for health reasons no doubt. Ha! Well, sorry we can't stay longer but I want to go and find that son of mine and tell him my good news. **(He waves the letter in the air and turns and exits downstage left through French doors)**

(Enter Henry and Gertrude centre upstage through main living room door)

Gertrude: **(She is looking annoyed at Henry as he sets about rummaging through the desk drawers and through the stack of paperwork on the top of the desk)** Oh now look Henry, we really are going to have to sit down and talk about your father. You cannot just snap your fingers and expect me to be happy with whatever you decide, it's just not, well, not democratic!

Henry: **(Stopping his search Henry looks agitated as he straightens up and looks over his shoulder to his wife)** Democratic? Since when were you ever worried about being democratic? I seem to recall you telling me that it was always your way unless you told me otherwise, and then it was only if you agreed with it... **(under his breath)**...However that works! **(He resumes his searching)**

Gertrude: **(She straightens her back some more and clasps her hands in front of her. She looks sternly at Henry)** Humph! Let's not be smart Henry it doesn't suit you!

Henry: **(Without stopping this time Henry continues to talk to his wife with his back to her)** Look Gerti – Gertrude - pet, let's not argue, today of all days. Please? ...and yes you're right we do need to sit and discuss all-things-dad but right now, I need to find what I'm looking for.

Gertrude: **(Trying to get her husband to look at her she shifts around so she is standing in front of him)** Well if you told me what it was you'd lost maybe I could be of some help. What is it?

Henry: **(Henry sighs and stands up straight and looks at her)** It was a file with some of dad's old papers in it, you know, old army stuff, his will, his plans for the future and all that sort of thing

Gertrude: His will? Henry darling I doubt very much if your father had the where-with-all to make a will. Why I remember talking to him not so long ago about his estate and what he planned to do with it and he was - well to be honest about it, he was quite rude! He told me it was none of my business and that Barney knew exactly what to do should his time ever come.

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Henry: **(Looking amused at her he laughs and starts rummaging through a new pile of papers)** Barney? Well that's a fat lot of good seeing as Barney is... Oh here it is! Brilliant! **(He holds a red folder file aloft triumphantly)** Now let's hope the letter is here too. **(He sets about opening the file completely wrapped up in what he is doing)**

Gertrude: **(She nods her head and pats her husband on the shoulder)** Good, that's that! Well if you don't need me anymore I'll make a start on dinner, but don't forget Henry, we need to talk about your father... tonight!

(Gertrude exits centre upstage)

Henry: **(Quite absently he is only slightly aware of what his wife is saying)** Hmmm, yes dear, tonight dear!

(Flicking through the folder Henry spies the whiskey decanter and glass on the table. Picking up the glass he sniffs it and shakes his head. Looking over his shoulder to make sure the coast was clear he pours himself a generous measure and makes his way over to the chair beside the window. Before sitting he opens the French doors and lets the cool breeze wash over him. He seats himself in the winged-back chair facing the audience. Taking a large gulp of the whiskey he sits the glass on the side table and starts to examine the contents of the file)

Henry: Now let's see, old photos, maps! Whatever they're all about! Letters, more photos, ah ha! This could be it! **(Carefully lifting out an old stained piece of paper Henry starts to read, but is interrupted by the doorbell)**

(SFX. loud door bell. Gertrude yells from offstage)

Gertrude: Get that will you Henry love; my hands are covered in flour?

Henry: Will do **(He leaves the file on the side table laying the paper on top and exits centre upstage to answer the door)**

Henry: **(OS)** Ah Pastor, come in, come in.

(There is a murmuring of another voice nothing identifiable)

Henry: **(Still offstage)** Yes Pastor Gertrude is here, she is in the kitchen. Gertrude dear it's Pastor John to see you. Follow me Pastor.

(Enter Stanley downstage left. Stanley looks cagily around the garden door before entering. Seeing the coast is clear he sneaks back in)

Stanley: Ugh! Pastor John! That man always made my skin crawl with his deep lazy voice and sticky-outy-teeth! **(He mimics sticking out his teeth as he speaks)** Take my word for it Barney, you don't want to be standing too close to him when he gets on a rant about religion and the church of today, with those teeth you're at risk of getting bitten, or at best you'll get drenched by the amount of water he 'sthprayths aths he sthpeakths! What-what! Seriously the man is a health hazard. Here sit down for a bit. **(He gestures to the two winged-back chairs and sits in the one facing the audience)** We'll be safe in here for a while. Gerti will be busy feeding him one of her famous raspberry sponges while he bends Henry's ear about church business. If there's one thing that man knows how to do is talk! **(He spies the glass left behind by Henry and sniffs it with a satisfied smile. Then he lifts the paper lying on top of the file and starts to read it)** You know Barney; I remember this as if it were yesterday. **(He reads a little more and chuckles)** You know you and I could have a little fun with this Barney. **(Taking a pen from his pocket he starts to write on the paper)** I know this will make Henry laugh if he ever reads it, ha, ha, mores to the point I know it will make that stuck-up excuse for a wife of his hopping mad. Oh I can just see her face ha, what—what! She'll screw up that pretty little pinched face of hers like a bulldog chewing a wasp! **(He throws his head back and laughs heartily and slaps the arm of the chair trying to make a face. Laughing some more he finishes the whiskey in the glass and places it back on the side table. He stops suddenly as he hears Henry's voice in the hall. He slides down into the seat hoping not to be seen)**

Henry: **(Off stage)** yes, yes dear I agree, I think Pastor John deserves something a little stronger too.

(Henry enters centre upstage talking all the while)

Henry: He's not the only one. **(He picks up the decanter and a clean glass off the side tray and pours a measure, he then looks over to the side table and grabs the glass he left there earlier and realises its empty. He puzzles over it for a millisecond then pours a small measure and quickly downs it before pouring another. He replaces the decanter and picks up the two glasses)** That's better, now Henry old chap, pin a smile to your face and be nice! **(He straightens his shoulders and gives an exaggerated smile and looks straight at the audience as he speaks before he leaves the room)** Now Pastor John this will warm you up! **(In a lower voice)** If you can shut-up long enough to drink it! **(He breathes deeply)** and... smile **(Exit centre upstage)**

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Stanley: **(Popping his head around the corner of the armchair to make sure the room was empty Stanley sits up properly in the chair and laughs)** Ha what did I tell you Barney, that man could talk an eight –day-clock down? Poor Henry, he never was too clever at avoiding him. Mind you he was never too clever at avoiding Gerti either what-what! Ha, ha poor guy, I did warn him Barney, I told him if he married that woman he'd never get another word in as long as he lived. I knew her mother Maisie Donaldson and that woman could talk for Ireland, but Gertrude Donaldson is in a league of her own. I always said she should be in the Olympics; she'd win gold, silver

and bronze for non-stop gabbing, and all without taking a breath. I swear if you looked hard enough you'd find the woman has gills...what-what. Ha, ha. Shhh! **(He holds up his hand to his lips and cocks his ear towards the door. Folding the piece of paper he puts it into his pocket)** Come on Barney, I fear we will be discovered if we stay here much longer. I cannot face Gertrude right now let alone Pastor John; quickly let's get out of here. I fancy a pint at The Dog and Duck before dinner. **(He stands up quickly knocking the file off the table and without stopping he exits downstage left through the French doors, leaving them slightly ajar)**

(Enter centre upstage, Gertrude, Henry and Pastor John)

Gertrude: Oh do take a seat Pastor; it's far more comfortable in here. I do not know what Henry was thinking bringing you into the kitchen, me with my hands covered in flour and I'm sure I must look a fright in my apron.

(Gertrude pats down her perfectly coifed hair as she unties her apron and folds it and sits it on the desk. All the while Henry is pouring fresh drinks)

Pastor John: Not at all Gertrude dear. It's a pleasure seeing a woman so happily at the heart of the home. What better place for a wife to be than in the kitchen?

Henry: **(Sputtering over his drink Henry looks amusedly at Gertrude who is looking furiously at the pastor)** Oh I agree Pastor, Gertrude's place has always been by the kitchen sink - **(seeing her about to explode he rushes on)** - and happily so as you said. Sure Gertrude would never be one to disagree with you there Pastor.

Pastor John: You are a lucky man Henry, a good wife is hard to come by; everyone wants to be off doing their own thing these days. The home is becoming a sadly neglected thing by all accounts. Family! That's what holds a household together in my book. Take your father for instance... **(Gertrude can take no more of this and looking fit to kill the pastor she holds her hand up to interject)**

Gertrude: I like to think my place has a greater reach than just the home Pastor. The days of tying ones wife to the kitchen sink are long gone as you may well know. As for his father...well, we have yet to discuss that issue ourselves. Now if you don't mind I have to get back to my baking. **(She blasts Henry with a look and nods towards the door as she leaves)**

(Henry stands up and follows her)

Gertrude: **(In a stage whisper)** How dare that man.....Henry, get rid of him before I say something I will regret.....and you, you're worse for encouraging him. **(She makes to leave then remembers something and turns back to Henry)** Do not make any decisions with that man with regards to your father either Henry, not before you and I sit down to discuss it as agreed! **(She gives him one last stare then turns on her heel and leaves centre upstage)**

Henry: Another drink Pastor? **(He picks up the decanter and proffers it to the pastor who nods gratefully and holds out his glass, at the same time Henry spots the file on the floor with the papers spilling out. Placing the decanter back on the desk, Henry crosses the floor and closes the French doors, picks up the papers off the floor then sits back down beside the pastor)** Let me show you some of these photos Pastor. They are of my father, some of them are fascinating.

(Lights fade to blackout. Tabs close)

Scene 2 - Kitchen

(Room with door upstage right and table in centre front. Dresser to back wall upstage left with cups & saucers and an old fashioned cake stand. Four chairs situated around the table. One either end and two facing audience. Lights Down. SFX. Doorbell rings. As the lights ease up Gertrude and Florence are entering the kitchen)

Gertrude: **(To Tomas off-stage)** That's right Tomas, you should find him in the sitting room if he isn't there, he's probably in the shed in the back garden.

Florence: Oh Gertrude dear how are you holding up? We saw Pastor John leave and I thought we would see if everything was ok. How are you dearie?

Gertrude: Oh Florence, I cannot deny it has been quite a stressful day with one thing and another. Tea dear?

(Gertrude sets about making a pot of tea and setting the china on the table as Florence looks around the room)

Florence: Oh thank you dear that would be lovely, I say, how is Henry? Is he still insisting –

(Gertrude spins around and gives Florence a look that stops her in her tracks)

Gertrude: Don't mention Henry to me Florence, I am quite beside myself and all he can do is sit rummaging through old – old - stuff, of his father's, he is being so annoying. Cake dear?

Florence: Umm please. Have the two of you decided what you are going to do about Stanley yet?

Gertrude: **(Slamming the sugar bowl on the table Gertrude picks up a spoon and stirs her cup quite vigorously)** Decided! Decided! So annoying Florence, He won't decide on anything. He won't discuss it at all. I tell you, I really think he is deliberately avoiding talking about it. I mean to say he already knows how I feel about it, but we do need to discuss it! **(She goes back and forward to the cupboards and table with plates and forks banging each down as she goes)**

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Florence: Of course you do, Gertrude dear, I mean to say it's not a decision to come to lightly, you both have to sit and discuss it sensibly and then let him know exactly how it has to be, after all it is his father.

Gertrude: I know. You see Florence; you understand. **(Placing the plate with some cake on the table she flops into the chair exhausted)**

Florence: Oh you poor dear. Men can be so exasperating sometimes. **(She mumbles through a mouthful of cake)**

Gertrude: Sometimes! Huh! How about all of the time! I mean to say Florence, really, what does he expect me to do? Move everything around just to accommodate his father? What do you think of the cake?

Florence: **(Florence looks around the room with a terrified expression)** Oh your lovely house Gertrude. Just when you've spent sooo long getting it just how you want it. I don't know how I would cope. The cake is beautiful... as usual dear.

Gertrude: He's already looking at places to hang some of his father's old pictures. He actually wants me to take down my beautiful water-colours in the living room.

Florence: You don't mean the ones you painted yourself? **(She feigns shock all the while trying to hide a smile)**

Gertrude: I do Flo; can you honestly believe he wants to take those down?
(SFX. Hammer on concrete)

Florence: Oh my word, what is that awful racket?

Gertrude: That my dear is Henry. He is determined to drive me to an early grave with all the ruckus. Hammering nails into my beautifully re-painted walls sending dust flying all over my new Axminster carpet. Just so he can create a space to make his father feel **(She uses her hands to make air quotes)** 'at home'. I mean - really!

Florence: Oh now Gertrude dear, that's being a little dramatic don't you think? What would his father want with a space to himself anyway?

Gertrude: Oh Florence, I keep asking that same question but you know Henry when he gets an idea -

Henry: **(OS)** Gert dear, Tommy and I are just heading out to the hardware store, we need more nails. Won't be long.
(SFX. door slams)

Florence: Huh - Men!

Gertrude: Indeed - Men!
(Lights fadeout to blackout. Tabs close)

Scene 3 – Sitting Room

(Tabs open. There are framed paintings leaning against the wall on the right. Pictures and papers are strewn all over the settee. Stanley is standing in the middle of the room)

Stanley: Oh my word, I say Barney, Those lads have made quite a mess. Henry never was one for DIY, Doesn't look as if old Tommy is much better either what what! Eh what's that, no I suppose not, I wasn't any great shakes at it either. Ha ha. Old Gerti will be pretty giddy when she sees the state of her precious furniture. Ha I should call her Giddy Gerti from now on, what what!

(Stanley wanders over and sifts through the pictures Henry left lying around. Picking one up, he sighs, and shows it to the audience. It is a Picture of a group of soldiers)

Stanley: Well, well, I had forgotten about these. A fine looking bunch of men if ever there was. Ha! And a handsome bunch at that! Look at this one, I don't see you here Barney, where were you when this was taken? What date was that anyway - Oh! **(He turns the picture over and reads the date)** Oh yes that was December 1944. I remember now Barney, there was only a few of us left - after Arnhem. **(He tuts and puts the picture down)** Come on old boy, I feel the need for a snifter - what do you say; one for old time's sake? **(He absentmindedly thumbs though the photos before placing his arm around his friend's imaginary shoulder and walks off through the garden doors)**

(Gertrude and Florence enter from centre upstage. Gertrude is carrying a feather duster)

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Gertrude: Oh my, oh, oh my, just look at this room. **(She gazes around in sheer horror as she picks her way through the mess, picking up bits and pieces as she goes, she addresses the audience as she speaks)** He cannot honestly think he's going to hang all of these pictures, surely? Oh dear some of them are so old and so tatty. They will ruin the whole ambiance of the room, **(she sniffs in annoyance)** not to mention the Feng shwoosie I have so carefully created in here. **(She closes her eyes and breathes deeply then speaks slowly)** Calm and inner peace. A soothing oasis -

Florence: Oh I say Gert, this is a jolly mess but we'll soon get it fixed up... don't you worry!

Gertrude: **(Gertrude is still standing with her eyes closed breathing deeply this time speaking through gritted teeth)** - calm and inner peace, a soothing oasis to bring the mind to rest and contemplation, bringing in the good chi!

(Suddenly, one of the pictures that Henry had hung up falls with a crash to the floor causing Gertrude jumps in fright)

Gertrude: **(She looks around and glares at the offending object)** Ohhhhh! How can anyone have good chi in this house with all this clutter? It will have to go, or so help me I will.

(The two start to fluff the dust off the couch just as another picture falls off the wall. They both scream and plonk themselves on the seat. Lights fade to blackout. Tabs close)

Scene 4 – Beer Garden/Sitting Room

(When the lights come up they only highlight half of the stage onto a small beer garden. The other half of the stage will highlight later in the scene with a scaled down version of the sitting room. Upstage to the left of the set Henry and Tommy are sitting at a wooden table in a beer garden with a pint each in front of them. Tommy is sitting side-on to the audience with Henry sitting on the opposite side of the table facing the audience. A bag with a hardware store's name sits on the table alongside of them)

Tommy: Thirsty work this old DIY lark.

Henry: Very.

Tommy: That's why I love getting stuck in to a bit of re-painting or just moving the furniture around, gives me a reason to go for supplies.

Henry: Ha, and a swift half on the way home.

Tommy: Exactly!

Henry: I'm kind of sorry I started now though. Those walls in the sitting room are tougher than I thought. I've bent more nails than I actually managed to get in. Lord knows if those pictures will stay up. I wouldn't be surprised if I got home and they were all on the floor.

Tommy: I doubt you're that bad. A hammer and a nail isn't exactly rocket science, besides, I think you just had the wrong nails. These masonry ones should do the trick, they can tackle any wall.

Henry: These are Gertrude's walls we're talking about Tommy. They're as tough as she is.

Tommy: But you're doing this for your dad, surely she knows that.

Henry: Yes she does, but she doesn't know why I would want to!

Tommy: Why? Were you not very close to your parents?

Henry: Oh Mum and I were, but dad - well, to be honest dad didn't take that much notice of me. He was so wrapped up in mum that I was pretty much left to my own devices and just did my own thing. There were times I felt he would have been happier if it were just the two of them. Silly I know!

Tommy: What about Gertrude?

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Henry: Oh, dad and Gertrude never really got along, so, as the years went on and we got busy with the kids growing up, we had our hands full enough without worrying too much about what dad or mum were getting up to.

Tommy: He was of the old school Henry; it wasn't the **(He makes air quotes as he says this)** 'done thing' for a father to show any kind of emotion. Raising kids was a mother's job, he saw himself as the provider and protector; until he just couldn't. I think for what it's worth, what you are doing is brilliant.

Henry: Ha, I wish Gertrude felt that way. She is totally against it, hates the fact that I am even considering changing anything in the house.

Tommy: You really need to sit down and talk things through and maybe the two of you could come to some sort of compromise!

Henry: Compromise, are you kidding me; Gertrude Donaldson compromise? She was never dad's biggest fan to start with, or her his, for that matter, and that's not about to change any time soon!

(The lights fade on the two men and they will appear to continue to speak to one another silently. As the lights fade on the two men a light focuses on Stanley walking in to same scene from stage right of where the two are sitting. He is in contemplative mood. He stands to listen for a while even considers sitting with them but hearing their conversation he thinks again. He heads for another area of the beer garden downstage right chatting to Barney as he goes)

Stanley: Ah there's nothing better than a leisurely stroll through the park Barney. **(He groans a little and rubs his hip)** What's that? Yes, I know my strolls are getting more leisurely as the years go by but you have to take the time to smell the grass and the hedgerow flowers and even just stop and listen to the flow of the river. A little detour never hurt either; You have to learn to relax with a wee dram now and again too. **(He winks as he waves a glass of whiskey in the air)** You could learn a thing or two you know Barney. You townies never appreciate the simple things in life. It's all about the bright lights and hustle and bustle of people trekking in all different directions that gets your blood pumping. I'm just happy to keep mine pumping at all ha! Oh I need to stop for a wee while. Sit Barney, take a load off!

(He sits down with another aging groan at another bench and continues to chat with Barney)

Stanley: You know it was interesting to hear Henry talk, I don't think I've ever heard him speak that much at any one time. I suppose being married to an Olympic yapper like Gertrude will do that to you. I always reckoned she was injected with a gramophone needle as a kid she talks that much. Lordy, she could drone on and on; and complain! Sheesh! If we had her in the war Hitler would have surrendered within a year what what! Put her into a room with a spy and they would sing like a canary in five minutes flat and they would still sue for torture. What ya sayin'? Oh you're right I'd have the white flag raised before I went in. **(He raises his glass of whiskey and toasts himself. He talks a gulp and continues)** Mind you I'm not surprised knowing who her mother was. You would hear her barking at her poor husband all the way down the far end of the street. Then again he did spend most of the time in the pub so I supposed it saved on shoe leather looking for him every day. I was always surprised though that Henry married her, she just didn't seem his type. Then again I don't suppose I would have known his type back then. He was an odd child, very quiet. But lordy, lordy, when he told me he was marrying that girl well... How's that?

(He puts his chin in his hand and looks into the middle distance and still talks silently as the lights on the beer garden scene fade. A light slowly rises in the other half of the stage where Gertrude and Florence are sitting on the settee)

surveying the mess Henry and Tommy left behind. The audience only sees the two on the settee. They each have a glass of Sherry. Gertrude sighs and shakes her head. Florence sighs and shakes her head too, then they both sigh again and take a sip of sherry)

Gertrude: How is it Florence, that one man can make such a big mess in such a short space of time?

Florence: Oh don't blame it all on Henry Gertrude; I can see Tommy's handiwork written all over this.

Gertrude: I doubt if this is all Tommy's doing Florence.

Florence: Tommy likes to think he is handy at the old DIY lark too, but to be brutally honest with you Gert', he's as useful as a chocolate teapot!

Gertrude: But I've seen the work Tommy has done around your house Flo, that bathroom he put in for you for example, it was lovely.

Florence: It leaked from day one Gert', as soon as I got him out to work I rang the emergency plumber to come and re-fit his fittings.

Gertrude: Oh how did Tommy feel about that?

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Florence: Never told him!

Gertrude: Why?

Florence: Because he was trying to do something nice for the house and why let him think he failed just because the toilet sprung a leak - and the sink - and the bath, but that's beside the point. He wanted to do something for me and it made him feel good that he did. Why ruin that?

Gertrude: But what if he tries to replace the cooker next time, He could blow you all to kingdom come!

Florence: No, I told him about Mary Crosby's husband blowing his thumbs off trying to replace their gas fire.

Gertrude: I didn't know Mary Crosby had a husband.

Florence: She doesn't, but Tommy doesn't know that; but hearing about it he decided that Gas was a step too far for him, so he agreed to stick to the smaller stuff from now on.

Gertrude: Like hammering nails into walls.

Florence: Sorry! But at least the wall's still standing.

Gertrude: Unlike those blasted pictures of Stanley.

Florence: Why is he so intent on hanging pictures of his dad now; after so many years?

Gertrude: You know, I don't really know. It's not as if they were that close. He was closer to his mother. Now that woman was a saint. How she put up with that man I will never know.

Florence: You really never liked him did you?

Gertrude: Let's say I tolerated him for Henry's sake.

Florence: Was it always like that?

Gertrude: From day one!

(At this point the lights over Tommy & Henry and over Stanley rise and in one voice Tommy, Stanley and Florence ask the same question)

Tommy: **(Together)** Can you remember when they first met?

Florence: **(Together)** Can you remember when you first met?

Stanley: **(Together)** Can I remember when we first met?

Gertrude: **(Together)** Oh Yes, I remember.

Henry: **(Together)** Oh Yes, I remember.

Stanley: **(Together)** Oh Yes, I remember.

(This is followed by a 'three-way' conversation with only the speakers being highlighted)

Gertrude: Henry and I had just gotten engaged. Poor Henry he was terribly nervous. I was just so excited and well, I suppose I was a little nervous too. Henry told me that his father had been in the air-corps and could be a force to be reckoned with. But I told Henry that everything would be perfectly fine. His father would be delighted for us when he heard about the engagement.

Stanley: The blithering idiot! Engaged! Engaged I tell you, and he wanted me to be happy about it. Well I thought he was a blithering idiot...Lordy, lordy When he told me he was marrying that Donaldson girl, well! I knew her mother you know, she could talk an eight day clock down. I told him, Henry I said, you'll never get another word in as long as you're married to that woman... What, what!

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Henry: Dad was a little taken aback when we broke the news of the engagement. He was a little surprised I was marrying Gertrude; I think he knew her mother. He mentioned something about her being quite a talkative woman. I'm sure he was just being funny, you know, just trying to make Gertrude feel at home. Anyway I told Dad that I was happy as Larry.

- Stanley:** The poor chap looked miserable. I don't honestly think Henry had much of a choice in his betrothal to that woman. She struck me as someone who gets her own way every time. I warned him he was making a huge mistake.
- Gertrude:** You could see the joy on his face. He came over all funny and insisted he talk with Henry privately. Between you and me Florence, I think he was giving him the old 'Well done son' speech. You could see how animate he was. It was a lovely moment really. I pretended not to notice, I picked myself a posy of wild flowers.
- Stanley:** There she was picking flowers as if she hadn't a care in the world, mind you I didn't tell her they were dandelions she was picking, such a silly girl!
- Henry:** So, I thought it would be a good idea if we went for a walk through the fields down to the river, its dad's favourite fishing spot and I thought we would show Gert' and maybe they could get to know one another a bit better over a spot of fishing.
- Stanley:** He wanted to bring her fishing - in those shoes. Ha well I suppose the chap was trying, so I thought why not? What's the worst that can happen? She might even enjoy it!
- Gertrude:** Fishing! Me! Fishing! I tried to explain to Henry that I wasn't really dressed for trudging through the fields, after all I was wearing my Sunday best Florence, and my best shoes, but I thought if that's going to make Stanley happy well then I'll give it a try, but - well, It didn't quite go as I had imagined!
- Henry:** It didn't go too well!
- Stanley:** It was a disaster! First she got her heel stuck in a cow pat, then she walked through a patch of nettles, then to add insult to injury she refused to attach a few worms to her fishing hook. She came over all fussy and squeamish then she shrieked when one of the poor little critters fell onto her dress. Well! She made so much noise that we'd never catch a fish in a month of Sundays. But would she listen when I told her to be quiet?
- Henry:** Dad and Gertrude really didn't see eye to eye when it came to the finer points of fishing unfortunately.

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- Gertrude:** He was so rude! Would you believe he wanted me to squash some horrible little wriggling worms onto the hook? Ugh! Then, then one of them leaped right out of his hand onto my dress! Well! That was the last straw I tell you Florence, I screamed for Henry to help get the little blighter off me but all Stanley could do was yell at me to stay quiet. Imagine he reckoned I was frightening the fish. Well! I told Henry to take me home. I had already stepped in something extremely stinky and stung the legs off myself with nettles and now I was being yelled at for frightening fish of all things! I just wanted to go home and have a lie down.
- Henry:** I thought it best to call it a day. Gertrude was a tad excitable and dad - well dad was getting a little hot under the collar. So we headed for home. I think Gertrude was a little embarrassed by it all so I told dad we would head on home and make plans for another day. I hoped he wasn't too upset.

Stanley: Was I glad when Henry said he was taking that, that woman home. I could not think of a worse day - ever!

Henry: All in all, I think it was a good day. Dad got to meet Gert' and Gert' got to meet my father, and deep down I think they liked one another.

Gertrude: A horror of a man! Florence, believe me when I say I was in no hurry to see that Stanley Lawton again for a very long time!

Stanley: An abomination of a woman. I don't know what Henry was thinking!

(All sigh heavily, look straight into the audience and groan. Lights fade slowly to blackout. Tabs close)

Act 2
Scene 1 - Kitchen

(Tabs open. Henry is sitting at the kitchen table with all of the contents of the red folder strewn out over the surface of the table. He is searching through each and every piece of paper looking for something in particular. He is muttering to himself as Gertrude walks in not looking too happy when she sees the state of her table)

Henry: I know it was here, it has to be here, there's nowhere else it could be. I'm sure I saw it the other day. (He's oblivious to Gertrude standing watching him)

Gertrude: What are you muttering about Henry Lawton? And just look at the state of my table.

(She starts to tidy the papers into a neat pile but Henry stops her)

Henry: No, no don't do that I'm looking for something Gert', It was here the other day I'm sure of it. You didn't see it did you?

Gertrude: What am I supposed have seen Henry? It might help if you told me what you are looking for.

Henry: It was a letter Gertrude. I'm pretty sure I saw it the yesterday just before Pastor John called. I had found the folder and when I went through the contents I spotted the letter, I'm sure if it.

Gertrude: Ok so, what was this letter about can you remember?

Henry: Well I didn't actually read it, as I said Pastor John arrived and well you know how he is, he just takes over.

Gertrude: Well what was supposed to be in the letter then? If there even was a letter!

Henry: Oh it was a letter all right. Mum told me about it.

Gertrude: From your Dad or to your Dad? Honestly I couldn't imagine your dad wasting time with letters. He usually just roars his intentions. Humph!

Henry: Mum said something about him writing a vow on his call up papers, that if he ever returned to her in one piece, he would never leave her side again.

Gertrude: A bit overly dramatic don't you think?

Henry: She thought it was because he had lost too many good friends in Arnhem in '44. After that, he worried all the time about never being around for her anymore. She always told me that the greatest pleasure he got was walking through the park on a Sunday afternoon holding her hand.

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Gertrude: Holding hands! Stanley? Now, that I find incredible. You mean to say he once had a soft side?

Henry: You know he always was a stubborn old goat, that was his nature and that was all I ever knew too, but mum, god rest her always knew how to get around him, He was putty in her hands. She had a way of making him feel that he was for ever right even though he was almost always wrong.

Gertrude: Stanley Lawton! Wrong?

Henry: I remember on one occasion dad decided to re-arrange all the furniture in the sitting room to make way for the Christmas tree. The only trouble was he had moved the settee too close to the door which meant the door would bang into it, which in turn rattled the side table causing her precious vase to wobble and fall. So Mum would go in and move the settee back to its original position and shift the Christmas tree beside the side table which sheltered her vase, and then we would tell him he did a sterling job making the room look cosy for Christmas. He never knew what she did, or if he did he never let on. You know he adored that woman.

Gertrude: Hmm, I find that hard to believe, but that reminds me, I must move that vase before you do damage to it.

Henry: Don't worry dear, I'm being careful. Now come on give me a quick hand looking for this letter.

Gertrude: Well just a few more minutes then I really have to get started on preparing for our quests; that's another thing Henry, I don't know why you invited them back here. We really need to sit and discuss everything; and I mean everything!

(Lights fade to blackout. Tabs close)

Scene 2 – Sitting Room

(Tabs open. Lights up. The furniture has been rearranged with the two winged back chairs sitting over towards the French doors. One facing the audience with the other facing away. Stanley sitting in the chair facing the audience sipping on a glass of whiskey. Looking at the letter in his hand)

Stanley: **(Looking towards the audience slightly off into the distance)** Isn't it always the same, the older you get the more you have to regret, what, what! I've had a long life and a relatively happy one. I saw things in the war that a young man of twenty should never see. I had the love of a great woman who I watched raise our son whom I am proud of, but I know I had no hand in his raising; that was of my own doing. I had been to war at twenty, my father too had been to war when he was a young man and he thought there could never be another war like it. He raised sons to be strong and proud and live a relatively carefree life, to marry and have children of their own, but he watched helpless as his sons got the call up to the worst war of all. And he watched too, as his wife had to bury one of her beloved sons and explain to two grandchildren why they would forever be without their father.

(Snapping his attention back to the imaginary Barney)

Stanley: You know Barney, I have often wondered if I did enough? **(He looks at the paper in his hand)** What's that you say – yes, yes I know I did my best I suppose, but... **(He sighs and looks to the audience again)** In truth I would have rather not become a father. I never wanted to visit the type of pain my parents went through upon my wife or anyone else. So I suppose I distanced myself from my own son hoping to be spared the pain if he ever had to leave. I made a vow the day I got my call up papers that should I return to my wife I would never leave her side again. And I never did. I know now, that I have spent a life in bewildered anticipation of what might happen, but that never did. **(He glances at the letter in his hand and starts to roll it up)** Now I wonder, will I be forgotten by someone who I tried so hard not to know; but who I loved with all my heart. Have I wasted so much time on an end that never came?

Gertrude: **(OS)** That man will drive me to an early grave, and the mess he's made of my kitchen.

(Stanley stands up with the letter still in his hand. He looks around and spying the vase he pops the letter in. He exits downstage left through the French doors. Gertrude enters the room and proceeds to dust. Talking to herself all the while)

Gertrude: The man is becoming obsessed with that letter, if ever there was one! He is driving me to distraction. As if I hadn't enough to be doing. **(She looks to where there is a picture of Stanley hanging on the wall)** Oh Stanley Lawton do not look at me that way. If I could get my hands on you right now I'd...

(SFX. knock on the door)

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Florence: (OS) Coo-eee! Gertrude dear it's only me.

Gertrude: In the sitting room Florence.

Florence: (Popping her head around the door Florence smiles and enters the room) Ah there you are, the front door was ajar, so I let myself in hope you don't mind.

Gertrude: Not at all dear, we're a bit at sixes and seven's at the minute. (Gertrude smooths her clothes down and waves her hand around the room)

Florence: Yes I saw Henry with his head in the boot of the car, I did say hello but I don't think he heard me. Anyway I came over to see if you needed a hand getting ready for this evening.

Gertrude: Oh Flo you are a darling. I have so much to do and I have to say Henry is as useful as a box of wet matches at the moment.

Florence: What is wrong with him?

Gertrude: He has spent all of last night and the best part of today looking for some blessed letter of his father's that quite frankly I doubt even exists.

Florence: Oh and what's in this letter, some juicy family secret?

Gertrude: Juicy? Hardly. This is Stanley we're talking about Florence; I doubt he did anything juicy in his life. He wouldn't know juicy if it jumped up and bit him.

Florence: Ha ha, well you can forgive a girl for hoping.

Gertrude: Florence, I would forgive just about anything at this point if Henry would just come in and help me get this place ready.

Florence: So I take it you had the talk about Stanley!

Gertrude: Talk, talk! Florence, just the mention of the man's name sets me in a spin and Henry has managed to avoid talking about the issue at every turn. All he'll talk about is that blasted letter.

Florence: Oh I thought if he was looking for a letter of his dad's then maybe you had had the talk.

Gertrude: Huh! Fat chance!

(Gertrude looks as if she is about to cry so Florence claps her hands and takes charge)

Florence: So, what need doing?

Gertrude: Well I have dusted and hoovered in here and I have the nibbles ready and waiting in the kitchen, I just need a few more chairs in here but I honestly don't know where I'll put them.

Florence: (Taking a quick glance around she starts to move the furniture) Well if we move the settee over to the window flat against the wall and move these two chairs over a

little bit we can squeeze at least four more in, I'll get Tommy to come give us a hand. Oh good timing, he's here now. Come on Tommy we could do with a little muscle in here. **(Tommy enters the room. Florence steps back and almost knocks the vase to the floor)**

Gertrude: Oh be careful Flo, that vase nearly went for a Burton. Here give to me and I'll put it behind the door. **(She pops the vase behind the sitting room door)** That's right Tommy just over there and yes that's good. Right now where is Henry?

Henry: I'm right here dear. No luck I'm afraid.

Tommy: Luck with what?

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Gertrude: Oh he's been looking for a letter Tommy; we'll fill you in later. Henry dear, why don't you and Tommy bring in the chairs from the kitchen? Then Florence and I can bring in the food. Where do you want the table set up?

Pastor John: **(Offstage)** Hello everyone!

(Everyone stops what they are doing and forces a smile as Pastor John enters the room)

Pastor John: Busy, busy, busy I see!

Gertrude: Oh hello Pastor John. How lovely to see you, sooo early!

Henry: Oh Pastor, just the man, I was wondering if you remember me showing you some of Dad's old photos yesterday.

Gertrude: I'm sure Pastor John can give you a hand with the chairs while you're talking Henry. We're getting pressed for time. Your dad will be here soon, and we need to be ready. **(She gives Henry a signal with the eyes and hand to get the Pastor out of the room)**

Henry: Yes dear, come with me Pastor; after you Tommy!

Gertrude: **(She drops her voice)** What's he doing here so early?

Florence: **(Laughing and stage whispering back)** He smelled the food. The man is a human blood hound.

Gertrude: **(Still stage whispering)** That man just knows how to get on my last nerve Florence. I swear it - **(Talking loudly as the men re-entre with the kitchen chairs)** Oh, thanks Tommy, just over there, thanks. Thank you Pastor, that's lovely. Henry dear, why don't you pour yourself and the two gentlemen a small snifter in the kitchen while Florence and I finish up in here. **(Again giving her husband that signal)**

Pastor John: Oh that would be nice Gertrude Dear.

Gertrude: **(Stage whisper to Florence)** - and don't let him near the food.

Florence: I think we should have a sit down too Gertrude, you look quite frazzled.

Gertrude: Frazzled? I'm nothing of the sort. I'm just trying to keep busy that's all, and out of Henry's way too I suppose.

Florence: You still disagree on the whole Stanley matter so?

Gertrude: Oh Florence, I really don't think this is a good idea at all.

Florence: Why, what are you so afraid of?

Gertrude: Oh nothing and a hundred different things I suppose.

Florence: Like what?

Gertrude: Henry always told me about his parents when we got together first, how his father adored his mother and never left her side. Something to do with the war I think but I do know he felt that his father kept him at arm's length.

Florence: He probably wanted to make him more independent I'm sure.

Gertrude: No it wasn't that, it was - well, he always felt as if he was in the way!

Florence: Odd!

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Gertrude: I know, but it took Henry a long time to become the man he is now and I am afraid that he will start feeling alone all over again.

Florence: But he has you Gert.

Gertrude: Not that kind of alone Florence; Alone in his soul!

Florence: I don't follow.

Gertrude: I'm afraid, I suppose, that by having his dad here in the house will make him remember the way he felt when he was a child.

Florence: What, you mean left out?

Gertrude: Invisible.....For want of a word!

(SFX. The sound of plates clattering offstage. Gertrude jumps up)

Gertrude: Oh come on Florence before they eat all the food.

(They exit centre upstage through the living room doors. Stanley enters upstage left from the French doors. He takes in the room and the way the furniture has

been rearranged. Lights highlight Stanley and leave the French doors in shadow)

Stanley: Looks like they are expecting quite a crowd tonight Barney what, what? **(He walks around the furniture touching the tops of the chairs as if looking for something)** Gertrude loves a party but I expect this is one she's not too excited about, what do you say Barney? Haha! I guarantee you she's doing her cheese on sticks and pineapple hedgehog too. **(He looks sad and a little reflective)** Ah, she tries hard I suppose Barney. I know I have given her a bit of stick over the years, but Henry loves her, for whatever reason. I never saw the attraction myself, but then again I didn't have to, did I? Now where did she hide that vase? That was Sally's favourite you know. Oh there it is. **(He spies the vase behind the door and carries it to one of the chairs brought in from the kitchen and sits down facing the audience. He turns it upside down shaking it trying to shake something out of it. He sits it back down in defeat and speaks to Barney)** My Sally was the only one for me Barney. It was just her and me against the world... **(He waves his hand dismissively in Barney's direction)** Yes, yes I know and the boy too. I know Barney don't rub it in. I hadn't forgotten. What's that? Yes you're right; he did turn out quite well in spite of me. He did a darn sight better raising his two kids than I did raising him Barney, that's for sure. Ah but it's too late for regrets now Barney. I hope to have made my peace with Henry...Shhh, someone's coming; damn it anyway! **(He tries to carry the vase back to where he got it but has to abandon it on its side so it is rolling on the floor. He scurries over to the winged back chair that is still in shadow and sits down in the one facing the audience. The other chair still sits with its back to the audience. He slides down to hide himself)**

Henry: **(OS)** There should be another bottle of scotch in here somewhere Gertrude, give me a minute, I'll... **(Henry walks in and kicks the vase so hard it shatters into pieces)** Oh holy Babylon anyway. Who left this lying here? Gertrude, **(He raises his voice calling for Gertrude)** Gert - what is this? **(He crouches down and picks out the piece of paper from amidst the broken pieces)**

(Gertrude rushes in and stops when she sees the mess on the floor)

Gertrude: Henry! What is wrong? It doesn't take two of us to look for a bottle of whiskey. Oh good lord Please tell me that is not the vase.

Henry: It is the vase. But look Gertrude, look what was in it. **(He holds up a piece of yellow faded paper)**

Gertrude: What is it and how did it get in there? **(She crouches down beside him and sets about picking up the pieces of vase)**

Henry: This is it Gertrude, I knew it was here somewhere. **(He looks excited)**

Gertrude: What is it?

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Henry: It's the letter. Look, just as mum said.

Gertrude: That's the letter you have been looking for? **(She looks aghast. Just then Florence comes into the room)**

Florence: Is everything alright Gertrude?

Gertrude: Yes Florence, **(She shows her the pieces of broken vase and throws her eyes towards the heavens)** Henry has just found the letter his mother told him about.

Florence: **(Clapping her hands in delight Florence leans down to look over his shoulder)** Oh quick read it Henry I have been dying to know what's so interesting about this letter.

Pastor John: **(He puts his head around the door)** Henry, sorry to disturb, but they're here.

Gertrude: Oh Pastor excuse me, we just need a moment.

Pastor John: **(He nods and leaves)** I'll go see them in.

(SFX. Mumbled voices offstage)

Florence: **(Florence puts her hands on Gertrude's shoulder and takes the pieces of broken vase from her)** I'll get a dustpan and brush dear. I'll have this cleaned up in no time. **(She leaves the room leaving just Henry and Gertrude)**

Gertrude: Don't throw it out Florence; it can be fixed. **(Looking anxiously at her husband she places her hand on his arm)** Are you ok Henry?

Henry: It's the letter Gert. **(His eyes are shining. He speaks almost in a whisper)**

Gertrude: Read it then.

(Still sitting amidst the debris Henry reads the letter to Gertrude)

Henry: 'This is my everlasting vow to those I love. If God were to be so kind to grant me the good fortune to return from the battle field where I will, to the best of my ability, perform my given duty to Queen and country, I swear that I should never part from the comfort of my wife and son. I will endeavour to be present in their lives for as long as the good lord grants me breath in my lungs. To be the best husband a man can be and the best father my son deserves of me, for I swear to raise him with all the love I have in my heart. Come what may; neither land nor sea shall ever part us again.' Stanley E. Lawton. Father, Husband, Airman; 1st Airborne Division. November 12th 1943

(Henry re-reads the letter silently to himself again then looks at his wife with a wistful smile)

Henry: That was the date on his call up papers, see its right here. He kept that promise right up until my mother passed away five years ago."

Gertrude: Henry, he signed himself father; first and foremost. That has got to mean something. **(Gertrude throws her arms around Henry)**

(They stay where they are not moving as if froze as the light over the winged back chairs rises. From the seat with its back to the audience, a man in full military uniform stands up and puts out his hand to Stanley who also stands up)

Barney: Stanley my old friend. I think it's time to go.

Stanley: Yes. I think it is Barney.

(They both turn to look at Henry and Gertrude hugging on the floor)

Barney: You have no more unfinished business now Stanley?

Stanley: No more unfinished business Barney.

Barney: No more mischief Stanley?

Stanley: No more - well just a little. **(Stanley looks to the audience and winks. Then turns back to Barney)**

Barney: Are you ready Stanley?

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Stanley: Ready as I'll ever be!

(The two walk out past Henry and Gertrude on the floor. Stanley gently places his hand on Henry's shoulder then leaves the room. Henry and Gertrude stand up as Florence comes back with a dustpan and brush and they clean the mess away. When they are finished Pastor John enters carrying an Urn with Tommy behind him)

Pastor John: Where would you like me to place him Henry?

Henry: On the shelf under his picture for now thank you Pastor

(Pastor John places the urn on the shelf under the Picture of Stanley. Then he faces Henry and nods at the letter in his hand)

Pastor John: So Henry, this is the letter you were telling me about; may I take a look?

(Taking the letter from him he proceeds to read it. The Tommy is trying to make something out on the opposite side of the paper)

Tommy: What's written on the back? Look you can barely make it out.

(Henry takes the letter back and turns it over)

Henry: Gosh, this is a pretty shaky scrawl. Oh, Haha, you're not going to like this Gert. Ha, ha. He wants to have his ashes stored in mum's vase beside the window under a portrait of him

Gertrude: Well given that you've pretty much destroyed the vase that's never going to happen.

Florence: I thought you said it can be repaired... **(She is silenced by a deathly look from Gertrude)** ...then again maybe not!

Henry: I think we all need a drink. Tommy will you do the honours? **(Tommy grabs five glasses and pours each a drink. Henry takes another glass and tips some of his whiskey into it and places it under the picture beside the urn. They all raise their glasses)**

Tommy: I think Stanley would whole-heartedly approve Henry. Here's to Stanley!

Henry: To Dad!

All: To Stanley; One of a kind!

(Lights fade to blackout. Tabs close.)

The End