

IF I SHOULD FALL

Scenes 1-3

by

Charlotte O'Leary

**Characters:**

Beattie Snelgrove

Royston Snelgrove

Elizabeth Marshall - Beattie's mother

Billy Glover

Joan - neighbour

Barbara - neighbour

George Burse - grocer

Mrs Biggerstaff - butcher

Mr Porter - window cleaner

Mr Glover - Billy's father

**The play is designed to be an ensemble piece with the following doubling up:**

Beattie

Royston/George Burse/Barbara/Mr Glover

Billy/Mr Porter

Elizabeth/Joan/Mrs Biggerstaff

**Set:**

A working class kitchen in a terraced house in Burnage, Manchester, 1941. There is a table in the middle of the kitchen, and to the right there is a door that leads to the hallway, and to the left the door that leads to the back yard.

ACT [1]

SCENE [1]

1941. BURNAGE, MANCHESTER. KITCHEN.

BEATTIE IS ATTEMPTING TO TIDY UP THE MESSY KITCHEN. SHE TAKES A TEAPOT OUT OF AN OVER-STUFFED CUPBOARD.

BEATTIE: You've got to go. You've got no spout. Sorry.

SHE CHANGES HER MIND AND SHOVES IT BACK IN THE CUPBOARD. SHE PUTS ON A GRAMOPHONE RECORD - TOMMY DORSEY'S 'OPUS NO 1'.

BARBARA SKEDADDLES THROUGH THE BACKDOOR. JOAN FOLLOWS, CALMER. THE WOMEN HAVE DONE THIS A HUNDRED TIMES BEFORE, A GENTLE BUM WIGGLE WHILE THEY LAY THE TABLE TURNS INTO A WELL REHEARSED YET ROUGH AROUND THE EDGES DANCE ROUTINE. IT'S ABOUT JOY RATHER THAN ACCURACY. BARBARA HAS NO CO-ORDINATION AND LAGS SLIGHTLY BEHIND EVERYONE ELSE. THE TABLE IS LAID.

BEATTIE: How's your cold Joan love?

JOAN: I'm just finishing it off, ta. Are we safe Beattie?

BEATTIE: Yeah, Mam's upstairs.

JOAN: Afternoon nap?

BEATTIE: Yeah it's her post-nap nap. I put her to bed with a jar of jam she'd had her sticky fingers in.

JOAN: Not one you were going to flog?

BEATTIE: Yeah! New stock.

You alright Barb?

JOAN: She's fine.

BARBARA: I'm not fine Joan, you know I'm not.

JOAN: Has Royston got anymore onions coming in? The rotten things have sprouted.

BEATTIE: Ah have they love, he's bringing fresh pickings in later on.

BARBARA: I could start sprouting over here and you'd not notice.

BEATTIE: What's the matter love?

JOAN: Don't ask her that.

BARBARA: I don't want to make a fuss, you know I don't.

BEATTIE: Of course you don't Barb.

JOAN: No you never make a fuss do you. How's that tea coming along?

BEATTIE: Nearly ready love. Would you like something to go with it?

BARBARA: Only Brenda's been telling them all down flower arranging my curtains are a state.

BEATTIE: Oh Barb. What with you being so house proud.

BARBARA: I am, I know I am. I've had such problems with me blackouts I just couldn't believe it when she said.

JOAN: Your nets could do with a good bicarb of soda though.

BARBARA: Joan Donamall you take that back. I was fine until we had blackouts. When they ask me what my war effort was I shall say it were keeping three sets of curtains going simultaneously. I'd not bother with the nets but I'd have all and sundry peering in the windows.

JOAN: No one's gonna want to peer in your windows for fear of what they might see, Barb.

BARBARA: Is there any cake Beattie, I'm fading fast over here.

BEATTIE: Are we ready?

BARBARA: What is it Beattie? Oh Beattie...it's not.

BEATTIE: Chocolate cake.

JOAN: Where'd you get the chocolate?

BARBARA: George Burse, I bet.

BEATTIE: When did you last have chocolate Barb?

BARBARA: 4 months, 12 days, six hours and twenty minutes ago. It were here. I wrote it in my diary.

JOAN: Are you crying?

BARBARA: I'm not crying.  
I am crying.

JOAN: How'd George get chocolate?

BEATTIE: He was supposed to be delivering it to Lady Muck up the road but said I could have it instead.

JOAN: I bet he did. Where are the plates?

BARBARA: Get it cut, get it eaten.

BEATTIE: Did we not put them out?

JOAN: I picked them up, where did they go?

BEATTIE: I can't find anything in this place

JOAN: You're worse than your Mam. They're behind you love.

BEATTIE: Where?

JOAN: There! There - to your left. No left!

BARBARA: If you don't hurry up love I'm just going to eat this with my fingers.

JOAN: Don't you get your grubby mits on her cake.

BARBARA: I can't help it, look at it, it's talking to me.

JOAN: Yes and it's saying wait until you've got a plate.

BEATTIE: How bigger bit d'you want?

BARBARA: Just cut the whole thing into three

JOAN: I'll just have a slither. Bit bigger. Bit

bigger. There we go.

BARBARA: That's not a slither, that's a slice.

BEATTIE: How big for you Barb?

BARBARA: I'll have a bit bigger than that. Bit bigger. Bit bigger.

JOAN: You can always have another slice.

BARBARA: I'll not get the flavour if it's too small.

JOAN: Do you want to put a slice away for Royston?

BEATTIE: It's not his thing.

BARBARA: I'll have his.

JOAN: You've not finished that slice yet. Are you sure he won't want just a taste?

BEATTIE: No he thinks cake's frivolous.

THE WOMEN TAKE A MOMENT TO SAVOUR  
THE FIRST SLICE OF CAKE.

JOAN: Ooo that's heaven on a plate. That's not frivolous, that's essential.

BEATTIE: You alright Barb?

BARBARA: (*Eyes closed*) Yeah. I just need a moment.

JOAN: Have you got any eggs I can take with us Beattie? George said rationing's down to one a week now. And you know what they say, if supply goes down,

BARBARA: Demand goes up

BEATTIE: And so does my price.

JOAN: George Burse'll be round here everyday.

BEATTIE: Yeah, he will. How many d'you want? A dozen or 24?

JOAN: Best give us a dozen and I'll come back if we get through those.

BARBARA: I gave half a dozen of mine to the vicar. You

might want to think about that too.

BEATTIE: What you give them to him for?

BARBARA: Half a dozen eggs and I'm that bit closer to God.

JOAN: You should have seen them down the hall the other week, after we had the raid. It were like Harvest Festival. I should imagine everyone in the village is that much closer to God.

BARBARA: Do you not think he liked the eggs?

JOAN: I should think he loved the eggs, and the cakes, pies, pastry, jams everyone's been taking him, that vicarage has got almost as much food as Beattie has.

BARBARA: We're in desperate times Joan, we've got to keep in with the man upstairs, just in case.

JOAN: If this war doesn't finish soon we're going to be rolling the vicar sideways into church. And he'll not be the only one.

BARBARA: Oh don't you start.

JOAN: You're the only one to put weight on during rationing.

BARBARA: You are cruel. (*Eats cake*) Why d'you think I'm a seamstress, it's so I can let all me clothes out. I reckon I've got another inch in this waistband then I'm going to have to start adding bits.

I'm having another slice, I'm not even asking.

BEATTIE: Do you want more Joan?

BARBARA: Get it finished up.

JOAN: I'll just have a slither. Bit bigger. Bit bigger. That'll do.

BARBARA: If this war goes on much longer we're going to be the size of barrels.

JOAN: Speak for yourself. I'd be quite happy if this war went on for another two years.

BARBARA: You're the only one in the village hoping for a telegram.

JOAN: Barb!

BARBARA: I did say any of that business again and I'm only across the road.

JOAN: A fat lot of use you'd be if I come over screaming and you're wedged in your front door.

BEATTIE: Can we get this cake finished, it'll only end up in Mother's handbag.

JOAN: Ah Beat. Still doing the daily check?

BEATTIE: She had a warm omelette in there the other day.

JOAN: One of yours?

BEATTIE: No.

BARBARA: It's difficult when they get to that age. My mother went completely round the twist.

BEATTIE: 'Round the twist' - how rude. She's just getting on. Tired. It'll be the war.

JOAN: Where'd she get a warm omelette from Beat?

BEATTIE: I don't know, same place as the half sandwich, false teeth and labels off tins. I found her up the other night eating marmalade out of the jar. Marmalade! Anything sweet needs to be nailed down in this place.

SILENCE AS THEY EAT THEIR CAKE.

JOAN: You'd best show us what you've got.

BARBARA: Ladies, I have got quite the selection.

BARBARA GETS A PILE OF LADIES' SLIPS  
OUT ON THE TABLE.

BEATTIE: Oh that's lovely. Lace. Is that rayon?

BARBARA: It's not rayon. Try again.

BEATTIE: It must be, very fine rayon.



BARBARA: It's silk.

JOAN: Silk! Give it here. When did the factory start doing silk?

BARBARA: Just this week. Why'd think we've got so many seconds. It's a right bugger to get the tension in the stitching right. Can you shift this lot or what?

JOAN: If the price is right I'll have no problem at all. Is this parachute silk?

BARBARA: Probably, don't know, didn't ask.

JOAN: Ay it's not bad quality is it. Why are these seconds?

BARBARA: They might not all be seconds. They might have been...liberated.

BEATTIE: Barb!

BARBARA: It's every woman for herself in that place.

JOAN: Look at the amount of lace on that.

BARBARA: That's bri-nylon jersey.

BEATTIE: I'm getting an electric shock off that.

BARBARA: Royston'd get a shock off it if he saw you in it.

BEATTIE: He'd get a shock if he saw the price. I've got to sell a heck load more veg before I can afford these, is this chiffon?

JOAN: With lace. The detailing in that. Are you sure it came from your factory?

BARBARA: I thought it a bit cheap looking.

JOAN: It's just the colour. That blue never looks nice in nylon.

BARBARA: Brenda'd go for it.

JOAN: I'll try her next time I see her over the fence. What are all these?

BARBARA: They're just your bog standard cotton.

JOAN: Plain, simple, poor cut, no style; they'll love them down flower arranging.

BARBARA: Do you reckon you'll shift them?

JOAN: Oh yeah love. I'm down the church tomorrow, I'll flog them then. If Brenda does take that one you'll need to let it out.

BARBARA: I'll not have enough material.

BEATTIE: Maybe sew two together?

BARBARA: Oh we are awful. We shouldn't be so rude.

JOAN: No we should not.

But if the factory do ever start an elasticated range they'll have a lot of customers in this village.

You got any bloomers? Always in demand.

BARBARA: There's cotton ones in the pile, extra large.

BEATTIE: For you?

BARBARA: Don't be cheeky.

JOAN: No they'd not be big enough. Right ladies I've got to go. Thomas is out in five minutes and it takes ten to get there.

BARBARA: It'll be nice when he's got his own key.

JOAN: Hopefully next year when he turns seven.

BEATTIE: Will you take the eggs?

JOAN: Yes love. Have you got any jam?

BEATTIE: I'm down to my last 157 jars. What'll you have?

JOAN: Just a jar of red'll do, don't want to take your best stock. Are you coming Barb?

BARBARA: Yes love. I've a nice evening of Huntley and Palmers and the wireless and I'll get through some of these alterations. Get them fixed and you can get them shifted.

JOAN: You'll not get through the alterations Barb, you never do.

BARBARA: You're right I won't love.

JOAN: What is that smell?

BEATTIE: That's the chicken for tonight. Can you give it a sniff, see if it's still alright.

JOAN: Have you not been keeping it outside in the meat safe?

BEATTIE: I did love but the cat peed on it so it's been in here past three days.

JOAN: Yeah that's just on the turn love. Give it a sniff Barb.

BARBARA: That's definitely on the turn love. I'd cook it in the next two or three days just to be careful.

JOAN: Let's get off love.

BARBARA: Bye love.

JOAN: Mind how you go love. Any problems with his lordship I'm only next door.

BARBARA: I'm only over the road love.

JOAN: Thanks for the eggs. Are you coming Barb?

BARBARA: I'm coming! Just another fingerful of cake.

JOAN: Barb!

JOAN AND BARBARA EXIT THROUGH THE BACKDOOR. THEY CAN STILL BE HEARD LAUGHING. BEATTIE POKES THE RAW CHICKEN, GIVES IT A SNIFF, POOH.

ACT [1]

SCENE [2]

BEATTIE IS PREPARING THE CHICKEN.  
ELIZABETH ENTERS FROM THE HALLWAY.  
SHE STUFFS ANYTHING SHE SEES INTO  
HER HANDBAG, MOSTLY TISSUES, SCRAPS  
OF PAPER AND BUTTONS.

BEATTIE: Mother what you doing?

ELIZABETH: Don't want the Hun getting these.

BEATTIE: What's the Hun going to do with my tissues?

ELIZABETH: He'll take anything he can get. Buttons! He'll sell the metal for scrap.

BEATTIE: Will you give it here, there's nowt metal worth scrapping in a button.

ELIZABETH: They'll melt them down for bombs!

BEATTIE: Can you just sit there. Down. Sit down. Stop picking stuff off the floor, you don't know where it's been. Hands Mother.

BEATTIE WIPES ELIZABETH'S HANDS DOWN  
WITH A DAMP CLOTH MUCH TO  
ELIZABETH'S DISGUST.

ROYSTON ENTERS WITH A BOX OF  
VEGETABLES. HE STARTS TO LAY THEM ON  
THE TABLE.

ELIZABETH: I'd best get upstairs.

BEATTIE: Stay here where I can keep an eye on yer. Just ignore him.

ROYSTON: Cheltenham Green Top, Webb's Wonderful,  
Beattie she's at it again.

BEATTIE: Mam will you take that lettuce out of your handbag.

ROYSTON: Bedfordshire Champion

BEATTIE: Joan said hers had sprouted. Are they still good?

ROYSTON: She can have these, I've got enough of the buggers. Scarlet Emperor and Little Marvel.

BEATTIE: Little Marvel - just like me!

ELIZABETH: "Little Marvel - just like her"

ROYSTON GIVES BEATTIE A SINGLE  
CHRYSANTHEMUM. BEATTIE GOES TO KISS  
HIM ON THE CHEEK BUT HE MOVES.  
ELIZABETH SEES AND SUCKS HER TEETH.

ROYSTON: They all laid today. The full dozen.

BEATTIE: Will you do the giblets? It needs the neck  
taking off and I'm not touching that.

ELIZABETH: I'll pluck and draw it.

BEATTIE: It's already plucked, Royston just needs to  
draw it.

ELIZABETH: I'll do it.

ROYSTON: I'll do it.

BEATTIE: Mother don't you dare start sticking your hand  
up that chicken

ROYSTON: It's dirty inside, get us a dishcloth.

ELIZABETH: I'll need a cleaver.

BEATTIE: You're not to touch it. Have you got the  
heart?

ROYSTON: I'm doing it.

BEATTIE: Is that knife sharp enough, it'll need a good  
yank to get it out.

ELIZABETH: Has he got the liver?

BEATTIE: Have you got the kidneys?

Mother will you sit down.

ELIZABETH: I told you I should have done it. A city lad  
hasn't got a clue.

BEATTIE: He's doing reet. Are you doing the neck?

ROYSTON: Do you want giblets or neck, I've only got one  
pair of hands.

BEATTIE: I'm just saying.

ROYSTON: This bird's off.

BEATTIE: It's not off, it's on the turn.

ELIZABETH: He can't even put his hand up a chicken.

ROYSTON: It's definitely off.

BEATTIE: It's on the turn! Cut the neck. Go on just chop it off. Give it bit of welly, it's gone a bit tough.

ROYSTON: Bird's off.

BEATTIE: I can cook it for a bit longer.

AIR-RAID SIREN.

BEATTIE: Oh for goodness' sake.

BEATTIE RUSHES TO PUT ROYSTON'S HELMET AND COAT ON HIM, HE OBJECTS TO THE FUSS. ROYSTON EXITS THROUGH THE BACKDOOR.

BEATTIE: Did you take yer torch? Ring us when you get to the station!

ELIZABETH: I'll chop its neck off.

GEORGE BURSE ENTERS THROUGH THE BACKDOOR.

GEORGE BURSE: Alright Mrs Snelgrove! Alright Lizzie. Tea on?

BEATTIE: You can't de-giblet a chicken can you?

GEORGE BURSE: Course I can. Look at that neck, give us that knife and I'll take that off for you.

*(Pause)* I saw Royston leave.

BEATTIE: Like the good little soldier.

GEORGE BURSE: I don't think it's going to be much of a raid. Fritz'll just be coming back from Birkenhead.

BEATTIE: Never mind Fritz what about my chicken?

GEORGE BURSE RIPS THE NECK OFF THE

## CHICKEN.

GEORGE BURSE: There we go Mrs Snelgrove.

BEATTIE: Thanks love. You'd think I'd asked Royston to stab a man the way he was going on. Do you reckon it smells off?

GEORGE BURSE: Just on the turn.

I've got something for you.

ELIZABETH: I bet he has.

BEATTIE: Mother!

You are very naughty George Burse.

GEORGE BURSE: It's been weighing my trousers down since Mrs Jones'.

BEATTIE: You didn't go to any trouble?

GEORGE BURSE: You mustn't tell anyone.

BEATTIE: You can trust me.

ELIZABETH: What about me?

GEORGE BURSE PULLS TWO SACKS OF SUGAR OUT OF HIS TROUSERS.

GEORGE BURSE: Two pounds.

BEATTIE: That'll do four pounds of jam!

ELIZABETH: You can do me a pie with that.

BEATTIE: I've got orders for jam. Are you not due another nap?

ELIZABETH: Oh I see how it is. I'm taking to my bed. Keep an eye out for Fritz out the window.

BEATTIE: Don't go moving the blackouts.

ELIZABETH EXITS OUT THE HALLWAY DOOR.

GEORGE BURSE TAKES HIS TEA AND STANDS BY THE BACKDOOR WINDOW.

GEORGE BURSE: Is everything alright Beat?

BEATTIE GOES TO TALK BUT:

GEORGE BURSE: There's a zebra in your backyard.

BEATTIE: Don't be a daft sod.

BEATTIE LOOKS OUT OF THE BACKDOOR  
WINDOW.

BEATTIE: I can't wait for Joan and Barbara to see this.

MRS BIGGERSTAFF ENTERS FROM THE  
BACKDOOR.

MRS B'STAFF: Alright Mrs Snelgrove. Mr Burse. Fritz is at  
it again. Tea on?

BEATTIE: You been to the zoo this morning?

MRS B'STAFF: The zoo?

GEORGE BURSE: It's not often we get exotic animals, is it  
Mrs Snelgrove?

MRS B'STAFF: What exotic animals?

GEORGE BURSE: That zebra you've got pulling your meat cart.

MRS B'STAFF: That's Ted. He's a horse. You know Ted's a  
horse.

GEORGE BURSE: He's a very stripy horse.

MRS B'STAFF: That's paint.

BEATTIE: Is that paint? Mr Burse did you know that was  
paint? I could have sworn it was a zebra.

MRS BIGGERSTAFF LOOKS OUT THE  
BACKDOOR.

MRS B'STAFF: What you talking about, it's definitely a  
horse.

There any tea or what?

BEATTIE: Course there is love.

MRS B'STAFF: I don't see what's so funny. If Ted gets  
knocked over during blackout I'd have no  
living.



GEORGE BURSE: No one's going to miss him with all those white stripes painted on him.

MRS B'STAFF: Everyone's doing it. Brenda asked me to paint her dog.

GEORGE BURSE: Maybe you could paint Brenda.

MRS B'STAFF: Why would I paint Brenda?

GEORGE BURSE: If she stumbles out of the pub during black out and gets hit by a car she could do untold damage to the car.

BEATTIE: Mrs Biggerstaff did you want a jar of the marmalade? I've got a jar left, Royston don't like it but I think it's worth a go.

MRS B'STAFF: I will do yes.

BEATTIE: I had terrible trouble getting the neck off that chicken.

MRS B'STAFF: You've got to whack it with a cleaver. Keep your mouth shut when you do it. The blood goes everywhere.

GEORGE BURSE: That's a mistake you'd only make once.

MRS B'STAFF: It did it a few times before I got the hang of it.

GEORGE BURSE: Right.

MR PORTER ENTERS THROUGH THE  
BACKDOOR.

MR PORTER: Alright Mrs Snelgrove. I'll not do your windows just yet, see what gets blown out. Fritz has been leaving you presents in the allotment. Tea on?

BEATTIE: They've not hit Royston's patch have they? I just did a deal on his tomatoes this morning, I can't have them blown up.

GEORGE BURSE: If he has I'll sell them as sauce for you Mrs Snelgrove.

MR PORTER: No the bombs are still ship-shape and Bristol fashion.

BEATTIE: Aww Royston'll deal with that love when he gets back.

MR PORTER: I can go Mrs Snelgrove, it's no bother.

GEORGE BURSE: I'll go for yer.

MR PORTER: Really I don't mind.

GEORGE BURSE: Consider it already done.

MR PORTER: Mrs Snelgrove I got you a little something.

BEATTIE: You didn't get me Craven A's did yer?

MR PORTER: Yeah. There's a bucketful of them outside.

GEORGE BURSE: Best make sure Ted don't eat them.

MRS B'STAFF: Don't be a daft bugger. Ted don't smoke.

GEORGE BURSE: He might have gone all Continental now he's started living his life as a zebra.

MRS B'STAFF: It's for blackout!

MR PORTER: Guess what else I got for you Mrs Snelgrove?

BEATTIE: Old Gold? Royston's favourite. Oh he'll be right pleased with that. Might put a bit of pep in his step.

GEORGE BURSE: I got you your Allenburgs, it's under the counter when you're ready.

BEATTIE: Anyone need a top up of tea?

MR PORTER: Is there cake? There's no pie is there?

BEATTIE: I'm sure I can find you a little bit of coconut ginger bread cake.

ALL-CLEAR SIREN GOES OFF.

BEATTIE: Royston!

MR PORTER: What about me cake?

BEATTIE: Never mind your cake, come again and I'll do you cake and a pie.

GEORGE BURSE, MRS BIGGERSTAFF AND MR PORTER EXIT AT SPEED THROUGH THE

BACKDOOR. BEATTIE TIDIES THE KITCHEN, ENSURING THE CHINA IS CAREFULLY LINED UP.

ROYSTON ENTERS THROUGH THE HALLWAY DOOR, CARRYING A SINGLE CHRYSANTHEMUM. TAKES OFF HIS HAT AND COAT.

BEATTIE: I've been worried sick love!

ROYSTON: I was perfectly fine.

BEATTIE: Was there any excitement?

ROYSTON: No.

BEATTIE: No bugger gave you trouble?

ROYSTON: Is that tea in the pot warm?

BEATTIE: I'll do you fresh. Where you going?

ROYSTON: We've had something land in the allotments. I'll ring the station.

BEATTIE: George Burse is sorting that out love.

ROYSTON: Burse?

BEATTIE: Yeah.

ROYSTON: That's official ARP duty. Why's the grocer doing it?

BEATTIE: He offered. Mr Porter offered n all but George said he'd do it on his way home.

ROYSTON: The window cleaner?

BEATTIE: It were ever so sweet of him to suggest it

ROYSTON: It's my job.

BEATTIE: I thought you'd be pleased love it's all in hand, you've nowt to worry about, I didn't know if you'd be in a state when you got back

ROYSTON: In a state?

BEATTIE: Tired.

Did you bring that chrysanthemum for me?

BEATTIE TAKES THE FLOWER OUT OF HIS HAND.

I'd best put it in water, eh.

Look at the head on that.

You have your tea love, I'll clear this lot, we don't want rats.

Do you want cake, I've got a lovely bit of coconut ginger bread left?

BEATTIE TURNS TO PUT THE PLATES IN THE SINK. ROYSTON EXITS OUT OF THE HALLWAY DOOR.

SHE TURNS, HE'S GONE.

BEATTIE GOES OVER TO ELIZABETH'S HANDBAG. PULLS OUT HALF A SANDWICH, HANDFULS OF TISSUES, SOME FALSE TEETH AND A LETTER. BEATTIE STARES AT IT FOR A MOMENT. SHOVES IT INTO HER APRON POCKET. STARTS TO ROBUSTLY WIPE DOWN THE COUNTER TOP.

SHE OPENS THE LETTER.

BILLY ENTERS AND SITS AT THE TABLE. BEATTIE SILENTLY READS THE LETTER.

BILLY:

I was surprised but pleased to receive your most welcomed letters, thank you dear. I shall always be pleased to receive any letters from you, but I can't promise to reply at once to every one, and there are times when we never get a chance to write for several days.

I'm in an empty house about two miles from the firing line. We're not safe here, the Germans know we're near to them, and they send shells over everyday. Three shells dropped about 50 yards from here. Then we was sitting down to dinner and two shells came through the roof.

Didn't kill anyone mind.

The Hun are only two miles away. I don't know

how the French round here stick it, they have their houses blown out and yet still they keep the shops open every day and they even put a picture palace on for us.

We came out of them last night looking like we'd been rolling in wet clay. It takes all our time just to keep clean. It rains here all the time, and the trenches are falling down. I don't think I've ever been so wet through.

But you know me Beat, we keep going. I must really close now. Hoping to hear from you soon,

BEATTIE:

Kindest regards Billy. 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1915.

BEATTIE TAKES THE KITCHEN APART.  
EVENTUALLY IN THE BACK OF A CUPBOARD  
SHE FINDS A TEA CADDY. IN THE CADDY  
ARE A PILE OF LETTERS.

ACT [1]

SCENE [3]

1910. ELIZABETH, 46, IS SAT AT THE TABLE SURROUNDED BY SILK, SHE IS ATTEMPTING TO STITCH A PAIR OF BLOOMERS. BEATTIE HAS TWO BOOKS AND CAN BARELY CONTAIN HER EXCITEMENT.

ELIZABETH: Beattie! Will you stop bouncing around, you're blocking the light.

BEATTIE: Mummy look at the book!

ELIZABETH: I've seen the book, will you stop messing.

BEATTIE: 'Red-Letter Saints' this one is, it's gold! Look at the gold on it Mummy, it's on all the pages. I bet it's worth a lot.

ELIZABETH: I've seen it, it's just a book.

BEATTIE: And 'Everyman's History of the English Church' look at the sticker - 'awarded to Beattie Marshall for question marks. 1910'.

ELIZABETH: Mr Glover's coming for his bloomers and if they're not finished I shall refer him to you-

BEATTIE: It's got pictures! On every page. Can you imagine. And adverts!

ELIZABETH: I don't think a book having adverts in it is anything to be proud of.

BEATTIE: 'Allenburgs Diet - an ideal peptonised food specially adapted to the need of both invalids and the robust'.

ELIZABETH: If these bloomers aren't finished neither of us are going to be robust.

BEATTIE: The Irish distressed ladies' fund - help for this work is earnestly solicited.

ELIZABETH: I am becoming a distressed lady

BEATTIE: The Church of England's Waifs and Strays Society

ELIZABETH: Beatrice-

BEATTIE: 'Your looks demand that you take care of your

hair - that you make it more beautiful, more lustrous, softer. Use Rowland's Macassar Oil - for YOUR hair'.

BEATTIE TURNS THE BOOK OVER.

BEATTIE: Fry's chocolate!

ELIZABETH: If you don't sit and eat your breakfast by the time I count to ten - one, two, three -

BEATTIE: Look at the time mummy! I'll be late for school.

MR GLOVER ENTERS THROUGH THE BACKDOOR.

ELIZABETH: four, five, six -

BEATTIE: Can I have my lunch to take?

ELIZABETH: seven, eight, nine -

MR GLOVER: Ten.

ELIZABETH: Mr Glover! Beattie go upstairs.

BEATTIE: Lunch?

ELIZABETH: No lunch, go upstairs.

MR GLOVER: A bad time?

ELIZABETH: Never a bad time for you Mr Glover.

MR GLOVER: Fry's chocolate, one of my favourites.

BEATTIE: Do you have a bar?

ELIZABETH: Don't ask such a thing.

BEATTIE: I won a book - two books for my writing at school. I wrote a story that was so good they gave me this book - see it's got gold in it - and then for my question marks I got this one.

ELIZABETH: Mr Glover won't want to see your silly books.

BEATTIE: I think you'll find he will.

MR GLOVER: He does.

BEATTIE: Told you so!

MR GLOVER: Very nice, gilt. Beautifully bound.

BEATTIE: Isn't it just.

ELIZABETH: (*Flirting*) You're not having it...

MR GLOVER: Oh Yes I am.

BEATTIE: Mummy tell him they're mine!

ELIZABETH: Beattie just go upstairs

BEATTIE: I'm already late for school.

ELIZABETH: Hush

BEATTIE: Mummy!

MR GLOVER: Let the child go to school.

BEATTIE: Give me my books Mr Glover and I'll be on my way.

ELIZABETH: No school today. Mr Glover, would you like a cup of tea?

BEATTIE: You said a day missed of school was a day missed of life.

ELIZABETH: There's more needs be done at home

BEATTIE: I have to go to school how will I become a writer and write books with gold on them?

ELIZABETH: No more to be said.

BILLY, 15, ENTERS THROUGH THE  
BACKDOOR.

BEATTIE: Mummy don't be so utterly hateful!

BILLY: 'Mummy don't be so utterly hateful!'

ELIZABETH: Beattie!

MR GLOVER: Billy!

BEATTIE: Give me back my books!

BILLY: Don't you treat my father like that

BEATTIE: He stole my books



MR GLOVER: You wanted me to look at them

BEATTIE: I didn't say you could keep them-

BILLY: Don't you call my father a thief-

MR GLOVER: Billy's in the family business now.

BILLY: I'm a businessman.

BEATTIE: I'm a writer.

BILLY: You're a girl.

BEATTIE: You can shut your face.

ELIZABETH: Beattie!

MR GLOVER: Well that's put you in your place hasn't it.

BILLY: Daddy she told me to shut my face!

MR GLOVER: Mrs Marshall, I'll come back later for the bloomers.

ELIZABETH: I am so sorry for Beattie's behaviour.

MR GLOVER: Billy.

ELIZABETH: Let me show you out Mr Glover.

ELIZABETH AND MR GLOVER EXIT THROUGH  
THE HALLWAY DOOR.

1941. BILLY SITS AT THE TABLE.  
BEATTIE FUSSES AROUND THE KITCHEN.  
BILLY STICKS HIS TONGUE OUT AT HER.

BEATTIE: Give us a moment to put some lippy on. I would have done it before if I'd known you were here. You're not supposed to put it on in front of boys. Mam said when she was younger she'd get up early to put her full face on before Dad were awake.

BILLY: I don't mind. I like watching you put it on. I'd get it all over my teeth.

BEATTIE: I wrote you four letters before you replied.

BILLY: I know dear, they all came at once.

BEATTIE: How'd they all come at once? I left nearly a month between each one.

BILLY: We were fighting a war Beattie, we weren't on holiday. I'm glad anything can get through at all.

BEATTIE: I didn't know if you wanted me to write. You just left.

BILLY: I wasn't sure if it was a good idea.

BEATTIE: I said I'd wait for you.

BILLY: I know you did love. It's a long time though isn't it. And what with you always with something on the boil.

BEATTIE: You were alright out there weren't you?

BILLY: I was fine.

BEATTIE: Do you forgive me?

BILLY: You've got to keep going haven't you.

BEATTIE: That's not what I asked.

BILLY: You've got to deal with what you've got haven't yer.

BEATTIE: Did I deal you what yer got?

BILLY: Our Beat you were always so direct. You've just got to keep going.

BEATTIE: I don't know I can.

BILLY: Don't be daft.

BEATTIE: Everyone's being a silly bugger.

BILLY: Beattie everyone was always a silly bugger to you.

BEATTIE: They're proper silly buggers now.

BILLY: I've got to go. I'll talk to you later.

That lipstick looks lovely on your Beat. Red was always your colour.

BEATTIE: Will you have some cake? There's plenty left.

BILLY STICKS HIS TONGUE OUT AGAIN,  
EXITS.

ROYSTON ENTERS THROUGH THE HALLWAY  
DOOR. BEATTIE WIPES THE LIPSTICK OFF  
AND MAKES A POT OF TEA.

BEATTIE: Just be a minute love.

ROYSTON: Why are there bloomers on the table?

BEATTIE: They're Barbara's.

ROYSTON: They're enormous. Even for her.

BEATTIE: Give 'em here.

BEATTIE WHISKS THEM OFF, LAYS THE  
TABLE AND TRIES TO GET ALL THE CHINA  
TO SIT NEATLY IN THE SQUARES OF THE  
TABLECLOTH. ROYSTON ADJUSTS THE TEA  
POT SO IT'S EXACTLY STRAIGHT.

ROYSTON: Why's Barbara leaving her bloomers on our  
table?

BEATTIE: She came round with some more stock for Joan  
to shift. She'd got some really nice full  
length silk slips.

ROYSTON: You didn't buy anything did you?

BEATTIE: I've never bought anything. When have I ever  
bought anything?

I've done you toast with jam. The raspberry.

ROYSTON: I wanted marmalade.

ROYSTON STANDS UP REALLY QUICKLY TO  
THE GET THE MARMALADE. BEATTIE LEAPS  
BACKWARDS.

BEATTIE: I'll do it for you love.

BEATTIE STARTS TO MAKE TOAST AGAIN.  
ROYSTON SITS BACK DOWN.

BEATTIE: They've started using silk at the factory. Can  
you imagine? They'll be able to flog that the

other side of town. You don't think they're going to stop doing the cotton do you? I'll be stuck if they do.

Barbara said they were having problems with the stitching. I suppose the tension's all wrong in't it when it so thin? When you do it by hand you can adjust for that. It'll be the machines. Do you reckon you can adjust the tensions on those big machines, they're not like the usual Singers are they?

ROYSTON: I don't like this marmalade.

BEATTIE: I know you don't, that's why I got you the jam. You had two spoonfuls before and you didn't like it then either. Do you want the jam? It's lovely.

ROYSTON: No.

BEATTIE: What do you want? Just toast?

ROYSTON HANDS HER THE PLATE OF REJECTED TOAST. BEATTIE STARTS TO MAKE A THIRD ROUND OF TOAST.

BEATTIE: Mam used to stitch bloomers by hand. I remember they used to either split down the back when you bent over or the elastic would go ping and you'd find them dropped round your ankles. Talk about dropping your drawers in public.

That's why Mr Glover stopped taking them from Mam. Mrs Glover's knicker elastic went ping when she was in the city. Said she felt them go but she managed to get her knees together in time to stop them from falling all the way.

She wondered whether to just let them drop to the floor and whip them off, or whether to try to keep them above sea level until she could get to safety.

ROYSTON: And?

BEATTIE: Kept her knees together and pigeon stepped all the way to Mr Glover's office.

Mind you, she were a cow, I bet she spent all

her time keeping her knees together.

A BRIEF SMILE BETWEEN THE TWO.

BEATTIE: I don't think Mam got anymore orders after that.

That were a shame, I liked Mr Glover.

ROYSTON NECKS BACK THE CUP OF TEA.  
BEATTIE GOES TO POUR HIM ANOTHER BUT  
HE'S ALREADY STOOD UP AND GOT HIS  
COAT ON.

BEATTIE: You not having the toast?

ROYSTON: Best get to work.

BEATTIE: You've not eaten. You can't go to work and not eat. You'll not be able to do the books if you're faint with hunger.

ROYSTON IS READY TO LEAVE. BEATTIE  
STANDS IN FRONT OF HIM, LEANS  
SLIGHTLY FORWARD. ROYSTON TAKES A  
MOMENT, THEN JUST WALKS PAST HER.

BEATTIE: I can do you something else? Do you want to take a piece of cake with you?

ROYSTON EXITS. BEATTIE LOOKS AT THE  
PLATE OF TOAST, FIDDLES WITH IT.  
GETS A JAR OF JAM AND LIBERALLY  
SMEARS IT OVER THE TOAST. EATS A BIT  
BUT HASN'T GOT THE APPETITE. SHE  
MOVES EVERYTHING ON THE TABLE SO  
IT'S ALL OUT OF ALIGNMENT. SHE TAKES  
OUT HER RED LIPSTICK AND APPLIES IT.

BEATTIE PUTS ON A GRAMOPHONE RECORD,  
BENNY GOODMAN'S 'SING SING SING'.  
SHE DOES A LITTLE SWAY AS SHE CLEANS  
AT THE SINK.

ELIZABETH ENTERS FROM THE HALLWAY,  
DELIGHTS IN THE MUSIC. DOES A ROUGH  
AROUND THE EDGES VERSION OF THE  
CHARLESTON. BEATTIE JOINS IN AND THE  
WOMEN SHARE A MOMENT OF JOY AS THEY  
DANCE AROUND THE KITCHEN. GEORGE  
BURSE ENTERS FROM THE BACKDOOR, SEES

THE WOMEN, AND JOINS IN WITH THE DANCING. HE CAN'T DANCE BUT IT'S JOYFUL NONETHELESS, UNTIL ELIZABETH STARES IN HORROR AT BEATTIE'S FACE.

ELIZABETH: Beatrice Marshall what's all that muck on your face?

BEATTIE: Mam it's lipstick.

GEORGE BURSE: I think she looks rather lovely Mrs Marshall.

ELIZABETH: She'll get a reputation. A house of ill repute. Look at the state of the place.

ELIZABETH GOES ALONG THE COUNTER ADJUSTING EVERYTHING.

ELIZABETH: Look at the state of your china.

BEATTIE: Mam don't start putting them away again.

ELIZABETH PUTS THE CHINA BACK IN THE CUPBOARD, TAKES OUT OTHER CHINA.

BEATTIE: That's the old stuff, don't get that out.

ELIZABETH: There's nothing wrong with this!

BEATTIE: That teapot's got no spout! You broke it on the tap.

ELIZABETH: You broke it. What about this one?

BEATTIE: That's a four cup Mother, you need a six cup.

ELIZABETH: You were always miserly with tea, two slurps and it was gone.

BEATTIE: Since when have I ever been miserly with tea

ELIZABETH: Charlie won't want one of the cups, get him the bigger one.

BEATTIE: Charlie?

GEORGE BURSE: Charlie's not coming Lizzie.

ELIZABETH: Don't start being miserly with tea when you've got a strapping boy. Did you make a cake?

BEATTIE: Charlie's not coming.

GEORGE BURSE: Lizzie, have a nice sit down and Beattie and I'll sort this out.

ELIZABETH: Where's the cake? (*Looks at George*) Are you here because it's a house of ill repute?

BEATTIE: That's George the grocer.

ELIZABETH STARES INTENTLY AT GEORGE.

ELIZABETH: He thinks he is but he's not. What you here for?

BEATTIE: For goodness' sake. (*Turns to George*) George, are you here because you've heard it's a house of ill repute?

GEORGE BURSE: That's absolutely why I am here. It's got a reputation for being the finest house of the most ill repute in the village.

ELIZABETH: This is all because you've got muck on your face!

GEORGE BURSE: Shall I take one of the rooms upstairs?

ELIZABETH: Oh dear god, Beattie I shall call the police!

BEATTIE: George you'd best go.

GEORGE BURSE: What about my ill repute?

BEATTIE: You can pick it up later.

GIGGLING, BEATTIE PUSHES GEORGE  
BURSE OUT THE BACK DOOR.

CURTAIN