

ACORN ANTIQUES THE MUSICAL!

By

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ACORN ANTIQUES THE MUSICAL!

The houselights dim. There is a recorded announcement asking for phones to be turned off etc. On to the safety curtain are projected a series of advertising stills with accompanying voice over. The adverts are for Christine's Corsets, Willoughby's Wools, Minchin's Hardware, and Furlongs the Drapers.

The safety curtain goes out to reveal a gold slash curtain. The music starts - just a beat. From the side of the stage comes a hand in a neon yellow rubber glove. The fingers click but the sound comes from the pit. Enter the chorus line.

SONG - MANCHESTERFORD (NEW VERSION)

COME ON BOYS
WE'RE GOING TO PAINT THE TOWN
WE'RE GOING TO TAKE YOU TO
MANCHESTERFORD

COME ON BOYS
WE'RE GOING TO HEAD ON DOWN
AND HERE'S A LITTLE CLUE
MANCHESTERFORD

IT'S NOT CHICAGO
BUT THERE'S NO EMBARGO
ON THE VA VA VOOM
IT'S THE SPOT
THAT'S GOT THE LOT
AND IT'S TWINNED WITH CHEADLE HULME
BRUSH YOUR BLAZER
AND APPLY YOUR RAZOR
AND WE'LL MAKE A MOVE
WHAT A WORLD AWAITS TO BE EXPLORED
COME WHERE THE JAZZ IS TRAD
THE FLOORS ARE CLEAN
THE TABLE MATS ARE MELAMINE
THAT'S MANCHESTERFORD

LEAVE YOUR COMFY SOFAS
AND YOUR PARKER KNOLLS
HEAVE INTO YOUR LOAFERS
AND YOUR DOCTOR SCHOLLS

FLOSS YOUR MOLARS
 AND PROTECT YOUR ROLLERS
 AND ADJUST YOUR HEMS
 FEELING SWANKY
 GRAB A NICE CLEAN HANKY
 AND SOME MIDGET GEMS

TWO RYVITAS
 GET YOUR ODOREATERS
 AND WE'RE ON THE HOOF
 SHADES OF TAN
 IN ACRILAN
 NOT JUST SMART, WE'RE SHOWERPROOF
 GRAB YOUR BROLLY
 AND YOUR TARTAN TROLLEY
 COS YOU NEVER KNOW
 CAN'T YOU FEEL YOUR CONFIDENCE HAS SOARED
 WE DON'T DO DRUGS
 WE DON'T DRINK GIN
 WE'RE NOT TOO KEEN ON CHIP AND PIN
 IN MANCHESTERFORD
 WON'T YOU LEAVE THE LAUNDRY
 AND THE KITCHEN STOVE
 DON'T YOU WANT TO PAINT THE TOWN RED

Mr Furlong

BEIGE,

Christine

MAUVE..

EXIT CHRISTINE and MR FURLONG FOR QUICK CHANGE.

All

COME ON BOYS
 THIS IS INVITATION THAT YOU CAN'T REFUSE
 AN OFFER THAT WE FEEL CAN'T BE IGNORED
 COTTAGE PIE
 BRITISH WINE
 THE BAR DON'T SHUT TILL TEN PAST NINE

WHERE'S THE PLACE
 WHAT'S THE TOWN
 I'LL SPELL IT OUT
 YOU WRITE IT DOWN
 M A N C
 H E S T
 E R F O R D
 ALL ABOARD!
 WE'RE GOING TO MANCHESTERFORD.

Blackout.

LIGHTS UP ON THE MANCHESTERFORD FRONT CLOTH.

OVERTURE

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE.

At the end of the overture, front cloth flies out to reveal Manchesterford High Street with all its lovely shops. Christine is fastening a big bra on to a plastic bust shape, Mr Furlong is looking at card of buttons in the light, Minchin's lad is mopping the pavement.

Mr FURLONG

Good morning, Christine, and what a fine morning it is.

CHRISTINE

You're not wrong Mr Furlong. Surely on a morning like this the ladies of Manchesterford will be thinking of trussing their breasts up with something sturdy and a little bit threatening.

MR FURLONG

One would hope so. And if any gentlemen was wanting to jazz up a beige leisure slack - I have a card of buttons here that can only be described as mid brown!

CHRISTINE

Ooh, steady! I haven't got over that lady asking for tights with a control panel yet. I told her, in Manchesterford, we control our underwear, not the other way round. She looked a little bit exotic, I think she may have been from Stoke.

MINCHIN'S LAD

Someone phoned up about a bucket yesterday.

CHRISTINE

We're buzzing aren't we, trade wise.

Enter Lucy, with lollipop stick.

MR FURLONG

Morning Lucy, manning the crossing today?

LUCY

Yes, I hope it's not as busy as it was yesterday, I had cars coming in both directions

Lucy exits. Mr Watkins and Derek enter and pass the row of shops. They are a couple of soberly dressed gentlemen, with a shopping trolley.

MR WATKINS

Good morning, shopkeepers. We shall be browsing later, Mr Furlong -we might have a press-stud related enquiry.

MR FURLONG

Well, they do come in two sizes, Mr Watkins, they're not something you can buy on impulse.

CHRISTINE

Oh and Derek - I got your (she mimes some kind of below the waist garment)

DEREK

Lovely. Just something to give support to the kidneys.

They leave. Miss Willoughby comes out of her shop holding a knitted tea cosy.

MINCHIN'S LAD

Morning Miss Willoughby.

MISS WILLOUGHBY

Such a beautiful day. And look - I finished it! These are going to be really popular.

MR FURLONG

Yes, I remember the one you made last year -

MISS WILLOUGHBY

Yes, I wish I could knit more than one a year - but luckily, as we only pay a peppercorn rent to the Countess of Manchesterford I don't have to make a profit.

Enter the Postman.

MR FURLONG

Morning Postie. Aha, the annual rent review letter from the Countess.

CHRISTINE

No doubt telling us the rent hasn't gone up and won't be going up.

POSTMAN

And now I'm going to knock on the door of Manchesterford's premier antique emporium.

MISS WILLOUGHBY

Run by the lovely Miss Babs.

CHRISTINE

And here she comes now.

BABS comes out of her shop and stands taking the air. The shopkeepers make little bows and curtsies.

MR FURLONG

Miss Babs.

CHRISTINE

Miss Babs

MISS WILLOUGHBY

Ss Babs.

MINCHIN'S LAD

(too embarrassed to do more than giggle)
Hur hur. Sorry, I haven't had sex yet and I get inhibited.

MISS BABS

Good morning, shopkeepers of Manchesterford. (to Minchin's Lad) I hear someone may be thinking of buying a bucket -

that is good news.

MINCHIN'S LAD

Hur hur.

CHRISTINE

Get inside, showing yourself up
with your virginity.

He scuttles inside. Babs takes the letter from the postman.

POSTMAN

You hardly need to open this one.

MISS BABS

No - but perhaps I should just
say this is from the Countess of
Manchesterford -

MR FURLONG

We've covered that.

MISS BABS

Oh. Jolly good. Well, if you've
explained the letter you may as
well go into your shops.

The shopkeepers all go into their shops. Babs cosies up to
the Postman as he takes out a big parcel and sorts out the
slip for her to sign.

MISS BABS

And how are you, Postie? Are you
enjoying this lovely May weather,
or as a working-class person, do
you prefer gravy?

POSTMAN

There's a parcel for Mrs Overall,
if you don't mind signing.

MISS BABS

Perhaps I could rest it on your chest, unless you can suggest another hard surface. (as she signs) So sweet of the Countess of Manchesterford to write year after year, just to tell us the rent hasn't gone up and won't be going up.

Mr Furlong, with his opened letter, staggers from his shop to Christine's -she opens the door, similarly shocked, to let him in. Babs is oblivious to this.

POSTIE

No, if she were to sell this whole row to property developers the cat would be amongst the pigeons.

We hear the miaow of a cat and an agitated flapping of wings and cooing. Postman hands over the parcel.

BABS

(standing very close to him)

Well, better not chat too long - people are so quick to spot a Lady Chatterley's Lover type situation.

POSTMAN

What, like a rough manly artisan making sweaty urgent love to a more higher class lady.

BABS (breathlessly)

Yes - that, kind of, throbbingly ludicrous liaison.

POSTMAN

No, the very idea's repellent.

BABS

Is it? It is to me, I must say!
Bye!

In her confusion, she tries to open the door on the non handle side, bangs into the doorframe, and gets away from him somehow.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

Scene change to the interior of Acorn Antiques, a bright, pretty, cluttered, old-fashioned shop, with steps leading down from the shop door, and a door upstage marked PRIVATE. BABS flips the shop sign to OPEN, puts down the parcel and the letter, and gives an anxious glance to the phone. It rings, she picks it up, it carries on ringing for half a ring.

BABS

Acorn Antiques, how may I help you?
Clarice Cliff? She's not in, I'm
afraid. I must go - I'm expecting
two pitiful adolescents from the
new government pitiful adolescent
training scheme. Oh look and here
they are gawping through the window
now. Bye!

From the street enter two young people, MIMI and HUGH, a rather plain pair in matching shell suits.

Good morning! Could you
introduce yourselves? In my
letter from the Government I only
have you down as a bar code.

They text busily, then stare at her. A mobile phone rings, BABS digs in her bag and reads the text message.

Would you mind if we communicated
by speaking? I don't really want
to be rooting in my bag every
time I have a query. So - you
are?

HUGH

Yeah.

BABS (baffled)

No... that can't be the answer to the
Question. Lets start again," You are?
I am". You are?

HUGH

I am.

BABS

Sorry, I've muddled you, I'm talking

names. You are?

HUGH

Correct.

BABS

Look - I'm at a very difficult time
hormonally -. What-is-your-name?
You-are-

HUGH

Yes!

BABS

What?

HUGH

Hugh R is my name - Hugh R
Kettlewell - Her-you, R for
Richard, Kettlewell.

BABS

(sounding the aitch)
Oh - Hugh!

HUGH

(not sounding it)
Yeah - Hugh.

BABS

And what about you?

MIMI

What about him?

BABS

No you! Who are you?

MIMI

Mi? Mi?

BABS

Of course you. And why are you
asking me twice - are you thick?

MIMI

I am thick actually, which let me tell you is more exciting than what it sounds.

BABS

Mother Theresa on a biscuit tin, who the heck are you and don't say "me".

Mimi stares at her.

MIMI

But my name IS Mi.

BABS

I don't want a philosophical blithering debate, what is your stupid name?

MIMI

Mi - short for Mimi.

BABS

Oh. Obviously I wasn't expecting pitiful adolescents from the wrong side of the Manchesterford tramway to have such aspirational names -perhaps when you have your own children you'll consider giving them something more appropriate such as Fog or Doorstop.

MIMI

Yes Miss Babs.

HUGH

Miss Babs.

BABS

Very good. And please don't breed willy nilly - we have very small staff quarters.

ENTER BERTA from the house.

BABS

Ah - here is my partner and younger twin sister, Miss Berta. Berta (in jolly Northern tones) "Hugh and Mi".

BERTA

You and Me what?

BABS

(gives up)

Oh!

MIMI

We're the new pitiful adolescents.

BERTA

I'm Miss Berta. My secret tragedy is this. Twenty years ago I was engaged to our business partner Mr Clifford, and then he had a terrible antiques related accident - he was hit on the head by a beech veneer button back banquette. When he came round he had no memory of our engagement. In fact he disappeared for many years. He promised his mother he would never marry while she was alive, but now she's on her deathbed my overwhelming fear is that he might go and marry somebody else, never realising that I am his one true love.

HUGH

That would be a tragedy of Greek proportions, Miss Berta.

BERTA

Well, it would be annoying! (she bravely holds back the tears) And please don't say anything to Mr Clifford – apparently even mentioning our engagement could kill him. Anyway, to business - your first day at Acorn Antiques! Do you like antiques?

MIMI

We're too pitiful to like anything really.

BERTA

Surely you have hobbies?

HUGH

What are them?

BABS

They're activities people do to distract themselves from the inevitability of death.

MIMI

We play games on us mobiles.

HUGH

Games with letters -

BABS

(copying his
pronunciation)
Letters?

HUGH

(showing her on his phone)
Look, there's this game called
Bet A Letter -it's on the quiz
channel on telly, you get all
these letters-

BABS

Berta - please -his mouth's
moving but nothing's making any
sense -

BERTA

Look - Hugh and Mimi need to be
set alight by the antique business.

BABS

You're so right, Berta! Could you
set the scene?

SONG - ACORN ANTIQUES

BERTA
DOORBELL RINGS AND IT'S A
CUSTOMER

BABS
WHOOSH!

BERTA
YOUR HEART HAS QUICKENED ITS PACE

BABS
SNAP!

BERTA
YOUR GUM IS GUMMIER

BABS
WHEE!

BERTA
THE WORLD IS A CHUMMIER LOVELIER
PLACE

BERTA
IN HE COMES - YES IT'S A CUSTOMER

BABS
DA DA DA DA

BERTA
YOU HEAR A MILITARY BAND

BABS
FLASH!

BERTA
YOUR EYES ARE BEADIER

BABS
CRUNCH!

BERTA
YOUR JACKET'S TWEEDIER

BABS & BERTA
GOLLY LIFE'S GRAND.

BERTA
FACE-TO-FACE YOU'RE STANDING
THERE

BABS
(OH LET HIM SEE ME)

BERTA
EYE TO EYE AND BLAZER TO BLOUSE
THEN YOU MAKE YOUR WAY TO HIM
COURAGE TAKE AND STAY TO HIM

BABS
"FEEL FREE TO BROWSE"

BERTA
WILL HE LIKE MY BIBELOTS?

BABS
(ITS THRILLING MIMI)

BERTA
WILL HE LIKE THIS WICKER WORK
TRAY?

BABS
NO, HE PUTS THE WICKER BACK
PUSHES PAST MY BRIC A BRAC
BIDS ME GOOD DAY
THEN MY WORLD TURNS BLEAK AND
ARID
TELL ME MIMI WHAT'S MY FUTURE
HOLD

BERTA
PAIN AND UK GOLD

BABS
LONELY CHILDLESS AND UNMARRIED
I PUT ON A LEONARD COHEN SONG
START TO HUM ALONG

BERTA
AND THEN...

BOTH
AND THEN...

BABS
DOORBELL RINGS AND IT'S A
CUSTOMER

HUGH
(WHAT ELSE CAN MATCH IT)

BERTA
THERE'S ANGELS ABOVE

BERTA
LUST FOR LIFE GETS LUSTIER

BABS
YOUR BUST IS THRUSTIER

BABS/BERTA
THIS MUST BE LOVE

BABS
SPIN THE GLOBE TO CATCH HIS EYE

MIMI
(IT'S GOT TO CATCH IT)

BERTA
STAND WELL BACK TO GIVE HIM THE
FLOOR

BABS
PUTTING DOWN THE GLOBE HE SHRUGS
PUSHES PAST MY TOBY JUGS

BOTH
HEADS FOR THE DOOR

BABS
THEN MY WORLD TURNS GREY AND
ASHEN
START TO READ THE VALLEY OF THE
DOLLS
COUNT PARACETAMOLS

BERTA
DRAINED OF COLOUR, LIFE AND
PASSION
TRY AND READ A BOOK OF FAMOUS
QUOTES
STOP AT CAPTAIN OATES...

BOTH
 EMPTY LIVES OF FEAR AND DREAD
 WE LONG FOR BEACHY HEAD

BABS
 AND THEN WE HEAR THAT LITTLE
 SOUND

BERTA
 THAT TURNS OUR WORLD AROUND

BOTH
 DOORBELL RINGS AND YES - IT'S
 CUSTOMERS
 TIME WASTERS, PEDANTS AND GEEKS
 QUESTION AND QUERY
 WILL HELP KEEP US CHEERY
 AND SILENCE OUR SHRIEKS
 PUT PINK IN OUR CHEEKS
 SO WELCOME YOU KNOW-ALLS AND
 FREAKS
 TO ACORN ANTIQUES

ALL
 ANTIQUES
 ANTIQUES

BERTA
 Now do you appreciate the subtle
 difficulties that accompany life in
 the speciality knick-knack sector?

HUGH
 I think it is all a bit more
 Byzantine than perhaps what we'd
 cottoned on to.

BERTA
 One thing I do know - nobody's to
 do a darn thing till we've all had
 a jolly nice hot cup of tea! Lets
 get Mrs Overall!

HUGH/MIMI
 Who's she?

BABS

She's worked for us since before we were born practically. She arrived in Manchesterford in mysterious circumstances, which luckily I've never bothered to ask her about. Mrs O! We call her Mrs O.

MIMI

Why do you call her that?

BABS

I suppose we don't like her enough to say her full name. (anxious pause) ull name! (mumbling to fill in) I expect she'll be here any..

Slightly anxious pause.

BERTA

(Ad-libbing gamely)
I'm sure she won't be -

BABS

(relieved, cutting into Berta's ad-lib)
Oh no, here she is!

Enter MRS O.

BABS

Mrs O - here are our new pitiful adolescents, Hugh and Mimi.

MRS O

Ooh, I am pleased. Two lowly serfs even more menial than myself.

BERTA

Open your parcel, Mrs O. Is it your collapsible self-heating carpet bag?

MRS O

That's right - plus - for only two pounds more, I got some multi vitamin and truth drug capsules, and a lemon'n'lime re-usable gusset freshener.

Babs and Berta pause for a minute to take in the full horror of this image.

BABS

Well, now we've ignored that - for heavens sake, put the kettle on!

MRS O

I shall! But not until I've said good morning to the third partner in the - en - enporium.

BABS

(quietly)
Enterprise.

MRS O

(smoothly carrying on)
Enterprise known as Acorn Antiques Mr Clifford! (realising she's missed a bit of punctuation she takes another run at it)Known as Acorn Antiques comma - Mr Clifford.

Enter MR CLIFFORD.

CLIFFORD

Beautiful morning. Ah , these must be our pitiful adolescents - they've arrived just in time - I hear someone's ordered a bucket from Minchin's Hardware, we may get a couple of knock on browsers.

BERTA

How's your mother Cliff? Is she still in her attention-seeking near death coma?

CLIFFORD

Ah-ha. (to Hugh and Mimi) She's been in a coma for quite some time.

MRS O

At first they thought it was
because she'd been watching
Bridges of Madison County - then
they realised she was actually
ill!

BERTA

Ooh, nearly time for our browsers.

Berta moves away and busies herself with some dusting.

CLIFFORD

Yes, we've certainly got a full
day's work ahead of us -I see
we've the rent review letter to
open and I think we did discuss
buying a new sellotape dispenser.

BERTA

Oh, and Pitifuls - we've just found an
old tea chest of our fathers -
what say they clear it out, Babs?
And Clifford, obviously, checking
with you as well there...

BABS

Yes Pitifuls, you go with Mrs
Overall- I expect she can find you
a macaroon or two to help the work
along!

MRS O

Ooh no, macaroons is for the gentry
- it's a bit of lard on a dishcloth
for this pair of scamps - come on!

She leads them out.

BABS starts to open the mail, BERTA takes the rent review
letter.

BABS

Well, as I was saying to the
postman with his tight muscular
buttocks - with his big bag of
letters - that at least our rent will
never go up!

BERTA opens the letter.

CLIFFORD

What would you do Berta, if you found out the Countess had sold the entire row of shops to property developers?

BERTA's eyes bug out, she reels round the shop choking. She manages to give the letter to CLIFFORD.

BABS

That's very good!

CLIFFORD makes a strange groaning sound and bends double - holding out the letter.

BABS

No, you see, Clifford, I don't think I'd do that - I think I would simply contort my face-

She reads the letter, her face stays contorted, she reels, groans, bends double, etc. Enter Mr Watkins and Derek, perturbed.

MR WATKINS

What's happened, Miss Babs? From our maisonette we could hear a terrible commotion, almost as if every shopkeeper had heard the street had been taken over by property developers.

BABS

That's precisely what has happened. The Countess of Manchesterford has sold the entire High Street!

CLIFFORD

They're putting the rent up by five thousand per cent.

DEREK

Oh, crikey- that means you have to start making a profit.

BABS

A what?

MR WATKINS

Well we know because we did
take that Weekend Citybreak
to Peterborough -the only shops
that make money now are
franchises.

BERTA

What does he mean, Clifford - I'm
frightened!

CLIFFORD

I have heard of them, Marks and Spencer -
is that one?

DEREK

Marks and Spencer? It's much worse than
Marks and Spencer, isn't it Mr Watkins?

MR WATKINS

It's coffee shops -it's nail bars,
it's tanning booths -

DEREK

Estate Agents, Lap dancing ! That
may have only been in Peterborough
and we didn't go in -we don't have that
kind of lap.

BABS

Well, nobody in Manchesterford
will sell out to a franchise -
that's for sure.

Mr Watkins and Derek take a big doubtful intake of breath.
Christine comes hurrying in with Mr Furlong.

CHRISTINE

I can't pay this increase.
I barely shift a girdle a month.

MR FURLONG

(holding a bunch of brightly coloured flyers)
Some of these franchises look
quite appealing.

CHRISTINE

I'm quite tempted by this from the
Hong Kong Thong and Panty Hut.

BABS

Thongs? Even in tweed I'm shuddering.
Look - there must be a way out of this
perilous situation -

HUGH and MIMI bring in the tea chest.

HUGH

Shall we sort your father's stuff
in here, Miss Berta?

BERTA

Babs! Do you think Father's
missing will could be in that old
tea chest?

BABS

Believe me, I've checked every
scrap of paper in the house.
Father's will must be somewhere,
but I'm darned if I know where.
Mrs O may know something! Mrs O!

MRS OVERALL in with tray.

BABS

Terrible news, Mrs O.

MRS O

Ooh I know Miss Ber - Babs. I was
giving the postman a mouthful of
something tasty by the scullery
door, and he filled me in very
thoroughly.

CLIFFORD

Why would the Countess do this, Mrs
O?

MRS O

(coming in too early)
Well...

CLIFFORD

...She was such a sober reliable
lady.

MRS O

Well. Somebody offered her a cocktail,

the next thing you know she's
 headed for Bermuda with a trunk
 full of provocative scanties. If
 she'd stuck to a lattice jam
 tartlet and a Vimto all this
 could have been avoided.

SONG - MACAROONS

MRS OVERALL
 THE MODERN WORLD IS FULL OF
 STRESS
 SO MANY NERVOUS WRECKS
 PEOPLE TURN TO ALCOHOL, DRUGS,
 AND EVEN SEX.
 DRINK'LL ROT YOUR LIVER
 DRUGS PUT YOU IN JAIL
 SEX I DON'T AGREE WITH
 BUT WHAT WORKS WHEN THEY ALL FAIL
 (a tray appears, she whips off
 her pinny to reveal another
 pinny.)
 IS SOME TEA
 ON A TRAY
 AND SOME BISCUITS COMING YOUR WAY
 BIT OF BAKEWELL TART
 LIGHTENS UP YOUR HEART
 CARBS WILL BRIGHTEN YOUR DAY
 (she passes round tea and
 biscuits to them all)
 CAN'T FEEL BLUE
 CAN'T FEEL FLAT
 WHEN YOU'RE MUNCHING SUGAR AND
 FAT
 SPEND YOUR SALARIES
 ON THOSE CALORIES
 DON'T BOTHER WITH BARBITURATES OR
 ANYTHING LIKE THAT
 DRUGS CAN DO DAMAGE
 TAKE POOR OLD OZZY OSBOURNE
 ALL HE SEEMS TO DO IS FRET AND
 SHAKE
 HE'S A ROCK STAR, A BARON, NOW
 I'M NOT BLAMING SHARON
 HE'S A STRANGER TO THE BENEFIT OF
 OVEN BOTTOM CAKE.
 HE WOULD BE, SMOOTH AS SILK
 IF HE LIVED ON MUFFINS AND MILK

LEARNT SOME ETIQUETTE
PLAYED THE CLARINET
HE COULD BE, WITH PRACTICE, A
SECOND ACKER BILK
HE COULD SIP, HE COULD SUP,
HIS TEA FROM A LOVELY BIG CUP
RELAX, UNWIND A BIT
EFF AND BLIND A BIT
COULD HAVE A CUSTARD FUCKING
CREAM AND SHUT THE FUCK UP.
COCAINE, ORGIES
FRANKIE BOUGH WILL TELL YOU,
A MAN'S CAREER CAN SUFFER A
MISHAP
SCANDALS, THEY FESTER, NOW I'M
NOT BLAMING NESTA
BUT FRANK'S NEVER HAD THE
PLEASURE OF AN EGG AND CHUTNEY
BAP
FEW LESS CHAINS
FEW LESS WHIPS
IF HE'D STUCK TO PASTY AND CHIPS
A NICE MADEIRA
WON'T PLUNGE YOU NEARER
TO A TELEVISION PROFILE THAT'S IN
TOTAL ECLIPSE
ALL THAT SEX
ALL THAT VICE
YOU COULD CATCH A CHILL IN A
TRICE
TAKE FELLATIO
CUT THE RATIO
WHOP YOUR CHOPS AROUND A LOVELY
COCONUT SLICE
FLIRTING, FOREPLAY
POOR OLD BILLY CLINTON
JUST A THONG AT TWILIGHT AND
HE'LL LUNGE
WHAT'S A SHAME HERE
AND HILLARY'S TO BLAME HERE
SHE SHOULD HAVE STUFFED HIS LUNCH
BOX WITH A BIT OF LOW FAT SPONGE.
TO CONCLUDE, DON'T BE RUDE
JUST STICK TO COMFORTING FOOD
IF YOU'RE FEELING FESTIVE
A NICE DIGESTIVE
WILL KEEP YOU ALL IN THE MOOD.
THWARTED LIVES,
SHATTERED DREAMS,
DIVVY OUT THE OLD GYPSY CREAMSÖ

BABS

You can't say that Mrs O, it's
very politically incorrect.

(Band vamps till ready
as she thinks of an
alternative.)

MRS OVERALL

PAIN AND FEAR

YOU CAN SMITE'EM

WITH A NOMADIC PEOPLES NON-DAIRY

BISCUIT EFFECT ITEM

CHEER YOUR AFTERNOON

WITH A MACAROON

PUT A SMILE ON YOUR FACE.

THOUGH YOUR VISION IS SHUTTERED

JUST GET YOUR CRUMPET BUTTERED

THE WORLD WILL BE A HAPPIER PLACE

At the end of the song, Mrs O sits down and gets her
breath back.

CLIFFORD

Compadres - go forth, rally the troops –
we shall hold a crisis meeting here
in Acorn Antiques in short order.

MR FURLONG

(leaving with Christine)

We shall, amnesiac antique
proprietor, we shall!

Babs , who has poured Mrs O a coffee during this exchange,
takes the truth drug and puts a tablet into Mrs O's cup.,
and hands it to her while she gets her breath back.

BERTA

What are you doing with that
truth drug Babs? You're not
giving it to -

Babs hands the cup to MRS O, who drains it gratefully, then winces.

MRS O

Ooh, that coffee's bitter. Maybe I
should give up on your dad's old
pants and get a cafetiere.

BABS

Look, Mrs O, I'm sure you know more about father and his missing will than you let on -

MRS O (uneasily)

Oh Miss Babs -

BABS

And don't try and prevaricate - I popped a truth drug into your coffee - has it kicked in yet?

MRS O

How should I know you snotty thick ankled cow? Oh, yes it has.

BABS

Quick - before it wears off - where's the will?

MRS O (reluctantly)

It's in there. It's a living will. It's a video.

BERTA and BABS leap to the pile and check the labels frantically.

BERTA

Got it!

BABS

Thank heavens we have that new forty two inch television that can be seen from quite a long way away.

BABS puts the tape into the cabinet, Berta whips off a tablecloth to reveal a huge tv. Clifford dims the lights, they all stare at the TV.

Up on the screen comes the logo - "LIVING WILL CO" This fades and is replaced by a big close up of their father.

FATHER

Look girls, it's loads of money so listen up. You get the first lot, when all three siblings turn up at the bank with their charm bracelets as proof of identity.

BABS

Did he say three?

FATHER

Yes, I did say three, shush! To get the next lot of money - one of you has to get married with your mother's blessing.

BERTA

Sorry - did you say three siblings?

FATHER

(to side of camera)

You splash out on a living will - they don't even listen!

BERTA

Freeze it Babs! But we're only two siblings.

BABS presses the freeze frame.

BABS

We can't get our mothers blessing - she went out for some boiled ham in nineteen fifty seven and never came back - Mrs O -

MRS O hesitates.

FATHER

Could you possibly take me off the freeze frame.

(They do - he stretches his neck.)

That's better. Thanks Babs. Now The final and biggest payment - which is in cash -will be all yours when -

The picture changes to a poor quality recording of a late seventies daytime quiz show, "BET A LETTER" HOST stands to one side of the set while a MAN and WOMAN run frantically back and forth to a large set of double doors, trying to make

a word with huge magnetic letters . They complete a word and the doors open showering the contestant with cash. The credits rolls as they hug each other, etc.

HUGH

It's Bet A Letter!

MIMI

We play that on us mobiles.

BABS

Ssh, pitifuls! What's the third condition of the will, Mrs O? Where's our mother?

BERTA

Is there a third sister somewhere with this very charm bracelet?

MRS O

Yes but I don't know where. She was adopted.

BABS

(looking at portrait)

And why is that the only picture we have of our mother?

MRS O

Because I...

(cheerfully)

Oh no, it's worn off - no more revelations for you, you youthful sexually fulfilled little antiques dealer!

HUGH (Putting his hand up)

Pitiful suggestion? Try that website - Triplets Reunited.

CLIFFORD

Good idea, let me just go and log on.

MRS O

I'd better check if there's a clean towel.

MRS O and Clifford go into the house. Hugh and Mimi pack up the tea-chest. Two agitated lady browsers, the spinsters Miss Cuff and Miss Wellbelove, enter.

MISS CUFF

Is it true we're getting a Hong Kong Thong and Panty Hut?

BERTA

No -

MISS WELLBELOVE

And that the Post Office is closing?

BABS

No Miss Cuff and Miss Wellbelove - none of our shopkeepers are selling out - come and browse over here where there are some antique things

Enter Mr Watkins and Derek.

MR WATKINS

The grocer's has closed - re opening shortly as Wendy's World of Waxing!

DEREK

The mobile library has become a tanning kiosk.

BABS

(ringing a bell on the desk)
Shopkeepers! In here now!

Miss Willoughby, Minchin's Lad, Mr Furlong and Christine come hurrying in. Mr Clifford comes in from the house.

Clifford - reassure our browsers - we have no interest in franchises.

CHRISTINE

Sorry but Hong Kong Thong are being very generous.

BABS

But ladies don't want thongs. One's rear end should be encased, solidified -

CHRISTINE

I admit they're controversial -
they seem to split ladies right
down the middle.

BABS

Miss Willoughby -you're surely
still wedded to wool?

MISS WILLOUGHBY

The thing is - my shop is the ideal
size apparently for a Botox Booth.

BABS

Botox?

MISS WILLOUGHBY

It's very popular -and it's so
quick - choosing wool can take a
couple of days - but you can have
your forehead paralysed in
minutes.

MINCHIN'S LAD

And where we keep our ladders -

CLIFFORD

Yes? Ladders, I'll deal with this,
it's not a ladies area.

MINCHIN'S LAD

It's the perfect height for
poles.

CLIFF

Poles? Eastern Europeans? Some
sort of youth hostel?

MINCHIN'S LAD

Poles for pole dancing. We've been
offered the franchise for the gentleman's
private club – the Grubby Garter.

WELLBELOVE

And Tilly's Teashop has been approached
by – what's the name of that huge chain of
faceless coffee shops, Pauline?

MISS CUFF
The Guilty Bean!

MR WATKINS
We know about them, we went
into one in Peterborough. They
pay terrible wages, they don't
believe in Fair Trade -

DEREK
They don't rinse their mops.

There is a horrified reaction to this. Enter Tony, a young man
in a sharp suit, he catches Babs' eye - electricity passes
between them.

BABS
Could you carry on fighting the
cause, but in a low mumble - we
have a customer!

She sashays towards him.
Could I possibly help you in any
way - perhaps by cramming your
head against my breasts, sorry I
put that badly, I meant could I
perhaps tell you a little bit
about Josiah Wedgewood.

TONY
(he speaks quietly, is very contained)
My name's Tony. Shall I give you
my emotional history in a
nutshell?

BABS
Why the heck not?

TONY
I was a plump and loving person,
but an unguarded remark by a
colleague led me to follow the
extreme low carbohydrate diet
marketed commercially as The
Fatkins. My jaw is chiselled, my
body is lean, but my heart is
cold, I have no human sympathies.
I'm a loan-

BABS

How marvellous - I'm alone too.

TONY

You should have let me finish -
the complete sentence should have
read "I'm a loan shark".

BABS

Oh.

TONY

I lend money to the weak and vulnerable,
I charge them ludicrous rates of interest
then after a short and stressful interval
I repossess their homes. We're in your
High Street. (he shows her his card)
We're Credit Cronies.

BABS

I don't believe in credit I'm
afraid.

The mumbling from the group is getting a little louder.

TONY

Look, I can't talk now, I have to
evict a couple of widows - but
could you sort me out a nice
little something to put on my
desk? If I'm ruining people's
lives they should at least be
able to rest their eyes on an
object of pleasing symmetry. Bye.

BABS

Bye.

TONY

I expect everybody tells you
this, but your eyes have the
stormy blue grey of the outer
Hebrides and your lips have the
fulsome pout of the concubine.

BABS

Yes, I do get rather tired of
hearing that.

Tony leaves - Clifford breaks away from the group who are now angry and agitated.

CLIFF

The mood of the shopkeepers has changed -they want to take their offers - they want the safety and security of a franchise -

BABS

Shopkeepers - is this true? Do you want Manchesterford to lose its identity? To become just another clone?

CLIFFORD

The word is clone.

BABS

The word is clap trap - we must stand firm.

Enter Bonnie, a tall woman in a black raincoat. She smiles ingratiatingly.

BONNIE

Good morning, mind if I browse?

BABS

Please do.

CLIFFORD

Before you ask, we are getting a new sellotape dispenser.

Bonnie starts to point an infra red measurer at the walls.

BONNIE

This is very spacious, one could have quite a big Ladies, quite a big Gent's.

CLIFFORD

We have no need of that which you describe -this is an antiques shop - if people wish to , well, spend a penny, they go home.

BERTA

Well said, Clifford!

BONNIE

Yes, quite. But could I just ask
you this - how wide,
approximately, is your soil pipe?

BABS

Look ,we've had quite enough
lavatory style questioning -
these are not antique related
queries -who are you and what do
you want with us?

BONNIE

I want to offer you a new life -a
life of profit, security, I want
to welcome you all to a world of
warmth, newspapers on sticks, sub
standard jazz, low fat lattes
with caramel drizzle -

MISS WELLBELOVE

A latte is some sort of coffee!

BABS

Are you from a chain of coffee
shops?

BONNIE

I'm from THE chain of coffee shops -(she opens
the inside of her coat to reveal her logo, and we
hear a jangle) I'm from the Guilty Bean!

They all gasp. Enter Mrs Overall.

BABS

Not now, Mrs Overall -can't you
see we're all reacting?

MRS O

I'm sorry Miss Babs - I thought I
heard the jangle of a charm bracelet.

BABS

Oh for heaven's sake Mrs O -Berta
and I are jangling our charm
bracelets the entire time.

MRS O

But. this was a slightly
different jangle. Similar, but
with a subtly different timbre.

BABS

That's the last time I let you
listen to Classic FM. Get back
in the pantry! Go and knock the
lumps out of some Ovaltine.

MRS O

Roger wilco, Miss Babs.

She skulks away.

BABS

I'm so sorry, just rewind a
little, not the whole thing
obviously.

Bonnie does a fast rewind, mumbling to herself.

BONNIE

I'm from THE chain of coffee
shops - (coat thing again,
jangle) I'm from the Guilty
Bean!

They gasp again.

BABS

Well, if you're looking for premises
you'll have to look elsewhere.

BONNIE

Oh, what a shame, I was thinking of
offering you lots of money.

BERTA

We can't carry on like this Babs, with
money we could relocate, live a little,
buy some confetti.

BONNIE

Hmmm. But maybe - what a
grand feeling to know that
whatever the world throws at us -
every High Street in Britain will
have a Hong Kong Thong, A Grubby

Garter, a Botox Booth and in
pride of place - a Guilty Bean.

BABS

Are you saying it's almost one's
patriotic duty to sell out?

BONNIE

Absolutely.

CHRISTINE

So we could all cash in with a
clear conscience?

BABS

Yes!

General hoorahs from shopkeepers - browsers are less sure.

CLIFFORD

Wait - keepers of shops! Surely
there's more to life than money –
the touch of a hand, the rough kiss
of a hiking sock – should we not
just take a moment to consider what
truly brings us joy?

SONG - MR CLIFFORD'S ANTHEM

I AM BUT A SIMPLE MAN
FOLLOWING A SIMPLE PLAN
I'LL TAKE A MOMENT IF I CAN
TO SOUND A WARNING
I AM BUT A SINGLE VOICE
THINK BEFORE YOU MAKE YOUR CHOICE
WHAT WILL MAKE YOUR HEART REJOICE
TO GREET THE MORNING?
A DEW KISSED ROSE, A LEAF OF
TENDER GREEN.
THEY MEAN MORE, THAN GOLD CAN
EVER MEAN
A FRIENDLY HUG, THE SMELL OF
GABARDINE
THEY COST US NOTHING, AND YET
THEY MEAN SO MUCH
A BABY'S SMILE, A LITTLE KITTEN'S
COUGH
A DAPPLED FIELD, WITH CATTLE AT
THE THROUGH

THAT FIRST BIG SCRATCH WHEN YOU
TAKE YOUR TROUSERS OFF
WHAT MORE COULD WE EVER NEED?
DO WE NEED THAT FLEETING THRILL
CONSUMER GOODS CAN BRING?

ENSEMBLE
NOT REALLY

CLIFFORD
DON'T WE WANT THE SIMPLE GIFTS
OF WHICH THE QUAKERS SING?

ENSEMBLE
IDEALLY

CLIFFORD
OTHER TOWNS MIGHT FEEL THAT CHILL
RECESSION AND DECAY
NOT OUR TOWN
WE WOULD RATHER LIVE IN SQUALOR
WE REFUSE TO CHASE THE DOLLAR
RAISE YOUR VOICE AND HOLLER
"NOT IN OUR TOWN"

CLIFFORD & ENSEMBLE
AS ONE BY ONE JOINS IN THE BATTLE
CRY
TAKE BACK YOUR GOLD, IT CANNOT
SANCTIFY
THE PRECIOUS GIFTS THAT MONEY
CANNOT BUY
WE DON'T NEED FORTUNE AND WE
DON'T NEED FAME
THE SUN COMES UP AND POINTS A
GOLDEN RAY
AND THAT'S OUR GIFT, ANOTHER
LOVELY DAY
THE AIM FROM WHICH WE'LL NEVER
BREAK AWAY
IS JUST TO STAY
THE SAME (THE SAME)
THE SAME (TO STAY THE SAME)
WE THINK WE WANT TO STAY THE SAME

CLIFFORD
(suddenly realising he's
the only one singing)
YES WE DO

At the end of the song, the ensemble continue humming quietly under Bab's speech.

BABS

You're so right Clifford. We've lost
so much in this country already,
threepenny bits, capital punishment,
Sing Something Simple. And now all
these coffee shops with their comfy
armchairs and prompt service are taking
away our heritage - our right to sit at damp
Formica tables, to drink lukewarm tea
served by a slatternly moron - Manchesterford
doesn't want thongs and botox – we have
big pants and baggy faces. We don't need
lap dancing –for heaven's sake - we have BBC2!
So you can take your soil pipe queries and
your microfibre macintosh and get the heck
out, Miss Babs is staying put!

Bonnie scowls.

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE THREE.

Lights up. The same, a few hours later. Shop empty except for Derek and Mr Watkins, browsing silently. Berta is dusting. Clifford comes in from the house.

BERTA

Any luck with finding our missing sister?

CLIFFORD

No, Google the word "triplet" and all you get is the tour dates for the Beverley Sisters.

BERTA

That's disappointing.

CLIFFORD

It is for me -their nearest gig seems to be Carlisle.

BERTA

Wouldn't it be lovely if we did find our mother and she blessed our marriage, a marriage, any old marriage, la la.

CLIFFORD

Well it would be lovely – but I have to say, neither of you seem very likely to get married.

BERTA

I like to think I'm not quite over the hill.

CLIFFORD

No, but far enough up it to have a good view of the top.

BERTA

Let's change the subject. Do you want to get engaged – only kidding!

CLIFFORD

You know, sometimes I have the strangest feeling that I was engaged.

BERTA

If someone were to try and jog your memory, would that bring it back, do you think?

CLIFFORD

No, as I've told you that could kill me apparently. The only thing that might bring it back would be the thing that caused it, an accidental blow on the head.

BERTA

Oh.

CLIFFORD

Now, let me measure this sellotape dispenser - I think we could go a couple of inches bigger.

Berta picks up a big vase and hold it high above her head, ready to hit Clifford. Enter Babs.

BABS

What on earth are you doing, Berta?

BERTA

I'm just comparing two anti perspirants, and actually, I think Mum rollette has the edge.

BABS

Mrs O! Ovaltine please, and leave the skin on, we're celebrating. We're renting out the shop as a rehearsal room, and the Manchesterford Amateur Operatic Society are going to have their first rehearsal in here starting tonight.

Enter Mrs O with tray.

MRS O

Here we are. There was no skin on the Ovaltine Miss Babs, so I popped in a bit of bacon rind.

Minchin's Lad hurries in followed by Christine, Mr Furlong, Miss Willoughby, Lucy and the Postman.

CLIFFORD

What's wrong lad?

MINCHIN'S LAD

It's that Guilty Bean woman –
she's on the rampage – she's not
giving up - she wants premises
- she's got scary lipstick on and I
don't think she's wearing a vest – she -

Bonnie enters. She is cold and hard.

BONNIE

Out of my way, pustular youth.
Which fool's actually in charge here?

BABS

I am - I mean -

BONNIE

OK - here's the deal – we want a
Guilty Bean in the High Street
and we want it here - We're
prepared to offer you this
(she shows her a card - Babs is
shocked) I'm sorry - that's me drunk
in a photo booth. We're prepared to
offer you this.

She shows her another card.

You've got two minutes to think
about it. (takes out phone)
Hello. Refurb please.

She puts the card away in her bag and we hear the jangle.

MRS O

What was that - was that your charm
bracelet, Miss Babs?

BABS (snapping)

For cripes sake put a dish cloth in it, Mrs O. I've got two minutes to make a life or death decision affecting our whole way of life and you're blithering on about triplets' identification jewellery.

BONNIE

Time's up, it's not two minutes but I'm bored.

BABS

It's no.

They all cheer. Bonnie is unmoved. She grabs Minchin's lad by the ear.

BONNIE

Are you Minchin's boy? Tell him I'll double his offer from The Grubby Garter -he can clear out today, I'll open tomorrow -(she propels him out of the door by his ear) Tyler - change of plan, sweetheart - hold on , I'm losing you -

She shakes her phone.

MRS O

That sounded like -

BERTA and BABS have heard it too and examine their own wrists.

BONNIE

(moving around)

Is that better?

MRS O pounces and pulls back her sleeve to reveal the charm bracelet.

MRS O

I knew it!

BONNIE

I beg your working class pardon?

BABS
 (showing bracelet)
 Look!

BERTA
 (showing hers)
 Look!

They all stare at each other.

CLIFFORD
 I'll deal with this, I have a
 scrotum. Is that your bracelet?

BONNIE
 Yes. I was adopted as a baby by
 heartless go-getters, people too
 busy to waste time in sexual
 intercourse. This is all I have
 of my real family.

CLIFFORD
 And do you have a ridiculous name
 beginning with B?

BONNIE
 Bonnie.

MRS O
 (overcome)
 Miss Bonnie! I'll go and beat up
 a bit more parkin...

Mrs O attempts to leave, but wanders too far downstage and
 can't see her way off. She wavers and then is pulled
 offstage by unseen hand.

BONNIE
 So these two - "women".

CLIFFORD
 Are your sisters Babs and Berta.

BONNIE
 I'm a triplet?

CLIFFORD
 Indeedy, a triplet who's been left a
 huge fortune.

BONNIE

A huge fortune? (into phone) Tyler -
hold on a tick, could you. Where is it,
where's my share?

BERTA

Well, we all have to claim it at the bank
together as a family.

BONNIE

Oh. And if I don't?

BABS

Well we'd be homeless.

BONNIE

Sorry -being thick - why would that
bother me - if you- lost your home.

CLIFFORD

Because their home - is now your
home.

BONNIE

(wonderingly)

My home. I've never had a home.
I've never really been loved..

SONG - PLEASE STAY HERE

BONNIE

THIS HAS COME AS A SHOCK, I DON'T
KNOW WHAT TO DO
DO I STICK AS I WAS, DO I COME IN
WITH YOU
DO I GIVE UP MY HIGH FLYING JET
SETTING WORLD
CAN I BEAR TO BE SIMPLY TWIN
SETTED AND PEARLED

BABS

IF YOU DON'T COME AND SIGN THEN OUR
PLANS WILL GO BUST

CLIFFORD

IT TAKES ALL OF THE TRIPLETS TO
ACCESS THE TRUST.

BONNIE

BUT I'M HOOKED ON THE PRESSURE

AND ON THE NEUROSIS,
PLAYING RUSSIAN ROULETTE WITH MY
DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS.

BERTA
PLEASE STAY HERE, WHERE YOUR LIFE
WILL BE SIMPLE AND CLEAR.

CLIFFORD
YOU'LL BE COSY AND WARM
YOU CAN HIDE FROM THE STORM
OF THE STRESS FROM YOUR HARD WORN
CAREER.

BABS
PLEASE STAY HERE,
AND I'LL LEND YOU A CRACKING
BRASSIERE
WE'LL DRINK COCOA TILL THREE,
YOU CAN BUNK IN WITH ME-
WE'RE A FAMILY SO DON'T RUN AWAY.

BABS/BERTA/CLIFFORD
THERE'S A LIFE FOR YOU HERE IF
YOU STAY.

BONNIE (SPOKEN)
I'M USED TO THE HIGH LIFE -
CHAMPAGNE, CAVIAR-

DEREK
WE'VE GOT A FONDUE SET, WE'RE NOT
ANIMALS.

MR WATKINS (SUNG)
WHAT A HAVEN THIS IS FOR US, COME
ON PEOPLE SWELL THE CHORUS.

ALL
PLEASE STAY HERE, SHOW THE HEART
BENEATH THE VENEER.
AND IT WON'T FEEL BIZARRE, YOU
CAN BE WHO YOU ARE,
YOU'LL BE KIND, YOU'LL BE WARM,
(AND YOU'LL BE) SINCERE.

BONNIE
YES I'LL STAY!

BABS/ BERTA
IT'S THE DAWN OF A NEW KIND OF DAY.

ALL
WITH OUR CLOUDS OUT OF SIGHT,
THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT.
UP ABOVE WILL A RAINBOW APPEAR?

MR WATKINS (SPOKEN)
OH, LOOK, IT HAS.

ALL
THERE'S A LIFE FOR US ALL, NOW
YOU'RE HERE.

Bonnie picks up her phone hesitantly.

Bonnie
Tyler - yes, sorry, people were
singing. Look- i'm handing in my
notice - no, I'm getting out of
coffee altogether. What? It's a
family business – it's called Acorn
Antiques.

They all cheer.

CLIFFORD
Go shopkeepers – keep your shops! And
customers - go with them and browse
animatedly!

CUSTOMERS and SHOPKEEPERS leave.

BABS
Mrs O! Bring our summer coatees!
Pitifuls – we're off to the National
Manchesterford and Shanghai Bank to
claim the first part of our father's fortune.

CLIFFORD
Tell Bonnie our plans for the shop,
Babs.

BABS
A rubberised welcome mat.

BONNIE
Pardon?

BABS

I know! And this really is a little
bit "out there" -vertical blinds.
Crikey, life's grand.

Mrs O comes in clutching the coats.

Hugh, Mimi – I leave the shop in
your charge – you are now on the
permanent staff!

MIMI

Pinch yourself, Hugh – we are living
the flipping dream!

SONG - HEY HEY

BABS

HEY HEY! WE'RE ON OUR WAY!
LET'S NOT DELAY
WE'VE GOT A BRIGHT TOMORROW
SHOO! WE'RE COMING THROUGH!
BECAUSE WE'RE ON OUR WAY.

BABS/BERTA/CLIFFORD

JUST TAKE A STEP
AND THEN ANOTHER STEP
IT'S EASY AND YOU CAN'T GO WRONG

CLIFFORD

NO NEED TO SCURRY

BABS

OR TO HURRY

BERTA

OR TO WORRY

BABS/BERTA/CLIFFORD

JUST RELAX AND MARCH ALONG.

BABS

HEY HEY!
WE'RE ON OUR WAY
TO AS THEY SAY

BABS/BERTA

A LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

BONNIE
CRIPES!

BABS/BERTA/CLIFFORD
NOW NO MORE GRIPES
BECAUSE WE'RE ON OUR WAY

Sliders in as Babs, Berta, Bonnie and Clifford exit, and Hugh and Mimi go into the shop just as the sliders close.

Sliders open.

Mrs O comes in from the house with a big laundry bag.

MRS O
Just off to the dry cleaners to
freshen up father's old bedding
for Miss Bonnie. I'm hoping they
can get a couple of nasties off
the candlewick.

MIMI
The dry cleaner's is closing next
week. It's going to be a drop in
silicone breast centre.

MRS O
We didn't have them in my day -
you stuffed your brassiere with a
couple of Cornish pasties - and
if he didn't fancy you naked - at
least nobody went hungry.

As she leaves, she is knocked to one side by TONY coming into the shop.

You're very rude!

TONY
I know, but at least all my veins
are still on the inside.

MRS O leaves.

That was mean, wasn't it, or was it?
I don't have normal feelings, so
I'm a bit clueless there.

HUGH

We're in charge of the shop – we can do it all, work the till, operate the sellotape dispenser – we can proffer refreshments actually can't we Mimi - would you care for a home made biscuit, sir?

TONY

"Sir" - imagine respecting another person enough to call them sir. I used to eat biscuits once, fig rolls, munchmallows, macaroons even - but I wanted to be thin – I wanted to be thin so much I made a pact - like Faust - I gave up sugar, I gave up carbs - I sold my soul to be thin. I have no emotions – for I am on the no carbohydrate diet known as the Fatkins.

MIMI

Do you get that noise every time you say Fatkins (*piano chord*) Oh, yeah, cool!

HUGH

Does this Faustian pact mean as long as you stay off carbohydrates you'll never have feelings?

TONY

Yes! But the crucial point is, kiddo - that as long as I stay off them I'll never be fat. Anyway - I've come for an objet d'art for my office at Credit Cronies - is the lady with the big-

HUGH

Babs?

TONY

Yes, the lady with the big babs - is she here?

HUGH

She just popped to the bank to

claim the first part of an inheritance-

TONY

Ok - well I'll be back - I was attracted to her on an intellectual level but once you're on the Fatkins (he waits but there's no chord so he carries on) you lose your animal urges. The lights are on in the penthouse but there's not much going on in the mezzanine.

MIMI.

What a shame. Looking that cute and never getting any. Bit like a panda.

TONY

See you around, little plump humans.

He leaves.

HUGH

Do you realise Mimi, we are now true antique dealers -

MIMI

(delighted)
I know – he came, he browsed, he didn't buy anything!

Babs, Berta , Bonnie and Clifford come back in, holding a big cardboard cheque for fifty thousand pounds, and a bundle of notes.

BABS

Ah, Pitifuls. All well?

HUGH

All well Miss Babs.

BABS

Good-O! Guess what. We got thirty seven pounds fifty in cash - so that's the rubberised welcome mat sorted, and the minute we find our mother we can cash this cheque. Any browsers?

HUGH

One. The man from Credit Cronies.
He said he might pop back.

BABS

Did he? I couldn't be less
interested. Well, you've done
jolly well - you can go and stand
in the throbbing - sorry -you can
go and stand in the yard for five
minutes.

HUGH

You're too good to us Miss Babs.

Hugh and Mimi go into the house. Cliffords BlackBerry
rings - the ring tone is the Cuckoo Waltz.

BERTA

Your mother, Clifford!

He stares at his phone.

BABS

Clifford's mother is in the new
NHS die in your own home scheme.
There's a web-cam over her bed
linked to his Blackberry.

CLIFFORD

The Cuckoo Waltz means it's time
to top up the drip, and if she
conks out altogether, which could
be very soon, the ring tone
changes to Daisy, Daisy and a
group email goes to everyone on
the Christmas Card list inviting
them to the funeral - it's a tip
top system. See you anon.

BERTA

Would you like me to come with
you in case you suddenly wanted
to get engaged or anything?

CLIFFORD

No. I'd rather be alone thanks - with
what's left of my memories.

He leaves, Berta sits, dejected, Bonnie looks round at the shop, dissatisfied. Tony approaches the door and looks in. Babs' bosom heaves.

BABS

Berta, don't you think it would be a good idea to show Bonnie the roller towel in the downstairs lavatory?

BERTA

I'll do it later, Babs, I'm feeling a little emotionally hollow at the moment.

BABS

(through clenched teeth and moving them both towards the door)

No, Berta, I think you should show her now -she could wash her hands at any moment and it has a tricky tug. Do you want a roller towel accident?

BERTA

Bossy bossy bossy. Just because I once managed to get a man.

BABS

I can get a man any time I like.

BERTA

No way Josie - you're too buttoned up.

BABS

I am not - and it's HOSAY!

Bonnie and Berta go into the house. Tony comes into the shop

BABS

Well, as we say in the antiques business - hello!

TONY

Hello Babs. Your skin has the glow of an early Rembrandt, your hair glistens like the sun catching the eastern slopes of Kilimanjaro.

BABS

I eat a lot of jelly - I think that helps. Do you have a girlfriend?

TONY

I can't have a girlfriend Babs. I have no emotions. Have you seen Brighton Rock - I'm like the boy gangster - the smiler with the knife - I'm like Pinky.

BABS

Well I have tons of emotion - I'm very bright and breezy - very perky.

TONY

I don't think Pinky and perky is ever going to be a winning combination.

BABS

No, really - it could work - I don't look it but I'm frightfully uninhibited. You say you have a cold heart but I'm sure I could warm your cockles.

TONY

My cockles are icy - you'd have to be red hot to thaw the permafrost of my passion.

BABS

Well -in that case, let me just move this lampshade, and, (she dims the lights and there's a crackle) sorry, the dimmer's a bit wonky.

The music starts, a sexy drumbeat. Babs whips off a lampshade to reveal a mike on a stand, she dims the lights, she takes off the jacket of her suit to reveal a tight top.

SONG-HAVE YOU MET MISS BABS

I MAY SEEM PRIM

I MAY SEEM PROPER

I'M BOTTLED UP, PULL OUT MY

STOPPER

THERE'S MORE TO ME THAN
 TWINSET AND PEARLS
 I'M LIKE A RADIATOR
 YOU'LL NEED A VENTILATOR
 COS UNDERNEATH I'M ONE OF THE
 GIRLS
 IF YOU'RE KEEPING SCORE
 IF YOU'RE KEEPING TABS
 I'M IN THE GAME AND I'M UP FOR
 GRABS
 M, I, DOUBLE S
 A BIG B, A, B, S OH YES
 HAVE YOU, Come on boys! I SAID HAVE YOU
 HAVE YOU MET MISS BABS!

At the end of the song she puts away her boa and puts on her jacket. Tony stands up.

TONY

Well if you can find me a vase or
 something that would be lovely.
 Thanks very much. Goodbye.

He leaves. Mrs O has come into the doorway as he exits, and sees him leave.

MRS O

Ooh Miss Babs – is romance in the
 air? You don't usually get your boa
 out in the daytime.

BABS

That was Tony from Credit cronies
 And I can only assume, if I can speak
 frankly, he's impotent.

MRS O

Yes, well, sometimes that's god's way of
 getting men to decorate the spare room.
 Bonnie and Berta come in from the house, there's a bit of a
 scuffle as Mrs O tries to exit.

BONNIE

Look -when I joined your (makes
 quote marks) "family" I must admit
 I was hoping for a little more than
 thirty seven pounds fifty.
 We need to cash that cheque. We need
 Mrs O to tell us where our mother
 is – I'll call her - Mrs O!

Mrs O comes in with the tray.

BONNIE

(holding the truth drug
bottle)

I've got the truth drugs, I'm
going to give her the whole
bottle!

BABS

But that could kill her!

BONNIE

We can't worry about every little
Detail. Mrs O - just gawp
pointlessly at the ceiling for a
minute could you?

MRS O complies. BONNIE tips the whole bottle down her
throat, smacks her on the back and stands back impassively.

MRS O

OK.

BABS

Is that our mother's portrait?

MRS O

No. It came free with a biscuit
delivery, we just put it up there
to cover an old wall safe.

BERTA

And did our mother go out for a
quarter of boiled ham in 1957?

MRS O

Yes.

BONNIE

And then what happened?

MRS O

She came home.

BABS, BONNIE, BERTA

But where is she now?

MRS O

Here!

BABS

Under the floor?

MRS O

No here, you dozy big-breasted pillock. (They stare at her.)
I'm your mother!

BABS

(distastefully)

You had sexual - joinings - with
our father?

MRS O

It was an accident. I was
bending over cleaning the bath -
your father slipped on a cake of
Lifebuoy, and his private parts
went up my kick-pleat.

BERTA

Easily done.

BONNIE

But didn't you take precautions?

MRS O

It was war-time - there was a
rubber shortage. We tried
painting condoms on with gravy
browning but they weren't a
hundred per cent effective.

BABS

But we weren't born in the war.

MRS O

No, you were conceived in the war
- but owing to the restricted
wartime diet you weren't born
till many years later - I was
long gone from Manchesterford but
pregnant, penniless -

BERTA

You came back..

BABS
To Acorn Antiques -

MRS O
And that's where Mr Clifford's
father found me one rainy night.

Vignette of great iron gates, black night, driving rain
(see "Oliver!") CLIFFORD (in wig to show he's his own
father) is bending over pregnant young girl, YOUNG MRS O.
He helps her up. The scene fades away.

I had three little girls that
night. Old Mr Clifford persuaded
your dad to take two and I had to
let the third baby go.

BABS
Like Blood Brothers.

MRS O
Well, shorter, and more laughs,
but...

Scene fades up of the YOUNG MRS O bending over two prams, a
twin and a single.

I gave you all a charm bracelet
(three Buntys had come that week
by mistake), and that was all I
could do.

Scene fades as she bids farewell to the baby in the single
pram.

BERTA
So now we can get married with
your blessing.

BONNIE
And claim the money.

BERTA
Maybe I could marry Clifford

BONNIE
And get the money.

BABS

Or something might happen with
Tony-

BONNIE/BERTA

What?

BABS

(wincing)

Oof - toe, knee - could you help
me into the house? Close up
Berta could you?

Bonnie and MRS O help Babs into the house. Clifford comes
in .

BERTA

Oh, Clifford.

CLIFFORD

I thought I'd pop back and help
move the furniture, for tonight's
rehearsal.

BERTA

We've had some rather good news -
Mrs Overall turns out to be our mother,
so it only needs one of us to get married
to cash the big cheque – so I wondered
what you thought about us getting
hitched. Just a purely business proposition -
no strings attached -twin beds, big
washbasin, no side-by-side toothpaste spitting.

CLIFFORD

Well, as you know, until I get the phone call to
say my mother has died I'm not free to marry.

BERTA

Yes, I keep wondering when we
will hear the Daisy Daisy ring
tone bringing that sad piece of news.

Clifford's phone rings, it sounds like the first first
three notes of "Daisy Daisy" but as it continues it becomes
Debussy's "Girl with the Flaxen Hair."

CLIFFORD

Yep, interesting. Thankyou.

BERTA

That wasn't your mother finally
kicking the bucket?

CLIFFORD

No. Wrong number. I'll just move
the leopard.

His BlackBerry rings. This time it is "Daisy Daisy" He
reads his email.

Yep, mother's dead.

BERTA

Oh, are you very upset?

CLIFFORD

No, she was emotionally
unavailable, and she stank of
Victory V's.

BERTA

Well, you're free to marry, and
you know the post office is now
a twenty four hour wedding chapel.

CLIFFORD

I'd love to marry you and put the
shop on a firm footing, but the
fact is, it doesn't feel right to
marry when I know that somewhere -
is the girl I fell in love with -
and I'm looking all the time,
hoping my memory will return -
just yearning to find that
missing piece of my heart.

BERTA

The evening star's coming out,
maybe you could make a wish on
it.

CLIFFORD

I'm a bit too old to believe in wishing
on stars.
But thanks for the wedding offer -
it's very much appreciated.
Toodle oo.

He leaves. The sun has set, Berta goes around turning on the lamps and drawing the blinds.

SONG - REMIND HIM

BERTA
CLOSE THE WINDOW
LIGHT THE LAMP
THE EVENING SUN IS FADING
SEND MY LOVE A STAR TO SHINE
ABOVE HIM
LET HIM SEE WHO I CAN BE
BEHIND THE MASQUERADING
LET THAT STAR REMIND HIM THAT I
LOVE HIM
SEND A FLARE HIGH IN THE AIR
A MESSAGE IN A ROCKET
COLOURS THAT WILL LIGHT THE SKY
BEHIND HIM
TAKE THE PAST, AND TIE IT FAST
AND PUT IT IN HIS POCKET
ADD A BIT OF LOVE JUST TO REMIND
HIM
ONCE WE WERE TOGETHER
AND I DIDN'T SEE AN END
DIDN'T SEE WHAT CHANGES COULD
ARRIVE
NOW HE'S NOT A STRANGER,
BUT YOU COULDN'T CALL HIM FRIEND
STILL MY DREAMS SURVIVE
FOLD A NOTE AND MAKE A BOAT
AND LET IT FLOAT DOWN RIVER
LET IT TRAVEL SAFELY, LET IT FIND
HIM
LET HIM READ, AND LET HIM HEED
THE MESSAGE I DELIVER
THAT MIRACLES OCCUR
THAT MEMORY COULD STIR
A GLIMPSE OF WHO WE WERE
THAT COULD REMIND HIM.

BLACK OUT

LIGHTS UP.

ACT ONE, SCENE FOUR.

The shop - later that evening.

The furniture has been pushed back, the room is full of the Manchesterford Amateur Operatic Society, which strangely, comprises Miss Willoughby, Mr Watkin, Derek, Minchin's lad, the Postman, his girlfriend Lucy, and Christine. They are putting on their tap shoes and putting their bags down etc, getting out scripts. Miss Cuff and Miss Wellbelove come in, in rehearsal clothes.

MISS CUFF

Alright, Amateurs, are we all here?

Babs, Bonnie, Mrs O and Berta come in hurriedly from the house.

BABS

Sorry, Miss Cuff – we had a slight domestic emergency.

BONNIE

(holding her head)

Not to worry, but I might sit this one out – it is quite a heavy roller towel.

Babs gives Berta a filthy look. Everyone is standing ready but all depressed and apathetic.

MISS CUFF

Come on everybody, what's wrong – there's an awfully tricky atmosphere in here.

MRS O

Ooh sorry -you know how it is with sprouts.

CHRISTINE

Look, Miss Babs - I'm going to come right out and say it -I know we agreed to stand firm – but I've closed Christine's Corsets – I open next week as the 896th branch of the Hong Kong Thong and Panty Hut.

MISS WILLOUGHBY

And I'm not Willoughby's Wools
any more - Sorry Miss Babs, I'm
Willoughby's Botox Booth.

BABS

And you Mr Furlong - please tell
me you are still purveying quality
slacks and other beige items.

MR FURLONG

I'm not. I panicked when I saw the
street changing.

BABS

What has Furlongs the Sensible Draper
become?

MR FURLONG

Furlong's the Sensible Piercing Parlour.

BABS

I see. I hope you're taking note
of these new names, Postman.

POSTMAN

I'm not actually a postman any
more. Me and Minchin's lad have
been taken on at the Guilty Bean
as baristas.

BABS

Well, I don't want to be a wet
blanket - or in modern parlance,
a damp pashmina - but I don't
really feel like rehearsing.

MRS O

Ooh, Miss Babs - we've been in
worse pickles than this - well –
Miss Berta knows what to do
when you're down in the dumps!

SONG - TIP TOP TAP

BERTA
ARE YOU GLOOMY
ARE YOU LACKING LUSTRE
HAS YOUR GET UP AND GO GONE HOME

BABS
HAVE YOU LOST YOUR ZIP AND ZAP?

BERTA
BE AS BRIGHT AND BLOOMY
AS A FEATHER DUSTER

BABS
DUST OFF THAT METRONOME
AND TAP TAP TAP

MR WATKINS
DON'T TURN TO BOOZE OR FAGS
THAT'S JUST SO MEDIOCRE

MISS CUFF
AND DON'T INJECT YOURSELF
WITH SHAKE'N'VAC

CHRISTINE
AND IF YOUR BUM LOOKS LIKE
TWO BAGS OF TAPIOCA

BERTA
TAPIOCA YOUR BLUES AWAY

MEN
TAP UNTIL YOU'RE BACK ON TRACK

MISS WILLOUGHBY
WE'LL SET YOUR PULSES RACING AND

MISS CUFF
LIKE SKEGNESS IT'S SO BRACING AND

MRS O
YOUR HIPS MAY NEED REPLACING BUT

ALL
WE'RE HAPPY CLAPPING AND WE'RE
TAPPING OUR BLUES AWAY

DEREK
THE DRUMMER'S REALLY THUMPING IT

BERTA
THE BAND ARE REALLY PUMPING IT

BONNIE
YOU'RE LIKING OR YOU'RE LUMPING
IT

ALL
CAN'T CAP
THE TIP TOP TAP!

DEREK
(spoken) Come on, Mrs O - take
your solo!

She whips off her pinnie to reveal a pinnie shaped tap outfit,
complete with rubber glove and makes her way to the front
line.

ALL
OOH, LET'S GO BANANAS
TAP IT UP, TAP IT UP, TAP IT UP
THAT'S HOT!
GO INTO THESE DANCE NIRVANAS

CLIFFORD
HIT THE FLOOR, POR FAVOR

MRS O
WHY NOT?
(she tries to keep up
but is in pain and gets
slower and slower)
WE'RE GOING EVEN FASTER NOW!
WE'RE SHAKING LOOSE THE PLASTER
NOW!
WE'RE HEADING FOR DISASTER NOW!
WATCH AS WE TAP YOU UP A STORM
THEN A HURRICANE.

MRS O
MY FLYING FEET ARE ALMOST A
BLUR
THE CROWD APPLAUD AND SAY LOOK
AT HER
SHE -
(stopping, the whole thing grinds

to a halt)
 I'm sorry - I'm just letting everybody
 down - I'll get back in the pantry where
 I belong.

DEREK

No -Manchesterford Amateur Operatic
 can't rehearse without you – you're the
 most amateurish of all of us.

MRS O

I treasure that, but it's my haemorrhoids,
 they're stress related, they're like the
 Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

Derek runs to his bag and gets out a canister and gives it
 to her.

DEREK

Try this -it's new on the market.
 (he whispers in her ear and
 mimes what she should do with it)

MRS O

Won't be a tick -just need to loosen
 some webbing.

She runs into the house. They wait.

BABS

Piles, not a very sexy affliction.

POSTMAN

No.

BABS

The sort of thing an older lady
 might get.

POSTMAN

Yip.

BABS

I don't have them,

Postman nods.

BABS

Clean as a whistle in that department.

They hear a whoosh.

MRS O (O.S.)
Oh crikey.!

She trots back on happily.

Oh that's done the trick -that's sent
the bowling balls right back up the
alley. Here we go amateurs. Last
chorus –and don't hold back the tempo!

MEN
NO TURNING TURTLE, WE'RE
THUNDERING LIKE A HARLEY
WHIZZING BY ON THE M ELEVEN

GIRLS
NOW WE'RE TAPPING AT BREAKNECK
PACE
STRAINING EVERY BELT AND STRAP

BABS/BERTA/CLIFFORD/BONNIE
AND AS WE HURTLE STRAIGHT FOR THE
FINALE
WHAT A SPEED -

MRS O
THIS IS TAP DANCE HEAVEN

ALL
TO THE FINISHING LINE WE RACE
DOING THE TIP, DOING THE TIP,

LUCY
DON'T SLIP

GROUP ONE
DOING THE TIP TOP,

GROUP TWO
CAN'T STOP,

GROUP THREE
QUICK HOP,

MEN
SLAP, CLAP,

MRS O

NEARLY HAD A MISHAP,

ALL
DOING THE TIP, TAP, TOP.

MISS CUFF
Take a bow everybody!

As they take the applause and the music carries on, Mrs O
turns to Derek.

MRS O
That stuff was marvellous, what was it called?

DEREK
Can't remember, but it unblocked our sink lovely.

BLACKOUT.

At the end of the interval, we have four new adverts projected onto the safety curtain.
They are for the Botox booth, the Piercing parlour, the Hong Kong Thong and Panty Hut and the
Guilty Bean.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE.

Lights up. The High Street, a few days later. Everything has changed. The shops are now- Furlong's Piercing Parlour, Hong Kong Thong and Panty Hut, Acorn Antiques, which has paper over the door and a sign saying "closed for refurb", then the Guilty Bean and the Botox Booth. Outside the Guilty Bean are the Postman and Minchin's Lad, both baristas, both smoking. Mr Furlong, now with a shaved head, skinny jeans and many piercings, crosses and goes into his shop. Christine is cleaning her window, she is in slacks with a thong over the top. She is listening to an ipod.

Babs enters on her way back to her shop, holding a parcel.

BABS

Had to collect my own parcel!
 (Christine doesn't hear her. Enter
 Lucy in white lollipop lady coat
 but no lollipop.)
 Good morning Lucy, are you
 Manning the High Street crossing?

LUCY

Ooh, no, I've given that up, I'm
 On the early shift at The Grubby
 Garter. (Lucy opens coat to flash
 uniform) See you wouldn't want
 to be you.

(Lucy exits crossing with Mr Watkins)

BABS

Oh good morning Mr Watkins.

Mr Watkins comes on, he has a very dark tan, and is wearing rather funkier, more blatantly gay clothes than before. Christine goes in to her shop.

MR WATKINS

I've been to what used to be the
 mobile library - Tan in a Van – you
 strip off and spread-eagle yourself
 against the non-fiction. I asked for
 a Des O Connor, I think I've ended
 up with a Jodie Marsh. Do you think
 it makes me look more youthful?

BABS

Erm-

MR WATKINS

With all this change going on,
I'm worried Derek will leave me -
for a younger man.

Mr Furlong enters, walking awkwardly, he passes Babs and Mr Watkins.

BABS/MR WATKINS

Mr Furlong!

MR FURLONG

Morning.

MR WATKINS

Sorry, you did know we were
homosexuals?

BABS

You are the only two men in the
street who iron their cardigans.

MR WATKINS

I must go - I'm going to the drop
in Silicon Centre-they're doing
three for two on penile implants.

He hurries off. Babs looks at the see through parcel, which holds three big 3D letters, A,M and O. Miss Cuff comes on, her look is unchanged.

BABS

Oh good morning Miss Cuff.

MISS CUFF

I did such a silly thing this
morning. I didn't have my specs
on, went into what used to be the
grocer's, to collect my usual
order, a pound of ground coffee.

BABS

Of course - it's Wendy's World of
Waxing now.

MISS CUFF

Yes, I breezed in and asked for my usual Brazilian.

BABS

Oh dear.

MISS CUFF

Not to worry - we can always have instant.

Miss Cuff leaves, walking a little awkwardly. Derek comes out of the , Botox Booth also funkily dressed and with several piercings, a shaved head and a tattoo.

DEREK

Hello Miss Babs -I'm terribly distraught as you can see

BABS

I can't actually.

DEREK

I'm distraught, that's your actual French.

BABS

Oh, it's just that your face isn't showing any emotion.

DEREK

I've had the full face special -I'm worried Mr Watkins will leave me now I no longer have the bloom of youth.

BABS

Well, have you tried talking to him?

DEREK

Ooh, no, we don't do talking. Mr Furlong was trying to get me to have an intimate piercing -but I like my brass shiny, and it's an awkward place to get to with the Duraglit. Ciaou!

BABS

Bonnie - I've got your parcel.

Bonnie comes out from the shop.

BONNIE

Oh they look splendid.

BABS

M, A, O. Have you ordered them for
The Manchesterford Amateur Operatic.

BONNIE

Um ... Yes. I'm certainly not starting
my own chain of coffee shops called AMO.

BABS

Bonnie. You know we stayed up
late last night chatting over a
bowl of semolina.

BONNIE

Yes.

BABS

Have you thought if there's
anything I can do to make Tony
fall in love with me -

BONNIE

Men adore it if you take an
interest in their work.

BABS

But he's a money lender.

BONNIE

Then borrow some money -that will
charm the pants off him, actually I've
already phoned him and asked him to
meet you here just about now and lend
you fifty thousand pounds – Ooh, he's
coming -and do something with your
breasts - they're not quite level.

While Babs rearranges herself, Bonnie comes downstage and
addresses the audience directly.

BONNIE

Look, I don't have time for the whole speech because my bus goes at half past ten, but I'm starting a chain of coffee shops - AMO coffee – here – haven't told the others yet.

With an evil laugh she stands aside as Tony enters with Debra, Bev and Evelyn.

TONY

(speaking calmly and kindly)
Babs. Why are you taking out a loan?

BABS

I want to be more closely involved in your trousers, in your work.

TONY

Please don't Babs. In the world of loan -I am always the hyena, you can never be more than an exhausted warthog.

BABS

Oh well, "whatever" – lets do it!

TONY

In that case, girls! These are my colleagues, Bev, Debra and Evelyn. They mean nothing to me of course, and as you may infer from their Dusty Springfield tribute hairdos – I don't mean much to them either. Girls – could we have the disclaimer.

BEV

(at top speed)
Shares can go up as well as down.

DEBRA

Profits can go down as well as up.

EVELYN

And the dish ran away with the spoon - sorry - I can never remember my bit, something about losing your shop if you don't keep up repayments?

TONY

That won't happen to Babs, girls,
she understands the importance of
reading an agreement before she
signs it. She recognises the necessity
to scrutinise the small print. She won't
get caught out like some poor souls.

SONG - THE OLD SMALL PRINT.

DEBRA, BEV and EVELYN whip off their jackets and reveal
backing singer outfits. TONY unfolds his briefcase to
reveal a keyboard.

TONY

TAKE MR SMITH A MAN FROM POTTER'S
BAR
WE LENT HIM MONEY FOR A BRAND NEW
CAR
HE WAS A RISK BUT THAT'S JUST HOW
WE ARE,
HOW THE SUNSHINE MADE THAT METAL
GLINT
SOON MR SMITH WAS OVER - WHAT?

GIRLS

THE MOON

TONY

DRIVING HIS MOTHER IN THAT PLUSH

GIRLS

SALOON

TONY

HIS PAYMENTS LAPSED, I DIDN'T BEG
I SENT A MAN TO BREAK HIS LEG

TONY AND GIRLS

HE SHOULD HAVE READ THE OLD SMALL
PRINT.

TONY

This is wrong, Babs -you
shouldn't be doing this.

BABS

No, no. Payments lapsed, broke

his leg, fair enough.

TONY

Let's give her another example,
 girls, shall we, there's still
 time for her to change her mind.
 POOR OLD MISS SUTCLIFFE LIVED
 WITH JUST HER CAT.
 SHE NEEDED JUST ENOUGH TO HEAT
 HER FLAT.
 I TOLD HER SHE SHOULD BORROW MORE
 THAN THAT.
 AT CREDIT CRONIES WE DON'T STINT.
 SOON SHE HAD DECKING AND A
 WATERFALL A WATERFALL
 A FLUFFY CARPET RUNNING WALL TO
 WALL
 HER PAYMENTS LAPSED, WE DON'T
 ENTREAT
 I CHANGED THE LOCKS, SHE'S ON THE
 STREET
 SHE SHOULD HAVE READ THE OLD
 SMALL PRINT.

BABS (SPOKEN)

They evicted a frail old lady?

BONNIE

She knew the deal!

TONY (SINGS)

BUT BABS, LOVELY BABS
 THESE WERE WASTERS, THESE WERE
 SCABS
 THEY PROMISED BUT THEY DIDN'T
 FOLLOW THROUGH
 IT'S A SHAME, BUT YOUR NAME
 HAS THE PURITY OF FLAME
 DO YOU TRUST US, COS WE TRUST IN
 YOU.

BABS

He seems to be warming towards me
- do you really think this will
work?

BONNIE

Sign and you'll find out! You
could be honeymooning in the
South Seas!

Tony crosses to Babs

TONY (SINGS)

JUST SIGN IT, DEFINE IT.
WRITE YOUR NAME AND UNDERLINE IT.
PUT ME DOWN A BABS RIGHT ON THE
LINE

GIRLS

(THAT DOTTED LINE)

TONY

IT WILL ALL BE FINE

GIRLS

(SO FINE!)

TONY

WHEN YOU SIGN.
DO THE DEAL
YOU WILL FEEL
A SHIVER DOWN YOUR SPINE

GIRLS turn their backs. Their dresses spell out D,E,B.
TONY turns his back - he has a big T on his shirt to
complete the word, DEBT.

MY SWEETIE, D,E,B,T
SPELLS A FORTNIGHT IN TAHITI
PUT ME DOWN A BABS
RIGHT ON THE LINE.

BABS takes a cursory glance at the contract but can't take
her eyes off TONY for very long.

GIRLS

THAT DOTTED LINE

TONY
YOU'LL BE MINE, ALL MINE

ALL
WHEN YOU SIGN.

BABS
(SPOKEN)ALL YOURS!

BONNIE
SIGN IT , JUST SIGN IT!
YEAH, YEAH, YEAH!

Babs signs and is swept away by the Cronies and Tony.
Bonnie rips open the parcel of letters.

BONNIE.
Let the games begin. Hugh! Mimi!

They appear in the doorway, Hugh is now in a smart jacket and slacks, with loafers and a cravat. Mimi is in twinset, pearls, a tweed skirt and court shoes, with her hair in a french pleat. They speak in pseudo-posh voices.

BONNIE
Take the letters down from the
window, Hugh.

HUGH
The Acorn Antiques letters? But
why?

BONNIE
Because we are about to open the
flagship store of the new coffee
and karaoke chain -Amo! Don't ya
love it - Amo - it's short and sexy, like
Brad Pitt. Anyway, enough of
my nocturnal admissions -take down
the name and dump the antiques.

MIMI
But antiques have become our very
life!

HUGH

We've been up all night watching
the Antiques Channel - hot news
is Arts and Crafts is due for a
mini-revival -

MIMI

And Satsuma ware has become
ridiculously collectable.

BONNIE

Do you know the songs from the
Disney Aladdin? This is a whole
new world! Forget antiques -
think foccaccia, panini,
macciato, bruchetta - am I making
myself clear?

MIMI

Will it be fairtrade?

BONNIE

How many more times -no, even the
paper napkins are soaked in the
DNA of sweated labour -now get
on! Are you familiar with the scrapheap?

HUGH

Yeah -we have loads of friends on
it.

BONNIE

(slowly)
Then do as I say.

They hesitate.

BONNIE

(into phone)
Scrapheap please. Reservations.

They go in sadly, HUGH close to tears, moving past MRS
OVERALL silently. She has come out with a duster and a
little pad and pencil.

MRS O

Whatever's the matter with Hugh
and Mimi? They do dumps look in
the, look in the, down in the
dumps, they look.

BONNIE

And you came tottering out for ...?

MRS O

Oooh now, I've been working on a new macaroon recipe for the opening - (She brings out a little lined pad and a short pencil)

BONNIE

(shielding her eyes)

Please - it's a little bit early to be looking at cheap paper. Do you remember, Mrs O, saying you would stay as long as you were wanted?

MRS O

Oh yes.

BONNIE

Well, you're not.

MRS O

Not -

BONNIE

Not wanted.

MRS O

Well I don't want to stay where I'm not wanted.

BONNIE

That's right. It's not just the terrible old working class baking, it's the look of you.

MRS O

I don't fit in, is that it?

BONNIE

You have it.

MRS O

I see. Don't worry. I won't make a scene. I was in the middle of a batch of parkin but it seems it'll have to

be parkin suspended. It's lucky
 my self-heating collapsible
 carpet bag arrived when it did -
 I'll pack up my macaroons and go.
 Can I tell Miss Babs and Miss
 Berta myself?

BONNIE

No.

MRS O

Then perhaps you'll give them
 this note.

CUE MUSIC.

She starts to write.

I've given this place my life,
 but if I'm too old and not modern
 enough for the new look antique
 business then so be it. There is
 a one day filo pastry course I
 could go on but I can see that
 would be too little too late.
 I've seen two thirds of my
 daughters grow up, I've had top
 notch dustpans, never been
 stinted on scouring powder, I've
 no complaints.

She sings.

MRS OVERALL

IT'S FAIR ENOUGH, I CAN'T KEEP IN
 THE SWIM
 I'VE PUT ICING SUGAR ROUND THE
 LAVVY RIM
 DOES MAKE ME WONDER WHERE I PUT
 THE VIM
 YOU'RE RIGHT MISS BONNIE I KNOW
 IT'S TIME TO GO
 I'VE LOVED YOU ALL FROM THE DAY
 THAT YOU ARRIVED
 I FEEL SO BLEST YOU ALL GREW UP
 AND THRIVED
 REDUNDANT YES- BUT NOT A BIT
 DEPRIVED

(speaks and writes) Miss Babs, Miss Berta, Miss Bonnie

(sings) Love from Mrs O.

She kisses the note, folds it, and gives it to BONNIE and very slowly goes off stage.

BONNIE crumples up the note and throws it away, then goes into the shop and closes the door.

BLACKOUT

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

The shop. Bare of antiques Acorn Antiques is now a generic coffee shop, with a coffee counter, newspapers on sticks, leather armchairs etc. The letters from the old sign lie scattered about, the mother's portrait is still on the wall, a big wrapped poster stands ready to go in its place.

Hugh and Mimi are taking down the last few Acorn Antiques letters from the window, very sadly and very slowly. Over their clothes they wear an AMO tabard. There is a tea chest in the middle of the floor with pictures and ornaments sticking out of the top.

Clifford, with the help of Minchin's Lad deposits something outside the shop door. Minchin's Lad leaves. Clifford bangs his head on the doorframe as he puts the box down. He comes in, rather out of breath. Mopping his forehead, for a moment he doesn't clock what's been done to the shop.

HUGH

Morning Mr Clifford.

MIMI

Mr. Clifford.

CLIFFORD

Polishing the letters eh? Good idea! Ow.

HUGH/MIMI

Are you alright, Mr Clifford?

CLIFFORD

Yes, just banged my head on the doorframe there. Oh.

MIMI

Does it hurt? Do you want a plaster?

CLIFFORD

No -something's coming back to me
-long curly hair, platform shoes,
hip hugging velvet trousers -

MIMI

(to Hugh) He's remembering his fiancée! What's her face like Mr Clifford?

CLIFFORD

Hang on, it's coming clearer. The face is familiar! Oh, it's mine-I remember now, I had a perm.

MIMI

Don't give up Mr Clifford, you'll find her.

He sings.

SONG -FIND HER

ONCE WE WERE TOGETHER
 BUT THE MEMORIES ARE BLURRED
 I DO BELIEVE OUR LOVE IS STILL
 ALIVE
 YOU CAN CALL MY ERRAND HOPELESS
 YOU CAN SEE ME AS ABSURD
 STILL MY DREAMS SURVIVE
 I'LL HAVE TO STEAL A CATHERINE
 WHEEL
 AND PIN IT HIGH ABOVE HER
 COLOURS THAT WILL LIGHT THE SKY
 ABOVE HER
 EACH LITTLE SPARK
 THAT HITS THE DARK
 WILL TELL HER THAT I LOVE HER
 IT'S LOVE THAT LIGHTS MY DREAM
 ITS TINY STEADFAST GLEAM
 I'LL USE ITS STEADY BEAM
 UNTIL I FIND HER.

At the end of the song, he looks around him and does massive double take.

CLIFFORD

Hang on a minute - what the flock wallpaper is going on in here?

HUGH

It's Miss Bonnie - and she's starting a chain of coffee and karoake shops.

CLIFFORD

What?

Bonnie comes striding in from the house, followed by Babs and Berta in their tabards.

BABS

But Bonnie - I think I deserve a bit more of an explanation than "shut your fat frigging face"

BONNIE

It's a coffee shop- there's the counter, there's the karaoke machine – get over yourself.

BABS

But none of us knows how to make modern coffee.
Mrs O!

Bonnie spots the box containing the Stannah.

BONNIE

And what the frappucino is that?

CLIFFORD

It's my mother's stairlift- to comply with the new disabled access regulations. There we are, topical humour!

BONNIE

No, no, no. This is Amo Coffee and Karaoke - it's not an old dodderer's day centre - Amo's customers will have style, energy, their own hips.

BABS

And where are the antiques?

BONNIE

Dumped -Acorn Antiques is closing down!

Tony in.

BABS

Over my tweed body! Hugh, Mimi – bring the antiques back. Tony – I don't want the loan - I'd like to take advantage of the usual cooling off period - Bonnie will return the money and we'll be back in the antiques business in no time. Phew - time for a cup of tea I think, where IS Mrs O, I don't usually have to bellow twice.

Berta notices the Amateurs, peering in and gathering by the door.

BONNIE

And who are these dopey old buzzards?

BERTA

It's the Amateurs.

BONNIE

Oh, crikey, that's all we need. Eff off you codgers!

BABS

(sees Tony is shaking his head sorrowfully)
Tony?

TONY

(he looks at her sadly)
You didn't read the small print did you?

BABS

Well, no - I didn't really read any of it - why..

TONY

Babs, Babs, why do you think I'm here?

BABS

I thought you might be proposing a sudden elopement, dashing off hand-in-hand to some little hideaway like Cheltenham.

TONY

I'm here to collect. If you don't make five hundred pounds by the end of trading today - (he gestures around) the loan's repayable in full. Or I get the shop.

BABS

Well, we'll just have to hope for brisk business. (grabs two framed tapestries out of the tea chest). Look, we could do two for one on samplers – here we are, Bless this House and Bring Back hanging - twenty five quid the pair.

BONNIE

You could have David Dickinson in the window in a thong and we still couldn't shift five hundred quid's worth of antiques in a day. Berta - get the coffee going! Clifford, Hugh, assemble the stairlift, we're going to need every dodderer we can get. Come in you elderly people – best coffee in the High Street, in you come. Nothing against elderly people here.

The Amateurs come in , their coats over their costumes. They look around suspiciously - they don't like what they say.

Tony, would you care for a muffin?

TONY

I am not a muffin man, a muffin man, a muffin man. I'll be back.

He leaves.

BONNIE

Come on Berta, get with the programme.

There's a big burst of steam from the coffee machine and Berta screams.

BERTA

I don't know how this works, and the sugar smells of Vim!

BONNIE

Hugh, Mimi, get rid of those letters -come on, queue up, don't breathe on the panini!

MR WATKINS

What is all this? What's Amo?

BONNIE

It's the new name, stop yapping,
get ordering. What's the hold up,
Berta?

BERTA

Miss Cuff ordered a low foam high
fat latte with sugar free caramel
syrup and hazelnut sprinkles -
which I did.

MISS CUFF

And then she poured it all over
the counter.

BERTA

She never said she wanted it in a
cup!

Bonnie spots the Postman and Minchin's lad.

BONNIE

You two, help out, go on, spit spot.

They reluctantly go behind the counter.

Now, who wants a go on the
karaoke while they're waiting?

Nobody much responds.

Come on -Babs, Berta, let's show
them how it's done. I'll just bring in the
big karaoke screen that can be seen from
quite a long way away.

Berta flicks through the list of songs. MR FURLONG brings in the TV which will show
the lyrics.

BERTA

Oh, I remember this one. It was a
big hit the summer that Clifford
had his beech veneer button back
banquette debacle. We used to
dance to it. It was "our tune"

MIMI

Put it on Miss Berta, memory's a
funny thing - he might remember

the moves, even if he can't
recall who he used to dance with.

SHAGARAMA!

As Berta sings, Mr Clifford starts to dance. He gives up
after a little while, out of breath. Mr Watkins and Derek,
amongst others, take to the floor - they try to out do each
other in the vigour of their movements.

BERTA
EMPTY DAYS AND RAINY NIGHTS
I'M SO TIRED OF CITY LIGHTS
AND MY CAREER
COS YOU'RE NOT HERE

BONNIE
WORK ALL NIGHT AND WORK ALL DAY
LOOKS GOOD ON MY RESUME
I'M TIRED OF RAIN

BERTA/BONNIE
GONNA CATCH A PLANE TODAY

BERTA/BONNIE
I'M HAVING A HOLIDAY
I'M GOING ALL HIP-HOORAY
I'M PACKING MY BLUES AWAY
THEN I'M OUT OF THE DOOR

BABS
MY TICKETS RIGHT IN MY HAND
I'M HEADED FOR SUN AND SAND
PARALYTIC BEFORE I LAND
AND SHAGGING BY FOUR

BONNIE
DON'T TELL ME WHO'S CALLED OR FAXED
DON'T TELL ME WHO'S JOB'S BEEN AXED
I'M HAVING MY HOO-HAH WAXED
THAT'S TOP OF MY LIST

BERTA
I'M LEAVING MY PLANTS BEHIND
ALL MY UNCLES AND AUNTS BEHIND
I COULD LEAVE MY PANTS BEHIND
THEY'LL NEVER BE MISSED

BERTA/BABS/BONNIE
SHED THOSE OLD TRADITIONS

FIND SOME NEW POSITIONS
LET YOUR INHIBITIONS TAKE FLIGHT

OOH AH LOSE YOUR ARMOUR
DITCH THAT LAST PYJAMA
LETS GO SHAGARAMA TONIGHT

CHRISTINE
YOU KNOW, TIME WAS
WHEN NOBODY GAVE A DAMN

MISS WILLOUGHBY
NOBODY LOOKED MY WAY
AND NOBODY CARED

MISS WILLOUGHBY/CHRISTINE
BUT NOW, BECAUSE I AM
WHAT I DAMN WELL AM,
I'M SAYING WHO ARE YOU
LOOK OUT I'M COMING THROUGH

BERTA/BABS/BONNIE
I'M HAVING A HOLIDAY
I'M PACKING THE COLD AWAY
MY CHERRY IS DEAD GLACE
I WANT TO GET HOT HOT HOT

I'M GOING WHERE BRITS ARE FOUND
WHERE GLAMOUR AND GLITZ ABOUND
I'LL BE WAVING MY BITS AROUND
AS LIKELY AS NOT

BONNIE
OOH DON'T BE MONASTIC
THIS IS DEAD FANTASTIC
YOUR HAND MY ELASTIC
THAT'S RIGHT

BERTA/BABS/BONNIE
OOH AH MUST BE KARMA
I'M PISSED, YOU'RE A FARMER
LETS GO SHAGARAMA TONIGHT

LADIES
YOU KNOW, TIME WAS
WHEN NOBODY GAVE A DAMN
NOBODY LOOKED MY WAY
AND NOBODY CARED
BUT NOW, BECAUSE
WOMANLY, WARM AND GLAM,

YOU'LL NEVER SEE ME CRY
BECAUSE I'M FLYING HIGH

BERTA/BABS/BONNIE
I'M HAVING A HOLIDAY
I'M CHUCKING MY THONG AWAY
I'M GOING TO BE DEAD RISQUE
TO THE SOUND OF THE SEA

ON THE COSTA BLANCA
DON'T BE SUCH A W*****
YOU CAN DROP YOUR ANCHOR WITH ME

ALL
HERE'S A TASTY STARTER
PUT YOUR HOT TOMATO
NEAR MY CHIPOLATA AND BITE

OOH AH SEX AND DRAMA
WHO NEEDS PANORAMA
LETS GO SHAGARAMA TONIGHT

At the end of the song, they sit down, exhausted. The others sit down with their coffees. Berta approaches Clifford cautiously.

BERTA
Did that bring anything back to you, Clifford?

CLIFFORD
No, it's all still a blank.

BERTA
Poor Clifford, engaged AND vacant.

DEREK
(out of breath still)
I think my disco days are over. One
good thing, it's worked my Botox loose.

MR WATKINS
Yes, why did you do that?

DEREK
Same reason you dipped yourself in Bisto.
Trying to look young, trying to sop you
losing interest and leaving me.

MR WATKINS

I wouldn't leave you.

DEREK
Wouldn't you?

MR WATKINS
Well, you must know how I feel about you.

DEREK
We don't really have those sort of conversations.

MR WATKINS
Well, maybe we should.

SONG - GENTS' DUET.

I'VE ALWAYS SAID I DON'T DO
FEELINGS.
AND THOSE I HAVE STAY UNEXPRESSED
AND WHEN I DO HAVE CARDS I HOLD
THEM
FAIRLY NEAR MY CHEST.
I RUN A MILE FROM JERRY SPRINGER
WHAT'S IN MY HEART REMAINS UNSAID
BUT EVER SINCE THE DAY I MET YOU
NOW I'VE LOST MY THREAD
GONE AND LOST MY THREAD
WHY, WHY AM I
ALWAYS BUTTONED UP
WHY CAN'T I SAY
THAT OLD CLICHE
I LOVE YOU?

DEREK
WE'VE NEVER BEEN ALL LOVEY DOVEY
WE DON'T DO CARD, WE DON'T DO
BALLOONS
IT ISN'T LOVE SO MUCH AS JIGSAWS
IN THE AFTERNOONS
I'M NOT A FAN OF JUDY GARLAND
SHE FILLS ME WITH A VAGUE DISMAY
BUT THERE'S A SONG OF HERS IT'S
CALLED
THE -THAT GOT AWAY?

MR WATKINS
MAN THAT GOT AWAY.

DEREK
SO CORRECT

CAN'T CONNECT
 CAN'T JUST COME RIGHT OUT AND SAY
 THAT I LOVE HIM.

BOTH
 WE'VE NEVER GONE FOR MATCHING
 APRONS
 WE DON'T PARADE AT MARDI GRAS
 BUT NOW I'D LIKE TO TELL THE
 WORLD
 HOW WONDERFUL YOU ARE
 WONDERFUL YOU ARE

MR WATKINS
 UNREHEARSED

DEREK
 I'M READY

MR WATKINS
 I'LL GO FIRST

DEREK
 HOLD STEADY

BOTH
 YOU ARE EVERYTHING TO ME
 AND I LOVE YOU.
 THERE NEVER IS A HAPPY ENDING
 THERE NEVER IS A CLOUDLESS SKY
 BUT IF WE'RE BRAVE AND NOT
 PRETENDING
 MAYBE WE COULD TRY
 SAYING WHAT WE MEAN
 MAYBE WE COULD TRY
 AND IF IT DOESN'T QUITE WORK OUT
 THEN WE CAN SAY
 WE WERE SCARED
 BUT WE DARED
 TODAY.

At the end of the song, Babs approaches Miss Wellbelove.

BABS
 How's your vanilla macchiato, Miss
 Wellbelove? Speak freely.

MISS WELLBELOVE
 Well, it has a rather nasty tang.

BABS

(bravely)

No, fair comment what sort of tang?.

MISS WELLBELOVE

Well, the nearest I could get would be baboon's urine.

BABS

Yes alright, thank you - crikey - what do you people want?

DEREK

We want Mrs O -

MR WATKINS

Of course -that's what's missing!

CHRISTINE

That's why there's no atmosphere!

They all agree excitedly.

BERTA

(calling out)

Mrs O? She's probably in the scullery.

They all rush excitedly to the house stairs.

BONNIE

Stop! Mrs O can't help us make five hundred pounds by six o clock this evening.

BERTA

No, but she could give her blessing to a marriage -

BABS

Oh, and cash the cheque and pay back the loan - brilliant idea Berta!

CLIFFORD

Well, I could get married I suppose, if it'll save the shop.

BERTA

I'm not doing anything - I don't mind
bobbing along to the wedding chapel.

BABS

Its up to Clifford. Which one of
us do you want to marry, Cliff?

CLIFFORD

(not bothered)

Bonnie? I imagine she's got the
most interesting underwear.

BERTA

(bravely)

Okey-dokey.

BONNIE

Great plan - I like it. But Mrs
O's not actually here. I - I
fired her.

DEREK

You fired your own mother?

BONNIE

(suddenly uncertain)

Was that - wrong?

The Amateurs are stunned.

CLIFFORD

It was - dodgy.

BONNIE

In that case I must make amends.

SONG - ONCE IN A LIFETIME

BONNIE

NOW I UNDERSTAND MY DESTINATION,
I KNOW WHERE IT IS I MUST GO, AT
THIS POINT IN THE SHOW
I'M GOING OUT TO FIND HER
I, THE ONE WHO HAS MALIGNED HER
THE PERPETRATOR OF THE
MISDEMEANOUR
THINKING SHE WAS JUST A CLEANER
OH WHAT A HAPPY STORY
WON'T IT BE HUNKY-DORY

WHEN I RETURN IN CLOUDS OF GLORY
 TRAILING MRS OVERALL.
 I WOULD FIGHT ANY FOE
 I WOULD RUN ANY RACE
 I WILL SEARCH HIGH AND LOW
 FOR A GLIMPSE OF HER FACE
 I WOULD TRAVEL TO CHEAM
 AND TO BURTON ON TRENT
 I WOULD FORD EVERY STREAM
 IF I KNEW WHAT IT MEANT
 I WOULD CLIMB UP AND SING
 FROM THE TOP OF THE DOME
 IF I THOUGHT IT WOULD BRING
 MY MOTHER HOME.
 I'M GOING OUT TO FIND HER
 YES I, THE ONE WHO UNDERMINED
 HER!
 MY ONLY CAUSE THE ONE MY HEART
 ESPOUSES
 FIND HER AND HER GHASTLY BLOUSES
 I'LL TRAMP, TRAMP FROM COWES TO
 CATTERICK
 LIGHT CANDLES TO ST PATRICK
 UNTIL I FIND MY GERIATRIC.

BONNIE
 I'M GOING OUT TO FIND HER

ALL
 SHE, WHO NEVER WINED AND DINED
 HER

BONNIE
 I NEVER TOOK HER TO A SHOW OR
 BALLET
 JUST BECAUSE SHE WAS DOO-LALLY

ALL
 BUT NOW, LUCKILY, BIZARRELY
 SHE'LL SEARCH FROM BIARRITZ TO
 BALI
 PLEASE FIND HER

BONNIE
 OR THERE'S NO FINALE

ALL
 FIND DEAR MRS OVERALL.

They shove BONNIE out of the door, still warbling. BABS

looks out. The Amateurs huddle together, anxiously waiting.

BABS

Mrs O can't have got that far – that's one of the blessings of osteoporosis.

She turns away and doesn't see Tony come in.

TONY

Babs.

BABS

Come for your pound of flesh? Well, at least you won't be breaking your diet. Ha ha.

TONY

I've hurt you.

BABS

Entirely my own fault. If you can't stand the cold, get out of the igloo. Don't worry, the minute my mother gets here, we'll find a way to pay you back.

TONY

Very well.

The lights go down in the shop. Lights up downstage, as the station clock comes down. Mrs Overall, in hat, gloves, coat and carpet bag, walks slowly along the railway platform, checking the time. There is the distant hoot and the hissing of the steam train. Bonnie appears and calls out.

BONNIE

Mummy! Oh my mummy!

They run to each other in slow motion through the steam and embrace. Hands clasped, they leave the stage. Before they exit, Mrs Overall breaks into a run to get off for her quick change.

The lights go up in the shop. HUGH's phone goes. He reads his text.

HUGH

She's found her! They're on their way!

BABS

Berta-quick - let's put on our new tweeds!

BABS and BERTA go into the house.

MISS CUFF

Mrs O's coming back! Let's give her a real
Manchesterford Amateur Operatic welcome!

They all cheer, the CHORUS cast off their macs and hats to
reveal their (slightly amateurish) Chorus Line costumes

SONG - OH, OH, OH MRS O!

CHORUS

IN A WORLD OF DOUBT AND TENSION
WHO CAN WE RELY ON
IS SHE COMING DOWN THE STREET?
IS SHE HEADING FOR THE DOOR?
WILL SHE MAKE OUR LIVES COMPLETE?
WHO'S THE ONE WE'RE WAITING FOR?
WHO'S THE GIRL WHO'S BEEN HERE
FROM THE START
WHO'S THE GIRL WITH PASSION, GUTS
AND HEART.
WHO CAN SET OUR PULSES THUMPING
BY HER STYLE OF CUSHION PLUMPING
WHO'S THE GIRL WHOSE HANDS CAN
CONJURE
MIRACLES WITH MOP AND PLUNGER
WHO'S THE GIRL WE'VE TAKEN TO OUR
HEARTS
WHEN SHE SMILES WE ALL FEEL TEN
FEET TALL
SHE'S OUR LITTLE FOUR LEAF CLOVER
MRS OVERALL.
WHO'S THE GIRL WHO NEVER LETS US
DOWN
WHO'S THE GIRL WHO'S NEVER SEEN
TO FROWN
NEVER GRUMPY, NEVER BITCHY
EVEN WHEN HER VEINS ARE ITCHY
WHAT A STUNNER WHAT A LOOKER
BOY CAN SHE DE GREASE A COOKER
WHO'S THE GIRL WE'VE TAKEN TO OUR
HEARTS
I HOPE SHE HEARS US CALL
BY GEE, BY JINGO, BY JEHOVA
MRS OVERALL
EVERY MOVE SHE MAKES
EVERY BUN SHE BAKES
EVERY POT OF TEA SHE BREWS
SHOULD BE ON THE NIGHT TIME NEWS

IT'S SO DELICIOUS
 EVERY LAV SHE SCRUBS
 SETS US ALL AGLOW
 A STAR, AND HOW
 I THINK SHE'S COMING NOW
 TELL ME THIS IS
 SIMPLY MRS
 OH GET HUMMING, YES SHE'S COMING

The stairs light up, MRS O arrives and poses at the top of the stairs, sideways, hunched like Bob Fosse. The steps light one by one as she descends, they take her hat and coat and lead her down - her veins glow, her overall is satin and sparkly, her rubber gloves are sequinned and catch the light.

CHORUS
 HERE'S THE GIRL WHO MAKES US
 CATCH OUR BREATH

MRS O
 Ooh I am pleased

CHORUS
 HERE'S THE GIRL WHO SAYS-

MRS O
 You'll catch your death

CHORUS
 WHO EXUDES BOTH CHARM AND
 LOVELINESS
 PLUS HER SPECIAL RUBBER
 GLOVELINESS
 THIS IS WHY WE'RE KEEN TO
 CLUSTER
 HOPING FOR A FLICK OF DUSTER
 HERE'S THE GIRL WE'VE TAKEN TO
 OUR HEARTS
 NOW SHE'S HERE WE'LL NEVER LET
 HER GO
 SHE'S BACK, WHAT LUCK
 CAN YOU SMELL TOILET DUCK?
 HELLO, MRS O!
 HERE'S THE GIRL WHO MAKES US FEEL
 SO CHUFFED
 HERE'S THE GIRL WHOSE KNOBS ARE
 ALWAYS BUFFED
 WAVE YOUR HANKY OR BANDANNA

FLY A FLAG OR GRAB A BANNER
RAISE A CHEER AND SING HOSANNA!

MRS O settles herself in the stairlift that runs alongside the stairs.

MRS O
Ooh how nice, a lovely Stannah!

Tempo goes into half time as she ascends in her Stannah.

ALL
HERE'S THE GIRL WE'VE TAKEN TO
OUR HEARTS
JUST HOW MUCH SHE'LL NEVER REALLY
KNOW
WE'LL CREEP, WE'LL CRAWL
TO COVER HER OVERALL
WITH KISSES
TELL ME WHAT BLISS IS
BLISS IS MRS O!
OVERALL!

She comes down the stairs, the steps start to retract, sending her catapulting down the last few. She is caught before she falls into the pit. As she recovers, Tony approaches.

TONY
Welcome back, Mrs Overall. You're too late.

MRS O
Oh it's Nobby No-Carbs.

TONY
You can't beat the terms of the loan -you may as well give me the shop now.

MRS O
Talk to the glove - the pinnie ain't listening.

TONY
It's not my fault. I warned your stupid daughter - and she wouldn't take any bloody notice!

MRS O

You shut your cake-hole, you
sugar-shunning shite hawk!

She takes a swipe at him with her tray, he neatly sidesteps
and she clonks Clifford on the head. He reels and then
focuses on Berta.

CLIFF

Bertles Wertles - my fiancée!

BERTA

Cliffy, oh my Cliffy!

Music. They embrace.

MRS O

Right. Now we're cooking with
anthracite. Get round the
wedding chapel you two and ask
for the sixty second service -
it's an extra two quid but what
the frig.

Clifford and Berta rush out. Bonnie comes in from the
house.

BABS

As they're marrying with my
mother's consent, we have enough
money to pay off the loan in
full. Right now.

MRS O

One of my daughters will endorse
this large cardboard cheque.

Babs goes to the huge cheque, crosses out Acorn Antiques
and makes it out to Credit Cronies.

BONNIE

Mummy I behaved so very badly.

MRS O

Not to worry. You had a difficult
birth, your head was wedged up
against my pubic bone.

Bonnie takes a moment to savour this image.

BABS

Your cheque, and that concludes our business, yes?

TONY

No - small print - cash only.

BERTA

Whoopee everybody, we're married, and look, didn't we get into our wedding clothes quickly?

BABS

Yes, well done -so pleased. Cash?

BONNIE

Cash?

BERTA

Cash?

CLIFFORD

Let's clear up few things shall we? We have to pay off the loan in cash, which we haven't got.

TONY

Correct.

CLIFFORD

Or we have to make five hundred pounds before we close, which we can't.

TONY

Correct.

CLIFFORD

So rather like the beech veneer button back banquettes that caused my amnesia – we're stuffed!

TONY

Yes. It's over! Acorn Antiques is mine!

MRS O

Oh no, I don't give up that easy,

I'm a Brummie, and that's god way
of making you live in Birmingham.
We can still set that till
pinging. Hand me my self-heating
collapsible carpet bag.

They scurry about to fetch her the bag - they open it for her and take out a tray of just-cooked macaroons.

Get a whiff of that, Credit
crony. Nothing more irresistible
than the smell of a mature
woman's macaroon.

TONY

(he breathes in with closed
eyes)
Oh..(he recovers himself) No!
I'm a loan shark - you can't
bring me down with a bakery item -
however fragrant.

MRS O

(as they take them to the
counter)
Put a sign outside Hugh - we can
sell five hundred quids' worth of
macaroons by six o'clock, easy.

Lot of hustle and bustle as a queue forms at the counter.

TONY

You haven't got till six o'clock.

MRS O

(not really listening)Oh shut
up and have a macaroon.

She shoves one in his mouth. Through a mouthful he says
slowly.

TONY

Old fashioned, aren't they, in
Manchesterford. It's early
closing. The shop shuts in four
minutes.

BABS

That's it then, it's over. My own
fault for falling in love with an
emotional zombie..

Soft music plays as Tony chews the macaroon. He is bathed in
a rosy glow.

TONY

Wait -something's happening to me
 -refined carbohydrate is running
 through my veins -the sugar is
 reaching my heart -it's starting
 to thaw - I am not a loan shark -
 I am a human being!

They all cheer.

BABS

(frostily) Well, too late for me
 I'm afraid. I don't care how hot
 your cockles are - I shan't be
 warming my hands on them.

BERTA

But at least now he's kind and
 loving he can cancel the debt and
 we can have our shop back.

TONY

I AM loving -and I'm tolerant-I
 could even sit through Bridges of
 Madison County – but I can't
 cancel the loan because Credit Cronies
 has just been taken over by ...

BONNIE

I'll tell them - The Guilty Bean!

CLIFFORD

So unless there's a miracle and
 we find your father's fortune in
 the next four minutes, Babs - all
 this will belong to the biggest
 chain of faceless coffee shops in
 the world and there will be no
 such place as Acorn Antiques.

BABS

If only father hadn't taped over
 his will with that stupid
 quiz.....

MRS O

He did love a puzzle bless him.
 I can't believe he wouldn't have
 left me a clue somewhere.

DEREK

It is tres baffling! That's your actual French - tres.

MRS O

What ?

MISS WELLBELOVE

We've only got three minutes!

DEREK

You must be distrait!

MRS O

Dis Tray? This tray? The tray!

It's hastily handed back to her. She turns it over and sees the clue. They all gasp. She reads it.

MRS O (cont.)

"The cash is in the safe" - take the picture down, Hugh! "The cash is in the safe, but you'll get what you seek when you find the one true heart that is Acorn Antiques." I felt like Ted Rogers then.

They all do the Ted Rogers 321 finger move. Hugh takes the picture down. The wall safe is revealed. Instead of dials, it has a layout of huge push buttons, like a seventies phone.

MIMI

It's Bet A Letter! The quiz off the video - he didn't tape over the will, this IS the will. We have to use the letters, come on, the ACORN ANTIQUES letters, grab 'em!

CLIFFORD

But the safe won't open, we've tried!

HUGH

You have to find a word - out of these letters, the right word opens the door.

HUGH
Make ANTIQUES!....

With Mimi's help, Christine, Miss Willoughby, Miss Cuff, Miss Wellbelove, Clifford and Berta get into line. They all hold a letter up. Babs joins, and Tony stands next to her, but she ignores him. Mimi drags Mr Watkins and Derek into position to form A N T I Q U E C O R N.

HUGH
No...Try C O N ...

They form the word CONQUEST. Hugh presses buttons frantically.

HUGH
Quest?.....No. Quota?

MIMI forms them into the word QUOTA and the remaining people form by accident, the word INANE.

POSTMAN
Two minutes!

HUGH
No

BABS
This is pointless!

She stands in the middle of the INANE group with her S and forms the word INSANE.

BABS
Its mad!

HUGH
Do ACORNS again....No.

They form the words ACORNS, Berta hovers nearby with the M and the O from AMO.

BABS
I don't see any Acorn Antique related words. Do you?

MR FURLONG
Snacamoos?

CHRISTINE

Cramoonas?

BABS

Shh, people are talking. (she
appeals to the audience) What?
Macaroons!

Swiftly the A,C,O,R,N,S spread themselves out to form
MACAROONS with Clifford and Berta's A,M, and O.

MINCHIN'S LAD

One minute!

Hugh presses the keypads, there is a beeping sound and the
frame flashes. The panel slides up to reveal another
panel the words MACAROONS. They all stop cheering as they
realise the safe is still closed.

BONNIE

What's happening?

MIMI

It's 'WORD WITHIN A WORD'!

HUGH

There's another word inside
macaroons and that word is the
true heart of Acorn Antiques.

BABS

Oh. Not coons I imagine.

MISS CUFF

Twenty seconds!

HUGH

Got it!

He presses the letters M, S, O, R - the words MRS O light
up - the door opens and cash floods out. General
jubilation.

BERTA

Now we can all have our shops
just the way we want them.

BABS seizes a handful of money and thrusts it at TONY.

BABS

Your loan - and if you'll excuse me, I have antiques to unpack.

TONY

Please Babs -hear me out - I love you - you're scrumptious and bumptious and utterly tweedylicious - I just want to kiss every buttoned up inch of you.

BABS

Well I'm not sure I - oh alright then.

They launch themselves at each other.

The Amateurs start to put the letters back up in the window.

BONNIE

Of course Mummy - You are the true heart of Acorn Antiques!

MRS O

So your dad did love me after all - I wasn't just a groin-grinding sex-babe.

BERTA

Listen everybody, we just had an awfully quick meeting and we're going to change our name and re-open selling antiques, macaroons and coffee.

MISS CUFF

But your coffee's repellent.

BERTA

No - Clifford's going to be in charge of all that - he's just remembered his lost years were spent in a Soho coffee bar.

CLIFFORD

My froth was the talk of Old Compton Street.

MRS O

What will the new name be? Could you find one that uses the old and the new letters? Acorn Antiques and Amo?

BONNIE

Yes Mummy, that's just what we have done - see - our new shop is going to be called "Quaint Macaroons"

MRS O

Quaint Macaroons. Does that use all the letters?

CLIFFORD

Yes, nearly all. We're just left with an 'E'.

MRS O

Well, even in Manchesterford, sometimes an 'E' is just what you need!

BABS emerges from her embrace laughing heartily, then realises she's no idea what an E is.

Well, Babs, Berta, Bonnie, Clifford, Tony, Mr Watkins, you people at the back – I think I've got everything I ever wanted.

BABS

It's no more than you deserve. You saved us just in time!

MRS O

Well, I always say you can't beat a nice reprise!

BABS

I think you mean reprieve!

MRS O

I think I bloody don't. Hit it boys!

MACAROONS – REPRISE

WHEN YOUR LIFE, TAKES A DIP,
 AND YOU THINK YOU'RE LOSING YOUR
 GRIP.
 DON'T GO OFF YOUR HEAD,
 POP IN HERE INSTEAD.
 YOU'LL BE OVER THE MOON.
 THERE'S NO GOING BACK,
 ONCE YOU'VE HAD A CRACK
 AT A MACAROON!

BOWS

HEY HEY WE'RE ON OUR WAY
 LETS NOT DELAY
 WE'VE GOT A BRIGHT TOMORROW
 SHOO! WE'RE COMING THROUGH
 BECAUSE WE'RE ON OUR WAY

HOORAH! WE'RE GOING FAR
 BID AU REVOIR
 TO ANY GLOOM OR SORROW
 WOW! WE'RE HAPPY NOW
 BECAUSE WE'RE ON OUR WAY

JUST TAKE A STEP AND THEN ANOTHER STEP
 ITS EASY AND YOU'LL SOON BE THERE
 YOU CAN'T BE QUEASY OR UNEASY
 AND THE WIND IS IN YOUR HAIR

HEY HEY! WE'RE ON OUR WAY
 WHEN WE ENTREZ
 WE WILL BE SO DELIGHTED
 CHECK! ALL HANDS ON DECK
 WE'RE REALLY ON OUR WAY

CURTAIN