

## Scene Five

*(The church hall. Later that summer.)*

*(LAWRENCE, a slightly shambling young man, enters with a scrabby art folder.)*

**LAWRENCE.** Annie?

*(ANNIE turns and looks at him. There's a beat. It's like she just heard an echo of a voice.)*

*(It makes LAWRENCE slightly lose confidence that he's turned up at the right time.)*

*("Are you ok?") Annie?*

**ANNIE.** Lawrence! Sorry. I was... *(She folds the blanket.)* ... wasn't sure you'd actually... *("Come")* You looked a bit stunned in the hospital when we came in to ask.

**LAWRENCE.** Yeah well. Normally it's a nightmare trying to find a life model. Suddenly a bus load turn up.

*(CELIA, CORA, RUTH and JESSIE enter, followed by CHRIS herding them.)*

**CHRIS.** IN in in in! Ha! Lawrence. Good lad.

*(They all pile in. ANNIE closes the door for privacy.)*

OK. Lawrence! Ladies, this is Lawrence. Porter at Skipton General Hospital.

**ANNIE.** And a photographer. Proper one.

**CELIA.** } *(Together, with a little wave.)* Lawrence.  
**RUTH.** }

**CORA.** *(Nodding.)* All right.

**JESSIE.** *(With some recognition.)* Hello, Lawrence.

**CHRIS.** Sorry about all the subterfuge, having to hang around in the car park. It's just it's our president, Marie. She's a bit like that thing out of *Lord of the Rings*, y'know? The big eye – the big... *(Beat.)* ...actually she's like quite a FEW things out of *Lord of the Rings*...

**ANNIE.** Stop it-t...

**CHRIS.** OK. Lawrence, this is Miss January, February, March and April...

*(CELIA, CORA, RUTH and JESSIE all rise up in arms.)*

<b>CELIA.</b>	} <i>(Together.)</i> {	Whoa whoa whoa
<b>JESSIE.</b>		Hold on...
<b>RUTH.</b>		Annie?
<b>CORA.</b>		Hey let's just take things easy –

**ANNIE.** *(Placating.)* IF – if they decide to go ahead. *(She nods.)* You said on the phone you'd had an idea.

**LAWRENCE.** *(Nervous as hell.)* Right. Well. When you –

*(CHRIS gestures to him to address the group.)*

– when they came in the hospital – Chris and Annie – about this – this calendar what you're wanting to sell at the Yorkshire Show...what it...what they er... *(He swallows.)*

**CORA.** Christ, love, if you're intimidated NOW, what are you gonna be like when Celia takes her blouse off?

**CHRIS.** Cora.

**CELIA.** Mesmerized.

**LAWRENCE.** *(Swallowing almost audibly.)* It should be what John said.

*(This quietens them all slightly.)*

When I was pushing him round. Talking to him about what it was you all did in here. He reckoned all the jam-making and knitting was basically a front for a load of respectable middle-aged women to get together and go nuts.

*(There's a beat where the room feels momentarily warmed by JOHN's humour. It gives LAWRENCE some confidence.)*

That's what your calendar should be.

*(He gets the drawings out. They all crowd round.)*

At first glance the photos should look like your classic WI calendar. All your traditional...cakes, jam, sewing an' that. *Everything* y'd expect. Except for one tiny thing. The person doing it is naked.

**EVERYONE.** *(Quietly, variously.)* Nude.

*(He shows the first sketch. We don't see it.)*

*(Pause.)*

**ANNIE.** You're right. John would've loved this.

**LAWRENCE.** *(Warming to his theme.)* See so each month, y'see, y'd get a different girl... *(He hands out pages.)* – painting, knitting, gardening here, see...until December when I thought we could do a group one of you all together singing Christmas carols.

*(The last sketch is a double spread. It creates a huge reaction.)*

**CHRIS.** Ohmygod that just... Lawrence that is PERFECT! We LOVE it! We AB-solutely –

**CORA.** Except for one small problem. *(Beat.)* He's a bloke.

**JESSIE.** I thought the point was we're not actually going to be showing anything.

**CORA.** On the *photographs*. I imagine there's going to be considerably more on display in the actual bloody room.

**CHRIS.** Cora, we've BEEN through this. An artist doesn't see a naked woman, he sees a "life model". *(To LAWRENCE.)* Don't you, Lawrence?

*(They all look at LAWRENCE. He loses what bottle he had.)*

**LAWRENCE.** I think... *(He swallows.)*

**CHRIS.** Yes?

**LAWRENCE.** ... I left me bike on a bend.

*(LAWRENCE exits.)*

*(The GIRLS all watch him go.)*

**CHRIS.** *(To CORA.)* Well thank you very much.

**CORA.** Look. I'm sorry, OK, I'm sorry. It's just – Ruby has already...got me down as a woman who makes a habit of *(Waving loosely.)* ... "parading herself in front of men."

**CELIA.** Why?

*(CORA bats it off.)*

**ANNIE.** Cora –

**CELIA.** No, come on you've never done anything like this/ before –

**CORA.** *(Killing it dead.)* Because I lost touch with her dad, Ceel. *(Beat.)* Because I'm the kind of mother who "loses touch" with the father.

**ANNIE.** Look no one's parading ANYTHING.

**CHRIS.** Lawrence would arrange the photos, leave the room, off comes the dressing gown, one of US would click the shutter.

*(Beat.)*

**ANNIE.** *(Collecting the drawings.)* Look he's done all these, all this thinking about it. At some point we're going to have to commit to giving it a go or not.

*(The GIRLS all look at each other.)*

**JESSIE.** Well. I think I can fairly quickly state MY position.

**CHRIS.** Jessie, look I appreciate for a woman of your –  
*(Searching for "le mot juste".)*

**JESSIE.** You know, the last time I heard the phrase "a woman of your age" it was my new, young headteacher explaining his reasons why I should retire. The following week I had to take over the school trip halfway up Plover Hill after he collapsed with exhaustion. *(She pulls her coat on.)* I have never had a problem with age, my dear. It has only ever had a problem with me. *(She puts her scarf on.)* Any teacher who has seen the years pass with lengthening legs and shortening skirts has felt old since she was thirty. And the danger, girls, of age, is what you think age expects of you. Witness my mother, who at the age of sixty considered a day when the postman and the gas man called to be one where she was, quote, "run off her feet". Why? Because the small incidents of life will expand to fill the hours you allot them, and the saddest thing on God's earth is those with the fewest hours left allowing less and less to fill more and more.

*(She heads for the door.)*

**CHRIS.** *(Stopping her.)* S – sorry, Jessie. Just to clarify – ?

**JESSIE.** No front bottoms. *(Beat.)* I'm in, as long as there's no front bottoms. That's a sight I've reserved for only one man in my life.

**ANNIE.** Right. D'you think your husband will mind?

**JESSIE.** Good God, love, it wasn't my husband.

*(JESSIE exits, shutting the door.)*

**CELIA.** *(Standing up and applauding.)* WAY TO GO, JESS!

*(RUTH starts to head out.)*

**ANNIE.** Ruth?

**RUTH.** The thing is...not all of us are Chris-es. *(Beat.)*  
Some of us are Ruths.

**CHRIS.** *(Gathering her up.)* No no no but see that's the point, hun. Having the Ruths. It's not like we're doing it because we want to show off fantastic bodies...

**RUTH.** But *actually* Chris... *(Choosing her words carefully.)*  
In fairness actually there IS a little bit of that, isn't there? You and Celia? And your little... "Bra-wars". Which is fine, I'm not saying –

**CELIA.** Don't be ashamed, Ruth.

**RUTH.** ...but not all of us used to ride topless on a Harley Davidson.

**CELIA.** Can you not make it sound like I was in the circus?  
I did it once, to spite my mother.

**CHRIS.** Ruth, show Eddie what he's missing. You're a beautiful wom –

**RUTH.** *(Snapping.)* CHRIS, I'll buy one, OK? I'll buy a hundred. *(She heads out.)* For John I'll buy a hundred. I'll be proud of you and buy a hundred.

*(RUTH exits.)*

*(There is a pause. ANNIE looks to CHRIS.  
CORA tries to slope unnoticed out of the door.)*

**CELIA.** *(Realizing.)* Cora-a...

*(CORA stops and turns at the door.)*

**CORA.** Celia, I am a vicar's daughter, a single mother and the church organist.

**ANNIE.** And?

*(This sudden summation of her life hits  
CORA out of left field.)*

**CORA.** And if I'm not gonna get them out now, when am I?

**CELIA.** That's my GIRL!

*(CHRIS and ANNIE hug CORA.)*

**CORA.** Lord forgive me. I know not what I bloody do.

*(CORA exits.)*

**CHRIS.** Are you all right with this, Ceel? The ladies of the Royal Yorkshire Golf Club are not going to like this.

**CELIA.** Believe me. That's why I'm doing it! *(She hugs CHRIS.)* I'll tell David Bailey I'll do July and if things get tough I don't mind spilling over into the Autumn.

*(CELIA exits.)*

*(Suddenly it's just CHRIS and ANNIE again.)*

**CHRIS.** I think we've got a calendar! You realize we're going to have to bloody do it now. *(A beat.)* How about you, Mrs Clarke? Are *you* all right doing this?

**ANNIE.** *(Thinking a beat.)* I wasn't actually. Sure. Not until he walked in.

**CHRIS.** Lawrence?

*(ANNIE starts to say something, but seems to think better of it. Then says it anyway.)*

**ANNIE.** I knew John agreed. *(Beat.)* Somehow I knew J – Oh God this is what happens isn't it? *(She puts her head in her hands.)* You start going mad. Start seeing them in other people. Before long you're seeing them in the markings on your toast. Am I going mad? D'you think I'm going mad?

*(CHRIS goes to her and holds her.)*

**CHRIS.** Love. You're about to take your bra off to buy a settee. You're a complete fruitcake.

**ANNIE.** *(Being hugged.)* Hey but hold on. What about "the dark Lord Ma-rrie who sees all, Mister Frodo?"

**CHRIS.** *(Squeezing her.)* Don't you worry, my little Gollum.

**ANNIE.** I wasn't being Gollum.

**CHRIS.** I think I know a way we can get round Marie.

*(Blackout.)*