

# **Summer School**

A play

by

Alan Wade

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## SUMMER SCHOOL

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# SUMMER SCHOOL

## Characters

Julie	Homemaker and full time Mum Late 20's
Dee	Career woman – 30's
Jim	Retired man – 60's
Irene	Jim's wife – 60's
Margaret	Widow – 60's
Mark	Young teacher – Late 20's
Rob	Young teacher – Late 20's
Joyce:	Tutor – Anything from 30 to 60
Sally	Margaret's daughter – Very Small part 30's

## SUMMER SCHOOL

The play was first performed by Totley Operatic and Dramatic Society (TOADS) on Wednesday May 10<sup>th</sup> 2017 at St John's Church Hall Abbeydale Road South, SHEFFIELD.

### Original cast

Julie	Claire Bird
Dee	Alice Nelson
Jim	John Bettridge
Irene	Judy Savournin
Margaret	Anne Bettridge
Mark	David Hutchesson
Rob	Ian Stuart
Joyce	Sarah Neal
Sally	Samantha Wright

with Sue Appleby and John Savournin

The play is dedicated to them and all the people working backstage and FOH who worked tirelessly to bring the script alive.

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*The play is set in the common room of a hall of residence in a campus university in the Midlands. The date is August 1975. The University is acting as a Summer School for the Open University.*

*The room is functional but a bit tatty. There are 8 office type chairs placed against the scenery. There is a door UL that leads to the bedroom corridor and one UR, which leads to the rest of the university. There is a door DL which leads to the kitchen.*

*When the curtain opens, Dee is sitting on one of the chairs reading a thick paperback novel. She is in her early thirties, composed and self-assured. Julie enters from the corridor. She is about the same age as Dee, but is nervous and excited.*

### Scene 1 – Saturday afternoon.

Julie: Excuse me.

Dee: Yes (*Dee does not look up*)

Julie: Is this what they call the common room?

Dee: I suppose so, it looks pretty common to me.

Julie: (*goes to front of stage to look out of the "window"*) You get a good view from up here. (*she refers to a brochure*) That must be the Williamson Building, engineering and that one over there is the Dame Dorothy Barker Building, Neurosciences, whatever they are.

Dee: Something to do with the brain I'd imagine.

Julie: I wonder if they could get me a new one. The one I've got isn't very good.

Dee: (*Still reading*) Yes

Julie: Oh.

Dee: I mean no. Sorry I wasn't paying proper attention. Very rude of me.

Julie: That's OK. Erm, my name is Julie.

Dee: Dee.

Julie: Dee, is that short for something?

Dee: Yes. (*pause*)

Julie: What, what is it short for?

Dee: If you must know, it's Deirdre.

Julie: Pretty name.

Dee: I prefer Dee, if it's all the same with you.

Julie: Right, OK, Dee. What's through there?

Dee: I believe it might have been a kitchen once.

Julie: Really?

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- Dee: Are you planning on going in?
- Julie: Yes, I was thinking of it.
- Dee: I'd suggest a piece of string tied to the leg of a chair.
- Julie: Why?
- Dee: It might help you to find your way out.
- Julie: I don't understand.
- Dee: Theseus.
- Julie: What?
- Dee: Theseus and the Minotaur. *(pause)* Greek myth. *(pause)* Theseus killed the Minotaur in the labyrinth and used the string to find his way out.
- Julie: Oh yes, I remember now. We did it at school. Bad as that is it?
- Dee: See for yourself *(Julie enters the kitchen)*
- Julie: I see what you mean. The things you come across when you haven't got a Brillo pad.
- Dee: You're not a scrubber by any chance?
- Julie: *(re entering)* I beg your pardon.
- Dee: No, not like that. Are you a person who likes scrubbing things, ovens, kitchen floors, small children.
- Julie: I like to think I'm house proud.
- Dee: I suggest you forget all that this week. You're here to use your brains not your brawn. What course are you doing?
- Julie: Art history.
- Dee: Do you paint?
- Julie: I try. I want to learn to do it properly, so I thought that looking at the way people in the past did it might help.
- Dee: Good thinking.
- Julie: What about you?
- Dee: English literature. *(shows Julie the book)*
- Julie: "Our Mutual Friend" Charles Dickens. I tried reading "Bleak House" once. I only got as far as the end of the first page.
- Dee: You should try again. You're an artist, didn't that first page paint a picture for you. All that fog.
- Julie; It was all rather, well bleak.
- Dee: Mmm. I think that was the picture Dickens was trying to put in your mind.

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Julie: I found it depressing.

Dee: Well yes, but life can be depressing at times.

Julie: I know but I don't want to read about it.

Dee: But bleak can be interesting. Look the coffee in there is as filthy as the cups. What say we go and find the Students' Union. See if they can sell us anything that bears a resemblance to the real thing. We'll need to bring it back here. We're supposed to be meeting our tutor this afternoon.

Julie: Will she be wearing a gown and one of those flat hats with a tassel.

Dee: A mortar board, I doubt it

Julie: Oh

Dee: Disappointed?

Julie: Yes, I thought here of all places they would be wearing gowns. I can't wait to wear mine.

Dee: I haven't worn one since I last graduated and I hired one then

Julie: You've already got a degree?

Dee: Yes, in economics.

Julie: Why are you here then?

Dee: Because I want to do something I want to do. I'm pretty good with figures so the advice at school was to get an economics degree and go into banking, which I did. But I'm really interested in books, which is why I am here. Come on let's find that coffee.

Julie: OK Lead on Mac something .

Dee: Duff, MacDuff. So you know some Shakespeare.

Julie: Is that Shakespeare?

Dee: Coffee's this way.

*(They exit UR. There is talking outside.)*

Rob: *(offstage)* Afternoon ladies.

*(Mark enters the room first. Rob enters backwards)*

Mark: You know, there must be hundreds of rooms like this up and down the country. They split the atom and discovered DNA in British universities, but have yet to invent a common room that cleans itself.

Rob: Yes, I think the feisty one.

Mark: What are you talking about?

Rob: I thought at first, the shy one, but then I said to myself, I'm up for the challenge. That's why we're here isn't it. This whole OU thing is a challenge.

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Mark: What are you talking about?

Rob: Those two who just left. You smiled at them.

Mark: I see. I smile at lots of people. I even smile at you sometimes. That doesn't mean that I fancy you. Besides, aren't you forgetting something?

Rob: What's that?

Mark: This time last year I was getting married, remember?

Rob: Oh yes

Mark: You should do, you were best man.

Rob: I always was the best man.

Mark: If you're talking about the two of us, it's the better man.

Rob: You're not interested in the other one then?

Mark: No.

Rob: I can't manage two. I don't know though, it might be OK. D'you think they'd mind taking it in turns.

Mark: Stop. Let's get one thing straight. I have come here this week, because it is another step in getting a degree and with it a small pay rise and the possibility of promotion. I am not looking for anything else. Besides I am happily married.

Rob: But Mark, you saw that old edition of Sesame. Don't you ever read the newspaper they send.

Mark: What did it say? Come to our summer school and indulge all your primeval urges.

Rob: Not in so many words, no. No, it was the small ads. "Two ships that passed in the night" and "Bungle Bear remembers Flopsy Bunny." I'm not stupid, I can read between the lines.

Mark: The only lines I'll be reading are by William Shakespeare.

Rob: You're no fun these days. They'll be expecting stories when we go back in September.

Mark: That should be easy for you, you are doing the Creative Writing. That could be your theme for the week. "Rob Peterson - Conquests and Infidelities on an Arts Foundation Course Summer School." Bound to sell millions.

Rob: Come on Mark. I want the degree as much as you do, but we can have a bit of fun at the same time, can't we?

*(Enter Jim and Irene)*

Irene: OK my love, let's sit you down over here. That's it. I think we've strayed into the cleaners' cupboard. I'll go and find us somewhere more comfortable to sit in a moment, when you've got your breath back.

Mark: Hello.

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Irene: Hello. We seem to be in the wrong place. We were looking for the common room on corridor 5B.

Mark: This is it I'm afraid.

Irene: I suppose it will be better when you've finished cleaning it.

Rob: We're not cleaners.

Irene; I can see that from the state of this place.

Mark: We are students

Irene; I see. Well much as I admire your ambition to earn some extra money in your spare time, I have to say I am not impressed with the results. What's through here (*she goes into the kitchen*) Oh my God! (*she comes back*) I suggest you start in there. I think something may have died. I shall go and find our rooms. I said I shall go and look for our rooms dear. I do hope they've been fumigated. (*she leaves*).

Jim: She'll grow on you.

Rob: Really?

Jim: Like mould. The trouble is that once she gets an idea into her head, she never lets it go.

Mark: So we'll be cleaners for the rest of the week?

Jim: That's it. That's Irene. I'm Jim by the way.

Mark: Mark

Rob: Rob.

Jim: Is this really the common room?

Mark; Yep. Grim isn't it?

Jim: Only slightly better than my old POW camp. Have you started digging a tunnel yet?

Rob: You think we might need one?

Jim: We might have need of an escape route before the week is out. It all depends.

Mark: Depends on what?

Jim: On how objectionable Irene is. She's got objectionable down to a fine art. Between you and me, I'd rather be sitting on the canal bank, fishing. That's all I ever wanted to do when I retired.

Mark: So why are you here?

Jim: Irene's idea. Said I needed to exercise my brain so she put us down for doing this.

Mark: And what are you doing?

Jim: The Human Figure in Renaissance Art. I've no bloody idea what it's all about.

Rob: Can't you draw?

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Jim: Draw, I've all onto draw breath.

*(Irene enters)*

Irene: I've found the rooms. They're not far away. Now you just stay here while I organise our cases. You two, come with me. Let's see if you make better porters than cleaners. Oh and darling, try not to breathe in any of the spores. Remember your chest.

*(Irene leaves with Mark & Rob There is an exchange of pleasantries in the corridor. Margaret enters Jim takes a newspaper out of his pocket and reads)*

Marg: Hello.

Jim: Hello.

Marg: Are you here for the summer school?

Jim: *(still reading)* Yes.

Marg: I'm doing romantic poetry, Keats and Shelley.

Jim: Oh yes.

Marg: What are you doing?

Jim: Reading my paper. Cricket results from yesterday to be exact.

Marg: Did they win?

Jim: Who?

Marg: Your team.

Jim: I don't have a team.

Marg: Why do you want to know the results then?

Jim: I can understand them. You know. Yorkshire 312 for 2. That tells me a lot. I like things I can understand.

Marg: Oh.

Jim: What I don't understand is why I'm here. *(he puts his paper down pause)* Maggie?

Marg: Jim? *(pause)* What are you doing here?

Jim: Reading the paper. I never thought

Marg: Neither did I after all these years. How long has it been?

Jim: Thirty, thirty five. What happened?

Marg: It was Dad. He wanted us out of Sheffield because of the blitz, so he sent us down to his sister's in Devon. We were there until the end of the war.

Jim: He wanted you away from me more like it. I went round to your house and he wouldn't tell me where you were. I kept writing, but I don't suppose you ever got the letters.

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- Marg: No, but for some reason he'd kept them. We found them in a biscuit tin when we cleared out his house after he died. Perhaps he felt guilty about keeping us apart. I was able to read them all. It was too late then of course. I didn't know where you were. They were lovely letters. Anyway, what happened to you?
- Jim: I was called up, taken prisoner just before Dunkirk and spent the rest of the war in a POW camp.
- Marg: It must have been terrible.
- Jim: Boring most of the time. Four years of being shouted at and sleeping on hard floors.
- Marg: Did you try and escape?
- Jim: Yes, we dug a couple of tunnels and we actually got to use one of them. It was 1945 and we came up in the middle of an American convoy. The camp was liberated later that day. Talk about a waste of time, but that's what we had plenty of. I thought about you every day. Are you er married?
- Marg: Was. Geoff died two years ago. I've got a daughter and two grandchildren. What about you?
- Jim: Yes I'm married. You've probably seen Irene on the corridor just now.
- Marg: What the lady talking to those two young men about how to clean a toilet?
- Jim: That'll be her.
- Marg: It was very detailed. Any children?
- Jim: No. Irene's been too busy with saving the planet, fending off unfriendly bacteria and the W.I. to want children. Oh yes, and looking after me.
- Marg: Do the WI need fending off?
- Jim: You always were a sharp one. They need organising according to Irene. She holds regular masterclasses in crab apple jelly making and something called tating.
- Marg: It's doing something useful.
- Jim: I know, but I'm fed up of crab apple jelly. We've got jars of the stuff at home,
- Marg: I like a bit of crab apple jelly.
- Jim: So do I but I'm not allowed to eat it. We're just stockpiling.
- Marg: .Do you need looking after? Have you been ill?
- Jim: I take pills for high blood pressure, but so do lots of other people. I mean, I get up in the morning and when I get back from the bathroom there's a cup of tea waiting, the beds have been made and my clothes are laid out. I keep telling her I can make me own cup of tea. I want to make it. She never puts any sugar in. What harm is there in one spoon of sugar in the morning. It was all her idea to come here. Why did you come?
- Marg: I felt there was a big hole in my life when Geoff went. I thought this might fill it. Keep my brain active.
- Jim: That's what Irene says. I was sure I wasn't going to enjoy it, but I'm beginning to think differently now.

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*(Noise from outside. Irene Mark and Rob enter)*

Irene: Now, have you heard of something called bleach. It's really good stuff for cleaning out drains and making them smell nice. I hope you're going to write this down. I don't want to have to repeat myself. *(she sees Margaret)* Hello, I'm Irene. These two men are. Who are you?

Rob: Rob

Mark: Mark

Irene: Two young men who are trying to make their way in the world as cleaners. They have a lot to learn. And this is my husband. He's called James. You'll find he doesn't say much. And you are?

Marg: Margaret.

Irene: Good that's all the introductions done.

Mark: Not quite.

Irene: Is there something else we should know about you?

Mark: There is but it'll keep. No, when we arrived there were two other women just coming out of this room.

Irene: Not more cleaners I hope.

Mark: I don't think so.

Irene: If they are I hope they are more proficient than you two. It says on the timetable sheet that we are due to meet our personal tutor in *(she looks at her watch)* five minutes time. Her name is Mrs Joyce Billington . And there was I expecting someone with at least a PhD.

Marg: Perhaps she's Professor Billington.

Irene: With a name like Joyce. I don't think so. If I was a professor, I'd want people to know about it. I'd want James to be proud of me. You would be proud of me wouldn't you James?

Jim: Ye...

Irene: Yes, yes he would *(enter Dee and Julie)* Ah, the lost sheep. You aren't members of the janitorial staff by any chance?

Julie: No.

Irene: I only ask because these two claim to cleaners and if you were, I think we'd have a skewed demographic.

Julie: That sounds awful. *(slight pause)* What's a demographic and I assume if it was skewed that would be a bad thing.

Dee: It might. It means we would have too many people from one walk of life. The best thing is to have a mixture. *(to Irene)* To put you at your ease, I'm in banking.

Julie: And I'm a full time house.....

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Dee: Homemaker

Julie: Homemaker and Mum.

Irene: I'm Irene and this is my husband James. That's Margaret and Rob and Mark.

Dee: I'm Dee and this is Julie.

Irene: You poor thing. Fancy just being an initial.

Dee: I like Dee.

Irene: Very well, Dee it is.

*(enter Joyce)*

Joyce: Good afternoon everyone.

Irene: Mrs Billington I believe. We've been expecting you.

Joyce: Are we all here? There should be seven in my group.

Irene: All present and correct. We've all introduced ourselves.

Joyce: Oh, I see, but not formally have you. That was going to be my first task. Besides I don't know who you are.

Irene: That's easy, I'm Irene...

Joyce: Please stop. I have to do this according to the guidelines I've been given. *(looking in her document case)* ah, here we are. Yes I have to introduce myself to you and then engage in an activity to provide cohesive bonding within the group.

Rob: Evo Stik.

Joyce: What?

Rob: Evo Stik. Good for bonding.

Joyce: You don't quite understand Mr ?

Rob: Can't tell you. I need to bond first. Nearly got you though didn't I?

Joyce: I'd like you to arrange the chairs in a rough semi-circle. I shall stand in the middle *(each takes a chair. Mark and Rob sit DS opposite each other.)* Good. In a minute we are going to play the beanbag game, but before we start that I want to tell you a little bit about myself and what my role is. Is everybody ready?

Rob: Yes, we're all sitting comfortably, waiting to begin

Mark: Shut up Rob.

Rob: Don't talk to me like that. We haven't been introduced.

Joyce: Thank you. As I was saying. My name is Joyce Billington and I am your personal tutor for the week. If you have any problems I am your first port of call. We will be talking about your experiences with the Open University later. Now for the beanbag game. It is quite simple. Here I have a beanbag and I am going to throw it to one of you. When you catch it I want you to say your name and what you find is most exciting about the

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course. Got that? Good. Then we will begin. I'll start. My name is Joyce and I am excited about meeting my new group of students. *(she throws the bag to Mark)*

Rob: We know your name already you just told us. You know before you threw the beanbag.

Joyce: I know I did.

Rob: But you're not playing the game properly.

Joyce: I can do that because I'm the tutor.

Rob: Special rules for tutors then. Do as I say, not do as I do. Good example you're setting.

Joyce: I believe it was this gentleman's turn.

Mark: My name is Mark and I'm looking forward to getting to grips with Shakespeare. *(he throws the bag to Julie)*

Julie: My name is Julie and I'm looking forward to thinking just about the course and not having to worry about what to get for tea or ironing. *(she throws the bag to Rob)*

Rob: I'm Rob. I'm here for the social life. *(he throws the bag to Mark)*

Mark: My name is Mark and I'm looking forward to getting to grips with Shakes.....

Joyce; No, no you mustn't throw it to a person who has already had it.

Rob: You didn't say that at the start. I think you're making these rules up as you go along.

Joyce; No I'm not. Can I have the beanbag please?

Rob: Don't give it her Mark.

Joyce: Why not?

Rob: You've already had it once. You said not to throw it to someone who has already had it or are you going to make yourself an exception to that particular rule as well, just because you are the tutor.

Joyce: Mark, will you throw the beanbag to someone who hasn't had it yet. Are you happy with that Rob?

Rob: Yep. *(Mark throws the bag, aiming at Margaret who is sitting next to Rob. Rob jumps up and catches the beanbag)* I'm Rob and I'm here for the social life.

Joyce: What are you doing now?

Rob: Wasn't it meant for me?

Joyce: Of course not.

Rob: Cricketer's instinct I'm afraid. Thought I was at silly mid-on.

Joyce: It was meant for the lady sitting next to you.

Rob: Sorry Margaret. Look I've done it again. I'm not supposed to know who you are. Shall I throw you the beanbag then you can tell me officially. *(he does so)*

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- Marg: I'm Margaret, Maggie to my friends and that's what excites me about this week, making new friends and maybe catching up with old ones. *(Maggie tries to throw the bag to Jim, but misses and it hits the floor)* Sorry *(Julie goes to pick up the bag)*
- Rob: No, you can't do that. You'd have to say your name again and that's against the rules. Wait a minute. Give the beanbag to Joyce. Joyce can break the rules. She's the tutor.
- Mark: Julie was only trying to help.
- Rob: That's OK. You can say her name.
- Joyce: Please Rob, can we just get on.
- Rob: *(Rob picks up the bag.)* My names Rob and I think you know the rest. *(He gives it to Jim, but Irene takes it off him)*
- Irene: His name is Jim and he is excited about the course as am I. The I being me, Irene.
- Rob: Is that allowed?
- Irene: Young man, I think you'll find that the rules, as you call them, do not apply to me. My husband is clearly an invalid and cannot answer for himself.
- Rob: So exceptions are tutors and invalids. I'm left handed, does that make a difference?
- Irene: You are being exceptionally annoying Mr Rob, whatever your name is. Kindly shut up and let us get to the end of this whole turgid process.
- Rob: Well, that's me told.
- (Irene throws the bag to Dee, who catches it)*
- Dee: My name is Dee. I was bored, I thought this might help.
- Joyce: Right I think that's everybody.
- Rob: That was fun. What's next?
- Joyce: I've got to go through this week's timetable, starting after the evening meal with Professor Williams
- Irene: That's more like it, a professor.
- Joyce: Yes, Professor Williams with a lecture on "The Structure of the Symphony." I am sure it will be very interesting. That finishes about 9.30 as do all the evening lectures this week.
- Rob: Doesn't leave much drinking time.
- Joyce: Might I suggest Rob, that you keep your imbibing to a minimum. You will need a clear head over the next few days. Right, your first seminar will be tomorrow at 9.00am and we will all meet up here after lunch to discuss the group task, which needs to be completed by Friday. I suggest that any spare time you have is taken up thinking about that. *(Joyce leaves)*
- Rob: Well I reckon I've got about half an hour of freedom left before dinner. Anybody care for a drink?
- Mark: I'll come. One last one before we start. *(They go)*

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- Irene: James, I think you should have a lie down after all that exertion. A little rest now will set you up for the whole evening. *(they go )*
- Marg: I suppose I'd better start unpacking. *(she goes Julie starts to roll up her sleeves)*
- Dee: What do you think you are doing?
- Julie: I thought I might have a go at that kitchen if we've got a few minutes.
- Dee: Stop right there. Roll those sleeves down. You are not going to clean anything. Now sit down. Right, what do you think of our fellow students?
- Julie: They all seem very clever. Much cleverer than me.
- Dee: Rubbish. I can't see any of them struggling to watch a programme on Michelangelo at half past midnight, while trying to sponge sick off a child's face after they've eaten too much fudge earlier in the day.
- Julie: We don't eat fudge at our house.
- Dee: I was only using that as a possible example. The point I was making was that you have to do so much before you can even start studying.
- Julie: But I can't write essays. I was never much good at it at school. Now I write half a page and I can't think of anything else to say and I can't imagine what I'll be like when it comes to the exam in November. I'll be a bag of nerves.
- Dee: Forget about home and for once in your life be selfish. You've got a case full of clothes and all your food will be cooked for you, so just think about the course.
- Julie: It'll be hard but I'll try.
- (enter Jim)*
- Dee: Hello James, aren't you supposed to be resting.
- Jim: Please call me Jim. I like Jim. All my friends call me Jim.
- Julie: Then why does Irene call you James?
- Jim: I said my friends call me Jim.
- Julie: Where is Irene?
- Jim: She's gone to the kitchens to talk to the chef about my particular needs.
- Julie: I'm sorry to hear that.
- Jim: So am I. I don't have any allergies. I don't have irritable bowel syndrome. I'm never sick. Yet she insists that I have a low fat, vegetarian diet. No added sugar or salt with a high fibre content. God it's so boring. So I was wondering if you young ladies might do me a favour. I see that its steak and kidney pie tonight. I love steak and kidney pie. I was wondering if you could plate up an extra portion and sneak it up here. You could leave it in there. *(indicates the kitchen)* Irene will never go in there.
- Julie: Won't she be cross?
- Jim: Not if she doesn't find out.
- Julie: But it will be cold.

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Jim: Don't care. Look if you're worried about my health, think of it this way. It's only for a week, then I'll be back on the wheatgerm and broccoli. It could be the icing on the cake.

Julie: What cake? Are you allowed cake?

Dee: I think Jim means that the food will make all the difference. I'm not a fan of bland, so I'm up for it.

Julie: In that case I'll clean a space where we can leave it. Don't want you to get ill.

Jim: Thank you, thank you so much. Must get back now. *(he leaves)*

Julie: Now can I clean the kitchen?

Dee: Not all of it and you're not allowed to enjoy doing it. Is that clear?

Julie: As crystal. *(Julie exits into the kitchen. Dee settles down with her book Julie is heard singing/humming)*