

[The play is about attending a performance in a small town professional theatre. Three of the cast start by sitting amongst the real 'audience' and move around the auditorium as if the existing audience were not there.]

It's 1986. The curtains are drawn. A lady with thick glasses and straggly hair appears through them to address the audience. Her whole appearance is unkept and untidy]

NELL Everybody, everybody. Good evening. Thank you, thank you everybody, thank you everybody for coming. Thank you. *[starts clapping, cast in audience join in]*. Thank you. Thank you.

[long pause as she looks round audience, she makes a nervous laugh]

NELL It's just, it's just, it's very cold outside. You'll need to all wrap up warm, *[eagerly]* yes, yes, hats and scarves and gloves on. Minus 40 outside, very, very cold.

[She turns to go. A man in his early 60s stand up in the audience. He's wearing glasses.]

GEORGE Heh lady, not so fast, what's going on?

NELL *(nervous laugh)* Well, you, you have to go home now.

GEORGE Why?

NELL The play. *[pause, quietly]* There's, there's, there's no play.

GEORGE But I paid you £10 quid to come and see One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, I want me ...

NELL Yes, yes, yes, but, but, but, not One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, not one, two, Two Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, that's better, that's better.

GEORGE *[aside]* You're one short of a cuckoo's nest if you ask me!

[A young woman approaches the stage dressed a little like Madonna singing 'Get into the Groove']

PENNY *[aside to George]* Don't speak to her like that. She can't help it.

GEORGE *[quietly back to Penny]* Well she took me money, she must have known there was no show! I'm not going till I get it back.

[He sits down defiantly on stage. A young man with a New Wave hair do and sharp suit also approaches the stage.]

MIKE Good idea.

[Penny goes and puts her arm round him and he kisses her, it turns into quite a long smooch.]

NELL I'm sorry, you, you , you can't. It's for charity.

GEORGE What do you mean, it's for charity?

NELL It's in the programme.

GEORGE *[He gets up turning the pages of his programme]* Where? Where does it say it's for charity lady? I can't see no charity in here!

[Mike and Penny disengage and start to look curiously through their programme too].

NELL Oh dear *[she wipes the back of her neck with her hand]* oh dear. *[She starts to clap again at the audience]* Thank you, everyone, thank you for coming. It's cold, you have to go, wrap up warm, yes, yes, yes, hats and gloves and scarves on. Minus 40 outside, very, very cold.

GEORGE *[shouting in her ear]* Where? Where does it say it's for blooming charity?!

NELL Little , little, little Dunkesbury's Appeal Fund, Refugees.

MIKE *(Walking onto the stage)* Little Dunkesbury's what?

NELL Page seven.

[George looks up page seven]

MIKE Now, I don't know what your game is lady but we're not all as dim as blind Jack over there.

GEORGE *(Marching towards Mike)* Don't you start mate, I'm not blind, bit short-sighted maybe, but definitely not blind, nor am I two pence short of a farthing. But what I am, if you must know, is an expert at Tai Chi, so I'd respectfully remind you to mind your own business!

NELL *[distressed]* Mustn't shout at people, no, not nice. No, not nice. *[pause]* You must go now. Wrap up warm, yes, yes, hats and gloves and ...

GEORGE *[Holding his scarf out as if he'd like to throttle her with it]* Scarves on, yes I know!

[He moves away, but gives Mike a pointed look as he does, unnoticed by the women.]

PENNY Excuse me, what's your name?

[Nell gives a beaming smile]

PENNY [*gently*] I'm Penny, Penny Webster, and this [*takes Mike's arm*] is my husband Mike. What's your name?

[There is a long pause]

NELL [*smiling*] Nell, Nell Bostock.

[Mike moves over to join George. They huddle together, unnoticed by the women]

PENNY Look, Nell, is it alright to call you that? I know you're only trying to do what you've been told to do as politely as possible.

[She pauses, no reaction from Nell. She looks carefully at her]

MIKE [*to George, looking round at Nell, hushed tone*] You mean the old biddy?

PENNY It was you, wasn't it? Who took our money as we came in?

MIKE [*shocked*] You mean tonight? Now?

[The men go into even more discussion. George is definitely in charge, Mike nods occasionally, very serious]

PENNY To see One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest? Do you remember?
And ...

NELL Yes, yes, yes, but, but, but, not One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, not one, two, Two Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, that's better, that's better

MIKE Yes, alright. [*nodding*] You are right. We'll do that.

PENNY OK. [*deep breath, very patiently*] Could you get the Manager for me please Nell?

[She looks round for Mike. The men approach the stage brandishing their programmes]

GEORGE I still can't see it mentioned in this programme, not even on blooming page seven!

MIKE I'm sure this Refugee Appeal thingy isn't a recognised, registered charity. In which case, you have no right at all not to refund us our £20!

NELL Refugees are, a big, big, big problem in Little Dunkesbury.

MIKE Why? Are they from Chernobyl?

GEORGE [*irate*] Look! Is this page seven?

NELL [*Gently, pointing at the bottom of the page, as if explaining to someone who can't read*] Sev-en.

GEORGE I know! Gordon Bennett!

PENNY [*Hurriedly to prevent things getting nasty*] Let me have a look.

MIKE [*Sitting on the stage, legs dangling*] Well, one thing's for sure, I'm not moving until Pen and me get our twenty quid!

PENNY [*defeated*] You're right, it's not on page seven at all. In fact, it's nowhere at all.

NELL [*beginning to get upset*] Little, Little Dunkesbury's church is there!

GEORGE What's that got to do with it?

NELL Every, everyone knows it, like, like, like, American Express!

GEORGE You're off your rocker you are. (*He sits on the stage so Mike is on his left*)

NELL [*very inward, head on side, rocking from one foot to the other, distressed*] Mustn't call, call people that. Not nice. No. Mustn't say words like that... No. No.

PENNY You're right. [*she looks pointedly at George. Nell keeps on rocking*]

GEORGE [*reluctantly*] Sorry.

PENNY Let's get back to the point here. [*touches Nell's arm gently. Nell looks up at her, stops rocking*] Could we see the Manager please Nell? I'm sure he - or she - could sort this mess out for us.

NELL I'll, I'll try.

PENNY Thank you. That's very kind of you.

[*Nell exits*]

PENNY [*watching her leave and sitting left next to Mike*] I'm not sure it's very fair on her to put her in that position. I shall be having words with the Manager when he gets here. [*She looks out at the auditorium*]

Heh! Where have the others gone? You'd have thought they'd have waited as well.

MIKE *(Puts arm round her)* Their loss and I thought you were brilliant with the old girl.

[He kisses her again. They have trouble keeping their hands off each other]

GEORGE Me too!

PENNY *(Coming up for air)* Thanks.

(Pause. Penny shivers)

MIKE Come on love, snuggle up to me, you know I'll keep you warm.

[They begin to giggle together. George starts to inch his way nearer to Mike]

MIKE *[horrified]* Heh! What do you think you're doing! Damned pervert! Don't come near me!

GEORGE *[pathetic, whining]* It's cold, me arthritis is playing up.

MIKE Well walk around then and keep warm. Anything, just keep away from me!

PENNY Oh darling, you can see he's in pain. You can sit next to me, Mr ...

GEORGE Bennett. George Bennett. Thank you love, anyone could tell that you've heart *(he moves round to sit next to her. Rather too closely)*

[Pause, they all look a bit uncomfortable. Finally Penny jumps off stage quickly so that Mike and George fall against each other. They push each other away and glare at one another].

PENNY *[turning round, concerned]* Do you think she's alright? Maybe I should have gone with her.

MIKE I'll go and look for the Manager myself, speed things up bit, *[grabs her by the waist]* then we can go home.

PENNY That sounds nice. *(She gives him a kiss, looks at George)* Excuse us, we haven't been married long. *(To Mike)* Be quick darling, it's a bit eerie in here on our own.

MIKE I'll talk to you if you like, you'll be able to hear me.

[At that moment the front door bangs shut. They all start.]

PENNY Nell? Is that you?

MIKE Nell Bostock, my foot, there's something strange going on around here and I'm going to find out what it is! *(To George)* You! Look after my wife! *(Runs to front door)*

PENNY *(Half following him)* Be careful!

MIKE *(Running back)* No-one there. *(Climbs on stage)* I'm going to look round the back here.

PENNY Are you sure you should go through there?

[He exits through the curtains. Penny approaches George.]

PENNY Mike! *(Pause. She goes to look through the curtains just as his head appears)* Oh, don't do that to me, you made me jump!

MIKE Sorry love, but there's something damned funny back there, come with me.

GEORGE *[pathetically]* You're going to leave me here, alone? by meself?

(He gets out a torch and starts to shine it out at the audience, then paces along the curtain. It opens with him. As he turns back, Mike appears behind him. He jumps.)

GEORGE *[angrily]* Heh! You've got a thing about springing out on innocent, unsuspecting people! I've a dodgy ticker, I have, and it does it no good at all to have all this Agatha Christie stuff!

MIKE Sorry but there's no time for hysterics. Give me your torch, will you? I want to show you something.

GEORGE *[offended]* Well really! *(hands over torch)*
[Penny enters stage left where she had been opening the curtains as Mike shines the torch all around the stage.

There are a couple of painted flats resembling a hospital stage right with some chairs placed in a semi-circle shape in front of them. Stage left is a table covered by a dust sheet. There is a drill lying on top of it]

PENNY *(Whispers)* Ssh! Look at what's Mike's showing you!

GEORGE But I can't see anything! Give me me torch! *(Mike does so)*

PENNY It's not your eyesight. There is nothing to see, that's just it. Don't you get it?

GEORGE No, I'm sorry, I'm not into all this jiggery pokery!

[The torch begins to flicker. Then blackout. George moves to front door unnoticed by Penny but seen by the audience]

PENNY Mike? Where are you?

MIKE Hang on love (*moves to wings*) I think there's a switch somewhere. Ah! This one, I think.

[He turns on a spotlight which shines brightly onto Penny so she has to shade her eyes. She therefore doesn't see George creep back]

PENNY Not that one darling, I can't see a thing.

MIKE Yeah, OK. Let's try this one.

[The auditorium lights come back on dimly]

GEORGE [*sarcastically*] When you've quite finished playing 'is there an electrician in the house', perhaps you'd show me what you want me to see?

MIKE (*Walking round the stage, pointing at everything, thoroughly fed up*) No proper scenery, tools left lying around, no stage crew, no tea lady even!

GEORGE Well that Bostock woman said they might have all gone!

MIKE (*To Penny*) Did I call him dim earlier? (*She shrugs*) Boy oh boy.

PENNY Mr Bennett, what Mike's saying is that there's little evidence here to suggest that they were even going to put a play on.

GEORGE (*Getting down from the stage surprisingly lightly*) Well, in that case, I'm going.

PENNY You're leaving? But you were so adamant about a refund.

GEORGE (*Halfway up the auditorium*) Still am, I'm going to get the police. There's something crooked going on in my opinion and I'm going to get to the bottom of it if it's the last thing I do.

PENNY No. Just because Nell's not like you or me, doesn't mean

MIKE [*seriously*] No he's right Pen. I'm sure there's someone else here. I feel like we're being watched.

PENNY Watched?

MIKE *[Suddenly]* Yes, think we'd best go. Now. *[He puts his arm round her and starts to bundle her off towards the exit. They start as George appears before them]* You! Why haven't you gone?

GEORGE The door's locked.

MIKE What do you mean the door's locked. It was fine a minute ago. *[Rushes to it and tries hard to open it]*

PENNY Locked? *[pause, then calls out]* Nell? Nell love? Have you got the key?

GEORGE We're prisoners.

PENNY Nell? Don't lock us in.

MIKE *[running back to the stage]* No way out that way.
[He starts trying the windows]

PENNY Nell? Bring the key back – please.

GEORGE We are prisoners.

PENNY *[reassuringly]* No. I'm sure it'll be alright. *[to Mike]* Any luck?

MIKE I'll try out the back.
[he goes on stage]

GEORGE *(sitting on stage)* I was a prisoner in the war, you know.

PENNY *[not really interested at the moment]* I'm sorry.

GEORGE *[monotone voice, staring blankly as if blinded]* God it all comes back, not that it really goes away. The smell was the worst thing, and always feeling hungry, even with that smell. People are too fussy these days especially the kids. They never know what hunger is ...

MIKE *[Centre stage]* Oh shut up, I'm trying to think.

GEORGE *[Continuing as if he'd never heard him]* .. Macdonalds this, French fries that, tomato sauce heaped on everything, like blood really, not a lot of difference ..

PENNY Mr Bennett, George. Please stop, you're beginning to scare me now.

GEORGE .. Tomato sauce, smell of urine, vomiting tomato sauce and ..

MIKE [*Over the top of George's words*] Snap out of it, God damn you, snap out of it! [*To Penny*] He's in some sort of state. You talk to him love, you might reach him.

GEORGE .. the guards, oh the guards making you eat, filth, and tomato sauce and the smell of urine and no sleep and bright lights and torture, torture, toenails dripping like tomato sauce ... all I could see was a round, glutinous pool of scarlet on the tiled floor..

PENNY George. You're safe now. [*Over the top to Mike*] I don't think he can hear me. [*desperately*] I'm no good at this!

MIKE And he thought the old biddy was nuts.

GEORGE .. Macdonalds, burgers, chips, and tomato sauce, kids smothered in tomato sauce, like blood. Couldn't stop it. Couldn't get out. Couldn't walk. Vomit. Lots of vomit like Macdonalds ice cream..
[Mike exits backstage unnoticed]

PENNY (*Beginning to breathe heavily, reaches inside her bag for an inhaler, takes a puff*) George? We'll get you a doctor, somehow. Mike?
[Notices he's not there, scared] Mike! Don't leave me with him!

[She runs off upstage. Nell enters from the wings]

NELL [*very concerned, trying to be helpful*] Are you poorly? You, you should go to the doctors. I, I, I know what to do, it was on Casualty. Did, did, did you watch Casualty? The, the man, the man, he needed an injection. [*Demonstrates jab on her arm*] Sharp, sharp, needle [*picks up the drill off the table*] like this.

[Beaming, Nell starts humming the theme to Casualty and approaches George].

NELL [*Bending down*] Are, are you poorly? This, this, will make you better. Like, like, like Casualty.

GEORGE [*Suddenly grabbing the drill, menacing.*] That's right dear, Casualty. Now go home before you become one!

[There is clearly nothing wrong with him. Nell laughs excessively. She is very frightened. Mike appears in the wings holding a length of rope in his hand that he drops pointedly on the floor. Nell turns round, stops laughing very suddenly]

NELL Is, is, he better? He, he, he needs to go to the doctors. [*saying this reassures her*] You must go now, wrap up warm, yes, yes, minus 40 outside, very cold, need hats and gloves and ...

MIKE We're locked in and I want some answers from you. What's this game you're playing?

[Penny enters]

NELL Game? I, I, I like quizzes. Yes, yes, very good at quizzes. [*she laughs through fear again*]

MIKE Why you! [*He goes to hit her*]

PENNY [*Breathing with difficulty*] No, Mike!

MIKE (*looking at her*) Not even once!

[Nell exits unnoticed]

PENNY No! [*deep breath*] Where's she gone?

MIKE Never mind. We're getting out of here right now.

PENNY [*breathing hard*] What, about him?

MIKE Don't worry about him.

PENNY But we shouldn't leave them behind!

MIKE I don't see why not, they deserve each other. [*puts his arm round her*] I'm more worried about you, is it your asthma?

PENNY Must be the dust, it's an old, building.

MIKE Where's your inhaler? In the bag?

[He takes out her inhaler and she uses it gratefully, he drops it next to the bag by George]

MIKE Now *come on!*

PENNY But how?

MIKE I think there's a window I can break out the back.

PENNY But she's ..

MIKE Don't worry about her Penny, I can deal with her and we're wasting time

[They exit. George waits a moment and then quickly picks up the inhaler. He takes out the cannister and swops it with one from his pocket. Then he places it back where it was. He then hears footsteps so resumes his still pose]

MIKE *[anxiously, he doesn't want her to see what George is up to; audience think he's concerned she's over-doing it] Penny!*

PENNY I forgot my bag.

[Takes another puff of her inhaler. Then she takes off her coat and puts it round George]

MIKE Now what are you doing?

PENNY *[genuinely concerned]* I don't like to, leave him here, he'll die of hypo, thermia, or something.

MIKE *[Dragging her away]* We'll call the ambulance at the same time as the police. *[urgently]* Now let's get out of here! *(they exit upstage)*

[George waits until they have gone, then stands up quickly. He calmly fetches one of the chairs and stuffs its cushion inside Penny's coat, fixing his hat on top. He places the 'body' on the chair and switches on the spotlight, moving the chair into the glow.

He picks up the rope Mike left and loops it around a beam in the ceiling and ties it round the body.

He puts the chair back and switches off the spotlight, then hauls the body up out of sight. Taking the other end of the rope, he hides himself in the wings as he hears their voices.

Mike enters with his arm around Penny. She is holding tightly on to him.]

MIKE *[pulling up a chair to centre stage]* Come and sit down darling. You'll feel better.

PENNY *[sitting down, real difficulty breathing]* I'm not, feeling, so good, sorry.

MIKE What for?

PENNY Not sure I'll be, up to, much, later, after all. *[she half laughs/cries]*

MIKE Another attack? *(she nods)* Deep breaths, 1,2,3, 1,2,3,

PENNY *(breathing with him)* 1,2,3

MIKE Here's your inhaler.

[Penny uses it. Then starts.]

PENNY *[breathing hard]* Where's, George? He must, have got out.

MIKE I doubt it.

PENNY *[With difficulty]* Why?

MIKE I suspect he and the old biddy may be ..

PENNY What?

MIKE Well to be crude, nutters

PENNY *[despairingly]* You think, we're at, risk?

MIKE Maybe.