

“THE PALACE OF VARIETIES”

(the life and times of Dennis Skinner)

by

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Commissioned by Derby Theatre 2020

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CAST

2 male 1 female

CHARACTERS

Dennis Skinner

Dennis' Mum

Dennis' Dad

All other parts played by two actors (the Speaker is at times played by either of the two). Actor playing Dennis doesn't double.

NOTE ON STAGING

The stage is set in traverse with two banks of audiences facing each other, like in the House of Commons.

SCENE 1: ORGREAVE

1984. THE BATTLE OF ORGREAVE. DENNIS IS UP A TREE, SINGING.

DENNIS “Oh what a beautiful morning,

 oh what a beautiful day;

 I’ve got a wonderful feeling

 everything’s going my way...”

 I think of a good speech as like a tree. First, you take a theme – that's the trunk. From there you can follow branches of thought and develop your theme in different directions, before returning to the trunk. Today's theme is "Class". It's 1984 and I'm at the Battle of Orgreave. I've had to scamper up this tree to escape being trampled underfoot by the cavalry charges of the mounted police. Climbing trees comes natural, since I was a lad scrumping fruit from General Jackson's orchard. But this young sapling can barely hold my weight and I fear it'll give way any minute and drop me like a chestnut. This is our Peterloo. They'll blame us for the massacre, for standing up for our rights, as they always do. The BBC will deliberately reverse the footage to show the miners throwing stones first and the cavalry forced to respond. It will be decades before any semblance of truth is restored to the history books.

"Man is by nature a political animal" - that's Aristotle.

SCENE 2: THE PALACE OF VARIETIES

DENNIS CLIMBS DOWN FROM THE TREE AND SITS ON HIS FAVOURED SEAT IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS. OPPOSITE DENNIS SITS A TORY M.P. AT ONE END IS THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE. SF/X OF DEBATES IN THE CHAMBER. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE RISES. HE IS WEARING A BLACK GOWN BUT WITH A FLAT CAP AND A FAG HANGING OUT OF HIS MOUTH. HE HAMMERS HIS GAVEL AND SPEAKS THROUGH A MICROPHONE, LIKE THE COMPERE OF AN OLD-SCHOOL NORTHERN WORKING MEN'S CLUB.

SPEAKER Order! Order! I need members on both sides of the House to calm down or there'll be no entertainment happening here this evening. As newly elected Speaker of the House, I'll be introducing a few changes. For our Labour members, we will, of course, be continuing with the darts and dominoes, snooker and cribbage, family trips to Blackpool Pleasure Beach and Butlins at Skegness, Xmas dinners for the pensioners and cheap beer at the Strangers' Bar.

For our Tory members, we'll be carrying on with the skiing and sailing, billiards and bridge, family trips to Royal Ascot and Henley Regatta, Xmas dinner at The Bullingdon Club and free cognac at The Ivy.

In these modern times, we like to think of ourselves as a progressive club, reflecting the diversity of modern society. We pride ourselves on our open attitude towards inclusion and representation for all.

MORE SF/X OF DEBATES IN THE CHAMBER.

SPEAKER HAMMERS WITH HIS GAVEL.

SPEAKER Order in the House please! May I remind members, it is my job to preside over the House and maintain good order and discipline. It is also my role to call upon the “turns” to present their acts. First up, in the red corner, we’ve the Right Honourable Member of Parliament for Bolsover, who would like to say a few words.

DENNIS Welcome to “The Palace of Varieties”. It’s full of "comedy people" - public-school twits who've never done a proper day's graft in their lives; speciality acts, freak-shows and ringmasters cracking the whip at tormented animals jumping through hoops of fire; tax-dodging villains who represent the billionaires and the bankers who run the country like it was a multi-national business, not a home for ordinary working people who just want a fair return for doing their bit and basic rights to protect their jobs and their families. Society shouldn't be a market-place for buying and selling people like commodities; it should be a social club, a welfare, where all members are valued equally and have an equal say in how things are run.

SPEAKER Now then, that’s quite an act to follow; so let’s have a big hand, in the blue corner, for our Right Honourable Member of Parliament representing the Tory Party.

TORY MP We are the party of private investment, not public expenditure. We support the freedom of the individual, not state interference. We will reduce the national debt of Socialism by lowering taxes for the wealthy so they can invest their wealth in the economy and create employment and prosperity for all. This will inevitably mean a period of austerity; but we will repair “broken Britain” and make poverty history. We are the party of law and order and a strong military. We believe in God, Queen and country and the sovereignty of the United Kingdom. Society

shouldn't be a Miners' Welfare of handouts and closed shops, it should be a members' club led by entrepreneurs, regardless of class, who know how to run the country as a successful business.

DENNIS SINGS AN EXTRACT FROM "I BELIEVE" (FRANKIE LANE)

DENNIS "I believe for every drop of rain that falls,

 a flower grows;

 I believe that somewhere in the darkest night,

 a candle glows;

 I believe for everyone who goes astray,

 Someone will come to show the way..."

SPEAKER (TAPPING HIS MICROPHONE) Testing! Testing! I have an announcement on behalf of the Committee –

DENNIS I could have been a singer. There was a time, around the pubs of Clay Cross, when you'd find me, after a full shift down the pit or at weekends, singing with some of the lads to raise money for one disaster fund or another.

SPEAKER We're all singers in our family. We have to be – there's no lock on the toilet!

DENNIS Don't get me wrong, I've nothing against posh people who use their privilege to help those less fortunate than themselves, like Tony Benn; it's those Tories who seek to use their privilege to increase their own ill-gotten gains, to line

their pockets and increase their wealth at the expense of the working class. Half of all Tories are crooks.

TORY MP Objection Mr. Speaker -

SPEAKER Order! I invite the Right Honourable Member for Bolsover to withdraw that statement and think of another.

DENNIS All reight then, I will – “Half of all Tories are not crooks”.

TORY MP Get him off!

SPEAKER Mr Skinner, you leave me with no alternative but to ask you to stand down and leave the Chamber.

DENNIS (RISING TO LEAVE AND GESTURING WITH CONTEMPT)

 Suit theesen, I’m a bit of an expert when it comes to being

thrown out.

SCENE 3 - JODIE AND DALTON

INSIDE THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT. TWO YOUNG PEOPLE ARE WAITING TO SEE DENNIS SKINNER.

JODIE: I don't like meeting new people.

DALTON: I've known Mr Skinner since I was eight years old.

JODIE: I don't like going out.

DALTON: He comes for a cup of tea with us at the Reading and Writing class.

JODIE: Everyone's looking at me.

DALTON: He asked us if we'd like to visit London? I like London cos I love "Minecraft".

JODIE: I want to go home.

DALTON: You can't go home, you have to stay with me. We've been told to wait under the big chandelier.

DENNIS APPEARS.

DENNIS: Now then, who have we got here?

DALTON: My name's Dalton.

DENNIS: Aye, it is; we've met before. And I know this young lady - Jodie, isn't it?

SHE IS TOO SHY TO ANSWER.

DENNIS: That's all reight, I understand what it is to be shy. People don't realise but I'm actually a very shy person underneath.

DALTON: Why have the police got guns?

DENNIS: To protect us, lad.

JODIE: Is someone going to hurt us?

DENNIS: No, no, no; you're safe here. No one can hurt us in here.

DALTON: You work here, don't you?

DENNIS: I have an office.

DALTON: I couldn't work in an office. I like it in the gardens - I built a shed.

DENNIS: Did you now? That's more than I could do. There are some lovely parks in London. 'Appen I'll take you one day. And what do you like doing Jodie?

JODIE: I like knitting.

DENNIS: I used to knit when I was a lad. I tell you what, I was a better knitter than me two sisters.

DALTON: When I started at big school, they asked me what was my ambition? I said, "To be expelled."

JODIE: He wasn't expelled.

DALTON: No, but I kept on trying.

JODIE: There's a lot of statues in here.

DENNIS: We don't bother with them. What we need are statues of the labourers and the craftsmen who built this place.

DALTON: Can we see where they do all the arguing and shouting?

DENNIS: You mean the Chambers?

DALTON: A dunno.

DENNIS: Follow me.

JODIE: Do we have to pay?

DENNIS: Some politicians do charge, but not me.

THEY GO TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

JODIE: Do we have to be quiet?

DENNIS: There's no one in today, you can be as loud as you like.

DALTON: Aren't you frightened?

DENNIS: If you can hold your own in a pit canteen, the Chamber is a picnic.

DALTON: How do you know what to say?

DENNIS: That's easy, lad. I think what would the people of Bolsover say? You have to stand up to the bullies.

JODIE: I don't like bullies. They call me names.

DENNIS: I get called all sorts in here. It's like theatre but the audience is a sea of angry faces staring at you. Don't let them get to you, lass.

JODIE: When people are angry, it's because they're in pain.

DALTON: I were told I were useless, that I'd never be able to read and write. But they were wrong. The Freedom Project taught me.

JODIE: It feels weird in here. It's like one of them places where they send you to prison.

DENNIS: (TO DALTON) That's where the Prime Minister stands when they're answering questions.

DALTON: (PLAYING TO THE GALLERY) I'm in charge so you do as I say!
Take a photo, Jodie.

DENNIS: You're not really supposed to - sod it, I'm looking away.

DALTON HELPS JODIE TO USE THE CAMERA ON HIS PHONE.

Have we done?

DENNIS TURNS BACK.

(TO JODIE) Why don't you sit over there on the throne?

JODIE GINGERLY GOES TO THE SPEAKER'S CHAIR.

JODIE Is this where the Queen sits?

DENNIS No, it's the Speaker's chair.

JODIE: It's really posh. I feel like a princess.

DALTON TRIES TO TAKE A PHOTO OF HER, BUT SHE DOESN'T LIKE IT.

JODIE Don't!

DENNIS: Come on, you pair, let's be having you. Why don't we go to the terrace and have a glass of pop and I'll show you the River Thames?

DALTON: Cool!

JODIE: I'm frightened of water.

JODIE AND DALTON EXIT.

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE RINGS HIS BELL.

SPEAKER Order! Order! We know you've had a few drinks but keep it under control. I have an announcement. We have a bit of a party-piece for you this evening. The Queen commands all Members of Parliament to attend her in the House of Lords, where she'll be doing a turn for us, singing - what's that song again? "Rule Britannia", with young Prince Charley on the drums and Big Phil on his organ.

DENNIS Well, I'll not be going.

SPEAKER Now give her a chance, she's doing her best.

DENNIS Tell her to pay her taxes.

SPEAKER We'll have no heckling from the bench.

DENNIS Have you got Helen Mirren on standby?

SPEAKER You're leaving me with no choice. Will the Right Honourable Member for Bolsover –

DENNIS (LEAVING) Don't bother, I'm going.

EXIT DENNIS.

SPEAKER I think the pies have come...

SCENE 4 – MUM AND DAD

THE CHILDHOOD FAMILY HOME

DENNIS (AGE 11) Me and my mates play soldiers on the pit tip. All the people in the world are at war. I've got a paper-round to help out. Mum's a cleaner and takes in washing. Dad's called Edward but people call him "Tony" – I don't know why. He's a miner and a Shop Steward for the Union. They've not let him work for years – they said he was a blacklister; but when Hitler started, they let him work again.

DAD If the rules are wrong, always speak up, lad. And do your bit for the community so no one can ever criticise you.

DENNIS Mum loves singing.

MUM IS SINGING, WHILE WASHING, AN EXTRACT FROM "SING AS WE GO" (GRACIE FIELDS).

MUM "Sing as we go and let the world go by,

singing a song, we march along the highway;

say goodbye to sorrow,

there's always tomorrow to think of today;

sing as we go although the skies are grey..."

DENNIS Mum's had another baby, number five; but's he's died after a few days.

(TO DAD) Dad, what was the babby's name?

DAD: I don't want to talk about it.

DENNIS: Why not? He must've had a name.

DAD IGNORES HIM.

Dad?

DAD: Adolf! He's called Adolf, now shut up! I'm off to the allotment to feed the chickens.

DENNIS: His name was Donald.

MUM: Dennis, you're making the place look untidy; now go and play with your brother.

DENNIS: Mum says she passed her scholarship exam but there was no money for her to go to grammar school.

MUM: You must take up your scholarship to Tupton Grammar, Dennis.

DAD : Now then, lad, Tommy Lund says you passed his house twice, waddling tha bloody arse down the street.

DENNIS: I've entered the walking race for the "Sheffield Star".

DAD: Now what would you want to do that for?

DENNIS: I come second.

DAD: Tha should have won it, lad. Come on, I'll take thee to Davies Cafe as a treat.

DENNIS We batter Hitler and there's an election after the War. We're all Labour voters in our street. I wear a flat cap on the side, like me dad.

(TO MUM AND DAD) I've taken a job at Parkhouse Colliery.

MUM: You've done what? You can't go squandering your education like that.

DENNIS: I'm sixteen, I want to be a miner like me mates - be a man and join the N.U.M.

MUM: (TO DAD) This is all your fault, filling his head with union business.

DAD: I don't agree with what you're doing, lad, but at least choose a pit with baths - there's none at Parkhouse.

DENNIS (AGE 38) Twenty-two years down the pit and a Union man when I'm elected as a Member of Parliament to represent the miners.

DAD: At least you'll not have to test the roof every morning at Westminster.

DENNIS I hear nothing from London; so on the Monday morning I put me pit clothes on and go to work as normal at Glapwell.

DAD What thee doing?

DENNIS 'Appen I'm not on their books yet.

DAD Get tha bloody arse down London and give 'em hell.

MUM: Let's get you smartened up a bit, shall we?

DAD: Stick to your guns and always treat Parliament as a place of work. And keep your eyes on what the others are up to.

DENNIS We've never been a family to display our emotions but I know they're proud of me.

DENNIS SINGS AN EXTRACT FROM "WISH ME LUCK AS YOU WAVE ME GOODBYE" (GRACIE FIELDS). HIS PARENTS JOIN IN.

DENNIS "Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye,

cheerio, here I go, on my way;

wish me luck as you wave me goodbye,

not a tear, but a cheer, make it gay;

give me a smile I can keep all the while,

in my heart while I'm away,

till we meet once again, you and I,

wish me luck as you wave me goodbye..."

DENNIS: After a couple of years, dad comes down to see me. I'm speaking in the House and there's a Tory M.P. keeps interrupting.

DAD: He's told you once, he's not giving way, so shut your bloody mouth!

DENNIS We get one over Ted Heath and his Industrial Relations Act.

DAD: Dennis, I've waited nearly fifty years for this moment. When we lost in 1926, I never thought I'd live to see such a victory.

DENNIS: (AS DAD EXITS) A few years later, dad passes away.

DENNIS VISITS HIS MUM IN A CARE HOME.

DENNIS I get my good memory from mum, so when she develops dementia, it feels unnatural. I visit her in the care home.

(TO MUM) Mum, it's Dennis.

MUM: Who?

DENNIS: Your eldest lad, mum, Dennis.

MUM: I don't know any Dennis.

DENNIS: I take her out to the grounds of the Miners Welfare and we sit together on a bench.

DENNIS SINGS AN EXTRACT FROM "IF THOSE LIPS COULD ONLY SPEAK"
(FOSTER AND ALLEN) AND HIS MUM JOINS IN.

DENNIS "If those lips could only speak,

 if those eyes could only see,

 if those beautiful golden tresses

 were there in reality..."

THEY EMBRACE. MUM EXITS, LEAVING DENNIS ALONE.

SCENE 5 – COAL (PART ONE)

DENNIS *“I’m crawling along a three-foot seam. The cutter’s ground to a halt and the fans have stopped blasting air. It’s cold and silent. The face is about 500 yards long and I’m probably about half-way. I can crawl forwards or backwards. I can twist onto my stomach or my back, but that’s about it. I’m as buried as you can be without actually being buried. I have this overwhelming urge to switch off the light on my helmet. I’m in total darkness. I’m in total silence apart from a faint echo in the earth. It’s not like a heartbeat, more like a signal.”*

(TO AUDIENCE) When you first see a long seam of coal in the earth, it’s a beautiful sight, like pure marble. You know it’s been there forever and you’re the first to see it, like some deep-sea diver discovering new worlds. When I crawled out of the earth in Clay Cross and started at Parkhouse Colliery in 1948, there were 700 coal mines and 750,000 miners in Britain, fuelling the creation of the Welfare State. From where the cage reaches the bottom of the shaft, it can take an hour or two to walk to the face and back. The older men take the paddy, but there’s never enough room for all of us. Some of us ride the conveyor belt. I love ducking and diving under the steel struts. If there’s a particularly low one, you have to lie face down on the belt. I’ve seen lumps of coal the size of small trucks fall out of the face. The noise and the heat and the dust are unbelievable. If you hear bits dropping off the lip, it’s time to leg it. I’ve seen steel bolts shoot out of the arches as the weight comes on top. The older men seem to know if someat i’n’t reight, so you soon learn to follow your instincts. They say, “If it talks to you, it’s gonna come on top; but watch if it’s silent, cos it’s still coming.” You’re a mile underground – that’s a lot of earth on top of you. And the only thing between you and being crushed to death are the chocs

supporting the roof. You hear a rumble like thunder and your heart beats faster; but you get used to it.

Coal is a dirty business. Carbon and water based, just like us, sharing an epic story. Over millions of years, dense forests in low-lying wetlands have rotted into the earth and slowly converted to coal. Around 4000 years B.C., Neolithic Man in China began carving ornaments from coal. In Bronze Age Britain, coal was used on funeral pyres. The Romans traded coal. The Industrial Revolution led to large-scale use of coal across the world. It was mined on all continents with the exception of Antarctica.

I was 17 years old when, at nearby Cresswell Colliery, in the early hours of the morning, a damaged conveyor belt caught in a machine and caused the motor to overheat and catch fire. 80 men were trapped in the tunnel beyond the flames. One young miner knew his dad were one of those in the tunnel. He knew the men would be huddled together, trying to breathe. He told himself no one behind the flames could have survived the fumes, let alone the fire. This lad had to help seal the tunnel, knowing his father was entombed inside.

There was blood on the coal that day. Let those who criticise the miners and the cost of coal realise the price of its getting. We knew how dangerous it was. Years later, as a Union man, there were times after a fatal accident at work, it was my job to call on his wife and have to tell her she was a widow. The work was slavery, no other word for it; but the solidarity in the pits, you couldn't measure it.

SCENE 6 - SCARCLIFFE SOAPBOX DERBY

TWO KARTS LINE UP FOR THE RACE. THEY ARE BUILT FROM A SIMPLE BOX ON A FRAME CHASSIS WITH FOUR PRAM WHEELS. ONE IS NAMED "THE BEAST" AND THE OTHER IS "THE IRON LADY". SPEAKER IS IN THE COMMENTARY BOX WITH HIS GAVEL.

SPEAKER We have a special treat for you today, ladies and gentlemen, we're in the village of Scarcliffe, near Chesterfield, for the infamous Scarcliffe Soapbox Derby, featuring the best home-made karts in the race of a lifetime. This a free event for charity so please give generously in the buckets provided.

A quick re-cap of the rules - all karts must have four wheels

- no motors

- no push-starts are allowed

THE DRIVERS APPEAR: DENNIS SKINNER AND MAGGIE THATCHER. THEY STAND ON SOAPBOXES BEHIND THEIR RESPECTIVE VEHICLES.

SPEAKER There are two contenders for this year's race. Let's welcome the first soapbox, driven by local personality Dennis Skinner M.P. – "The Beast". The second soapbox, "The Iron Lady", is driven by that national treasure, Margaret Thatcher. Let's have a big hand for both contestants.

As usual, the karts gather at "The Horse and Groom", at the top of Main St. to prepare for the race. Main St. has been closed to traffic since the 10.45am bus passed through the village. Big call-out to Bolsover District Council for supporting the

race. St. John's Ambulance are in attendance with plasters and Savlon at the ready for any bumps and scrapes.

Let's go over to "The Horse and Groom" to see how our contestants are shaping up. It's 1979 and Mrs. Thatcher is the Prime Minister.

(INTERVIEWING THE CONTESTANTS) So Mrs. T, how does it feel to be the first female Prime Minister?

IRON LADY Any woman who understands the problems of running a home will be nearer to understanding the problems of running a country.

BEAST: We got rid of Ted Heath, she won't last long.

SPEAKER Is The Beast confident he can win?

BEAST: I'm in it to win it - that's the Skinner way.

IRON LADY: My father was a Methodist Preacher and Mayor of Grantham.

BEAST: She's a jumped-up Grocer's daughter.

IRON LADY: I have studied at Oxford and I am a Chemist and a Barrister.

BEAST: I was formed in the pits and the War.

IRON LADY: I am fully prepared for the job in hand; I have had voice coaching at The National Theatre.

BEAST: If you put tulips and daffs together, the daffs always come out on top.

IRON LADY: Dinosaur!

BEAST: Milk-snatcher!

IRON LADY: Where there is discord, may we bring harmony;

 Where there is error, may we bring truth;

 Where there is doubt, may we bring faith;

 Where there is despair, may we bring hope.

AS THEY GET INTO THEIR KARTS, THEY BOTH SING AN EXTRACT FROM "I
WON'T BACK DOWN" (JOHNNY CASH).

BEAST&IRON LADY "Well, I won't back down,

 No, I won't back down,

 You can stand me up at the gates of hell,

 But I won't back down.

 Gonna stand my ground,

 Won't be turned around,

 And I'll keep this world from draggin' me down,

 Gonna stand my ground,

 And I won't back down..."

SPEAKER I can see this is shaping up as quite a contest. The race
starts at the top of Main St., then over the Bone Rattler, through the Chicane, over

the Jump and finishes at the bottom of the hill outside "The Elm Tree", where the prize-giving takes place.

The contestants are in position at the start. It's 1981 and there are riots in thirty-five cities and towns, including London, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool and Leeds.

IRON LADY: Our Monetarist policies are succeeding in reducing inflation.

BEAST: At the expense of the highest unemployment figures since the Thirties.

IRON LADY: We have given the police extra powers to "stop and search".

BEAST; It's your SUS laws has caused these riots in the first place.

IRON LADY: We understand there are racial tensions in our inner-cities.

BEAST: It's not about race; there are only ever two tribes: the rich and the poor. I will always support the underdog in society.

IRON LADY: There is no such thing as society.

SPEAKER As they approach the Bone Rattler, it's The Beast edging in front by a pram wheel. It's 1982 and The Falklands War.

BEAST: I've never been a flag-waver; I've no time for Nationalism.

IRON LADY: When you've spent half your political life dealing with humdrum issues like the environment, it's exciting to have a real crisis on your hands.

BEAST: I'm not a pacifist in temperament because my first instinct is to react to aggression, but I'm one of only thirty-two who vote against sending this Task Force.

IRON LADY Traitor!

BEAST It's the first time the people of Bolsover and Shirebrook have avoided eye-contact with me.

IRON LADY: Our nation's pride is at stake. We have ceased to be a nation in retreat; it is the "Falklands' Spirit".

BEAST: "Cruel Britannia"! She is spilling British and Argentinian blood to cover up her mistake losing the Falklands diplomatically in the first place.

IRON LADY: We are fighting to show that aggression does not pay and to support 2000 loyal British islanders.

BEAST: A bit of me wonders if the Argentinians were lured on to invade so she can have her little war.

IRON LADY: Rejoice! Rejoice at the news and congratulate our forces and the Marines.

SPEAKER The Iron Lady is over the Bone Rattler and into the lead with her re-election the following year in a landslide victory. On to the trickiest part of the race - through the Chicane and over the Jump. It's 1984 and the start of the Miners' Strike.

THEY SING AN EXTRACT FROM "WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON, BOYS?" (BILLY BRAGG).

ALL "Which side are you on, boys?"

Which side are you on?

Which side are you on, boys?

Which side are you on...?

BEAST: The sun's out, the miners are out and now the dockers are out.
I'm proud to stand up for my class.

IRON LADY: I regard the trades unions as the enemy within.

BEAST: The strike is about jobs for the next generation. I've given all my
wages this year to the miners - have you given yours to the police?

IRON LADY: The lady's not for turning.

BEAST: She's a dictator with a handbag.

IRON LADY: Being powerful is like being a lady: if you have to tell people you
are, then clearly you aren't.

BEAST: 1984, it's George Orwell come true. The Ministry for
Employment means 3.3 million unemployed; Privatisation means making the rich
richer at the expense of the people; Rationalisation means making thousands of
workers redundant.

SPEAKER October 1984 and the I.R.A. bomb the Tory conference at The
Grand Hotel in Brighton, in an attempt to assassinate the entire British government.

IRON LADY: All attempts to destroy democracy by terrorism will fail. Let us
stand together for we are British!

BEAST: I've always been a supporter of Troops Out. We all know MI5 have secret files on left-wing M.P.'s.

IRON LADY: When John Wakeham, Tory Chief Whip, who lost his wife at Brighton, comes into the chamber on crutches, the House rises in respect, except for The Beast who sits scowling in his regular seat.

SPEAKER Through the Chicane and on to the Jump. 1985 and the end of the Miners' Strike.

BEAST: If the Labour leadership and the T.U.C. had supported us, we could have won.

SPEAKER Over the Jump and The Iron Lady is streaks ahead.

IRON LADY: I am extraordinarily patient, provided I get my own way in the end.

SPEAKER It's a mad dash towards the finishing post. 1990 and the Poll Tax riots. 200,000 people gather in Central London to protest.

BEAST: The advances of the working class have never been made in Parliament, but on the streets and the picket lines.

SPEAKER The Beast makes up ground. The Poll Tax is repealed and Labour are ahead of the Tories in the polls. In a night of the long knives, there is a cabinet rebellion against their glorious leader, forcing The Iron Lady to resign. At the end of 1990 and the end of the race, there is a photo-finish.

At the prize-giving in "The Elm Tree" pub, The Beast's nemesis, The Iron Lady, is declared the Winner of the Scarcliffe Soapbox Derby. But it is clear

her racing days are over. The Beast wins Best Dressed Soapbox and carries on to race again, as ever, sailing close to the wind.

AS THE IRON LADY LEAVES, BEAST SINGS HIS OWN VERSION OF “I HEAR MUSIC AND THERE’S NO ONE THERE” (FROM THE MUSICAL “CALL ME MADAM”).

BEAST “I hear Thatcher and there’s no one there,

 I smell blossoms and the trees are bare,

 All day long I seem to walk on air,

 I wonder why? I wonder why...?”

EXIT.

SCENE 7 – KATH

KATH I was born in Clay Cross. We were neighbours of the Skinners, I know all the family. My first recollection of Dennis is when I was about 8 or 9 years old. He used to wear this long cream raincoat. He was a lovely man. He'd speak to everyone. He was the King of Clay Cross. All our family were Labour. There were lots of families like the Skinners. On election day, all the neighbours would dye their bloomers red and hang them out on the washing line. People looked after each other – it was proper Socialism on low pay. Dennis spoke for us. He's the nicest person ever chewed a slice of bread and dripping. At 17, it was Dennis got me involved in the Labour Party. You could say I was his prodigy.

There were five pits in Clay Cross. I was married to a miner. During the Strike, my husband got truncheoned and banned from the picket lines; so I took his place. I was the first woman on the picket line. They sent a policewoman specifically to stand in front of me. I said: "I should warn you, if you kick me in the groin, it's not gonna hurt as much as the lad next to me."

One time, at Blidworth roundabout, I was driving the van, with a shit load of flying pickets in the back, when the coppers pulled me over. It was about 3 o'clock in the morning.

POLICEMAN Where you lot going?

KATH We're going fishing.

I enjoyed every minute of the Strike. We'd no money but my kids said it was their best Christmas ever. I was very shy before the Strike, I didn't like talking in public, but the Strike brought me out of my shell. I used to drive Dennis to

meetings cos he didn't drive til he was much older. He used to play tennis with my husband but he said to me once in the car -

DENNIS I think you're the true Socialist in your house.

KATH He was very strict with members during an election –

DENNIS Get out there campaigning!

KATH Members were scared of him. He could be a bit of a bully on election day, but people would turn out for him. My parents wanted me to stand as an M.P. but I didn't want to go down there. I went to No 10 once to deliver a petition. Dennis met us there. No, I was always a "Union man".

SCENE 8 – COAL (PART TWO)

DENNIS *“We’re in freefall. I’m clinging to the bars of the cage, others are pressed up against the roof, knowing for a few seconds what’s about to happen. Everything is slow-motion. I’m floating like an astronaut: upside down, wrong way ‘round, arse over tit. I open my mouth to curse this godforsaken industry, but the rush of air takes my breath away and silences me.”*

(TO AUDIENCE) They talk about stress at Westminster, but they have no idea. Stress is being in a cage half-way down the shaft when suddenly it stops. Three years after I became an M.P., 18 miners died and 11 were seriously injured at Markham Colliery in Derbyshire. The cage carrying the men down the shaft failed and crashed to the bottom.

Not long after Markham, Thatcher started with her ethnic-cleansing of the coalfields. The young people of former mining communities were left with waves of unemployment and a tsunami of heroin addiction. We haven’t had a pit in Derbyshire since 1992, when they closed Bolsover and Shirebrook pits; yet there’s still tons of coal left underground.

I’ll allus be proud to stand up for my class. We should remember where we come from: coal hasn’t changed, the world has.

EXIT DENNIS.

SCENE 9 – SHIREBROOK

THE MARKET SQUARE. DENNIS IS ON HIS SOAPBOX.

TEENAGERS Give it a rest, grandad. Always on about bloody coal – who gives a fuck?

DENNIS You'll find me on a Friday morning down Shirebrook market, listening to what the young-uns have to say.

TEENAGERS Welcome to "Dodge City" – what's not to like?

It's like a care home on drugs,

loud people like my mum shouting at us all the time,

car alarms and banging music,

knife crime and muggings -

"Oi! Hand it over!"

The Model is home to a lot of weirdos -

"Die paedo!"

Living in Shirebrook scares me sometimes:

DENNIS I'll tell you what I don't like. Mobile phones. I don't have one; I don't need one. Seems to me they're only used for gossiping. I don't send emails - they can be used against you. Some folk email me "Dennis this and Dennis that", as if they were part of the family. I like an old-school written letter, properly addressed to "Mr Skinner". I don't do texting - for the same reason. I don't trust social media - telling the whole world your business. I prefer to talk to people face-to-face.

TEENAGERS Where I live is like being stranded on a desert island.

I wish I lived in America, in a bigger, cleaner house.

America is better than Shirebrook cos celebrities live there;

DENNIS I don't like selfies - sticking your chin out at the camera,
everyone trying to be a celebrity. I don't do celebrity. I don't do bling. When they
elected me Chair of Clay Cross District Council and offered me a gold chain, I said
"Don't put that thing around my neck; melt it down and sell it and put the money in
the Housing Revenue account." And I put a stop to people standing up when I
entered the Council Chamber. I'd abolish the House of Lords and scrap the
monarchy. It's inevitable that one day people will wake up and see the royal charade
for what it is. I don't do patronage. When Jim Callaghan was Prime Minister, he
offered me a ministerial post in the cabinet. I told him, "This politician's not for sale."
You see, once you take their patronage, you cease being your own man.

TEENAGERS Shirebrook is full of underage drinking, sex and drugs -

litter everywhere and a fight around every corner,

the girls have long nails and the boys have dead trim.

Shirebrook is less posh than London,

car crashes and flames,

animals gone missing

and the Roadman will shank you.

DENNIS I don't do parties. I don't believe in organised happiness. I've never had a birthday party; I don't want one. I've had more than my fair share of happiness in life and it's all occurred naturally.

TEENAGERS Roadman knows the ins-and-outs of the area,

rides around on bikes or mopeds,

takes part in street activity -

crimes and gang fights.

Standard gear is Nike trainers, Addidas tracksuit bottoms,

puffer jacket, Armani man-bag

with a trusty shank and a spliff or two.

Chillin' outside McDonalds -

breakfast, lunch and dinner;

listening to drill.

DENNIS I've never eaten a curry - my palette was formed in the 1930's.
I've never called people "comrade" – it's not a term we used down the pit.

TEENAGERS Roadman is bruv, cuz, blud, fam,

violent and feared, innit,

with peng ting on arm -

peng ting love Roadman.

DENNIS I love family, especially get-togethers with my grandkids -
watching a new generation in a complicated world which I know very little about.

TEENAGERS Where I live is a good place because of the people,

everyone knows everyone,

where I live is really caring,

a small area of countryside.

One day I saw my nan walking down the street.

DENNIS I love Nature and I love singing.

TOGETHER THEY SING AN EXTRACT FROM "WONDERFUL WORLD" (LOUIS
ARMSTRONG). DENNIS STARTS THEN THE TEENAGERS JOIN IN.

ALL "I see trees of green, red roses too,

I see them bloom for me and you

And I think to myself, what a wonderful world.

I see skies of blue and clouds of white,

The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night

And I think to myself, what a wonderful world.

The colours of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky

Are also on the faces of people going by,

I see friends shaking hands, saying "How do you do,"

They're really saying, "I love you."

I hear babies crying, I watch them grow,

They'll learn much more than I'll ever know

And I think to myself, what a wonderful world,

Yeah, I think to myself, what a wonderful world."

EXIT.

SCENE 10 – BLUEBELL WOOD

GRAHAM I wasn't very sporty, but I was the best at climbing trees. Dennis 'ld send me up for chestnuts. Once, I fell to the ground. Our Gordon says, "Dennis, I think tha's killed our Graham." When we lived on John St, I was only very little; but we played on the pit-tip, sliding down on a shovel. When I was six or seven, we moved down the hill from Clay Cross to a brand new council house in Holmgate. We had an inside loo and separate bedrooms for the lads and lasses. It were luxury. We lived on a new estate for miners' families, which they were still building. We played on site, dodging the Foreman, which was great fun. But Britton Wood were nearby, which was a completely new adventure for us. Picking berries, collecting mushrooms, rabbiting, tater-picking for farmers and getting the hay in. Dad taught us how to make chewing gum from wheat. Dennis was about ten years older than me.

DENNIS It's my job to look after the young-uns - I even change their bums.

GRAHAM We're walking in the woods with Dennis, which he allus makes like an obstacle course. We're tickling trout in the river and splashing about in ponds what had formed from when the miners dug coal from the surface during the General Strike. That's when dad was first laid off for being a troublemaker. I'm up a tree collecting eggs from a crow's nest.

(TO DENNIS) There's six of 'em; how many should I take?

DENNIS (TO GRAHAM) Take three.

GRAHAM (TO DENNIS) I can't carry three.

DENNIS (TO GRAHAM) Put them in your gob and climb down.

GRAHAM I'm inching my way down when suddenly a branch breaks and I fall to the ground –

(TO DENNIS, CHEWING BROKEN EGGS) Aargh! They've bust open in me gob.

DENNIS (TO GRAHAM) You dirty bastard. Let's go home, I've picked some bluebells for mum.

MUM (TO DENNIS AS SHE PUTS THE FLOWERS IN A VASE) You shouldn't go picking wild flowers.

GRAHAM You soon learn the facts of life in the woods.

MUM (TO GRAHAM) Next time, Graham, take our David with you.

GRAHAM (TO MUM) That's not fair, I always have to look after him.

DENNIS (TO GRAHAM) I have to take you everywhere.

MUM (TO GRAHAM) Run a little errand to the shops for us.

GRAHAM I was always the errand lad – fetch this, fetch that. Not everything we got was from the shops. Mrs Wright from the farm would come 'round the houses with milk – you had to bring a jug and she'd fill it. The fruit and veg man came with his horse and cart and another would come selling clothes. There were no cars or telephones. The lads would play cricket in the street and the lasses skipping. Both would play marbles. I didn't have a bike 'til I was fourteen. We had comics – "Dan Dare" and "The Eagle". And the grown-ups had the wireless. There was no tv until "The Coronation". We'd pay a penny-an-hour to one of the neighbours to watch her tv, until we got one of our own. It was magic and having an aerial on your roof was a proper status symbol.

MUM At least I know where I am when we have nowt – I'm not having to worry about who to pay and who not?

GRAHAM Mum was a very strong woman but she'd use humour to get us to do stuff. Dad could just bang the table and frighten all of us. He was in the Communist Party. We're all bloody-minded in this family: it's either right or it's wrong.

DENNIS We were poor and we thought some fucker should do something about it.

DENNIS AND GRAHAM DANCE AND SING AN EXTRACT FROM "LET'S FACE THE MUSIC AND DANCE" (FRED ASTAIRE AND GINGER RODGERS).

DS & GS "There may be trouble ahead

But while there's music and moonlight

And love and romance

Let's face the music and dance.

Before the fiddlers have fled

Before they ask us to pay the bill

And while we still have the chance

Let's face the music and dance..."

SPEAKER (RINGING HIS BELL) I have an announcement. This year we've arranged our Summer outing for the members of our care home, otherwise

known as “The House of Lords” – old people are so lovely, don’t you think? We’ve come to Clay Cross in Derbyshire, also known as “Skinner Town”.

DENNIS Land of my birth.

GRAHAM And mine.

DENNIS And seven more of us ‘n all.

SPEAKER I’m sure our members will be interested to know that there is a railway tunnel underneath the town centre built by none other than George Stephenson. (RINGING HIS BELL) Wakey, wakey, Lords and Ladies, stick with the programme; no sleeping on the job. Later on, there’ll be bingo at the Luncheon Club.

DENNIS I was on the council for ten years before I became an M.P. We managed to knock down the slums and build new council houses for the tenants and bungalows for the elderly.

SPEAKER Do you hear that, Lords and Ladies? I bet there’s a few of you would secretly fancy a little bungalow in Clay Cross? But first, we’ve a re-enactment for you of “The Clay Cross Rebellion of 1974”. Dennis Skinner will be playing Dennis Skinner and Graham Skinner will be playing Graham Skinner. I’ll be playing High Court Judge, Lord Denning, naturally.

SPEAKER PUTS ON THE WIG AND TAKES UP THE GAVEL.

GRAHAM I’m one of eleven elected councillors. Our David’s another.

We're refusing to implement central government's order to increase rents for our council tenants by £1 per week, which is nearly double the rent.

DS & GS (CHANTING) "We'd rather live in a tent,

We'd rather live in a tent,

Ee-ay-addio, we won't pay the rent!"

DENNING There will be no more protesting or I will have you up for Contempt of Court. I have made my decision. All eleven Clay Cross councillors are to be dismissed immediately and barred from holding office. In addition, they are to be made personally bankrupt and their assets seized.

GRAHAM They're not taking my Ford Escort. I've taken off the wheels and put it up on bricks.

DENNIS They take it anyway, the bastards. What kind of central government bankrupts locally elected officials?

GRAHAM I've had to transfer the tenancy to the wife. And the utility bills. I've no job now and Eileen is a part-time dinner lady.

DENNIS (SHAKING HIS FIST) I told the Prime Minister, "You'll get some of this!"

DENNING I have instructed government officials to knock on every door and collect the rent.

GRAHAM They knock on every door but there's no bugger in! They'll not
be answering in a hurry.

GS & DS (CHANTING) "We'd rather live in a tent,

We'd rather live in a tent,

Ee-ay-addio we won't pay the rent!"

GRAHAM AND DENNIS RETURN TO BLUEBELL WOOD

DENNIS Bluebells prefer deciduous trees like oaks; so when they decide
to chop down all the oaks and replace them with pines, there are no more bluebells.
All this knowledge, it's lost.

GRAHAM I've lived in Clay Cross all me life. People from outside ask,

Why have you never left?" "And go where?" I tell 'em. I'm still doing what I can to
help folk 'round here.

THEY RESUME THEIR SONG AND DANCE ROUTINE

DS & GS "Soon we'll be without the moon,

Humming a different tune and then

There may be teardrops to shed

So while there's moonlight and music

And love and romance

Let's face the music and dance."

SCENE 11 - THAT'S MY BUSINESS

1989. JEAN'S HOUSE, CLAY CROSS. THE PRESS HAVE GATHERED AT MARY AND DENNIS SKINNER'S HOUSE, OPPOSITE JEAN. IN A PARK IN LONDON, DENNIS IS HIDING BEHIND A TREE FROM THE PRESS.

DENNIS I don't talk about me private life; it has nothing to do with my politics. I'm lying low in London until it's all blown over. I've always been careful around women, not to put my arms around them and such like, in case the Press got the wrong idea. I don't know what they're hounding me for; I bet they're having a field day in Clay Cross.

JEAN Mary keeps herself to herself. She always has done. She's not one for visiting, even though she's my cousin and we grew up together. Mary and Dennis have lived opposite on Thanet Street for years. She phones to say the Press are swarming 'round her house. I says, "I know, I've seen 'em. Is there anything I can do?" But there's nothing anyone can do.

REPORTER As a neighbour of the Skinners, can you tell me what you know about the affair?

JEAN I know nothing about that. And if I did, I wouldn't tell you. Now clear off! (TO DENNIS) Thirty years, Dennis, and three lovely children, all grown up. Does it count for nothing?

DENNIS COMES OUT FROM BEHIND THE TREE.

DENNIS (TO JEAN) Mary's a good wife and mother.

JEAN I remember when you first came a-courting Mary.

DENNIS SINGS TO MARY AN EXTRACT FROM "SO IN LOVE" BY COLE PORTER

FROM "KISS ME KATE"

DENNIS "Strange dear, but true dear,

When I'm close to you dear,

The stars fill the sky,

So in love with you am I"

(TO JEAN) We used to go to the pictures at "The Bug Hut" and talk politics.

Mary was a great Socialist.

JEAN In those days, there were no such thing as blankets on the beds.

We used army coats.

DENNIS The toilet was at the end of the garden and there was a gutter
full of effluent ran between the rows of houses. But anyone who lived there would
help you.

REPORTER Can you at least tell me where Mr Skinner is in hiding?

JEAN As far away from the likes of you as possible, I shouldn't
wonder.

REPORTER While we're waiting for Mr. Skinner, we've a quick soundbite for you from a couple of locals.

JEAN BECOMES LOCAL 1 AND REPORTER BECOMES LOCAL 2.

LOCAL 1 Some of us have known for years his marriage was over.

LOCAL 2 I hear he's been giving his researcher one.

LOCAL 1 Lots of marriages have hit the ropes since the closures, what with all the unemployment.

LOCAL 2 Turns out she's a bit of London posh.

LOCAL 1 Lots of miners' wives were politicised during the Strike. Some men didn't like who their wives had become.

LOCAL 2 Lois Blasenheim, according to The News of the World. What sort of bloody name is that? Dennis'll find that a right mouthful.

LOCAL 1 I don't see the problem? It's not like Dennis has been preaching back-to-basics.

LOCAL 2 He's done nothing wrong; he'll still get our vote. At least he's not been caught wearing an Arsenal strip.

DENNIS (TO AUDIENCE) It's like finding mesen in a D.H.Lawrence story: educated miner, punching above his weight, meets exotic foreign lady. Truth is, this "coalition" with Lois has let my imagination run wild. But that's my business. This is

why I don't do interviews with the Press.

JEAN (TO DENNIS) Truth be told, you've always been a bit of a loner.

DENNIS It comes with the job.

JEAN Most times we'd see you walking home alone.

DENNIS It's not like workin' at 'pit, I have to be in London.

JEAN Don't give me that. You enjoy being the maverick. You've always had a bit of the Dean Martin swagger about you, charming the women.

DENNIS That's not fair.

JEAN You're a good-looking fella and easily flattered.

DENNIS It's not like that.

JEAN There's a certain vanity what comes from the performer in you.

DENNIS It's public speaking, I have to rally people to the cause.

JEAN You mean you like the sound of your own voice.

DENNIS (TO AUDIENCE) Lois is from New Jersey. During the Summer recess, we fly over there and ride our bikes along the river. I didn't learn to drive 'til I was sixty. Since then, I've driven to Europe with Lois and friends.

HE SINGS AN EXTRACT FROM "UNDER THE BRIDGES OF PARIS" (DEAN MARTIN).

"Under the bridges of Paris with you,

I'd make your dreams come true..."

JEAN (TO AUDIENCE) Years later, at Mary's funeral...

DENNIS (TO AUDIENCE) The kids asked me if I'd speak about their mother.

JEAN (TO DENNIS) It was a lovely speech, Dennis.

DENNIS We gave her a good send-off, didn't we?

EXIT JEAN. DENNIS RETURNS TO HIDING BEHIND HIS TREE. THE REPORTER APPEARS AND CATCHES SIGHT OF DENNIS HIDING.

DENNIS LEGS IT.

REPORTER Mr Skinner, sir, (CHASING AFTER) Mr Skinner, is it true that...

SCENE 12 - BREXIT

SPEAKER (HAMMERING WITH HIS GAVEL AND CALLING) Boris! Boris!

Has anybody seen Boris? I realise you've got Brexit to deal with, but we need a bucket in the Gents' toilet; they're coming in here with their shoes wet. Now then, ever since we've been on the telly, people have been asking, "Where's the comedy?" Well, we've not got comedy but we do have Brexit for you. It's the word on everyone's lips.

DENNIS AND BORIS JOHNSON PERFORM A SONG AND DANCE ROUTINE TO AN EXTRACT FROM "MAKE 'EM LAUGH" (DONALD O'CONNOR)

DENNIS&BORIS "Make 'em laugh, make 'em laugh,

Don't you know everyone wants to laugh?

My dad said, "Be an actor my son, but be a comical one."

They'll be standing in lines

For those old honky-tonk monkey shines;

Now you could study Shakespeare and be quite elite

And you could charm the critics and have nothing to eat,

Just slip on a banana peel, the world's at your feet,

Make 'em laugh, make 'em laugh, make 'em laugh..."

BORIS We're taking back control.

DENNIS Of Bolsover?

BORIS And the rest of the "red wall".

DENNIS Not on my watch, you're not.

SPEAKER I see we've an intelligent audience with us this evening. Our erudite voters can decide for themselves if you're funny. I can assure members that the following words are all actual quotes.

BORIS Voting Tory will cause your wife to have bigger breasts and increase your chances of owning a BMW M3.

DENNIS When posh boys are in trouble, they allus sack the servants.

BORIS My chances of being Prime Minister are about as good as the chances of finding Elvis on Mars or my being reincarnated as an olive.

DENNIS Royal Mail for sale – Queen's head privatised.

BORIS All the young people I know – i.e. those under 30 – are just as avaricious as we flinty Thatcherite yuppies of the 1980's. In fact, they have an almost Nigerian interest in money and gadgets of all kinds.

DENNIS I think we should provide the Royals with work. The Queen should have a job at Royal Ascot, looking after the horses, cos that's her real talent; and Prince Philip should run a kebab shop in North London.

BORIS If gay marriage was OK, then I see no reason in principle why a union should not be consecrated between three men or indeed, three men and a dog.

DENNIS No wonder they call him "dodgy Dave", he's allus looked after his own pocket.

BORIS If a constituent came to my MP's surgery with her face obscured, I should feel fully entitled to ask her to remove it so that I could talk to her

properly. If a female student turned up at a school or university lecture looking like a bank robber, then ditto... It's absolutely ridiculous that people should choose to go around looking like letter-boxes.

DENNIS George Osborne is educated beyond his intelligence.

BORIS I don't believe that economic equality is possible; indeed some measure of inequality is essential for the spirit of envy and "keeping up with the Joneses" – greed is a valuable spur to economic activity.

DENNIS Lord Pym is the Minister for "Unemployment". There are nearly two million people on the scrap heap – that pile of human misery known as the dole queue.

BORIS I suppose I am a millionaire, but so are a lot of people.

DENNIS I'm not an angry man...

BORIS The entire EU population of 580 million are able to treat the UK as though it's basically part of their own country. I can ensure that the numbers of migrants will come down.

DENNIS I've had a United Nations heart by-pass: it was done by a Syrian cardiologist, a Malaysian surgeon, a Dutch doctor and a Nigerian registrar. And they talk about sending them back from whence they came.

BORIS The UK send £350million to the EU every week.

DENNIS The real powerhouse of the Common Market lies in Germany. We fought for six years against them in the Second World War, If Honourable

Members allow this political union, they will allow the Germans to win now when they lost in 1945.

BORIS The past 2000 years have seen failed attempts to recreate the “golden age” of the Roman Empire. Napoleon, Hitler and various people tried this out and it ended tragically. The EU is an attempt to do this by different methods.

DENNIS I’ve said it before, the Common Market is nothing more than a “capitalist club”. I’m the only one in parliament to have voted against every single EU Treaty. I believe eventually the EU will fail and I think I’ve been proved right up to now.

SPEAKER So there we have it, ladies and gentlemen, our two rivals have finally come to an agreement to “get Brexit done”.

EXIT BORIS

MALC I were born in Bolsover, down the road in Carr Vale. As a kid leaving school, you were sent to work with your dad. I started at Bolsover pit at 15 and worked there til pit closed in ‘95. As a Deputy I had to work during the Strike, which was understood by the lads. They knew my loyalty was with the Strike. The miners love Dennis; he speaks the working man’s language. What you see is what you get; I can’t fault the youth. I came here to live in The Model Village in 1964. First thing you bought in The Model were a sweeping brush. The people were friendly, up for a laugh and they’d got your back. The Model was built exclusively for the miners and their families; but if a miner died, his wife and family were out within a week. Now jobs at the pit have been replaced with Universal Credit and Zero Hour Contracts; the village hall has gone and even the Co-op. I’m 74 now. S’pose you’d

describe me as a funny owd bugger. I lost the wife eighteen years ago. I take the dog for a walk every day; she prefers early mornings. And I like me birds. I used to breed parrots. I'm a bit of a "home-bird" meself. I've a caravan other side of Lincoln towards Skeggy; that's about as far as I go. I live under the Castle at the bottom of the hill. Some of the locals have never been inside the Castle because of the cost, but 'round 'ere we're still loyal to the Crown. Most of the shops in the town centre have closed, apart from the bookies and the beauty parlours. They've been replaced with charity shops and vapour cigarettes, Polish supermarkets and Turkish kebab houses with their shop windows smashed in. Even the pubs have gone, although we do have a Wetherspoons, where the world and his wife can tuck in to a Full English at 10 o'clock in the morning.

DENNIS JOINS MALC TO SING AN EXTRACT FROM "GETTING TO KNOW YOU"
(JULIE ANDREWS).

MALC "It's a very ancient saying

 But a true and honest thought

 That if you become a teacher

 By your pupils you'll be taught.

DENNIS As a teacher I've been learning

 You'll forgive me if I boast

 And I've now become an expert

 On the subject I like the most.

MALC&DENNIS Getting to know you

Getting to know you

Getting to know all about you

Getting to like you

Getting to hope you like me”

MALC Traditionally ‘round ‘ere, people would vote for a dinosaur if it were a Labour candidate; but local council went Tory recently. ‘Appen it’ll be same nationally. Council are frightened of Dennis. But I respect the youth because he doesn’t take handouts: he has the lowest expenses and the highest attendance of any politician and he bought his own flat in London. I’ve voted Labour all me life, but the Tories are business people and better at handling money. Why do we send international aid to all these countries when we need it at home? Why don’t we get as much out of Europe as we put in? Brexit is a sore point for me. We’ve been betrayed. I know Dennis has always been anti E.U. but if Labour get in, Corbyn won’t leave Europe. I’ve had words with Dennis, but at least he tells the truth. The country’s in turmoil. My main concern is immigration so I’m voting B.N.P. Don’t get me wrong, my auntie was a German Jew and I admired her; but what this country needs is a dictator.

MALC&DENNIS “Getting to know you

Putting it my way but nicely

You are precisely

My cup of tea

Getting to know you

Getting to know all about you

Getting to like you

Getting to hope you like me..."

EXIT MALC AND DENNIS.

SCENE 13 – COVID AND CLIMATE CHANGE

A HOSPITAL IN LONDON. TWO BEDS. IN THE FIRST BED, DENNIS COMES 'ROUND FROM AN OPERATION AND SITS UP.

DENNIS Nurse? (CALLING) Nurse! Nurse!

HIS DAD APPEARS AS A KITCHEN PORTER

DAD I don't think there's anyone on the ward, lad.

DAD SITS UP.

DENNIS Dad?

DAD Short-staffed.

DENNIS Is that you?

DAD Years of austerity and cuts in public services.

DENNIS What you doing here?

DAD Try pressing the buzzer.

DENNIS What am I doing here?

DAD They've had to save your skinny ass again.

DENNIS Good to know I'm not dead.

DAD Some of us are less fortunate.

DENNIS I don't believe in God, so I know this can't be divine intervention.

DAD Don't get cocky, you've got an infection.

DENNIS I've survived cancer and a double heart by-pass, I'm not letting a little infection take me.

DAD It's not just that, lad. I've some bad news: you've lost your seat.

DENNIS I've never lost a feight before this election.

DAD It used to be as people who went to the pub never voted Tory.

DENNIS Well, it's tough shit; s'pose I've just got to get on with it.

DAD This new guy, he told the press there should be a statue of you to honour the contribution you've made to your community.

DENNIS Bugger statues, I'm not interested in that.

DAD It's Brexit and immigration, it's obvious. There was only Boris promising to deliver on both.

DENNIS I couldn't side with that Joker against me own party.

DAD No one said you should. Corbyn shouldn't have agreed to an election, that was his big mistake.

DENNIS I was in hospital, I couldn't campaign on the streets.

DAD Stop mekin' excuses.

DENNIS Maybe I've been down here too long. Maybe I should have retired before the election.

DAD We don't do retirement – not as long as those bastard Tories want us to.

DENNIS He's loving every minute of it, saving the country – he's allus fancied himself as a bit of a Churchill.

DAD They're straight back to their old ways of taxing the workers to pay for it.

DENNIS Maybe this time people won't forget what's important.

DAD It's up to you to get out there and tell 'em. What we need is a Robin Hood tax on the super-rich.

DENNIS I want to, dad; but I can't even walk.

DAD I don't care if you're on death's door, lad; you're a Skinner, and Skinnners never give in.

EXIT DAD

SPEAKER I am resigning my post with immediate effect. I would advise members of the committee to review their position and do the same. It's time to re-invent how things are done if we are to honour the aspirations of the younger generation who want to address the future, not harken back to the past. In recent times we have become socially distanced, self-isolating, out of touch. There has been a profound shift to the politics of social media – a new kind of democracy. I'd like to thank all the members for being such a wonderful audience.

EXIT SPEAKER.

DENNIS I know, I know - the irony's not lost on me.

ENTER MUM AS A NURSE

MUM Now then, my little bluebell, I need to take your blood pressure.

SHE PREPARES HIS ARM.

DENNIS Thank you, nurse.

MUM You're not to be working yourself up into a state, Dennis.

DENNIS Mum?

MUM Not in your condition.

DENNIS Bloody hell, it's like a proper family reunion.

MUM Has your father been getting you all excited again about
politics?

DENNIS I've had to change me routine and I don't like it. What with
illness and Lockdown, I can't drive back home to South Normanton and I can't fly to
the States with Lois for Christmas.

MUM I know just what you need. (HELPING HIM OUT OF BED) Come
on, get dressed.

DENNIS Where we going?

MUM Outside.

DENNIS Good. I've me bike parked out front.

THEY STEP OUT OF THE HOSPITAL AND STOP TO BREATHE IN THE FRESH
AIR.

DENNIS Smell that. It's like after a shift underground in the bowels of the Earth, coming up into the fresh air. It's intoxicating.

MUM You can't buy that feeling: when the trees blossom and the flowers bloom.

DENNIS People forget: the pits were cheek-by-jowl with the countryside. Miners have always been green-fingered and proud of what we grow, tending our gardens, planting our flowers and vegetables.

MUM We allus knew about miners' "black lung" from breathing in coal dust; but it's taken a while to realise the Earth's being poisoned an' all. Turns out, coal's not good for us any more.

DENNIS (LOOKING AROUND FOR HIS BIKE) Bloody hell! Some bastard's knicked me bike.

MUM Just as well. You'll not be cycling anywhere in a hurry. We can walk, I'll help you.

DENNIS Where to?

MUM On a bit of a pilgrimage; you'll see.

DENNIS I do me best thinking in the open air. On glorious days like today, with the scent of roses, revolution seems possible.

MUM It should be Nature what inspires politics, Dennis.

THEY ARRIVE AT THE TREE FROM SCENE 1, WHICH IS IN FULL BLOOM.

DENNIS How did you know?

MUM It's your magnolia.

DENNIS My favourite tree. Look at those huge white flowers, like giant hands.

MUM Place your hand in the flower, Dennis.

HE DOES.

 This is the best way to heal yourself.

DAD RETURNS TO JOIN THEM AND THEY SING AN EXTRACT FROM "I'M GONNA LIVE TILL I DIE" (FRANK SINATRA).

ALL "I'm gonna live till I die!

 I'm gonna laugh 'stead of cry,

 I'm gonna take the town

 and turn it upside down,

 I'm gonna live, live, live until I die.

 They're gonna say "What a guy!"

 I'm gonna play for the sky.

 Ain't gonna miss a thing,

 I'm gonna have my fling,

 I'm gonna live, live, live until I die..."