

## Characters

<b>Narrator (M/F)</b>	-	The Story Teller
<b>Malcolm (M)</b>	-	Stella's Husband
<b>Stella (F)</b>	-	Malcolm's Wife
<b>Barman (M/F)</b>	-	Barman of The Bell Inn
<b>Voices (M/F)</b>	-	Disembodied voices of Inn customers
<b>Young Man (M)</b>	-	Inn Customer

It is intended that this script is performed as a monologue; one actor performing all characters. It could alternatively be played by more than one actor with an onstage or offstage narrator.

## Scene 1 – The Bell Inn

**Narrator:** Somewhere, there is a pub; it might be called the Wagon and Horses, the Queen’s Head, the Carpenters Arms or even the Toad and Turnip. Outside the walls may be half timbered, of white pebbledash, hard blue brick or shiny tile. The name of the pub may have been changed, the insides knocked about, landlords come and gone. What is certain, is that inside this pub, there is a snug or failing that, a corner where friends keep up with the latest gossip, acquaintances exchange views and strangers confide. You may think when the heavy doors are bolted at the end of the day, the stories depart with their speakers into the night air; that nothing remains; this is not so. Once spoken or even thought, they enter the patina that builds up with the heat and light and smoke on the horse brasses, the old photographs, the oak beams, the mirroring behind the bar. Some stories are from the present, some have been around for aeons.

**Narrator:** On a foggy evening, the tolling of St. Leonard’s bell can be heard throughout the valley. You’d think its sound would travel better when it was clear, but the mist, like unravelled wool, wanders here and there, carrying vibrations seldom heard when the weather is fine. Last century in honour of the gift of the bell, the nearby pub changed its name from the Green Man, to the Bell Inn. Stella and Malcolm, lost in a maze of minor roads on their way home from a concert, heard the bell and made for its muffled call.

**Malcolm:** If there’s a church, there’s bound to be a village. And if there’s a village, there’s bound to be a pub. It’s a long drive back, I could do with half a bitter, and something hot. What’s the special dish round here Stella?

**Stella:** I don’t think places have special dishes these days; it’s all mix and match. At one time, you could almost tell where you were by the specials; Cornish pasty, Bakewell tart, Welsh rarebit, Huntingdon pie, um .....

**Malcolm:** Haggis

**Stella:** Cumberland sausage.

**Malcolm:** If we head down this side road, we might be lucky

**Stella:** The fog can hardly get worse. I think there’s a reservoir round here; maybe when we’re past it, it will clear up. Fog clings around water doesn’t it.

**Narrator:** Twisting and turning downhill, the road led them down into a village.

**Malcolm:** The Bell Inn. And the lights are on – hurrah!

**Stella:** That’s funny, the fog’s suddenly lifted. Listen Malcolm, the church bell has stopped ringing.

**Malcolm:** There’s a welcome.

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**Narrator:** Pushing open the heavy oak door, they found themselves inside a long room; in the bar area, a real log fire burned brightly. Running the length of the room was a table chock-a-block with diners, who when the newcomers entered, stopped their conversations and stared openly. Addressing the barman, Stella said,

**Stella:** It's nice to find somewhere open. It's such a nasty evening.

**Narrator:** The barman nodded. His hair was combed forward, as if cut with a pudding basin over it. Around his neck was a lime green kipper tie.

**Barman:** What can I get you?

**Narrator:** Malcolm rubbed his hands together,

**Malcolm:** Oh half of the best, and – for you love?

**Stella:** I'll have a half too please.

**Narrator:** They watched as the man pulled steadily at the pump, like a lock gate, releasing the amber liquid. No pressurised pumps here. Stella sniffed,

**Stella:** The food smells wonderful. I don't suppose you have any spaces? We haven't booked I'm afraid. We're on our way home.

**Barman:** We don't take bookings. I don't know that we have any vacancies.

**Narrator:** Disappointed, Stella scanned the long table for empty seats. The diners were dressed in motley fashions from past eras. It must be a theme evening, she thought. In a surreal way, their conversation seemed to encapsulate what they were wearing.

**Voice:** In my day, you weren't allowed to leave anything on your plate! If you did, it would be on your plate next meal. And you certainly wouldn't be allowed afters.

**Voice:** And there was none of this answering back. Children were seen and not heard.

**Voice:** Good thing too I say.

**Voice:** Country's gone to the dogs!

**Voice:** Bring back corporal punishment!

**Voice:** They never should have stopped national service.

**Voice:** It's so difficult to get service these days! I remember the time when staff stood to attention when you entered a shop. The customer was king then.

**Narrator:** A young man with slick brylcreamed hair, wearing a satin shirt mumbled,

**Young man:** There's only one king.

**Narrator:** Malcolm took a long draught of his ale.

**Malcolm:** Oh, this is, mmm. I haven't tasted beer like this since oh -

**Narrator:** By way of response, the barman said,

**Barman:** There may be a vacancy.

**Narrator:** Sensing more flattery might increase their approval rating, Stella added,

**Stella:** It's wonderful seeing everyone eating round the table together! It's so rare. People don't share food like they used to, do they? It's all TV suppers, and instant this and that.

**Narrator:** The barman nodding, said,

**Barman:** You seem to be our sort of customer. We are a little fussy. I think we can fit you in madam.

**Stella:** Oh excellent!

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**Narrator:** Immediately, a cry of dissent arose from the end of the long table. A man wearing a green felt waistcoat was waving his pipe in the air, and his female companion, in beige twin set and pearls, was holding aloft a coffee cup. Stella reddened, as they echoed indignantly,

**Voices:** We haven't finished yet!

**Stella:** Oh please, we're in no hurry!

**Barman:** You wouldn't be seated at that end. New customers are always placed at the top. If you'd like to wait in the snug please, with your drinks.

**Narrator:** Inside the snug, lit by flickering gas wall mantles, artefacts from the past were displayed; gleaming horse brasses, polished copper warming pans, rakes and hoes, old photographs of the village. Malcolm turned to Stella,

**Malcolm:** What a weird place!

**Narrator:** She giggled,

**Stella:** It certainly is! All these characters! I wonder how long they've been in here?

**Malcolm:** From the 1960's by the look of the girl with the beehive hair-do and crimplene dress!

**Stella:** Fashions do come full-circle though, don't they? Ponchos are back again.

**Narrator:** As if to prove her point, through a small window of the snug, she saw a woman wearing one. Somehow though, in tan and chocolate brown stripes, hers looked outdated rather than retro. She said,

**Stella:** I wonder what the barman meant by 'we seemed their kind of customer'?

**Narrator:** Malcolm shrugged. He turned away from the photograph he was studying when the menu was brought in by the barman. Below his green kipper tie, were purple flare bottomed trousers. Trying not to stare, they studied the menu. Malcolm drooled,

**Malcolm:** Rissington roly poly.

**Narrator:** Opening her mouth to coo, 'Rissington rabbit stew', Stella was forestalled by a commotion; chair legs scraped against the flag tiles, pottery was smashed, doors creaked open, then slammed shut. Worse were the cries, first loud, then diminishing, as if someone had adjusted the volume. Stella saw through the small snug window, that the seats where the man with the pipe, and the woman in the twin set were seated, were vacant. She asked the barman,

**Stella:** Where've they gone?

**Barman:** They've gone home. It was time.

**Narrator:** At the long table, everyone moved along a space, leaving two chairs for Malcolm and Stella. The couple taking the vacated end seats, she in turquoise crocheted dress, he in orange tank top, exchanged nervous glances. Standing by the chairs at the top of the table, Malcolm suddenly said,

**Malcolm:** You know what love, roly-poly is a bit passé now. I fancy garlic mushrooms! I bet you'd love a toasted goat cheese Stella?

**Narrator:** Stella stared as if he had gone mad. The barman said stiffly,

**Barman:** Oh that isn't our sort of thing at all! I recommend the brown Windsor soup.

**Narrator:** Malcolm replied,

**Malcolm:** Ugh, no thanks, reminds me of school. You don't have a television, do you? I'd like to watch the football results.

**Narrator:** A stunned silence was followed by outraged muttering. Stella looked at Malcolm, and he pulled her towards him to whisper,

**Malcolm:** We mustn't sit down at the table!

**Narrator:** Unnerved by his strangeness, she said lamely to the barman,

**Stella:** I think I'll forgo the rabbit stew; poor little bunnies!

**Narrator:** The barman, snapping the menu shut like an empty trap said,

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**Barman:** The Hearty Goodfellow is on the top road! I think you are more *their* type of customer!

**Narrator:** Hastily collecting their coats, voices followed them,

**Voice:** Thank goodness they're not staying! The thought of him sitting here, eating garlic for an eternity, doesn't bear thinking about.

**Voice:** And why would anyone eat goats' cheese? What's wrong with good old cheddar, that's what I say! That's people today for you.

**Voice:** But what about the empty chairs?

**Voice:** Someone else will hear the bell.

**Narrator:** Outside, Malcolm pushed Stella into the Hillman.

**Malcolm:** Don't look back. Never look back!

**Narrator:** Pushing the accelerator, the car stuttered up the hill.

**Malcolm:** Rissington! As soon as I saw the photograph of St Leonard's in the snug, its spire sticking out of the water, I felt something wasn't right. Rissington was flooded to make the reservoir decades ago! They evacuated the village, but according to legend, the bell still rings out. The Bell Inn exists only in the past!

**Narrator:** Suddenly an old Riley loomed out of the gloom. Startled by seeing another car on the road, the driver, wearing a camel coloured duffel coat and brown trilby, glared balefully at them. Beside him, the woman in black astrakhan coat and matching hat, did likewise. Stella said,

**Stella:** Listen! The bell's started up again!

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