

NOT LONG NOW

A script for Advent

WILD GOOSE RESOURCE GROUP

Set up

In the central area two seats sit about a yard apart. Anna is on one, Sim on the other. Behind and around them are three other seats or stools. Drever and Hyug sit on two. The third will be used by Crampton when she enters. Man and woman (Mary and Joseph) are out of sight and merely have to make an entry, him obviously supporting a pregnant wife, towards the end of the sketch. They pass by the central area without responding in any way to the dialogue.

Characters

Anna & Sim: two pensioners (reading magazines)
Hyug: a labourer (reading a tabloid newspaper)
Drever: an academic (reading a published book)
Compton: a registration officer (looking through files)

The Script

It may be necessary to amend certain specific references or language usage, depending on when and where the script is to be used.

First published in 'WILD GOOSE PRINTS no. 6: Christmas Scripts For Ex-Angels', John L. Bell & Graham Maule (Wild Goose Publications, 1990), copyright © 1990 WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow G2 3DH, Scotland. wgrg@iona.org.uk; www.wgrg.co.uk.

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Anna: It'll not be long now.

(Pause)

I'm saying, it will not be long now.....

Sim: I know.

Anna: Say that again?

Sim: I know.... It'll not be long now.
I'm agreeing with you.

Anna: But Sim, you've never agreed with me before.

Sim: I know.

Anna: So what changed your mind?

(They freeze or return to reading)

Hyug: There were five o' us, just clowning about.
We were waiting for the gaffer (boss) tae come back.

And this lassie walks by, so I just stick my fingers in ma mooth and goes... (whistles)

That wis a' (*all*).

Well, ye dae that kind of thing, you know what I mean?

(Pause)

So how wis I to know her auld man wis the boss?
I'd just been working there three days,
...casual, you know.

So, up he comes.
Jotters on the spot (*Sacked right there and then*).

I says tae him...
'See you...
come the revolution,
the labourers will be wearing the fancy jaijets (jackets)!'

Sim: What changed my mind?
I don't know.

Anna: Something must have.
Would you say you were optimistic?

Sim: Yes I'd say that.

Anna: Well, what was it that did it?

(They freeze)

Drever: This is it...
published today.

(He holds the book up and may walk about a bit)

I've just received the first copy...
My fifteenth book.

I was so elated...
I said to myself:
'Non finis sed initium'...
not the end of the beginning.

And then the phone rang.

(He picks up an imaginary telephone)

"Dr Drever?"
'Speaking'
"The principle for you"
'The principle'

...Primus inter pares...
Is he going to congratulate me?
Did someone send him a copy?

"I have sad news for you..."

'A bereavement?'
"We have to close your department..."
"But you can't close philosophy!"
"We have to close your department..."
"But what about the pursuit of learning?"

What about the universe in university?
What about how people think?
Who people are?

If the world is to be ruled by computers...
Deus ex machina?
Why not shut down electronics?
Why not close nuclear physics?
Why philosophy?

(He freezes)

Sim: I don't know what did it.
But I do know that there was a time when
I never thought I would see the day.

I'm 76 now.

Anna: Just a year older than me.

Sim: And when my eyesight started to go
and the arthritis set in,
I thought that was that.

Anna: But there's still time.

Sim: Yes there's still time.

(They freeze)

Compton: *(Enters in a fluster, muttering under her breath)*

I hate it!
I hate it, I hate it, I hate it.

And if Philip hadn't eloped with his secretary,
believe me, I wouldn't be doing it.

But the money was good....
and I had been a grade 3 civil servant in the Home office,
so it seemed the right move.

But it's all very well for the politicians to decide it needs doing.
They just have to face the press.

They don't have to face the door slammed on your face or the dogs.
Or 'He doesn't live here any more, missus (Mrs)...'
Though you know that he's probably upstairs,
and they'll all clink their glasses
and shout hooray when I'm out of earshot.

(She freezes)

Anna: So, what changed your mind?

Sim: *(No response)*

Anna: Was it something you read
or something someone said?

Who have you been talking to?

Sim: It's a feeling...
just a feeling.

Anna: What kind of feeling?

Sim: I woke up two days ago, in the middle of the night.
There wasn't a sound.
I was wide awake.

Normally when that happens
I worry about getting enough sleep.
but I wasn't worrying.

Inside...
although there wasn't a voice...
Inside...
I felt myself saying...

(They freeze)

Hyug: When the revolution comes...

Drever: Why philosophy?...

Compton: He doesn't live here any more, missus....

Hyug: When the revolution comes,
the labourers will be wearin' the fancy jaikets.

They a thought I was a nut job, comin' oot wi' that.

The boss...his jaw dropped open.

'Well, if that's the way you think...
it's just as well I'm payin' ye off,'
says he.

I really didnae mean to say it.
I mean, I'm no really political
but something's got tae happen.

We cannae go on like this forever...

Work five days, bevy (*drink*) for two.
Work another five,
get paid off...

bevy again for two.

I mean it's life,
but it's no' life really.

There must be something else.

(He freezes)

Sim: I felt myself saying,
'It'll not be long now.
It'll not be long now...'

And do you know, Anna...
I felt like I was sixteen again.

Anna: Is that all?

Sim: What did you expect?

But how come you so sure?

(They freeze)

Compton: No matter what we call it,
they call it a poll tax,
and anybody who has anything to do with it,
gets tarred with the same brush.

To be quite frank, it dements me...
the endless round of door-to-door registrations,
form filling,
trying to smile,
reassuring pensioners that they'll be alright.

And then coming home at night exhausted,
and making tea for the twins
and going back out at 9 o'clock
to do the DSS (*Department of Social Security*) hostels.

How do you poll-tax boarding houses?

(She freezes)

Anna: Intuition.

Sim: What do you mean?

Anna: It's something a woman knows about...

It's something mostly only women understand.

Like when my cousin died at sea four years ago
I knew that something had happened to him.
I hadn't seen him for about 12 years.
But I knew...
I just knew...

that something has happened to Alec.

Sim: But this isn't a death?

Anna: No...but the feeling's just as strong.

(They freeze)

Drever: Why philosophy?

If you're going to cut departments,
why start with the ones that are about thinking,
about trying to make sense of this world.

Maybe, of course, they think that philosophers,
like astrologers,
just gaze into a crystal ball
or contemplate their navels.

Would that it were so easy.
Nihil est facilis.

To read the signs of the times,
to see the way society is shaping,
to be able to reflect on the past
in order to understand the future.
To identify the worth of something new...
that is no easy thing.

That requires wise women and wise men.
But the world seems to have no place for wise men.

Or maybe our time is yet to come.

Anna: It'll not be long now.

Compton: Registering the voters...

Anna: It'll not be long...

Hyug: When the revolution comes...

Anna: It'll not be long...

Drever: Maybe our time is yet to come...

Sim: No, it'll not be long now.

(Mary & Joseph - Mary obviously pregnant - wander from a back corner)

Compton: Look, there are two...
on the move,
avoiding payment.

Hyug: When the revolution comes...

Drever: Somebody must need wise men.

Hyug: There must be more to life than this.

Drever: ...to identify the worth of something new...

Compton: Everybody has to register...

(Getting hysterical)

Everybody.

(Mary and Joseph pass by Anna and Sim)

Anna: It'll not be long now...

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