

ETHEL AWAKES FROM HER LITTLE SLEEP

ETHEL Who? Who's coming?

RALPH The Good Lord Aunty. Are there any imminent arrangements you would like to discuss with Him dear?

MARGARET Ralph stop it! You know she can't hear you unless you shout.

ETHEL Oh, it's you Ralph. Have you been here long dear? I think I'll have my breakfast now Ralph. Would you call Clive for me, dear? I'm not allowed to ring the bell.

MARGARET You have already had breakfast dear. Porridge and toast, remember? Your birthday treat.

ETHEL Is it my birthday?

MARGARET Probably not.

RALPH Well you told me it was your birthday, Auntie.

ETHEL Did I?

RALPH Yes! Why do you think I gave you my...er... a scarf, remember?

ETHEL Did you? What's it look like?

RALPH It's got lots of colours and porridge on.

ETHEL LOOKS DOWN.

ETHEL Is it like this one?

RALPH It is just like that one Auntie.

ETHEL Why didn't you buy me a different one? Men Margaret, they have no idea when it comes to buying presents. My husband was just the same.

MARGARET Which one dear?

ETHEL They were only ever good for one thing. Mind you they were good, but it take's a woman to find out just what they are really good at. Eh, Ralph?

RALPH Well, you're almost right Auntie. I must admit I've always found men to be... a little more versatile. Maybe it would have been because yours were much older dear.

MARGARET Oh, they aged very quickly with your Aunt Ethel, dear. The first one barely made it to the Alter.

RALPH I bet she could write a book about her life.

MARGARET Yes, if only she could remember it dear.

END OF SCENE 1

SCENE 2

MARGARET AND ETHEL ARE SITTING IN LOUNGE. MARGARET RINGS A LITTLE BELL TO SUMMON CLIVE. EVERYONE HAS A SET NUMBER OF RINGS, BUT MARGARET HAS TO RING CLIVES NUMBER TWICE BEFORE HE COMES, CONFUSING RALPH WHO THINKS ITS HIS NUMBER OF RINGS

ENTER RALPH

RALPH You rang mama?

MARGARET No, No. Your two rings twice . I rang two rings. Its Clive I want.

RALPH But you rang four times mama.

MARGARET Yes, because he didn't come on the first two rings. I had to ring twice.

ENTER CLIVE CARRYING WASHING

CLIVE *D.D* Did you want me, mama?

MARGARET Of course I wanted you. Didn't you hear your two rings? I rang you twice.

CLIVE I...I... was confused.

RALPH You were confused dear boy! Why do you think I'm here?

MARGARET Why is everyone so stupid? Ralph dear, you're two rings twice, and Clive your two rings once. Ethel is a continuous ring because of her deafness. It really is that simple.

CLIVE The confusion arises when you have to ring more than one time mama. (CLIVE REALLY STUTTERS ON THIS LINE)

MARGARET That's easy for you to say Clive, but you have to look at my position here. I have no other way of summoning any of you...you wouldn't want me to shout out your names, like some common fish persons wife! I believe that's the correct term commonly used....Well would you?

CLIVE N...n...

MARGARET That's settled then. You will just have to pay more attention in future.

DOORBELL NOW RINGS.SAME TONE AS MARGARETS BELL. EVERYONE LOOKS AT MARGARETS BELL CONFUSED

MARGARET Will someone answer the door?

CLIVE DEPARTS TO ANSWER DOOR. OFFSTAGE CONVERSATION

CLIVE Oh, h, h, hello Vicar.

VICAR Hello Clive, I've come to see Margaret.

CLIVE She... she's

VICAR Yes, yes. I'll see myself in. Haven't got all day boy.
ENTER VICAR

VICAR Margaret, my dear Margaret, how are you today?

MARGARET I'm.....

VICAR They told me you were ill. I must say you do look rather pasty dear. Is it your chest again dear? I hope Doctor Cuthbert has given you some antibiotics. They usually do the trick for you don't they Margaret? Are you taking them dear?

MARGARET No, I finished taking them three weeks ago. I'm much better now, thank you. I hope I won't have to wait three weeks for you to arrive when I die vicar.

VICAR Oh, my dear I am sorry, but I have been so busy lately, running here and there. There are people dying all the time, Margaret. What with all the marriages, christenings and deaths.

RALPH No peace for the wicked Vicar.

VICAR GIVES RALPH NASTY LOOK

VICAR Oh, it's you Ralphy.

VICAR GOES OVER TO RALPH (MARGARET DOESN'T HEAR THIS CONVERSATION)

VICAR Run out of money deary?

RALPH Tut tut, Vicar, don't be narked just because I got here before you did.

VICAR The good Lord will always provide for the righteous, deary.

RALPH Oh that's nice. Does that mean you no longer require the rest of my inheritance then?

VICAR You won't be so ungenerous when He arrives!**(VICAR POINTS TO THE SKY)** He is coming, you know.

RALPH Oh, he's told you that has He?

VICAR Not yet, but I feel it dear boy. He will speak to me someday. Just as He did for Moses.

VICAR TURNS NOW TO MARGARET AND PUTS ON A FALSE SMILE

VICAR Your latest illness has prompted me to enquire or rather more urgently now, request that you think about what I said to you before.

RALPH LEANS IN

RALPH He wants for you to alter your will mama, in favour of his church.

VICAR Our beloved church Margaret

MARGARET RINGS HER BELL TWICE. THEN DOOR BELL RINGS TWICE

RALPH Could THAT! be me mama?

MARGARET RINGS AGAIN, THEN DOOR BELL RINGS AGAIN. ENTER CLIVE

MARGARET Clive, could you get me a cup of tea?

VICAR I wouldn't say no to a cup of tea myself, Margaret.

RALPH You never say no to anyone who offers you pleasure, do you vicar?

VICAR I'd make an exception in your case, dearie.

DOORBELL RINGS AGAIN

MARGARET Will you answer that door Clive? Or do I have to do everything myself?

CLIVE ANSWERS DOOR (OFF STAGE CONVERSATION)

ROSE Allo, I'm from the agency.

CLIVE A.....a...

ROSE Oh, I'm sorry. **(THEN SHOUTS)** I'm from the agency!

CLIVE N..n..no, I'm not deaf. A....agency, what agency?

ROSE The Blessed Care Agency. I'm Miss Fisher. Rose Fisher

(SHORT SILENCE). MARGARET RINGS BELL TWICE

CLIVE C..could you wait here?

CLIVE ENTERS LOUNGE

MARGARET Where is she?

CLIVE Who...who?

MARGARET The new nurse, stupid. Bring her in, before she's too late to be of any use.

CLIVE DEPARTS AND THEN RETURNS WITH ROSE. THEN CLIVE LEAVES STAGE TO GET TEA.

MARGARET Come here my dear.

ETHEL Margaret, who's that?

MARGARET It's the nurse, dear.

ETHEL Worse....Worse than what?

RALPH Auntie Ethel, I think mama has got you a new nurse, dear.

MARGARET Us Ralph, Us.

ETHEL But she's a female again. Can't we have a nice male nurse Margaret? I'd prefer a male nurse.

RALPH So would I auntie, so would I!

MARGARET Male Nurse? Whoever heard of such a thing. You can't have a malenurse. What about when we are in need of...er...bathing? Having a man's hands all over you, dreadful!

RALPH Wonderful! *(SAYS IT THE SAME TIME AS "DREADFUL!")*

VICAR TURNS TO RALPH AND SCOWLS

ETHEL Well, she's not strong enough. We need someone strong Margaret, like a man.

MARGARET We have Clive don't we? Clive can get you into your bath as usual, with your special gown on of course. Then nurse...er, what did you say your name was?

ROSE Rose. Rose Fisher, Miss.

MARGARET Mrs ...Crompton-Smythe.

VICAR Or, Margaret to her loved ones.

MARGARET Yes, well Rose, what are your qualifications? Do you have a diploma?

ROSE A wha?

RALPH It's a certificate dear.

ROSE Oh yeah,I got one of them when I left school, everybody did.

MARGARET May I see it?

ROSE *Er!* Ar doh think ah could find it now, its bin years since.

MARGARET Oh, very well, What experience have you had and with whom?

ROSE Well.... I haven't had a boyfriend for some time now.

RALPH To whom were you nurse to, dear? Not your latest sexual experiences. We are not interested in those.

VICAR He certainly isn't.

RALPH And you might be, Vicar?

ROSE Oh, them. Ah... er yeah, there was Mrs Brown. I looked after her right up until she died. And Mrs Craddick. She died in me arms. Like a baby she was. And Mrs Armitage. Now, she wasn't supposed to take all of them tablets together. I told her, but she took them while I wasn't looking. Horrible it was. But, I cleaned her up to look nice before the family come round.

MARGARET Did you ever look after anyone who managed to survive dear?

ROSE Oh, yeah. The agency changes us round. Stops any er...what's the word?

MARGARET Suicide?

ROSE Nah, nah. Familiar something or other...

VICAR ...arity. Familiarity.

ETHEL **(AWAKES)** Is it?

RALPH Is it what dear?

ETHEL Time for tea?

ENTER CLIVE WITH TEA. CLIVE LEAVES STAGE

MARGARET Well Rose, it seems as if there is very little left for us to choose from these days. The last two were foreigners; hardly spoke a word of English. Are you acquainted with the English language at all Rose?

ROSE Oh yeah, I was only born a couple of miles from ere.

MARGARET I'll take that as a yes then, at least you can understand me. Now you see this **(Margaret holds up bell)** Do you know what it is used for?

ROSE Yeah, we had one of them in the school I went to. It was a lot bigger than that though. They used to ring it when play time was over.

RALPH Yes, well it's much the same here dear.

MARGARET Rose, now I want you to pay attention and tell me exactly what you hear.

MARGARET RINGS BELL TWICE, FOUR TIMES. CLIVE ENTERS ON THIRD RING

MARGARET Clive, go away and concentrate. Now Rose, what did you hear?

ROSE The bell, Mrs...

MARGARET Yes, you heard the bell, but how many times did the bell ring?

ROSE I dunno, it was a lot.

MARGARET Rose, listen carefully and count the number of rings as I do them, because when you hear the bell ring this number of times it is you I require. Do you understand?

ROSE I think so, but I'm no good at arithmetic.

MARGARET Just count Rose.

ROSE Yeah, yeah ok. **COUNTING AS BELL RINGS**) One..two...three..four..five..six....

CLIVE ENTERS LIVING ROOM. BUT BEFORE HE CAN SPEAK, MARGARET SPEAKS.

MARGARET Clive, I hadn't finished ringing. Rose is two rings, four times. You are two rings. Why! am I surrounded by idiots! Very well now, how many rings are you Rose?

ROSE Er...I've forgot

VICAR Four times two, Rose.

ROSE Oo... er. They never said anything about this at the agency.

RALPH Its easy my dear. Just stand perfectly still and count the number of rings. You are two rings, rung four times. Simple. You don't suffer with tinnitus do you dear?

ROSE With wha?

RALPH Tinnitus. It's a constant ringing in the ear. Most people around here suffer with it. There's no cure.

MARGARET A good point Ralph. Rose will you go into the garden dear. I'll just test your hearing. When you hear your number of rings I want you to come back here right away.

RALPH Through the kitchen Rose, and then turn left. Don't go too far into the garden, dear. Stop before you get to the sheep fence.

ROSE Ooer, I don't like sheep I was chased by one once. ad two big horns he did.

RALPH That would have been a ram dear.

ROSE It would have been if I hadn't moved so fast. I thought they were supposed to be gentle creatures, like what Jesus ad round him in the manger. This one ad horns like the bloomin Devil!

MARGARET Rose, just go outside the door. I want to test your hearing, not your bravery, dear.

END OF SCENE
