

CONVERGENCE
(A DIFFERENT
CHRISTMAS STORY)

BY

Vivian Lermond

CONVERGENCE (A DIFFERENT CHRISTMAS STORY)

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*Dedicated to all of the truly
supportive friends in my world*

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

TILLY YORK	40's, a widow, stoic, pragmatic
LES FARADAY	late 40's, bitter, sarcastic, Tilly's brother
NORTON FARADAY	30's, boisterous, fun-loving, kind, Cousin of Tilly and Les
MALCOLM SMITH	20's, fit, pleasant, a stranger
CYNTHIA	20's, Norton's girlfriend, gentle, wise

The single unit set features a combined living/dining room with furniture from a different era. There is a sideboard and a formal dining set. The living room area offers a faux fireplace with a mantle decked with holiday greenery, a well-decorated Christmas tree, a sofa, arm chairs, coffee table and a small telephone table. There is a coat rack by the exterior door.

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ACT 1 SCENE 1

It is morning in Cropton, Yorkshire, UK. LES FARADAY is seated at one end of the dining table, nursing a mug of tea. TILLY YORK enters, wearing a dressing gown and carrying a cup of tea. She sits at the opposite end of the table.

LES. Just a cuppa? Tilly dear, you need food fortification to give you strength for the annual Christmas coming of the cousin!

TILLY. And he's bringing a bit of young fluff along ... Cynthia something. Thankfully, the Faraday family Christmas comes once a year!

LES. Where is your holiday spirit, Sister Scrooge? You used to love Christmas ... all joy, jingle bells and ginger bread.

TILLY. It's different now ... without Ned and Kathleen.

LES. Yes. I will say that when it came to entertaining our side of the family, Ned was most tolerant. Perhaps he thought it was his York family duty to be kind to his poor relation.

TILLY. (*Bristling.*) Ned was certainly kind to you, Les. VERY kind!

LES. No need to get pissy! I was just making a joke!

TILLY. And I don't appreciate your cheeky humour!

LES. Sorry. (*A beat.*) So, cousin Norton's latest ... what's she about?

TILLY. We'll find out soon enough.

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LES. He invited her to family Christmas. A bold step, I'd say. (*A beat.*) Norton ... what a piece of work!

TILLY. At least he is employed and hasn't lived a totally loveless life! (*A beat.*) I tell you; this will be my last year to host this annual family charade. I'm firm on that!

LES. (*Dismissive.*) You say that every year. (*The doorbell rings. Tilly jumps to her feet.*)

TILLY. Good lord! I wasn't expecting them until noon!

LES. I'll handle the meet 'n greet. Run along and put on your happy holiday face. (*She makes a fast exit. Les opens the door to MALCOLM SMITH.*)

MALCOLM. Sorry to bother. My car broke down. I tried to call a tow but I can't get a signal. May I use your phone?

LES. Dodgey mobile reception is common in these parts. Come in ... come in. You're heating the street! (*Malcolm enters.*) The landline always works ... over there on the table next to the sofa.

MALCOLM. Ta. Would you know a mechanic I can call?

LES. Billy Edgars would be your man, but he's out of the village. He'll be back on the 24th.

MALCOLM. That's two days!

LES. Well ... yeah.

MALCOLM. Is there another mechanic here?

LES. You're in Cropton, population 321 last census. No need for another mechanic. (*A beat.*) Where you headed?

MALCOLM. A village up North that doesn't even register on my SAT-NAV.

LES. Can you ring a friend to give you a lift to where you're going?

MALCOLM. I drove up from Birmingham.

LES. A Brummie, are ya?

MALCOLM. No. Is there a hotel within walking distance?

LES. Afraid not. (*He extends his hand in greeting.*) Les Faraday.

MALCOLM. Faraday ...

LES. Used to be a common name in this county.

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MALCOLM. Malcolm ... last name, Smith. A common name everywhere.

LES. I live here in this lovely relic of a house with my sister, Tilly. Maybe she can help you get your problem sorted! (*Calling out.*) TILLY! We have a visitor!

TILLY. (*Off-stage.*) Coming!

MALCOLM. I appreciate your help! (*Tilly enters, startled at the sight of Malcolm.*)

LES. Tilly York and Malcolm Smith ... consider yourselves introduced.

MALCOLM. So sorry to barge in, but my car kinda shuddered, stuttered and stopped. I need to find lodging until the town mechanic gets back in two days. I sure welcome your suggestions.

TILLY. (*Thoughtful, pacing.*) Unfortunately, there aren't any options I can think of. (*She pauses, looks him over.*) Well then, Malcolm. Sometimes life doles out the unexpected. I welcome you as my house guest until Billy Edgars gets back.

MALCOLM. Thank you! You're a life saver!

LES. Problem solved!

MALCOLM. Of course, I'll pay you for your troubles!

TILLY. Twaddle and tosh! Your money is no good with me. We are not the sort of folk in Cropton to turn away a stranded stranger.

MALCOLM. I'm grateful.

TILLY. Fetch your things and Les will show you to your room. (*Malcolm exits the exterior door.*)

LES. He seems okay.

TILLY. Polite and respectful.

LES. I guess his mam raised him right. At any rate, he doesn't seem the type to pinch the silverware, AND ... he might prove to be a great distraction from Norton and his coquette named Cynthia!

TILLY. (*Irritated.*) I never called the woman a coquette! Norton simply warned me she is younger.

LES. You're the one who called her a bit of fluff!

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TILLY. *(Sarcastic.)* Forgive my rash assumption. *(A beat.)*
Show Malcolm to the bedroom at the end of the second floor.

LES. *(Surprised.)* The nursery?! But you never --

TILLY. – It’s the red room now. I had it redone during your last -

LES. – Don’t go there! *(An awkward break in the conversation.)*

TILLY. So then, it’s a good thing I had Ella and her girl help me clean this whole house from stem to stern this week.

LES. As you say, sometimes life doles out the unexpected.
Somehow, you always seem ready for it.

(Malcolm enters, rolling a small luggage case behind him.)

TILLY. There you are then! Les will show you to your room.

There’s a bathroom just across the hall. I’m putting the kettle on.
You look like you can use a strong cup of tea.

MALCOLM. Ta. Appreciate that. *(Les and Malcolm exit through the interior doorway.)*

SCENE 2

A short time later. Tilly sits at the dining room table, writing in a notepad. The sideboard is laden with tea things and a plate of biscuits. Les enters.

LES. Got him settled.

TILLY. Good ... good. *(She tears off a piece of paper from the notepad and hands it to Les.)* I need you to make a run into town. I’m low on butter, eggs and wanting a few other things.

LES. *(Looking over the list.)* Figgy pudding? I hate figgy pudding!

MALCOLM. *(Entering, wearing running gear.)* I love figgy pudding!

TILLY. *(To Les.)* There! You see? Some of us appreciate a good confection! *(Les grabs his coat from the coat rack. Malcolm pulls out his wallet.)*

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MALCOLM. Here ... let me pay for the groceries!

TILLY. You'll do nothing of the kind. You're a guest in my house! *(Les exits. Tilly calls after him.)* Les! Be quick about it! And don't be making any extra ... stops! *(To Malcolm.)* Help yourself to tea. I just made the Jammie Dodgers last night.

MALCOLM. Jammie Dodgers ... best biscuit ever! Much appreciated, ma'am.

TILLY. Call me Tilly. No need for formalities.

MALCOLM. Tilly ... short for Matilda, right?

TILLY. Please! Nobody but my granny ever called me that!

MALCOLM. *(Laughing.)* Understood!

TILLY. Malcolm ... an unusual name. I've never known a Malcolm.

MALCOLM. It's derived from Scots-Gaelic I've been told. And I've never known a Tilly. *(He moves to the sideboard, pours a cup of tea, tosses in two lumps of sugar, skips the milk, puts one biscuit on his plate and sits at the table.)*

TILLY. Come on then! A strapping lad like you can manage more than one biscuit!

MALCOLM. Strawberry or raspberry?

TILLY. The strawberries are homegrown and I make my own jam.

MALCOLM. *(He adds more biscuits to his plate.)*

TILLY. I always bake a massive batch of Jammie Dodgers for the holidays. I like to serve up a bit of good childhood memories on the season menu. *(She watches him bite into a biscuit.)* So?

MALCOLM. I might have just tasted the full flavor of heaven!

TILLY. *(Pleased.)* Get on with you! *(A beat.)* Were you able to call or text your people to let them know about your disrupted travel schedule?

MALCOLM. My phone is working fine now.

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TILLY. A large family “do” is it?

MALCOLM. No.

TILLY. Well, you’ll be getting a Christmas pre-dose of family here. My cousin Norton and his girlfriend are due to swoop in this afternoon.

MALCOLM. I’m so sorry to intrude on your family time!

TILLY. Intrude? Hardly! You’ll be a breath of fresh air!

MALCOLM. Family ... a complicated topic. *(He pushes back from the table and gathers his tea things.)* Which way to the kitchen?

TILLY. No bother. I’ll take care of it.

MALCOLM. Thanks for the tea, the Jammies and the conversation,

TILLY. As they say in the lovely land of Spain – *Me casa es tu casa.*

MALCOLM. My home is your home. *(A beat.)* I’m off for a short run.

TILLY. Enjoy.

MALCOLM. Cheers! *(He exits.)*

TILLY. *(To herself.)* He’s right. Families are complicated.

SCENE 3

A short time later. Tilly has transformed the dining room table into a formal holiday showcase of fine china, silver and crystal. She sings to herself as she positions the place settings on a holiday table cloth.

TILLY. *It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas, everywhere you go --*

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LES. (*Entering.*) And ho! Ho! Ho! My, my ... going posh, are we?

TILLY. I always do for the holidays.

LES. (*Sarcastic.*) Right. The most wonderful time of the year. (*He sets the grocery bag on a dining room chair.*) I got everything on your list ... and some chocolate covered cherries. Norton likes those.

TILLY. He doesn't. You do. He likes Cadbury's dairy milk.

LES. Where's the boy?

TILLY. Gone for a run.

LES. One of those city Liberal health nuts, I suspect.

TILLY. (*Pausing from her task and giving him the stink eye.*) If you're of the mind to be slapping on Liberal labels on someone for no reason, I must say Conservatives tend to be aged men on a downward slide past their prime.

LES. What I meant was --

TILLY. – I know exactly what you meant!

LES. You surprise me.

TILLY. Oh?

LES. Taking in a complete stranger. I would have thought you'd make some calls and farm him out elsewhere.

TILLY. Farm him out? He's a human being, not livestock!

LES. I've just always thought you to be a wary sort of woman.

TILLY. How could you possibly know that? You left home when I was a young teen and you were gone hither and thither from my life for fifteen years!

LES. Mam used to say it was always best to err on the side of caution.

TILLY. And dad used to say – you made your own bed. Go lie in it.

LES. You're a woman. You need to be careful.

TILLY. Since when did you transform into a chivalric knight in shining armor? You're being ridiculous! There's nothing

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suspect about Malcolm Smith and it's the first time ever a stranger has landed on my doorstep.

LES. Still, you --

TILLY. -- It's my home and my decision. I certainly wasn't going to tell him there was no room at the inn. End of discussion! *(She stands back and admires the table.)* There! Finished! What do you think?

LES. *(Sarcastic.)* A fine bit of old grandeur in an otherwise uncivilized world. *(A beat.)* I think I'll have a lie down before the onslaught of all the holiday happiness.

TILLY. Suit yourself. *(He exits. She picks up the grocery bag, makes for the exit, resumes her singing.)* It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, everywhere you go ...

SCENE 4

Tilly is seated on the sofa, skimming through a magazine. Malcolm enters through the exterior door.

TILLY. Have a good run?

MALCOLM. Ace! Worked out all the kinks from being car bound for two hours. I took a complete running tour of Cropton and got the mechanic's phone number off his garage.

TILLY. *(Laughing.)* I'm sure you got the odd look. We don't have many dedicated joggers in Cropton. Most of our residents are over forty. Young people move away. Unless you're working a family farm, jobs are scarce.

MALCOLM. It's a nice place ... rustic.

TILLY. Of course there are disadvantages. If you need to do any serious shopping, it's a twenty-five-mile jaunt to York ... a beautiful city. It's where my husband's people are from.

MALCOLM. But you chose to settle here.

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TILLY. A place that is quiet and uneventful. In the end, I guess you could say home is where the heart is ... or was.

MALCOLM. A wise man once gave me good advice – grow where you're planted.

TILLY. Funny. It makes me think of lawn weeds ... dandelions. A good wind will take their puff heads airborne and wherever the seeds land, they can grab onto a wee spot of earth, grow and thrive.

MALCOLM. Quite so!

TILLY. Some of us left to explore the world beyond, but came back to our roots.

MALCOLM. You and Les?

TILLY. Yes. The last of the local Yorkshire Faraday clan. The rest have passed on or moved out. *(Their conversation is interrupted by car honking.)* They're here! *(Calling into the wings.)* LES!

LES. I hear them! *(Tilly makes for the exterior door. Malcolm remains stationary and slightly out of view. NORTON and CYNTHIA enter. Cynthia carries a Poinsettia plant. Les enters.)*

NORTON. Les, you old coot! You look as bad as the last time I seen ya! And look at you, Silly Tilly! Still the best lookin' one in the family!

TILLY. And you, Knobby Knees Norton, need glasses! *(They hug.)*

NORTON. Announcement! Announcement! This is Cynthia, the very special woman in my life!

CYNTHIA. Pleased to meet everyone! *(She hands Tilly the plant.)* I hope you like white poinsettias. The shopkeeper told me they are a symbol of good cheer, success and wishes for happiness. Happy Christmas!

TILLY. Well, I can certainly use more of all of that! It's lovely! Thank you! *(She places the plant on the sideboard. Cynthia hangs her coat on the coat rack. Tilly turns toward Malcolm.)* Where are

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my manners! Norton, Cynthia ... meet Malcolm. He is my guest until the 24th.

NORTON. Ayup! The more the merrier, I say!

MALCOLM. Nice to meet you both. Cynthia ... the name of the Greek moon goddess.

NORTON. Yeah? She's a goddess, no doubt! And I'm over the moon crazy about her! And mate, you're just in time to start the celebratin'. *(He reaches into his jacket and pulls out a bottle of whiskey.)* I brought a bit of Christmas craic! *(He hands Tilly the bottle. She shoots him a look to kill. The room goes dead quiet. Malcolm reads the situation.)*

MALCOLM. Thanks, Norton. But I'll take a pass. A hot shower is what I'm needing. Catch you all later. *(He moves to the interior doorway. Tilly slams the whiskey down on the sideboard.)*

TILLY. I'll fetch your towels. *(She exits.)*

NORTON. He seems like a nice bloke. New in town and flyin' solo?

LES. His car died and the mechanic is out of town. Tilly took him in.

CYNTHIA. How awful to be stranded!

NORTON. And how damn nice of Tilly.

LES. *(Grabbing his coat.)* I'm heading for the woodpile. Need to stock up on yule timber for the great room.

NORTON. Gotta keep the home fires burnin'. *(A beat.)* Hey ... you used to tinker with cars. Did you check out Malcolm's car?

LES. I sold my tools years ago. *(He exits.)*

NORTON. *(To Cynthia.)* You okay, luv? You've been awful quiet.

CYNTHIA. There's something off about that man.

NORTON. Malcolm? Was he givin' you the look over?

CYNTHIA. No! Your cousin!

NORTON. *(Laughing.)* Oh him! Les has been off his whole life! Born narked and stayed that way ... always cheesed off.

CYNTHIA. *(Thoughtful.)* I wonder why.

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NORTON. We all do.

LES. *(Off stage.)* Norton! Get off your bum, get out here and give me a hand!

NORTON. Straight away! *(He gives Cynthia a quick kiss, grabs his coat and exits.)*

SCENE 5

Later. Tilly enters, carrying a cheese and veggie platter. She places it on the coffee table, along with small plates and cocktail napkins. Malcolm enters, dressed in a jumper and trousers.

MALCOLM. Where is everybody?

TILLY. Gone into town to do their Christmas shopping.

MALCOLM. 'Tis the season.

TILLY. Les and Norton always wait until the last minute. The shops close in half the hour. *(A beat.)* Have a nosh. We've a few hours 'til tea.

MALCOLM. Maybe a little cheese. *(He samples a cube of cheese.)* Scrummy! What type of cheese is this?

TILLY. Cheshire ... Norton's favorite.

MALCOLM. He has great taste. *(He approaches the Christmas tree, takes a closer look at the ornaments.)* You've a lovely tree. I'm sure all the ornaments hold special memories. *(She joins him.)*

TILLY. They do. This one here was a gift from my husband ... a crystal star. It was our first Christmas. It came in a red satin box with a note that said "you'll always be my guiding star."

MALCOLM. I'm very sorry for your loss.

TILLY. Thanks. *(A beat.)* And this one ... a York family heirloom passed down from the 19th century!

MALCOLM. I fancy this silly nutcracker!

TILLY. *(Laughing.)* Ned was nuts about nutcrackers ... and characters from The Wizard of Oz!

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MALCOLM. (*Jocular.*) Good man! Good taste! (*A beat.*)

Photograph picture frames ... here's a darling sweet child!

TILLY. My little treasure, Kathleen. I lost her too.

MALCOLM. I hope you can find comfort in the knowing that she is Heaven's angel now.

TILLY. Yes. I've learned to accept.

MALCOLM. I'm glad. Acceptance isn't easy. (*A beat.*) Oops!

Someone has gone missing. Probably just slipped out of their frame. Here. I'll help you look.

TILLY. (*Laying a hand on his arm.*) Some things lost can never be found. (*The moment is lost with the boisterous entry of the family, carrying shopping bags.*)

NORTON. (*Wearing a Santa hat.*) Merry makers! Rejoice! Santa has landed! It's time for fun for everyone!

CYNTHIA. It's snowing! It's going to be a white Christmas!

TILLY. Nothing like a snow blanket to get us all in a holiday frame of mind!

NORTON. Lookin' like one of them famous winter paintings by that guy ... Tony Ronaid.

CYNTHIA. It's Thomas Kinkade, luv.

MALCOLM. Brilliant artist.

TILLY. A man who could brush stroke the spirit of serenity onto canvas.

LES. Sappy, sentimental slop if you ask me.

TILLY. (*Terse.*) Nobody asked you. (*She switches gears.*) I expect you've worked up an appetite. I've set out some nibbles and bits to tide you over 'til tea. (*She moves to the coat rack, grabs her coat and hat.*)

NORTON. Where are you off to?

TILLY. First snow. I fancy a walk in our winter wonderland. (*She exits.*)

MALCOLM. (*Rising.*) I'm off to a Zoom meeting. Cheers! (*He exits through the interior door.*)

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LES. *(Mimicking Malcolm's voice.) "I'm off to a Zoom meeting. Cheers!"*

CYNTHIA. *(Standing abruptly.)* It can be awkward, you know, being a stranger in the midst of family, not quite knowing what to do! *(She snatches her shopping bag and heads for the interior door.)* I have presents to wrap! *(She exits.)*

NORTON. You upset her. What the hell is wrong with you?!

LES. I just said --

NORTON. – I know what you said ... cockin' a snook at the kid!

LES. I didn't do --

NORTON. Grow the hell up and get a personality! *(He storms out. Les chuckles to himself, crosses to the coat rack, grabs his coat.)*

LES. Christmas ... the most wonderful time of the year. Right. Gotta be a good boy and play nice with others. *(A pause.)* Think I'll have a smoke and then suck it up and mend some broken fences. *(He grabs his coat and exits the exterior door.)*

SCENE 6

Early evening. Tilly stands by the dining table, polishing crystal candlesticks. Candles lay on the table. Cynthia enters.

CYNTHIA. Malcolm is held up in his room. Les and Norton are at the billiards. What can I do to help?

TILLY. Kind of you to offer. If you could put the candles in the candlesticks?

CYNTHIA. Sure! *(She obliges.)* You set such a beautiful table! Cloth napkins ... lovely!

TILLY. It's nice that a young woman like you appreciates an old school formal table.

CYNTHIA. Elegance is ageless.

TILLY. I don't entertain like this anymore. But the holidays come once a year and I rally for the occasion. *(A beat.)* Before you

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leave, you must ransack my linen cupboard and take some of the cloth napkin sets off my hands.

CYNTHIA. For real?!

TILLY. I won't be using them.

CYNTHIA. What a generous woman you are! Thank you! (*She finishes her task.*) Finished! What would you like me to do next?

TILLY. Nothing. How about we have a natter and relax? I've everything under control.

CYNTHIA. I thought that as soon as we met ... that you know how to manage your life.

TILLY. Let's just say I'm a life management work in progress.

CYNTHIA. The way Norton sings your praises, I was fully expecting you to be Wonder Woman!

TILLY. (*Laughing.*) Sorry to disappoint, but my costume is at the dry cleaners!

CYNTHIA. (*Giggling.*) I'll keep your secret.

TILLY. I don't suppose Norton ever told you about his brief career as Superman?

CYNTHIA. He didn't!

TILLY. Norton was obsessed with Superman. After much begging and pleading, his mam got him a Superman suit for his birthday. He was six, I think. At his birthday party when the adults were busy organising games, he suited up, climbed the trellis to the roof of the garage, launched himself, and fell to mortal earth, breaking his wee arm!

CYNTHIA. The poor pet!

TILLY. Auntie Karen decided that was the end of that. The Superman suit went to the rubbish bin.

CYNTHIA. (*Shyly.*) He's my Superman now ... without the cape.

TILLY. Norton is a kind soul ... totally transparent ... a man without malice.

CYNTHIA. I'll confess. I wasn't keen on him when we first met. He asked me out for three months before I said yes.

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TILLY. Norton has never been one to take no for an answer.

CYNTHIA. It was our age difference that held me back.

TILLY. A sensible consideration on your part. My Ned was seven years my senior. All relationships have challenges. But most times, love wins over logic.

CYNTHIA. Logic is safe. Love isn't.

TILLY. When it's right, you know.

CYNTHIA. How did YOU know?

TILLY. Life is like school. Figuratively speaking, it took me a longer time to graduate from lower form than most, perhaps. I had to muster my way through some hard lessons about what love isn't until I got to understanding the formula of what it is.

CYNTHIA. *(Serious.)* For someone so young, you carry the wisdom of some ancient sisterhood in your soul.

TILLY. Young? I'm fast heading past 42!

CYNTHIA. At whatever age we are, we have the right to happiness. I wish that for you, Tilly.

TILLY. *(Softly.)* Now that is a fine bit of wisdom from a young woman with an old soul.

CYNTHIA. *(Laughing.)* So says the woman with her Wonder Woman costume at the dry cleaners! *(Their conversation is interrupted by the argumentative entrance of Les and Norton.)*

NORTON. I won!

LES. You bloody cheated!

NORTON. I damn well didn't! Pay up the twenty quid!

TILLY. If you're going to carry on like school boys, take it elsewhere!

CYNTHIA. It's a game! It's just a game!

NORTON. No, it ain't!

TILLY. It is. And I'm not in the mood for you rattling your gums!

CYNTHIA. Us two were just havin' a nice natter until you two barged in!

NORTON. *(Sheepish.)* Sorry.

LES. *(Sarcastic.)* Pardon moi!

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TILLY. I don't. Push off!

NORTON. But you haven't heard what he done!

TILLY. I don't need too. This is my house and I'm the presiding judge and jury. Norton, I award you twenty quid, payable after you unload the dishwasher. *(Les storms out of the room.)*

NORTON. Tilly, you don't --

TILLY. -- I do,

CYNTHIA. Gosh, Tilly! You didn't have to do that.

TILLY. I did. The dishwasher, Norton! *(He exits.)*

CYNTHIA. *(Tentative.)* I don't mean to overstep boundaries, but I gather you and Les aren't close then?

TILLY. As close as the North and South Pole.

CYNTHIA. But you let him live here?

TILLY. It's a long story. Let's try and get ourselves back in the holiday spirit, shall we?

SCENE 7

Later that evening. The meal is over. The group is seated at the dining table.

CYNTHIA. Tilly, that roast was yummy!

NORTON. Bangin'!

MALCOLM. I'll second that!

CYNTHIA. And the Yorkshire pudding!

NORTON. Don't forget the pease pudding!

MALCOLM. Brill! I'd never had it before.

NORTON. The magic of yellow peas, a ham hock, and some spices. It's Yorkie scran, mate.

TILLY. They're all the same recipes I've used for years.

LES. Our mam's recipes.

TILLY. Ned's mam actually. Mother York was a culinary icon.

NORTON. Pease and Yorkshire ... we ate a lot. But none of us

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Faradays had the kinda cash to be buyin' a big old slab of Silverdale, except at Christmas. Normal fancy for us was roast chicken.

CYNTHIA. There's nothin' wrong with roast chicken. A lovely supper!

MALCOLM. Or baked beans on toast.

TILLY. I read that beans on toast is Sir Patrick Stewart's favorite meal!

LES. (*Scoffing.*) A toff takin' to beans on toast?

MALCOLM. A West Yorkshire man ... Star Trek? The Next Generation? Jean-Luc Picard?

NORTON. That bloke?!

MALCOLM. Him.

NORTON. Damn!

TILLY. The man has won awards in television, film and stage. He even has a star on The Hollywood Walk of Fame!

MALCOLM. I've always got Heinz beans in my cupboard.

CYNTHIA. Same here!

TILLY. Can't have a proper full English breakfast without them!

CYNTHIA. It's nice to have traditions.

MALCOLM. And to create new ones.

NORTON. Well said, my man. (*Tilly rises and starts to clear the empty dishes. Malcolm is on his feet.*)

MALCOLM. I'll do that. You've done enough.

LES. Relax, Malcolm. Let a woman do a woman's work.

CYNTHIA. Now then, Les. It is the 21st century, and in the grand process of evolution, men of my generation have figured out how to clear a table.

NORTON. (*Laughing.*) Touché! En garde! (*Malcolm moves to remove Les's plates.*)

LES. (*Caustic.*) So, you're serving staff by profession then?

MALCOLM. (*Playing with him.*) Very observant, Doctor Watson. But ah ... you employed the wrong verb tense. I did wait tables whilst paying my way through university. (*Malcolm finishes*

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the table clearing, stacks the wares on the sideboard as Tilly changes tack.)

TILLY. Enough about us. Malcolm, tell us about your family traditions.

MALCOLM. Ladies first. I defer to Cynthia.

CYNTHIA. *(Caught off guard.)* I ... I don't have a family. I was an orphan. *(The group reacts, each with different emotions.)*

TILLY. Oh, dear girl!

CYNTHIA. It's all right, really. You can't live life looking backward if you ever plan to move forward.

NORTON. Yeah ... you can't be who you are and who you were at the same time.

MALCOLM. Well said.

TILLY. Brilliant philosophy.

LES. Well now. *(Giving Tilly a stare down.)* Cynthia is hardly a young bit of fluff, I'd say.

CYNTHIA. *(Laughing.)* Les, I'll take that as an inverted complement.

MALCOLM. What about your adopted family?

CYNTHIA. I was born to an unwed teen. She couldn't take care of me. I never got adopted. The nuns at the home raised me. They were very kind.

TILLY. Nuns?! Where? Where was this place? I had no idea there were such facilities still operating in the 1990's!

CYNTHIA. A far cry from here. 'Twas the Nazareth House ... a home for unwed mothers and orphans, Wrexham, Wales. They were church funded and somehow flew under the government radar. It's a home for the elderly now.

MALCOLM. Your biological mum ... have you ever tried to find her? Check with the General Register Office? Take a DNA test?

CYNTHIA. No. I used to think about it. But it was twenty-five years ago. I have no intent to disrupt someone's world. I'm sure my biological mum has moved on with her life.

MALCOLM. Maybe.

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LES. Can we move on? Lighten the mood?

NORTON. A brilliant idea! What say you, Tilly?

TILLY. Hmmmm ... what?

NORTON. I say it's time for a Christmas carol sing-a-long! A bit of the holly and the ivy and all that!

LES. (*Snarly.*) Joy to the World.

CYNTHIA. (*Giving Les a stare down.*) And peace on earth to men of good will. (*Malcolm has maneuvered himself back to the sideboard and is collecting dishes. Tilly notices.*)

TILLY. Malcolm Smith, I command you to moves away from that sideboard! Come join us!

NORTON. (*Clowning.*) A command has been issued by the Sargent Major! Heed the orders or you'll get no figgy pudding!

MALCOLM. (*He joins them.*) I'm warning you ... I barely remember the verses.

NORTON. Ha! Don't remember the verses? You don't know Tilly!

CYNTHIA. I know all the verses, but sadly, I'm no songbird.

TILLY. (*A confidential aside to Cynthia.*) Neither is Norton, but he puts his heart into it. (*She grabs a thick folder from the side table and hands it to Malcolm. They form a semi-circle. Les backs off and moves across the room to the sideboard. Only Cynthia spies Les pinch the bottle of whiskey from the sideboard, grab his coat and silently exit the exterior door.*)

CYNTHIA. Norton ...

NORTON. What did I tell ya? Tilly got enough copies of Christmas music to pass around the whole bloody town! She used to be the choir mistress here.

CYNTHIA. Norton ...

NORTON. The woman can sing like an angel!

MALCOLM. Somehow, I'm not surprised.

TILLY. (*Laughing.*) Norton, you always exaggerate!

NORTON. Yeah? As granny used to say, the proof is in the

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puddin'! I'm tellin' ya, Tilly outta get herself signed up on Britain's Got Talent.

CYNTHIA. NORTON!

NORTON. Just a minute, luv. Tell Malcolm and Cynthia I ain't lyin', eh. Les?

CYNTHIA. He's gone.

TILLY. Gone?

CYNTHIA. He left and took Norton's bottle of whiskey with him. *(Norton rushes to the coat rack, grabs his coat and is out the door. Tilly slumps onto to sofa. Malcolm and Cynthia join her.)*

NORTON. *(Off stage.)* Les, you free-loadin' wanker! Get your sorry arse back in the house! You ain't gonna ruin another family Christmas! You ain't gonna be bringin' no more hurt to nobody!

END OF ACT 1

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