

Act 1

It's the 1st of December 1944. The government has said that the Home Guard are to be stood down on the 3rd of December. Their uniforms and arms returned. We go to the hall in Upper Catchpole where the Home Guard is going on parade one last time to prepare a Christmas celebration for the town.

Door stage left. Table with two chairs stage right.

Opens to an empty stage.

Sarah *(Off)* You know Margie, I think you must be the luckiest girl in the whole world.

Margie *(Off)* What makes you say that Sarah?

(Sound of door opening and closing. Enter Margie and Sarah.)

Sarah Well! You're going to have all your family there with you this Christmas, aren't you.

Margie Yes! Daddy did say that he was coming up from London for the holidays, but I still don't see why that should make me lucky.

Sarah I only have my dad and mum, and she's in bed all the time. Neville is somewhere in the south Atlantic and Trevor is in France.

Margie *(Putting her arm round Sarah, sisterly)* This war can't go on forever you know and they'll be home again with you.

Sarah I know! It's just that I miss them so much. The other thing is that you have your Roger.

Margie What do you mean? I have my Roger?

Sarah Well you are engaged to him aren't you?

Margie Oh that!! Look Sarah, one day someone will sweep you off your feet just as Roger did to me. Even though he was in a hospital bed at the time.

Sarah No! I'll end up an old maid, just like Mrs Warburton, and as nutty as a fruit cake to boot.

Margie Mrs Warburton was married once you know. Come on Sarah everything is going to be just fine this Christmas; I can feel it, can't you? There seems to be a change in the air as though the world is fed up of all this killing and war. It had better be anyway because Roger and I

are getting married in September so it had better be all over, and I want you to be my bridesmaid, so cheer up Sarah.

Sarah I know you're right Margie, it's just that when I see other people walking hand in hand in the park I get sort of lonely. Anyway I thought that we'd finished with all this Margie.

Margie So did I. I wonder what the captain wants us for.

Sarah You don't suppose the military base could be opening again. Could it?

Margie No! Daddy would have mentioned it last time he was home if it was.

Sarah Well, we were stood down in September. I wonder if we're being stood up again.
(*Sound of door. Enter Reg, Pat, and Bill.*)

Reg So we're not the first! Good.

Margie No! We've not been here long though. What's it all about sir?

Reg When everyone's here Margie. I don't really want to go through this more than once.

Sarah Hello Pat. How's your Stuart?

Pat He's fine. He was up on leave a month ago and did mention that he could be sent out to India.

Bill Now then girl! Careless talk and all that.

Pat Sorry dad. How's your Trevor, Sarah?

Sarah He said in his last letter that he was worried sick that they might be sending him out to India in the New Year.

Bill You shouldn't be talking about these things you know. But if I know your Trevor he'll be just fine. The thought of him coming'll send the Japs running home, then he, they'll all be back for Christmas.

Margie We've been saying that for the last five years Mr Brack.

Bill Well now that we're driving Jerry back to his fatherland it won't be that long, and when we're finished with him, we can concentrate on that lot in the East.

Sarah Do you really think that it will be all over by next Christmas Mr Brack?

Bill I do lass. Don't ask me how I know, I just feel it. My left arm is aching.

Sarah Mr Brack?

Pat Its true! His left arm aches when anything is going to happen. He knows when it's going to snow, or rain before anyone else because of that arm.

Reg I've heard that a lot of men from the first war who had limbs amputated feel the same sort of thing. No one can explain it.

Margie I hope that you're right Mr Brack; I'm supposed to be getting married in September.

Pat To that R.A.F. officer Margie?

Margie Yes. He's flying a desk now; thank goodness. He says that they won't let him do any more missions.

Bill I'm not surprised Miss. When I talked to him in August he said that he'd done four tours.

Margie I know, and not flying is killing him, but I told him that if he flew over Germany again then there wouldn't be a wedding.

Bill He told me that he was trying to get into night fighters just so that he could fly again.

Margie Yes! He managed that. At least he's flying over England, that's when he can get away from his desk, and will be relatively safe. Anyway it's much safer than flying over Germany every night and dropping bombs.

Reg You must be terribly proud of him though Margie!

Margie I am sir, but I'm worried as well. I never know if he's flying or not. At least when he was flying the bombers I knew that he wouldn't be going if the weather was bad, but with the night fighters! Well you can hear someone up there virtually every night can't you?

Bill He seems to be able to get to see you a lot Margie so he can't be stationed so far away.

Margie No, he's at a place called Church Fenton, somewhere in Yorkshire. Says that he knows Hull and Sheffield like the back of his hand, but only at night.

Reg If you don't mind my asking Margie, how did you meet him?

Margie He was in the cottage hospital. His aeroplane was badly damaged in a raid over Germany, all his instruments had been shot up and he was lost. He managed to crash land out on the moors, three of his crew

were killed and he was badly injured, but he's alright now. That was in forty two.

Reg You know we talk about the bravery of the Army, but those boys who fly out every night over Germany never knowing whether it will be their last night or not, that takes guts.
(Sound of door opening and closing. Enter Frank, Steve, Tina, Mike, and Sally.)

Bill I wouldn't do it, that's for sure.

Frank What wouldn't you do Bill?

Bill Fly over Germany every night.

Steve I shouldn't worry about it Bill, you're too old now. And besides you'd fly round in circles, with you only having one wing

Frank Do they have one armed pilots?

Bill Cheeky beggars.

Frank Good evening everyone. What's the problem sir?

Reg There's no problem Frank, all will become clear shortly. Fall the men in sergeant.

Mike Alright men, listen in please. Fall in and be quick about it.
(They fall in to attention. From right, Bill, Pat, Frank, Sally, Tina, Margie, Sarah, and Steve.)

Reg Stand easy. I'm pleased to see you all here this evening. As you are all well aware the top secret military base.....

Margie In the railway tunnel.....
(All laugh)

Reg Was closed down during the summer and we, as a platoon, were stood down in September. Well the government has announced that the entire Home Guard is to be stood down on the third of December, that's this Sunday! We have trained together, laughed and cried together for the last four years, but above all we have stood together through thick and thin and come through it relatively unscathed. Our only loss being the wife of Sid Hislop, the Mayor when we were founded in nineteen forty. I think that we have all come to know each other very well. Not only each other, but the entire town, and that is why I've asked you all here tonight. Mrs Hurst and I thought that it would be nice if we could all somehow hold a Christmas party for the town, here in the hall, as a thank you to them for their support and help throughout our time as the Home Guard protecting the town. I realise that it won't be easy, what

with the rationing and all, but I have faith that we, with more than a little help from our friends and families, can pull this thing off. You ladies seem to have produced miracles at every meal time since hostilities began all those years ago.

Tina Wouldn't it be better to wait until the war is over sir?

Reg No Tina I don't. Christmas is a time for families and to remember family members who are away, whether they are away fighting like Pat's husband or Margie's fiancé or working, like Margie's father. I don't know the exact number of men from the town who are away fighting but I think that we, the Home Guard can show the people of the town that those brave boys are in our thoughts as well as theirs. So the question is, could we put on a Christmas party for the town?

Sally Well the ministry of food has made life a little bit easier by publishing those food facts in the papers, I saw one the other week for a Christmas cake!

Sarah I saw one for icing so we could ice any cake, if someone made one.

Sally We'd need some fresh eggs to make a good cake. They don't rise so well if you use the dried eggs and milk.

Sarah And fresh milk.

Tina Yes. *(Hopefully looking at Sally)* I wouldn't know where we could get things like that from. Would you Sally?

Sally *(Laughing)* If you have any spare vegetables, I could see if my brother could spare some milk and eggs.

Margie He'd be invited too, wouldn't he sir?

Reg He most certainly would!

Margie Could we bring our boyfriends and fiancés sir? *(To Sarah)* You can meet Roger's friend and get to know him.

Reg Of course you can Margie. We'd need more food that's all.

Sally Well you can forget about the meat. I'll see if my darling brother can spare one of his pigs then we can have a hog roast.

Bill Just where do you think you're going to roast it? You can't do it outside, not with the blackout!

Sally He'll cook it in his barn, he's done that before. Remember when we had the hunt ball on the farm, was it last year or the one before?

Margie The one before. Daddy couldn't get home last year.

Sarah I don't know about you Sally but I'm going to need a new dress for it.

Tina I wouldn't worry about that Sarah. I have a parachute that I rescued from the bomber Margie's fiancé crashed on the moors.

Sally So have I. You don't think that they'll want them back if they find out about them, do you? Or that we'll be in any sort of trouble for taking them?

Tina Well I went up there with Mavis Mitchel, the policeman's wife so I can't see that we'd be in any sort of trouble. I'm sure that we could dye it and come up with a new dress for you. You can have any colour you want so long as it's brown.

Sarah Why brown?

Tina It's winter so there aren't any nettles for the green dye, so it'll have to be bark.

Sally And that comes out brown! Or if you know of anyone who has some beetroot we could do you a nice pinkie mauve.

Sarah I don't really care, I've never had a silk dress before, thank you.

Steve I don't suppose anyone has a spare suit that might fit me, do they? I'm afraid that the trousers to mine have seen better days and the jacket is a bit tight round the shoulders for some reason.

Mike I'll have a look in my wardrobe for you. We wouldn't have to wear suits would we sir?

Sarah Sure it's the shoulders, Uncle Steve?

Reg Yes I think so, if you have one. If you don't then just look smart. Everybody knows how hard it is to get clothing these days. Why only the other week Mrs Hurst went to a jumble sale and picked up a nice top coat. She turned it and it looks like new now.

Sarah Mike is it true that Mrs Warburton tried to use the blackout curtains to make a costume for the kiddies school play?

Mike I'm afraid that it is, they wanted a spider costume and she thought that the blackout materiel would be ideal.

Pat She's always been a bit mad that one.

Bill Now then my girl. If you mean a little bit eccentric then say so, but don't call anyone mad. *(To Reg)* She's completely round the bend if

you ask me, always has been. Mind you she did lose her husband, father, and brother in the last one, all on the same day too. That's enough to drive anyone round the bend.

- Reg Now about the food, I don't think that we need to go overboard with it. Just a few sandwiches each, we don't need vast amounts.
- Sally Men! You don't have a clue when it comes to parties. You lot stick to the drinks and decorations, we girls will plan and come up with the menu. You should have asked Mrs Hurst to come here tonight sir.
- Bill That's a point, we'll need some beer.
- Sarah And soft drinks.
- Tina Don't forget that we'll need some games for the children.
- Reg What on earth for?
- Tina You men are hopeless when it comes to organising things like this.
- Bill What do you expect us to make decorations out of?
- Pat Dad! There are newspapers and tissue paper. You can go and cut some ivy and holly from the hedgerows.
- Margie Anything evergreen will do.
- Pat Haven't you taken any notice of what mum's done these last five years?
- Bill I've been busy in the shop.
- Pat And you've not noticed anything when you've closed the shop and come into the house?
- Steve I'll see to the greenery when I'm out and about. I know where there is a nice big holly tree covered in berries.
- Mike Just don't get caught Steve.
- Steve Roughly how much do you want?
- Tina Enough to decorate this hall. A big holly and ivy arch round the door would be nice and festive.
- Sarah Goodness knows, we need something festive this year. Gran says that the shops are short of virtually everything.

Reg This is why Mrs Hurst and I thought that it would be a good idea, cheer everyone up a little.

Margie Sir! When did you want to put this party on? What date?

Reg Well! We thought that the twenty third would be nice, that's a Saturday so no one should be working.

Sally Except us women! What will Mrs Hurst be doing for the party sir?

Reg She'll be doing some cooking I expect. I haven't asked her and she's not said. We came up with this idea and I thought that I'd see what you all said and thought about it first, I mean there's plenty of time isn't there?

Tina *(Sarcastically)* Oh yes! Plenty of time sir. Twenty three days is plenty of time. We are on rationing you know, if we have to bake cakes and buns and things then we have to save our coupons.

Sally A Madeira cake doesn't cook itself and needs to stand for a few days to mature.

Tina Especially a fruit cake. How many people are you expecting sir?

Reg I thought that we would put invitations out to the whole town.

Margie That would mean getting them designed and printed, then delivered to every house.

Sarah Without exception. Don't forget that paper is rationed as well.

Margie To see just how many people would want to come.

Sally Then you can start planning the amount of food you need. It's no good catering for a hundred and five hundred turn up.

Pat If you can get them to Mr and Mrs Clark they might be willing to deliver them with the post. When they've been printed that is.

Reg This is getting more and more complicated.

Tina It has to be done with military precision you know, or not at all.

Sally Right! If we're going to do this then us women are taking charge. Mike, you can be in charge of the kiddie's games, keep them occupied. Steve can see to the decorating of the hall, helped by Bill and you sir. Incidentally Mike, how many children are there in town?

Mike We have thirty two under elevens and twenty eight in the seniors. I think that I could keep them all occupied until you're ready for them. How about if I get them singing carols? It is Christmas after all.

Tina That would be brilliant Mike. Yes, we'll leave all that up to you.

Frank Nothing for me to do, good.

Tina Don't count on that Frank. You will be busy collecting the food and bringing it to the hall.

Sally Then you can give Mike a hand with the children's games.

Frank Me!! I hate kids, you all know that.

Sarah Have you told your wife that, Frank?

Sally Come on Sarah, he's only been married for six months.

Sarah Maybe! But she is expecting, isn't she Frank?

Frank I know and I'm dreading it.

Bill Its different when they're your own. I know that I didn't really want any.....

Pat Thank you.

Bill But when she came along everything changed.

Frank What, for the worse?

(Pat looks at Frank and puts her tongue out at him)

Bill You should be looking forward to it Frank. Alice and I have never looked back since Pat here was born. She was the best thing to happen to us. She certainly took our minds away from the thoughts of my lost arm.

Pat That's why he calls me his little left hand girl.