

Listen!

A Comedy by Clive Read

Act I

The curtains open on a room in a house. It is not the main room but a room used as an office or spare room on the ground floor. A hum of conversation is heard from the adjoining room stage left. On the stage looking down on to a table stage right is Viv - a middle-aged quite attractive woman dressed all in white: white suite, white blouse, white shoes etc. She is reading a newspaper, on it is a cup and saucer she tries to look at the paper under and around the saucer and becomes agitated.

Viv Sod it! Sod it! Damn cup! *She looks up at the audience.* Fancy leaving a cup on a newspaper. *She peers around the cup again.* It's an article written about me you see. *Still looking down she suddenly smiles and looks up.* You're wondering why I don't move the cup - well I can't. You see I'm dead. That noise you hear next door in the living room is my funeral do. *The door opens stage left and Will - Viv's husband - enters with an armful of coats.*

Will *(Talking off left.)* I'll leave them in here. *He puts the coats down.* Get yourself a drink Pat – Jenny and Alec are in there somewhere. *A doorbell rings.* Oh that'll be Viv's mum and dad. *He exits.*

Viv That's my husband - Will. Bless him! How's he going to manage without me? I did everything for him. He seems to be bearing up well. Mind you - it must have happened that quick. I wonder if he had a tear at the Crematorium. I didn't go. Well I didn't think it was right - you know - haunting your own funeral. Hey I hadn't thought about that. I'm a ghost aren't I - I suppose? I'm haunting this room now. Oo-er. I don't feel at all spooky. *The door bursts open again and Betty enters with a coat and umbrella. She is an attractive woman in her 30's.*

Betty It's alright Will - I'll put them with the others then I'll give you a hand.

Will *Off.* Thanks Betty. *He pokes his head around the door.* You're managing really well Betty - keep it up.

Betty It's not easy.

Will I know - but if you can hold out for an hour or so it will be all over. *The doorbell goes again.*

Betty I'll go - you go back in there. *They exit.*

Viv That's my best friend - Bet. She lives next-door. Her husband left her a year ago - went off with a lady dentist *(laughs)*. Funny that isn't it? Mind you, he

was an odd cove - I'd need gas to let him shag me. Sorry about that - that was a bit crude I suppose. I'm not really like that. You see the trouble is you're really listening to my thoughts. Normally I would have thought what I just said but my mouth would have edited it to something like "I really don't fancy him" but I'm getting better at it all the time. *She looks down again at the newspaper.* You see, I don't know how it happened - you know - the end. By the date on the paper it was ten days ago. This is the coroner's report but this bloody cup - sorry - this cup is covering up the cause of death. I suppose I must have had a heart attack. I can't move anything you see or be seen or heard by anyone. It's a bit frustrating. *The door opens and Tad (Viv's younger sister) enters carrying more coats. She looks very distraught.* Oh - that's my baby sister. Don't cry Taddy. I wish she could hear me. I'm alright - I'm quite happy. Oh - she's trying to be so brave - I feel like having a good bawl myself. *Taddy gets herself together, dries her eyes and exits.* You find out who loves you on a day like this don't you? Me and Taddy have always got on well. We call her Taddy because when we were small we entered a fancy dress competition. I was a frog and she was a taddy - you know a tadpole - and it just stuck. *She looks at the heap of coats on the sofa.* That's my mum's coat that is. I bought it for her for Christmas. She must be here with my dad. When you're dead you know it makes you selfish. I hadn't thought of the effect that my dying would have on Taddy and my mum and dad.

Will *Entering with more coats.* We are grateful you could come Vicar. *He exits.*

Viv Vicar? What bloody Vicar? I had no time for that silly bug..... sorry.... person when I was alive and I could certainly put him right about the after-life now. It's nothing like he told me. I suppose you'd like to know what it's like. It's quite interesting really. You know you - you know the you behind your eyes - looking out on the world? Well two days ago that was all I was. No body - no nothing. It felt odd - just sort of floating. I was outside the funeral home. I knew straight away that I was inside it - you know - gone. I didn't go in and have a look at myself - not because it would upset me - I just wasn't interested really. I thought there might have been some angels, St. Peter or the Pearly Gates - or something. Not that I ever believed in it before but nothing happened. So I thought - that's it Viv - if you want something to happen you'll have to do it yourself. So I concentrated on having a body and there it was! I couldn't help trying a few different shapes just for fun. I tried tall and willowy with long, blonde hair for a while, but I felt uncomfortable so I settled for this old bod of mine. I took a few pounds off and I didn't bother about the varicose veins and stretch-marks and things - well there's only me to see. I soon found out no-one else could see or hear me and that I can't move or affect anything in the real world. That's why I can't move that sod..... er ... cup. So I thought I'd come here - and the next minute here I was! It's the only way to travel and bit like beam me up Scotty only a bit quicker. You would think I'd be a bit pis..... upset... that I was plucked off in the prime of life. Well - hardly the prime - but not a bit of it. I've never felt so calm and contented in my life - or death - if you see what I mean.

Odd isn't it? I chose this white cozzie because it seemed right somehow, but I can have whatever I like. I'm just so curious about what happened to me and I do feel somehow that it's important that I find out. *She moves back and looks at the paper.* Of course this paper would tell me if someone would move that cup! *The door opens and an elderly couple - Viv's mum and dad - enter.*

Dad Come on love, pull yourself together.

Mum Stop saying that! I don't want to pull myself together. I just want to go home.

Dad We can't go yet - what would people say?

Mum I don't care what they say! I don't believe it - so there! There's something wrong - I tell you there's something wrong.

Dad Don't start that again - you just upset yourself.

Mum Well do you believe she'd do it?

Dad The Coroner did.

Mum But do you?

Dad You never know what people might do when they get depressed love.

Mum She wasn't depressed! That's just him saying that. She wouldn't do it I tell you - it's all lies, I know it's all lies.

Viv What is? What's all lies?

Dad Look - here's the Coroner's Report in the paper. Just you read what he says.

Mum No I shan't - I'm not interested. He's wrong - they're all wrong!

Viv Oh Mum - please read it. READ THE REPORT MUM!

Mum Alright then - you read what he has to say.

Viv Hear! Do you think I got through to her?

Dad Now just sit down Mum and listen to this calmly then you can perhaps put your mind at rest.

Viv At last I shall know how I snuffed it.

Dad Vivian Tammy Goodman,*carrying on while Viv speaks...*wife of William Terence Goodman living at 27 Lilac Walk leaves mother, father and sister.....

Viv Tammy - oh my God - that's not fair! I kept that second name a secret all my life and they're bandying it about now I'm dead. Get on with it Dad! I know all that!

Mum Get on with it Dad! I know all that! Get to the Coroner's Report.

Viv Do you think she can hear me? No.

Dad *Continuing reading.....* After listening to the evidence from Mrs Goodman's husband and Mrs Blake, the next-door neighbour, on the depressed state of the deceased, her excessive drinking and dependence on sleeping pills, the Coroner said that he considered that Mrs Goodman drove to Herald's Wood, put a hose pipe into the exhaust and died of carbon monoxide poisoning while the state of her mind was unbalanced. The autopsy confirmed that Mrs Goodman had the equivalent of two bottles of red wine and ten sleeping pills in her stomach. A note had been left by the deceased.....

Mum I don't want to hear any more - I don't believe it. She wasn't the sort of person to take her own life.

Viv You tell him mum! That a load of old boll..... nonsense!

Dad What about the note? You have to admit ... *Viv interrupts ...*that is fairly conclusive evidence.

Viv Note? Note? What note? What bloody note? I'm sorry but you must see this would make an angel swear!

Mum I'd like to see that note.

Viv Me too!

Dad Now, now. You don't want to go into all that - it's morbid.

Mum She was my girl and I want to see everything.

Viv Quite right mum! I'd like to see it too. *Will enters.*

Will There you are. What are you doing in here? You're not reading that report in the paper again. You'll just upset yourself mum. *He goes to put his arm around her - she pulls away.*

Mum I'm not your mother - I've told you that before - so don't keep calling me it!

Dad Now mum - there's no need for all that - not today of all days. The family should stick together.

Will That's quite right dad. This should be a day of forgiveness and friendship. We should all remember Viv as she used to be - not as she became.

Viv What are you on about?

Mum I suppose you're right. I just can't believe she could take her own life. I never knew anyone with more life than our Viv.

Dad We've got to accept it mum - you can't argue with the note.

Mum I'd like to see that note.

Viv Yeah - me too!

Dad The police have got all the evidence love.

Will No - actually they haven't - they returned all Viv's effects this morning. *He goes to a cupboard and takes out a large plastic bag. Mum instantly takes it and starts rummaging through it.*

Mum Here's the note. Now we'll see won't we?

Dad Now don't go upsetting yourself again.

Mum *Reading the note.* Will, I've decided I cannot continue in this way, it is too painful, so I think it would be better for all concerned if I took the decision to end it. I know it's going to be difficult for the family, but they will get over it in time. So sorry, Viv.

Dad You see love. She must have been so unhappy.

Mum She wasn't! I tell you she wasn't! I'll never believe it. If you had a hundred letters I'd still never believe it.

Will But why won't you believe the evidence of your own eyes?

Mum Because it's not true that's why.

Viv That's right - it's ridiculous.

Mum It's ridiculous.

Viv I'm sure she can hear me. *Tad peers around the door.*

Tad Oh there you are. What are you doing in here?

Mum We're looking at Viv's things.

Tad Is this what she was wearing?

Will Yes - the police returned them this morning.

Tad Viv would never wear this with this - and trainers! It's just not her is it mum?

Mum She wouldn't be see dead in those!

Viv Oh dear mum - you've put your foot in it now.

Mum Well you know what I mean.

Will I can assure you that in the depressive state she was in she wouldn't have worried about colour co-ordination.

Tad I can't believe she'd spend the day dressed like a clown.

Mum Me neither. She may have been upset but that doesn't mean she'd lost all sense of taste.

Tad Is this all of it?

Will Yes - the police returned everything she was wearing.

Tad But there's no bra.

Will What?

Mum You heard what she said - there's no bra.

Dad Well - perhaps she didn't wear one that day.

Mum Don't you be so stupid! Of course she did - she'd put it on as soon as she got up.

Tad That's right! I've never known her not wear one - ever!

Dad I can't see what you're getting at.

Mum There's something wrong - that's what we're getting at.

Will Look - the police have thoroughly investigated Viv's death and they're quite satisfied that she committed suicide so I think it's time that we all accepted this sad but true explanation and get on with the rest of our lives the best we can.

Mum Never!

Viv You tell the sanctimonious git! I've never heard such a load of lying, old claptrap in my life!

Dad You're just going to get yourself all worked up mum. I'm surprised at you Taddy, getting your mother all excited - there's just no point to it.

Tad She was my sister and this is all wrong - I agree with mum - things are just not right.

Will Look everybody I think we should just calm down and join the others.

Dad Yes - come on now - people will think we're being funny.

Mum Alright - but I won't let it rest. I'm going to find out the truth.

Dad Now just calm down - you'll make yourself ill. *(They exit)*

Viv *(She sits in a chair)* I just can't work it all out. I wouldn't wear these - and as for that so-called suicide note I know where that came from. Let us try and work out what happened in a logical and organised way. Now, it says in the paper I died a week ago last Saturday. Saturday? What was I doing Saturday? Oh yes - I remember! The red wine! Now I have a drinking problem. I suppose you would call me an occasional drunk, once or twice a month I drink too much. Last Saturday was such an occasion. Will was going out to a darts match or something with his mates, I had a nice hot bath, put on a big towelling robe, settled down on the sofa in front of the fire with a bottle of wine - well two actually - and settled down to watch a film on telly. That's the last I remember. That's not unusual really, I would have woken up the next day with a bit of a headache and that would be that. Now I must admit I haven't been at my happiest lately but I don't know why. Will has been a bit distant lately and I've been feeling a bit spare - you know. But certainly the thought of topping myself had never crossed my mind. *(The door opens Will and Betty enter conspiratorily and close the door behind them).*

Betty What did the old cow say?

Will She said she isn't satisfied and is going to the police.

Betty They won't take any notice of her will they?

Will I shouldn't think so.

Betty I thought it was all over when the autopsy and coroner's report said suicide.

Will We shall just have to ride it all out for a few months until it all calms down.

Betty She'll never calm down - or that sister - I'm frightened Will. I thought it was all over.

Will It's just talk. Don't worry it will all blow over. Come on - we'd better get back. *(He kisses her and they exit).*

Viv Well now that explains a lot! I feel such a pratt! It's terrible that you've got to die to find out that your best friend hates you and your husband's having it off with her and most of all the bugger murdered me! I'll get them for it somehow. But how? Let's work out how they did it. Now I remember that Will opened the first bottle of wine. I bet he put the sleeping pills in it. Oooh! Can you believe it? You think you know people don't you? When I think of how I fussed over that monster I feel so helpless. Oooh! I..... No! Calm down. Let's continue. I drank the first bottle of wine pretty quickly I recall and started on the second. I felt very sleepy but the telly normally has that effect on me. I fell fast asleep, well unconscious I suppose, then that evil git came in and dressed me, no woman would have put that odd collection of clothes on me. Both of them took me down to Herald Wood, fixed the hosepipe, left the note and waited for someone to find me. Now - that note - I did write it..... *(Mum enters and starts to go through the bag of evidence)* Oh - look at her - it's tearing her to bits and she doesn't know why. *(Mum picks up the note)*. Ah! Yes - the note that my stupid dad thought was concrete proof. I wrote that - it must be - oh six or seven years ago. Will was having a fling with some girl at his work and wouldn't stop it. Our marriage was far from perfect but I wasn't standing for that! I went and stayed with my friend for a couple of days. I didn't want to worry my mum or my sister. Anyway I decided enough was enough and I was going to end the marriage - not my life! I sent it to that swine who came round wheedling and creeping that he would never do it again, how I was the best wife a man could have - you know the drill. Well - stupid me - I forgave him. As far as I knew he was on the level until just recently when I suspected something was wrong. But I had no idea it was that evil bitch next door!

Mum *(Reading note)* It's her writing *(sniff sniff)*

Viv I know it is mum but it's years old - me and Jill composed it.

Mum Why did she do it?

Viv *(Going up close)* I didn't mum - don't believe that rotten bastard!

Mum I suppose it must be true.

Viv Mum. No. LISTEN TO ME. I DIDN'T DO IT. THAT ROTTEN BASTARD MURDERED ME.

Mum I can't bear the thought of her so sad and alone in the woods - in such despair to do that to herself.

Viv MUM! THAT BASTARD KILLED ME.

Mum I'm sure I would have known if she'd been so unhappy - I'm her mother.

Viv IT WAS THAT BASTARD WILL.

Mum *(Throwing down the letter)* It's a lie - I don't believe that bastard Will.

Viv Hooray! Good old Mum! I got through to her, yes I have. She's never said "bastard" in her life. Mind you, it's hard work. *(Mum starts to leave)*. Don't go Mum - I want you to help me. *(Mum exits)* Oh well. I'll try her again later. Now - what mistakes have they made? No bra, non-matching clothes, hardly conclusive of their own are they? The note. Only me and Will ever saw it. He must have kept it. What for? Not for this surely. Oh no! I can't think about that. I suppose he showed it to that bitch. How can I prove it's years old? *(She goes over and looks at it)* Jill! Jill! She helped me to write it. Knickers! She moved to Bristol. I don't suppose she even knows I'm dead. If she knew she would have come to the funeral. She'd remember that note. I'll beam off to Bristol. I don't know where she lives in Bristol. She's in that telephone book. Aagh! I can't look it up and even if I did she wouldn't hear me. Mum and my sister - they're my only hope. I must get them to contact Jill. *(Will, Betty and Dad enter)*.

Will Look Jim, you know what with Viv's insurance and the mortgage being paid I'm very comfortable now. Mum is overwrought - quite right too - she was so close to Viv. It's all come as a terrible shock. What I thought was why don't you let me pay for you and mum to go to Orlando for a month. Viv would have wanted it. If she stays around here she'll just mope and be unhappy - now what do you say?

Dad Well, I don't know - you know what she's like.

Betty I think that's a wonderful idea Mr. Baker. She looks like she could be heading for a nervous breakdown.

Dad Do you think so.

Betty I certainly do and in my job Mr. Baker I've seen an awful lot of this kind of thing.

Will Would you say that her behaviour this morning was rational - be honest Jim.

Dad Well she's entitled to her opinion.

Will Is she Jim - is she? The whole of the police force and the coroner's staff having looked thoroughly into Viv's death have come up with the only possible verdict - suicide.

Dad But there are some odd things you know.

Will What? She wasn't wearing a bra and her clothes didn't match?

Dad Well mum thinks it's a bit odd.

Will Well it is - of course it is - she wasn't acting rationally. I loved Viv but I have to say this past few months she was almost impossible to live with. But she's gone now - poor, tortured soul. We now have to look after the living and I'm very worried about mum and I'm sure you must be. Go on – be honest - you are aren't you?

Dad Well since Viv's accident she has been acting most strangely.

Betty Well there you are!

Dad Do you know what she told me just now? It's stupid really but she says she can feel Viv's presence in this very room.

Will Well what did I say? Is that rational?

Viv Good old mum! I knew I was getting through to her.

Dad I think I'll try and persuade her - for her own good.

Will That's right. I'd feel really guilty if I didn't do something to help Jim - you know that.

Viv You ought to feel guilty - you toe rag! I'll get you if it's the last thing I do.

Dad I'll have a word with her - I'm sure I can persuade her. It's very good of you Will and I do appreciate it.

Will It's the least I can do - the sooner the better I think Jim - she's becoming obsessed. She should get right away from it for a few weeks.

Betty Did Mrs Baker say that she felt Viv in this room?

Will She was overwrought Betty. The sooner she gets away for a good holiday the better.