



WHAT A WAY TO GO

by Peter Whittle

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- a musical comedy

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CHARACTERS:

- Mabel Potts - a woman of 45-50yrs
matter of fact, frustrated
- Vic Potts - a man of 50-55yrs, married to Mabel
proud but rather run down, pathetic figure
- Brenda Potts - their daughter, 25yrs
- Rita Thorpe - a woman of 45-50yrs, sister of Vic
nobody's fool, somewhat overbearing
- Bill Arkwright - a man of 40-60yrs, runs a small building firm
with his brother which includes undertaking
as a sideline. Can turn on a respectful,
dignified tone when required.
- Norman Arkwright - a man of 30-45yrs, brother of Bill who finds
his more jokey, irreverent approach troubling.
He is not so easy around women.
- Rev. Gilbert Pritchard - an upstanding local vicar trying to provide a
bulwark against creeping secular ways.

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ACT I

SCENE 1

The Potts kitchen and side room in their marital home.

The stage is in two parts with a made-up bed in room adjacent to kitchen on the ground floor. It's sometime in the 1960s. Most of the modern ways have passed them by so far. Vic is asleep in the bed having recently been sent home from hospital following a boxing match. He has a bandage wrapped diagonally across his face perhaps helping to mend a broken jaw. (Its purpose is really to hide his nose from the audience unless it is possible to simulate a broken nose facing one side with make-up in which case a bandage would be unnecessary). Mabel is in the kitchen baking. She's wearing a wrap around apron and headscarf. The doorbell is heard, waking Vic who starts to stir.

Mabel: I wonder who that can be (*talking to herself*). I hope it's not the vicar.

Opens the door and Brenda enters.

Mabel: Oh, it's you. Hello, Brenda. Come on in.

Brenda: Morning, Mum.

Mabel: Come to see yer father I suppose.

Brenda: Yes, I thought I'd better come over. How is he? What did they say at the hospital?

Mabel: He's as well as can be expected. Sit yourself down.

Brenda: That's a relief.

Mabel: He's on death's door. (*Mabel is matter of fact*).

Brenda: Oh. (*concerned*)

Mabel: Dr Barker popped in earlier and says he's on his last legs. He came round from his coma but he won't last long. Could be any day apparently.

Vic catches some of this but is struggling to hear properly, so approaches the doorway separating the two rooms to listen more intently.

Brenda: I see, it's serious then. I'm so sorry, Mum.

Mabel: Oh there's nothing to be sorry about. I just don't see why they had to send him back here. Said they thought he'd like to end his days in his own home. That's all very well, I thought, but I'm the one who's going to have to clear up, eh?!

She resumes baking. Brenda is a little taken aback that her Mum is not more upset.

Brenda: Is he upstairs?

Mabel: No, he's in the side room there, having a snooze. Barlow says he's surprised he came round at all this time, but he's very likely to have further bleeding on the brain. Apparently his vital signs are not good. I can't see any at all myself. Silly bugger. We all told him not to go through with it. Him and yer Uncle Frank.

"Yer both past it. Pack it in," we said. "Put your gloves away. You're too old to be boxing at your age." But would they have it? Not on your nelly. "Just one more fight, Mabel" he said. "I've got to prove who's the top dog in this family." Who was he trying to kid, eh? I ask you.

Brenda: I guess it was important to him.

Mabel: Rita tried to stop her Frank as well, but he was just as obsessed. "Just one more, and I'll hang them up for the last time."

Brenda: Well he certainly did that, I suppose.

Mabel: He'd gone before they even got him on the stretcher. Went out like a light. I'd better tell her about your Dad I suppose. She's only just had her Frank buried. She'll probably want to see her brother before he goes as well.

Brenda: Sounds like she'll have to hurry then. Does Dad know he hasn't got very long?

Mabel: No, of course not. He just thinks he was knocked out for a bit and now will be perfectly all right again, just like before. He must hold a record for hitting the canvas head first so many times over the years. But he always came round again and just picked up from where he'd left off.

Brenda: Amazing. (*with some admiration*).

Mabel: He thought he'd recovered each time but actually he lost more and more of his marbles. He just got slower and slower in the ring over the years. That chap from the local paper said, "He could float like a bee, and sting like a butterfly". Vic, the stupid bugger, thought that was a compliment and cut it out of the paper for his scrapbook.

Brenda: Boxing was his life, eh Mum.

Vic continues to react to these statements sometimes hurt, occasionally baffled.

Mabel: But by the end he had no idea how pathetic he was. It's not the same this time, though. They did one of those egg scan things.

Brenda: Egg ? Ah, you mean an EEG?

Mabel: That's right, an egg scan. Apparently, his insides are all scrambled. Frank wasn't much better mind. Why they kept on having to fight each other over so many years beats me. Talk about a long-standing family feud. It was never settled. Whenever one match was finished they started arranging the next one. They just wouldn't let it go. Like two grown up kids scrapping over a bowl of leftover cake-mix.

Brenda: Shame they couldn't compete at something less violent instead.

Mabel: Oh, we tried that. We thought chess might be the answer at one point. But Vic could never get the hang of it. Far too complicated for him. One year, Rita and I even bought them both a set of tiddly winks. It just didn't catch on. They liked the smell of blood on leather too much. The fools.

Brenda: But I did like those shiny dressing gowns. It made Dad look twenty years younger.

Mabel: Apparently, Frank got buried in his. Had "Frank Thorpe" in gold letters, "welter-weight champion of East Gridlington, 1935" sown on the back. His finest hour. We all told them, if you two go in that ring again you'll be the death of each other. But would they listen? Stubborn as mules they were, both of them.

Mabel thinks Vic is asleep but he has of course been listening to all this. He starts sparring with an imaginary foe to prove he's fighting fit with mixed results.

Vic: Losing me marbles, eh? Never. I'll show them.

Vic sings As Fit As A Fiddle in protest:

Listen to mp3 recording on:

<https://soundcloud.com/mrvingers/fit-as-a-fiddle-1>

Fit as a Fiddle

1. When it comes to the crunch,
I can still pack a punch,
Lay you flat on your back,
With a bunch of fives.

With a swift upper cut,
Or a lunge to my gut,
You will fail to connect,
As I ducks and dives.

I'm lean and nimble on my feet,
Not an ounce of fat 'round my middle,
If you step in the ring to compete,
You will find I'm as fit as a fiddle.

2. How I long for a scrap,
Just to beat the crap,
Out of some poor sod,
In a knockabout.

Overwhelm the defence,
With a blow so intense,
That he falls to the ropes,
Punch his senses out.

I crave the smell of the sweat,
As I warm to the baying of the crowd,
With a snarl and jaw firmly set,
My head all bloody, but unbowed.

3. One must learn to go,
With the flow, from a blow,
As he catches you out,
With a jab to the chin.

You may play by the book,
But I'll plant a right hook,
As your guard you do drop,
I will always win.

I'm lean and nimble on my feet,
Not an ounce of fat 'round my middle,
If you step in the ring to compete,
You will find I'm as fit as a fiddle.

He is now worn out again and retreats to bed.

Brenda: I guess you'll be calling off the divorce now, will you?

Mabel: Will I heck. Why should I do that?

Brenda: With him being so poorly like. There's no point going on with it now if he's just about to go?

Mabel: Look, I have no intention of remaining his widow for the rest of my life. I've spent most of it playing second fiddle to his boxing. That's all he's ever cared about and I've had enough. I'm not having him pop his clogs before we've cut all our ties.

Picks up some papers from the table.

Mabel: These papers arrived yesterday. One more final signature and they can go before the judge for the last time and we're there. Degree Absolution or whatever they call it. Time to wash my hands of him for good.

Brenda: Decree Absolute.

Mabel: Exactly. It's the only degree I'll ever get.

Brenda: Well, if it's what you want, Mum.

Mabel: Yes, it's what I want indeed. I should be grateful he finally woke up I suppose. Otherwise, I'd 've missed me chance. Anyway, it's about time you got yourself a fella, isn't it? The clock's ticking you know.

Brenda: I'm working on it but I just haven't found the right one yet.

Mabel: Well don't wait around for Mr Perfect. You could be waiting forever.

Brenda: You're a right one to talk. Urging me on to find a bloke and you're busy trying to get rid of one.

Mabel: Well I've waited on him long enough. Three meals a day for a lifetime. I reckon he's outstayed his welcome.

Brenda: Till death us do part, Mum?

Mabel: Exactly.

Brenda goes through to see her father while Mabel continues cooking.

Brenda: Hi, Dad

Vic opens one eye.

Vic: Is that you, Brenda?

Brenda: How are you feeling, Dad.

Vic: A bit groggy but I'll be as right as rain in the morning. Never you mind what yer mother tells you.

Brenda: Yes, I'm sure you'll be fine. Looks like you went a bit too far this time, eh?

Vic: What d'yer mean?

Brenda: You and Uncle Frank.

Vic: Neck and neck all the way. But I got him in the end, eh?

Brenda: I don't understand. The ref should have called it off before it got that far.

Vic: He did, but we just carried on. Never let the rules get in the way of a good fight, I say.

Brenda: Well you both got your comeuppance.

Vic: Best left hook I've landed for years.

Brenda: Trouble is, he landed a good left hook at the same time.

Mabel takes a cake out of the oven.

Vic: Yes, I know. I let me guard down there a bit. But I must have won on points.

Brenda: Nobody won, Dad. Uncle Frank died there and then in the ring and you went into a coma. That's not winning. That's mutual slaughter. We didn't think you'd be coming back.

Vic: Well, here I am. I'll be my old self soon enough. I'll miss Frank though. Hated his guts, but we had some good times together.

Brenda: It's good to see you, Dad. I'd better be off.

Vic: And you, Brenda. That cake smells gorgeous. Could you ask her if I can have a piece on your way out.

Brenda: I'll see what I can do. Bye, Dad.

Brenda returns to the kitchen.

Brenda: Dad says can he have a piece of that cake. The smell's been wafting through.

Mabel: Certainly not. It's for the funeral. We'll be having people round afterwards and I'm not serving up half eaten cake. I've got a reputation to consider you know.

Brenda: But he hasn't gone yet ma.

Mabel: Doctor says it could be any time. I don't want to be caught unprepared.

Brenda: Oh well, I've got to be off now. I'll try and pop round later on.

Mabel: Thanks for coming round, dear.

Brenda: See yer, Mum.

Brenda exits.

Mabel: I suppose I'd better let Rita know (*to herself*). She'll want to say goodbye to him. She's only just seen her Frank off.

Mabel goes through to the side room carrying the papers and a card.

Mabel: You've woken up now have you?

Vic continues to lie in bed following her around the room with his eyes as she opens the curtains and window.

Mabel: Ah, that's better. Some fresh air. I've got Jack's birthday card here for you to sign.

She picks up a newspaper from the floor.

Vic: Who's Jack?

Mabel: Your grandson. He's six tomorrow. You don't even know how many grandkids you've got, do you, never mind how old they are.

Vic: Of course I do. Here, pass me that pen.

Mabel passes him a card and a pen with the newspaper underneath to rest on.

Mabel: Here you are. Just put your name at the bottom. V, I ... C.

Vic: I can spell me own name thank you very much.

Mabel: Sorry. Just thought I'd help.

Mabel takes the card and puts the divorce papers in front of him.

Mabel: And sign here while you're at it.

Vic obliges but has no idea that he's signing a legal document to sanction the last stage of their divorce.

Vic: Here you are, lovely. You know, Mabel, you're looking great.

He starts to get a bit fruity.

Mabel: Give over (*taking the papers back*). How can I look great in one of these things.

Vic: Well you do. It reminds me of me mother when you wear that pinny. Come over here and give me a cuddle.

Mabel: Don't be disgusting. I have no wish to look like your mother and you're in no fit state to get excited.

Vic: Not even for old times sake?

Mabel: No.