

# “THE ECKERSLEY RISING”

A comedy

© by

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## THE ECKERSLEY RISING

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# THE ECKERSLEY RISING

## CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

(Doubling possible)

Colin & Coleen.....	Juvenile narrators (may be one person)
Flo.....	Walter's dominant wife
Walter Midgley .....	Mild-natured clerk
Doctor .....	Any accent, male or female
Albert Boothroyd .....	Walter's boss & labour councillor
Betty .....	Corner shop proprietor
Brenda .....	Walter's nosey neighbour
Mr. Braithwaite.....	Deaf neighbour
Council chairwoman .....	Any accent
Georgina Spencer .....	Conservative councillor
Reporter .....	Pushy male or female
1st Photographer .....	Non-speaking
2nd Photographer .....	Non-speaking
Radio Engineer .....	Voice off, male or female
Radio DJ .....	American, male or female
M.I.5 agents .....	Male or female
Denis(e) Davis .....	OB reporter

## THE ECKERSLEY RISING

### ACT 1 – Scene 1 (Walter's bedroom)

FX 1 (Intro music)

LT1 (Colin & Coleen comes into a spot at the side of the stage to address the audience)

COLIN Eh up!

COLEEN Are you all right?

COLIN Have you ever thought you knew a person really well then something happens to change your opinion of them, something really out of the ordinary? I don't suppose it happens very often 'cause when you build up a picture of somebody you're generally right aren't you? You put them in little boxes and say he's a so-and-so or she's a what's-it - "categorizing" I think they call it...

COLEEN Well that's the way we used to think of my Uncle Walter, we'd put him in a little box - not that he needed much boxing he were a little fellah with glasses that looked as if he wouldn't say "boo" to a goose and when you saw him next to my Aunty Flo you knew right away what he were - he were henpecked.

COLIN She were the boss and she never let him forget it - not that she said it outright, like, but just little things she did - you knows women's ways....

COLEEN He looked what he were, a clerical assistant in the offices at Boothroyd's Builders. It wasn't much of a job but it brought in just about enough to pay what they owed on their little terraced house in Victoria Street and sometimes they even had enough left over for little personal things - she could have a bit of extra wool for her knitting and he could get himself something for his rig.

COLIN His "rig," as he called it, were his radio apparatus. He were one of them radio hams that sits up all night talking to people on the other side of the world telling them what the weather's like and his room were like a mini Joderell Bank, wires and aerials everywhere ...

COLEEN He used to spend so much time with his rig at weekends that he listened at night and slept during the day. He said it were for the atmospheric but I think it were to get away from my Aunty Flo - stands to reason, she couldn't give him an ear-wiggling when he were asleep now could she? ....

COLIN And she never let up. Most of the time it were about how he could better himself if only he'd try and then they could move out of Victoria Street round to the semis in Alberta Grove. It weren't far but far enough for her... aspirations she had, but not my Uncle Walter....

COLEEN I don't know what brought it on - some said it were the fact that his dad had died sudden but one day he did something right out of the ordinary, right out of character for him ...

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LT2 (Lights up on Walter in bed apparently wearing pyjamas [but has clothing underneath for later scenes])

FX2 (Sound of morning radio)

(Flo shouts to him)

FLO Do you know what time it is?

WALTER I know

FLO Its half past seven

WALTER (Mimicking)" Its half past seven"

FLO You'll have to look sharp if you want the eight o'clock

(She comes in to him)

FLO I said its half-past seven

WALTER Yes, all right

FLO It wont be all right if you're late again - just look at you - I know they said for better or worse but - if you got to bed at the proper time instead of playing with that wireless all night there'd be none of this

WALTER I'm not going today

FLO (Not hearing) How you expect to impress people turning up half asleep I'll never know - appearances count for a lot - you're what ?

WALTER I'm not going

FLO Of course you're going - its nearly twenty five to

WALTER How many more times do I have to tell you - I am not going to work

FLO What's up? Are you feeling off colour?

WALTER No

FLO You've got time off?

WALTER No

FLO Then what?

WALTER I don't want to go.

FLO Have you fallen out with somebody?

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WALTER No

FLO Then what are you sulking for?

WALTER I'm not sulking, I've just decided I don't want to go that's all

FLO Let me feel your head

WALTER Me head's all right

FLO There must be something up with you - not wanting to go to work - whatever next? Do you think you can just take a holiday whenever you feel like it? What's Mr. Boothroyd going to say?

WALTER He can say what he likes

FLO If you think I'm going to tell lies for you -

WALTER (Deliberately) I'm not going there -

FLO I suppose I could tell him you're not well -

WALTER Ever again

FLO I beg your pardon?

WALTER I said "Ever again". I'm not going to that place ever again  
(Stunned silence whilst she takes it in)

FLO Have you taken leave of your senses, Walter Midgley?

WALTER I don't think so

FLO My ears must be deceiving me - you're joking aren't you? Tell me you're joking

WALTER I'm not joking

FLO Its true, you haven't got a joke in you – what's brought this on?

WALTER Nothings brought it on

FLO Well something must have - you don't just wake up one morning and decide out of the blue "I don't think I'll go to work anymore". It can't be done.

WALTER It can. I'm doing it

FLO You can't just give up a good job without a reason

WALTER What's good about it?

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FLO                   Its a job – that’s what’s good about it - it might not be much but its more than many round here have got. Is that what you want to be - unemployed?

WALTER               I won’t be unemployed - I’ll have plenty to keep me busy

FLO                   Doing what?

WALTER               Keeping chickens

FLO                   Keeping - ? I don’t believe it - now I’ve heard everything - come on you’ve had your fun, now get yourself up

WALTER               I’m not getting up, I’m stopping here

FLO                   You’re serious aren’t you?

WALTER               I’m afraid so

FLO                   My God, there’s three million people looking for jobs and my husband decides he doesn’t want his

WALTER               I know it sounds strange

FLO                   "Strange"? I’ll say

WALTER               But I’ve been thinking about it for a long time

FLO                   You have, have you?

WALTER               And I’ve come to the conclusion there’s no need for me to work any more

FLO                   Isn’t there now?

WALTER               No. You see there’s the final payment on the house this month and once that’s out of the way then -

FLO                   And you think keeping chickens is going in bring enough in for us to live on?

WALTER               If we’re careful

FLO                   I don’t want to be careful! I’ve been careful for thirty years - run after you night and day and now you want me to be careful?

WALTER               Please yourself

FLO                   I’ll not please myself end neither will you - we said when we got the house paid off we’d be able to move round to Alberta Grove

WALTER               You said

FLO                   That’s it, is it? Now the house is paid for you want to rest on your laurels ?

HALTER               No, chickens

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FLO I'll chicken you - and what do you think my friends will say when they hear I'm married to somebody that's out of work?

WALTER They can say what they want

FLO Where do you think you're going to keep these chickens of yours?

WALTER Down the yard

FLO There isn't room to swing a cat

WALTER I don't want to swing a cat

FLO What about your pension?

WALTER They can keep it

FLO If your father -

WALTER Fat lot of good a pension did him - gold watch, shake of the hand and next week its "Abide With Me" - right good retirement he had.

FLO I'll not put up with this, d'you hear? I don't know what's brought it on but I wont take it lying down

WALTER I will. Now if you don't mind I've got some serious thinking to do

FLO Huh!

(She goes out slamming the door)

Act 1 - Scene 2 (Walter's bedroom)

LT3 (Cross-fade to Colin & Coleen)

COLIN And there he stayed... all that day, all the next and the next. He did get up occasionally though - well he'd have to wouldn't he?

COLEEN She didn't take it lying down either, she tried every way she knew to make him see sense – she knew he couldn't stand the noise of the hoover so what did she do? She spent hour after hour going round doing the hoovering, all round the landing and the bedrooms twice over

FX3 (Hoovering noises as Flo bumps the bed with the hoover)

COLIN ... But that didn't get him up

COLEEN Then she thought that he couldn't stand the music that she liked, so she played all her records non-stop as loud as she could



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FX4 (Sound of Cliff Richard as Walter covers his ears)

COLIN ... But that didn't work either

COLEEN She was getting desperate and was buzzing round like a dying bluebottle – she tried everything to get him out of bed – she threatened him, scolded him, and though it's very hard to believe, eventually she even tried being nice to him ...

(Knocking on the bedroom door)

FLO (In her nice voice) Are you there Walter?

WALTER Where else am I going to be?

FLO I've just brought you a bit of supper - your favourite - sardines on toast

WALTER That's very kind of you

FLO Can you manage all right?

WALTER I think so

FLO 'Cause if you cant you can always come downstairs - I've built up the front room fire very cosy it looks

WALTER Front room you say?

FLO Its very romantic with the firelight flickering on the wallpaper

WALTER What's up? Has the bulb gone?

FLO 'Course not it just looks more - well homely. Do you mind if I sit on the bed?

WALTER Help yourself - mind my drawings - just move them

FLO You've not noticed my new nightie

WALTER Oh? Very nice - not very warm - but nice

FLO Doesn't it "do" anything for you?

WALTER It cant do much for you – aren't you cold?

FLO Walter, you've been in bed now for three days.... I'm sorry if I was a bit - well - sharp with you, but you took me by surprise

WALTER I suppose it was a bit sudden

FLO Now that I've had time to think about it I'm coming round a bit more to your way of thinking

WALTER That's nice to hear

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FLO I realise a man must have his hobbies - I know you've got your amateur radio but I expect you get a bit fed up listening to that night after night

WALTER Oh I don't know

FLO And I've decided if you want to keep a few pets then it's all right with me

WALTER They aren't pets

FLO Mrs. Fitzakerly was telling me about a lady on the other side of the estate that breeds these lovely little Chihuahuas ...

WALTER I don't want Chihuahuas - I want chickens and not for pets, for business

FLO If you wanted, you could even keep a couple of chickens as long as the cage wasn't too big. I think there's room next to the coal bunker, then you could feed them when you got home from work and -

WALTER Haven't you realized yet? I'm not going back to work - I meant what I said - and I don't want two or three, I want three hundred

FLO Three hundred?

WALTER That's the minimum to make it a viable proposition

FLO Three - ?

WALTER I know it sounds a lot but if you design everything properly it can be done - all it needs is different levels for them to go up and down not battery farming, they're not caged in - they can wander where they like up and down the ramps - like a car park - would you like to see my drawings?

FLO If you think I'm living with three hundred chickens in my back yard -  
  
(Flo angrily wraps her dressing gown round her)

WALTER You see - this is where they go in and this is where the feed is stored - if you look -

FLO I don't want to look - I don't even want to think about it. What do you think the neighbours would say?

WALTER They'll be glad of the eggs

FLO What about the smell?

WALTER They don't smell if you know what you're doing

FLO And you do, do you?

WALTER Well I've got these books out of the library

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FLO                    You wont even put a shelf up for me

WALTER                That's not the same

FLO                    Why can't you keep chickens and still go to work?

WALTER                Because to do anything properly you've got to devote yourself to it full time and this is something I want to do, work isn't

FLO                    Mr. Boothroyd rang up today

WALTER                What did you tell him?

FLO                    I said you weren't well

WALTER                Oh yes? And what's supposed to be the matter with me?

FLO                    I just said the first thing that came into my head - I said you had spots

WALTER                Spots?

FLO                    Yes - chicken pox

                          (Walter laughs)

                          I couldn't very well tell the truth now could I?

WALTER                I don't see why not - I'll write to him if you like

FLO                    You'll do no such thing. If I've told him you're not well, then you're not well

WALTER                But I've never felt better

FLO                    Then why've you stayed in bed this long? You've only been up to go to the toilet

WALTER                I need somewhere quiet to work out me plans and if I'm up here I'm out of your way

FLO                    Well you can just stay here another few hours till the doctor's been

WALTER                Doctor? But I've told you - I've never felt better

FLO                    If you think I'm letting the whole of Eckersley know what you've been saying you can think again - poorly you are and poorly you'll stay

WALTER                Oh 'eck

                          (Knocking on front door)

FLO                    That'll be her now

                          (She goes down to let the doctor in)

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Come in doctor

DOCTOR Mrs. Midgley

FLO He's upstairs in the front bedroom, the one on the right

DOCTOR Thank you

(He goes up and knocks on bedroom door)

WALTER Come in

DOCTOR Now then Mr. Midgley, how are you feeling?

WALTER Fine

FLO He's not well

WALTER I am - I feel grand

FLO He's been having these funny turns, saying funny things

DOCTOR Do you think I might examine him in private?

FLO Of course - but he's not well – don't let him tell you any other

DOCTOR Very well

(Closes door on her but she cocks an ear on the other side)

Now then, what seems to be the trouble?

WALTER There's no trouble. The only trouble is I can't get it through her head that I don't want to go to work any more

DOCTOR You don't? I see. You mean you want a rest?

WALTER Aye, a long one - twenty years. Can you give me a sick note for that long?

DOCTOR Why is it you don't want to go to work?

WALTER I've had enough of it - I've tried it and I don't like it. It's not compulsory is it?

DOCTOR Well ... (tapping him on the chest) Breathe deeply ...

WALTER Well is it? There's nowt to stop you staying at home if you feel like it is there?

DOCTOR (Looks down his throat) Its not very usual... say "ah"

WALTER Aah... I don't suppose it is, but I'm doing it

DOCTOR (Taking his pulse) Have you had problems at work then? Pressures?

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WALTER Not so's you'd notice, no more than anybody else

DOCTOR Any dizziness? Headaches?

WALTER No

DOCTOR What made you suddenly decide to - ?

WALTER I don't know. I think it were losing me Dad. It made me start thinking - sixty five he were - seven days retirement then "bang!"

DOCTOR Bang?

WALTER Bang - just like that. I've got his watch in that drawer if you'd like a look

DOCTOR Er... there's no need. Put this under your tongue (gives thermometer)

WALTER (Garbled) It were a lovely watch

DOCTOR Eh? You can take it out now

WALTER I said it were a lovely watch but they might as well have given him an eight day clock and wound it once! That's not for me, I want to enjoy myself now, not when I'm too old for it.

DOCTOR Laudable feelings. Are your bowels all right?

WALTER How d'you mean?

DOCTOR Are you regular?

WALTER As clockwork. Don't you ever get fed up?

DOCTOR With what?

WALTER Going to work? Being a doctor? I'm sure I would, listening to everybody's problems all day

DCOTOR I must admit it does sometimes grate a little

WALTER There you are then

DOCTOR (Drifting off) There are mornings when I walk into that waiting room and look around and ... yes, well never mind about me, it's you we've got to sort out

WALTER I'm all right, it's her down there. She can't understand that I've just had enough. I mean that lot I work with are dead from the neck up - I don't want to end up like them do I?

DOCTOR Course not

WALTER The house is paid for, we haven't got a car and there's only the two of us, so why should I give myself ulcers doing something I don't want to do?

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DOCTOR                   Have you thought about changing jobs?

WALTER                   I 'ave and I am - I'm going self-employed

DOCTOR                   I see. Anything interesting?

WALTER                   Chickens

DOCTOR                   Chickens eh? Breeding them?

WALTER                   Aye, breeding, rearing, fattening, egg production, the lot. Did you know the chicken is the most productive animal known to mankind?

DOCTOR                   Really?

WALTER                   Penny for penny they give better value than any other animal - beats the cow by a mile - anyway I've not much room for cows

DOCTOR                   Where?

WALTER                   In t' back yard. I'm building a run for them out there when I get everything finalized

DOCTOR                   Finalized... of course. My wife gets hers from the supermarket

WALTER                   Aye, but that's where folks are going wrong - battery farming - and what do you get? A frozen lump of meat in a cellophane wrapper - tasteless stuff

DOCTOR                   That's true

WALTER                   Whereas my birds are going, to have some variety, some interest in life. I haven't got much room but what I have got I'm going to use well. It'll be like the Plaza Hotel for them - home from home - I've thought of everything, well nearly everything - see

                                  (Shows him plans he's drawing)

DOCTOR                   It looks very complicated - I never thought there was so much to it

WALTER                   Oh there is, there is - what you've got to do is try to find a use for everything -

DOCTOR                   Recycling?

WALTER                   That's it - recycling - and the more you can recycle the more economical it is - this is just the general lay out - hey that's not bad - "lay out" - get it?

DOCTOR                   Yes

WALTER                   But this is much more interesting - its the detailed plans for the automatic feeding system - do you want to see?

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DOCTOR Well if you don't mind I'll save that pleasure for another time - I've got several more calls to make

WALTER Yes I was forgetting - I wont keep you

DOCTOR Best of luck with your plans then

WALTER Aye, thanks very much

DOCTOR Bye then

WALTER Bye doctor

(The bedroom door is opened to find Flo caught by surprise)

FLO I were... er... just doing some dusting.

DOCTOR Do you think I could have a word with you downstairs, Mrs. Midgley?

FLO Of course

(They go down)

FLO How bad is he doctor?

DOCTOR Well it's a very unusual case

FLO I knew there must be something

DOCTOR Oh there's nothing wrong with your husband physically, Mrs. Midgley

FLO There isn't?

DOCTOR No, but as to his mental condition I'm not too sure - I'm not an expert in these matters you see

FLO You think he's going a bit funny in the - ?

DOCTOR I don't know. He appears very rational but from what he says - given up his job he says?

FLO That's right

DOCTOR It could be a sign of emotional strain, one never knows - these things come in strange ways

FLO What do you think I should do?

DOCTOR If I were you I should let things ride for a while, see what develops - I'll give you a certificate if you like for his employers - emotional strain can be a funny thing

FLO Do you think it could pass?

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DOCTOR           It could... on the other hand it might not - we'll just have to wait and see - he certainly seems happy enough

FLO                Yes but I can't just leave him there - its three days now

DOCTOR           Have you spoken to his employers?

FLO                Just to say he were off colour

DOCTOR           I think you should have another word with them, they might be able to help ...  
Good-day to you

(He goes)

Act 1 - Scene 3 (Walter's bedroom)

LT 4               (Spot up on Colin & Coleen)

COLIN            So that's just what she did – she spoke to his employers

COLEEN           And the next thing he knew, Uncle Walter was receiving a very unusual visitor

LT 5               (The lights change to show passage of time and we're back in Walter's bedroom)

(Knocking on bedroom door)

BOOTHROYD      Walter? Can I come in?

WALTER           Aye, if you like

BOOTHROYD      I'm sorry to hear you're not well

WALTER           I'm grand

BOOTHROYD      Your wife says you're a bit under the weather

WALTER           I'm not, I've never felt better

BOOTHROYD      I've brought you some grapes

WALTER           That's very kind of you

BOOTHROYD      What're you drawing?

WALTER           Oh just doodling

BOOTHROYD      She said something about you wanting a bit of time off work

WALTER           Not a bit - a lot



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BOOTHROYD I must admit when you didn't turn up I was wondering where you'd got to

WALTER I bet you were

BOOTHROYD We had all them G4Is to sort out and what with the audit coming up - how long are you going to need?

WALTER About twenty years

BOOTHROYD Eh?

WALTER Do you think they'll wear that Mr. Boothroyd?

BOOTHROYD I don't understand

WALTER I didn't think you would. I'm not coming back, Mr. Boothroyd - never no more I've had enough of you and your G4Is

BOOTHROYD Walter?

WALTER And since you no longer own me I think we should start using our proper titles from now on - you can call me "Mister"

BOOTHROYD But you can't just not turn up for work, Walter -

WALTER "Mister"

BOOTHROYD "Mister" Midgley - you cant just not turn up – there's procedures, channels to go through - you have to work your notice

WALTER Well I'm sorry to upset the procedures but I don't want to work me notice

BOOTHROYD But there's a month's salary involved

WALTER You keep the salary and I'll keep my sanity

BOOTHROYD It does sound a bit mad, I must admit - another twenty years and you'd have a good pension -

WALTER Another twenty years and I might have a box with brass handles!

BOOTHROYD Is it something I've said?

WALTER No, it's not something you've said. Mr. Boothroyd, though Lord knows you've said enough. You said what you had to say

BOOTHROYD I know I was sometimes a bit short with you but I had to get the job done didn't I?

WALTER Aye, you had to get the job done

BOOTHROYD And you have to be cruel to be kind

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WALTER Well you were certainly that

BOOTHROYD Kind?

WALTER No, cruel - but all that's past - you did what you had to do and now I'm doing t'same

BOOTHROYD You'll miss the Christmas party

WALTER So I will - I'd never thought of that

BOOTHROYD There you are then

WALTER That's another good reason for packing it in

BOOTHROYD After all the effort I've gone to

WALTER Effort? You call three bottles of plonk and a box of sausage rolls "effort"? I hate to think what you'd have done if you'd really tried.

BOOTHROYD Well I have tried, whether you appreciate it or not and I've tried today ... but you don't know when you're well off Walter -

WALTER "Mister"

BOOTHROYD Mister Midgley! But you will - one day - and when you do you needn't think you can come crawling back to me for a job because you wont get it - d'you hear?

WALTER I hear

BOOTHROYD There's many a one in Eckersley would be glad of your job

WALTER They can have it

BOOTHROYD And what are you going to live on?

WALTER Hasn't she told you? I'm going to breed chickens

BOOTHROYD So that's what you're drawing is it, a chicken coop?

WALTER Its more than a coop is this, it's a veritable factory

BOOTHROYD I didn't know you were a designer

WALTER There's a lot about me you didn't know and didn't bother to find out. You ought to show more interest in your staff – there's lots of things people can do if they put their minds to it

BOOTHROYD And you've put your mind to this have you?

WALTER I 'ave

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BOOTHROYD           And that's your final word?

WALTER               Not quite

BOOTHROYD           Eh?

WALTER               Shut t'door on the way out will you

BOOTHROYD           (Slamming door) There's gratitude for you!

Act 1 - Scene 4 (Downstairs)

LT 6                   (Lights up on Colin & Coleen at the side of the stage)

COLIN                 And there he stayed for over a week just sitting up in bed all day reading his books and doing his drawings –

COLEEN               He didn't even bother with his wireless ... when the time came that he'd finished, Aunty Flo were quite taken aback....

                          (The bed is removed either in blackout or during a close of curtain during the following & Walter removes his pyjama top to go downstairs)

FLO                    I'll just have five minutes ... Lord knows I deserve it ... What on earth I'm going to do with him I don't know ... perhaps I should write to one of these problem pages in here (Picking up magazine) ... they might have some idea

                          (She turns to the problem page and reads aloud)

                          Dear Marjorie ... My husband is giving me terrible problems ... he's started taking these Viagra tablets and just wont' leave me alone ... he's constantly demanding his conjugal rights at any time of the day or night and I don't know what to do with him ... in the bedroom, in the kitchen, in the garden, he's insatiable ... P.S. Please excuse shaky writing!

                          I should be so lucky ... perhaps the answer's in my horoscope, lets have a look (Reading) "Someone very near to you may be behaving very strangely" – well that's true – "But sometimes its best just to humour people and go along with their ideas ... these things often have a way of sorting themselves out" – what a load of rubbish – I don't know why I bother, I don't even believe in them

                          (Walter appears in his cap and clothes)

                          Walter? What're you doing up?

WALTER               (Triumphantly) I've finished

FLO                    Finished what?

WALTER               Me plans - I've finished me plans and now its time to move on to stage two

FLO                    What's stage two?

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WALTER                   The construction

FLO                        You're not going to do a lot of banging about?

WALTER                  I am

FLO                        But what about my migraines?

WALTER                  You'll have to buy some cotton wool or else pay a visit to your sisters

FLO                        Walter, I've never seen you like this

WALTER                  You have now - I'm sorry but my mind's made up

LT 7                      (Lights come up on Colin again)

COLEEN                  And away he went down to the wood yard for his materials... when they arrived he were like a beaver building a dam - non-stop banging day and night like there was no tomorrow

LT 8                      (Sounds of hammering ... Lights come up on Walter in half-constructed hen house... Colin comes through back gate)

COLIN                    Can we come in Uncle Walter?

WALTER                  Of course you can - mind your head

COLEEN                  Its coming on

WALTER                  It is that

COLIN                    How long do you reckon before its finished?

WALTER                  A few more days - I've got the roof to do yet then its about finished

COLEEN                  What's this bit for?

WALTER                  This is for my radio gear - I'm bringing it out here instead of the little bedroom. I might as well combine the two

COLIN                    It seems a funny combination - chickens and radio

WALTER                  Not really. There's not much to do at night with the chickens and that's the best time for reception. I reckon if I can get everything out here it'll be a lot more convenient and she'll have the little bedroom spare then, wont she?

COLEEN                  I suppose so (Pause)

COLIN                    My mum reckons you're daft

THE ECKERSLEY RISING

WALTER She does, does she?

COLIN She says you've given up a good job for nowt

WALTER Does she go to work then, your mum?

COLIN No, but -

WALTER Then how would she know?

COLEEN What made you give up work?

WALTER Here - come here - (takes him to the back gate - traffic noise) Do you see that lot out there? Take a good look - what do you see?

COLEEN Cars - motor bikes - people

WALTER Aye but where are they going?

COLIN To work, you mean?

WALTER Aye, and take a look at their faces

COLIN They don't seem very happy

WALTER They don't, do they?

COLEEN So why do they go?

WALTER You tell me

COLIN Is it worse than going to school?

WALTER Much worse Colin, much worse - school is for years, work is for ever

COLEEN I don't mind school that much -

COLIN Why did you start at Boothroyd's in the first place

WALTER I don't know

COLEEN Why didn't you choose something you liked?

WALTER Its not like that - pass me that saw (He begins to saw)  
What are you going to do when you leave?

COLEEN I don't know yet

WALTER Isn't it about time you made up your mind?

COLEEN I suppose so but what's the point - there's not many jobs to choose from and if you raise your hopes you might only get disappointed

THE ECKERSLEY RISING

WALTER                   What do you like doing best when you're not at school?

COLEEN                   Walking through the woods I suppose - exploring - finding animals

WALTER                   And what does your mum want you to do when you leave?

COLEEN                   She's got me lined up for a job at Ainley's where they make the jumpers

WALTER                   You won't find many animals at Ainley's - not four-legged ones anyway

COLEEN                   Aye, but beggars can't be choosers

WALTER                   (Pausing) You're not a beggar Coleen, you're a person, an individual with the whole of their life in front of them - just remember a person's only got one thing worth anything and that's themselves - if you devote your life to something that isn't the real you, then the only one you'll be deceiving is yourself – that's what happened to me - I deceived myself - I kept going to that office day after day because it was a habit - I'd convinced myself it were for the best but inside me there was this little voice that kept saying, "This isn't you Walter, you can do it but it isn't the real you" ... Then when my dad died it brought me to my senses - I woke up one morning and it were like a revelation. I'd been having these ideas about keeping chickens but one half of me kept putting the idea to the back of my mind - foolish daydreams they were - then that morning I woke up thinking of another boring week at work and I just decided the time had come - it took a lot of doing but I did it.

COLIN                    It must have been hard

WALTER                   It was – it's always easier to drift along with the tide, you remember that. I only wish I'd done it years ago - its like a great weight's been lifted off my shoulders

COLEEN                   I must say you're looking a lot happier

WALTER                   I feel it - I've never enjoyed myself so much for years - I keep finding myself singing and then I think to myself "You never used to sing at Boothroyd's, lad"

COLIN                    How's Aunty Flo taking it?

WALTER                   She's had her cases packed three times and unpacked them. If she had anywhere to go she'd go

COLEEN                   What about the neighbours?

WALTER                   Him on this sides as deaf as a post. He thinks I'm building a pigeon loft and her on the other side, she's just what I expected - she's up at that window more times than enough - she's there now - thinks I can't see her behind that curtain

COLIN                    What've you told her?

WALTER                   I told her it were a shelter for immigrants to live in till they find their own place - you should have seen her face

(The back gate opens and in comes Mr. Boothroyd as Colin & Coleen go out)

THE ECKERSLEY RISING

COLIN Eh up, you've got a visitor

BOOTHROYD Can I come in?

WALTER Mr. Boothroyd - of course you can - mind your head. Will you have a cup of tea?

BOOTHROYD I'm not here for pleasure, I'm here on business council business - you're aware that I'm on the council - well there's been a complaint made

WALTER Oh I see

BOOTHROYD I've received information from the Planning Committee that you are making structural alterations to this dwelling

WALTER I'm building a chicken run - you know that

BOOTHROYD Let me finish - the complaint is that you are erecting a structure for habitational purposes and this structure does not appear to have passed through the appropriate channels

WALTER You mean planning permission?

BOOTHROYD Exactly. I have a petition here from several local residents who inform me that they have nothing against strangers from overseas but they do object to a transit camp being built next door to them

WALTER Now you know Mr. Boothroyd that what I'm building here isn't a habitable structure - its habitable but not by people - by chickens - and if I remember correctly the rules and regulations clearly state that I'm allowed to increase the volume of my premises by ten per cent without the need for official planning permission - I think you'll find that's right -

BOOTHROYD There are of course building regulations

WALTER I think you'll find that when it comes to building regulations they only apply to premises occupied by humans - I don't think you'll get any objections from my inhabitants

BOOTHROYD I would also remind you -

WALTER You've dropped your papers

(Walter helps to pick them up)

BOOTHROYD Thank you. I would also remind you that I am the elected representative for this area and if there are any problems I am entitled to raise them at council meetings

WALTER Of course Councillor Boothroyd

BOOTHROYD I am not, of course, threatening you

THE ECKERSLEY RISING

WALTER                   Of course not

BOOTHROYD            But if there are problems with regard to the use of these premises then I am in a position to sort the matter out, as it were

WALTER                   Right

BOOTHROYD            I have friends, Walter

WALTER                 That's nice to know

BOOTHROYD            Friends in high places

WALTER                 I'll remember that

BOOTHROYD            Just as long as you do

WALTER                 Have you finished?

BOOTHROYD            Aye for now

WALTER                 Then if you don't mind I'll carry on  
(He continues sawing as Boothroyd goes out)

Act 1 - Scene 5 (Corner shop)

LT 9                     (The lights cross fade to the corner shop)

FX 5                     (Sound of shop bell)

BETTY                   Hello Brenda, how are you?

BRENDA                 Much the same love

BETTY                   I've heard there's some excitement down your end

BRENDA                 Excitement? Is that what you call it? Bang, bang, banging day and night - I can't sleep for the noise he makes

BETTY                   Is it that bad?

BRENDA                 You don't know the half - five times I've been round to ask him for some consideration – that's all I ask for, a bit of consideration but all you get is "nearly finished"

BETTY                   Is it right what they say - he's given up his job?

BRENDA                 As true as I'm standing here



THE ECKERSLEY RISING

BETTY Never! Is there anything I can get for you?

BRENDA I want something for headaches - tablets, powders, anything'll do

BETTY Have you used all them you got the other day?

BRENDA Aye, they soon went

BETTY Didn't they work?

BRENDA Nothing works - you just get rid of one headache and away he goes again

BETTY I'd complain if it were next to me

BRENDA I have complained - he wont listen. I've even had the police round and they say its nothing to do with them - civil matter they say - I've been to the council – there's nothing anybody can do. I told them, I said "It's lowering the value of my house having that stuck next door" but they're not interested – he's not breaking any regulations you see - he's cunning like that

BETTY It's her I feel sorry for

BRENDA Why? It's no more than she deserves with her airs and graces - "My Walter's a salaried person, a member of staff" - he were a junior clerk, nothing more and nothing less

BETTY I haven't seen her out much since

BRENDA Nor have I - well what would you do? I couldn't raise my head in public if it were me

BETTY (Glancing through window) It seems she has done, she's coming now  
(Shop door bell - they are all false smiles)

BRENDA And I said to him, "Sixty pence for them, you must be joking"

BETTY Such a price – (To Flo) Morning Mrs. Midgley

FLO Morning

BRENDA Lovely morning for the time of the year

FLO Is it?

BRENDA Makes you just want to pack your bags and get off on holiday doesn't it But then your Walter's already on holiday isn't he ?

FLO I beg your pardon?

BRENDA It is holiday he's on isn't it?

THE ECKERSLEY RISING

BETTY                   What can I get you?

FLO                     Half a dozen eggs please

BETTY                   That's eighty-nine pence

BRENDA                 Isn't he on holiday then?

FLO                     Why do you ask?

BRENDA                 Only we seem to be seeing a lot of him lately

FLO                     If you'll excuse me - I've left a cake in the oven

BRENDA                 I'd have thought Walter would have done that for you

                              (Flo beats a retreat)

BRENDA                 Cake in the oven indeed! - Did you see her face? Redder than that beetroot ...

Act 1 - Scene 6 (Tea table)

LT 10                   (Cross fade to teatime in the Midgley household)

FX 6                    (Radio playing music)

                              (Walter at the table - Flo coming in, looking cross)

WALTER                 That were nice. Do you mind if I have another cup of tea?

                              (Stony silence from Flo)

WALTER                 I said, "I could just fancy another cup of tea"

FLO                     (Crossly) You know where the teapot is

                              (Walter pours his own tea)

WALTER                 It were a nice bit of ham, were that

FLO                     It should have been for the price I paid

WALTER                 From Betty's was it?

FLO                     No, it wasn't as a matter of fact. I did go there but her from next door was in

WALTER                 I see

FLO                     I don't think you do. It was obvious they were talking about me - they tried to hide it but it stood out a mile

THE ECKERSLEY RISING

WALTER                   And what are they saying?

FLO                        Do you really want to know?

WALTER                   Not really, but talking about it'll make you feel better

FLO                        So far I've heard several reasons why you've given up work – there's all kinds of rumours - one says that you were caught fiddling but they didn't have enough evidence to take you to court

WALTER                   Imaginative

FLO                        There's another that says you were caught in a compromising situation with that tarty bit at work

WALTER                   I should be so lucky

FLO                        And the worst I daren't even tell you

WALTER                   You've got to now you've said that

FLO                        They're saying ...

WALTER                   Go on

FLO                        They're saying you've been passing messages on your radio

WALTER                   Messages?

FLO                        To Russia

WALTER                   You mean espionage? They think I'm a spy do they? I see - thief, sex maniac and communist spy - you cant get much lower than that

FLO                        Its all right you joking about it, I've got to live with it - its me that's got to face them

WALTER                   Why don't you tell them the truth?

FLO                        If I told them you'd given up your job to keep chickens they'd think I was as daft as you

WALTER                   But it doesn't matter what they think, what matters is what you think - if you can live with yourself that's all that matters

FLO                        I'm not sure I can

WALTER                   What? Live with yourself or live with me?

FLO                        Both. It came as such a shock, Walter. Why didn't you prepare me for it?

THE ECKERSLEY RISING

WALTER No amount of preparing would have made it any easier - it would have just given you longer to worry about it and the longer you had, the more you'd have tried to persuade me not to do it – isn't that right?

FLO Of course it's right - what would you expect me to do?

WALTER I'd expect you to try to understand – that's all I want, a little understanding – can't you do that for me?

FLO I'll try Walter, I'll try, but it wont be easy

WALTER (Getting up) Right then

FLO Where are you going?

WALTER Just down the yard – I've just got one or two bits to finish off - wont be long  
(He goes)

FLO "Wont be long" – that's the last we'll see of him tonight

Act 1 - Scene 7 (Neighbour's House)

LT 11 (Cross fade of lights to Brenda in Mr. Braithwaite's house peering out of window as the deaf Mr. Braithwaite eats his dinner)

FX 7 (Sound of lorry reversing)

WALTER (Distantly shouting as wagon reverses)  
  
Come on - right hand down a bit a bit more that'll do

BRAITHWAITE Is there something going off?

BRENDA Its a lorry

BRAITHWAITE You what?

BRENDA A lorry

BRAITHWAITE Sorry? What are you sorry for?

BRENDA A lorry - he's bringing a lorry up the back lane

BRAITHWAITE There's no need to be sorry - you've cooked my dinner haven't you? There's no need to be sorry for that

BRENDA It looks like chickens

BRAITHWAITE You what?

THE ECKERSLEY RISING

BRENDA I said "It looks like chickens on the lorry"

BRAITHWAITE (Looking at plate) It's beef isn't it ? It tastes like beef

BRENDA Hundreds of them – he's never going to get them all in there

BRAITHWAITE Its not pork - I know pork when I taste it

BRENDA He is, he's taking them in

BRAITHWAITE I said "I know pork when I taste it" and this is definitely beef

BRENDA He's bringing in another -tray

BRAITHWAITE Rain?

BRENDA "Tray" I said - he's bringing in another tray

BRAITHWAITE It wouldn't surprise me if it did rain. I was wondering what you were doing at the window

BRENDA Aren't you bothered?

BRAITHWAITE What?

BRENDA Bothered – aren't you bothered?

BRAITHWAITE I'm not bothered. It can rain for all I care – doesn't make any difference to me

BRENDA God, its like pulling teeth

BRAITHWAITE You what?

BRENDA I said - oh never mind ... There he goes again ... So that's his game

BRAITHWAITE Its not as if I was deaf

BRENDA Thinks nobody will notice does he? Thinks nobody's bothered

BRAITHWAITE But I'm not deaf

BRENDA He'll find out different. If he thinks I'm living next door to that lot....

BRAITHWAITE I said "I'm not"

BRENDA You're not what?

BRAITHWAITE Deaf - I'm not deaf

BRENDA Have you seen them?

BAITHWAITE Eh?

BRENDA The birds

THE ECKERSLEY RISING

BRAITHAITE            You what?

BRENDA                The BIRDS!

BRAITHWAITE        (Getting up) What birds? Oh them. I thought he were having pigeons - they're funny looking pigeons are they

FX 8                    (Sound of chickens being moved)

BRENDA                They're chickens

BRAITHWAITE        You what?

BRENDA                I wont stand for it

BRAITHWAITE        There's a few going in

BRENDA                I'm not paying my rates to live next door to that lot

BRAITHWAITE        I say - he's got quite a few hasn't he?

BRENDA                I knew there was something odd about him

BRAITHWAITE        I say -

BRENDA                Oh shut up!

BRAITHWAITE        I beg your pardon?

BRENDA                I said "Shut up" - are you deaf or what?

Act 1 - Scene 8    (Council Chamber)

LT 12                    (Cross-fade lights to Colin & Coleen on stage right)

COLIN                    Eventually he got his chickens in and as every poultry keeper knows, there's a settling down period before you see any benefits of your handy work ...

COLEEN                 There was a settling down period for the neighbours as well. They just couldn't understand that there was nothing anybody could do to stop him - they tried solicitors letters, threatening letters - it even got as far as the council chamber...

LT 13                    (Cross-fade to debate in Council Chamber)

CHAIRWOMAN        And now we come to item seven on the agenda any other business - I believe Councillor    Boothroyd has something to raise ...

BOOTHROYD            Well councillors, I'm sorry to take up your time at the end of what has already been a lengthy meeting but my point concerns several complaints I've received from my constituents about the keeping of pets in private dwellings. It seems that if the property is council- owned there is no problem but in this case we are

THE ECKERSLEY RISING

faced with the problem of a privately-owned house where the occupier is keeping - would you believe - chickens

- CHAIRWOMAN Chickens?
- BOOTHROYD That's right Madam Chairman - chickens
- CHAIRWOMAN There's nothing wrong with keeping chickens surely?
- BOOTHROYD Agreed - at the proper time in the proper place but this fellow is keeping a lot of chickens in a little space - three hundred to be precise - in a very small back yard
- CHAIRWOMAN Has he been given planning permission?
- BOOTHROYD He doesn't need it
- CHAIRWOMAN What about building regulations?
- BOOTHROYD Nor them. It seems the only come-back we, as elected representatives, have is if he commits a public nuisance
- CHAIRWOMAN Aren't three hundred chickens a nuisance?
- BOOTHROYD I think so
- SPENCER Might I have a word Madam?
- CHAIRWOMAN Of course Councillor Spencer
- SPENCER For what purpose is he keeping these chickens?
- BOOTHROYD He says it's a pastime but I suspect it's to sell the eggs
- SPENCER In other words a small business. So what you are saying councillor is that like the rest of your party you're doing your damndest to stop a small businessman getting off the ground - even though you're in business yourself
- BOOTHROYD It's not that, Councillor Spencer, and you know it. I'm not trying to make a political issue out of this but I've had complaints and as the elected member for this constituency it's up to me to put these complaints before the chamber
- SPENCER I can't see what harm he's doing if he's complied with all the regulations
- VOICES OFF Here! Here!
- BOOTHROYD As well as the chickens he's got ugly radio aerials all over the place - he's making the place look an eyesore. I'm quite sure the councillor there would be up in arms if it was next door to him
- SPENCER You're being personal now councillor
- BOOTHROYD Maybe so but how many chicken coops do you see on your estate?

THE ECKERSLEY RISING

SPENCER                   And is it not true councillor that he's had these "ugly radio aerials" as you describe them for a long time now and nothing was ever said about it?

BOO'PHROYD           Well, yes

SPENCER                   You see I've done my homework - and is it not also true that this person who's struggling to set up a little egg business is none other than one of your old employees?

BOOTHROYD           What's that got to do with it?

SPENCER                   Its got everything to do with it councillor because as I've heard he's told you to stick your job and you don't like it.... and when he tries to set up a little private enterprise you've got your knife into his ribs the first chance you get

BOOTHROYD           I really must object!

SPENCER                   But do you deny it? Eh?

                                  (Sound of uproar in chamber)

CHAIRWOMAN       Order! Order!

LT14                       (Cross fade to Walter's shed)

Act 1 - Scene 9 ((Walter's Shed)

FX 9                       (Intro music)

LT 15                     (Spot up on Colin)

COLIN                    Now where did we get to? Oh yes, the councillors arguing about Uncle Walter's plans ... well all of this went off without Uncle Walter knowing much about it - he were far too busy sorting out the teething troubles in his production line...

COLEEN                 That's why it came as a bit of a surprise one day when Aunty Flo answered the front door to find the local Conservative councillor standing there ...

LT 16                     (Lights up on house area)

FLO                        Yes?

SPENCER                Mrs. Midgley?

FLO                        Yes, we don't buy anything on the doorstep -

SPENCER                That's all right because I'm not selling anything - Georgina Spencer, Conservative Councillor



THE ECKERSLEY RISING

(Offers his hand)

FLO                    The Georgina Spencer? Spencer's Jewelers?

SPENCER             That's right

FLO                    Oh, come in Mrs. Spencer, come in

SPENCER             That's very kind of you

FLO                    What can I do for you?

SPENCER             Well actually it was your husband I came to see

FLO                    Walter?

SPENCER             He's the chap who used to work at Boothroyd's isn't he?

FLO                    That's right. Have you come to persuade him to go back to work? I do hope you can - you've no idea of the trouble he's caused me -

SPENCER             No, it's not that - quite the reverse in fact

FLO                    You don't want him to go to work?

SPENCER             Well that's up to him, but I just came to offer him my support for his new venture

FLO                    Venture?

SPENCER             His egg business

FLO                    Oh, you mean the chickens

SPENCER             Yes, is he in at the moment?

.FLO                   He's where he always is - in that shed with his birds - if its not birds its wireless - I never see him nowadays

SPENCER             Do you think I might have a word?

FLO                    I'll get him for you

SPENCER             (Getting up) No, that's all right, I can find him - this way is it?

FLO                    That's right, down the yard, it's the door on the left marked "Office" - office indeed!

FX 10                 (Sound of chickens clucking)

(Spencer approaches Walter's shed door and knocks)

THE ECKERSLEY RISING

SPENCER Mr. Midgley?

WALTER Just a minute

(Pause then door opens)

WALTER Sorry about that, I were just talking to a bloke in Barnsley

SPENCER Barnsley?

WALTER On the radio - I'm a radio ham

SPENCER Oh I see

WALTER What can I do for you?

WALTER Well I'm Georgina Spencer -

WALTER Should I know you?

SPENCER Not necessarily - I'm the Conservative councillor for the adjoining area

WALTER If you're looking for votes I don't bother much with politics

SPENCER No, I'm not looking for votes Mr. Midgley. I've just come to say we're right behind you

WALTER Are you now?

SPENCER Yes

WALTER How d'you mean?

SPENCER With your enterprise

WALTER Me - ?

SPENCER Your business

WALTER Oh me chickens - I wondered what you meant. I'd hardly call it a business, not yet at any rate - it will be when they start laying

SPENCER Through there are they?

WALTER Aye, through that door where I can keep an eye on them

SPENCER Do you mind if I have a look?

WALTER By all means - but watch your suit

SPENCER I'll just shove my head in the door

FX 11 (He opens a door to the sound of hens clucking)

## THE ECKERSLEY RISING

WALTER                    There's a tray of disinfectant to walk through – it stops diseases being brought in

SPENCER                    You've certainly been busy

WALTER                    Do you like it?

SPENCER                    I do - where does that go?

WALTER                    That's a walkway up to the top layer - hey that's not bad "Layer" - d'you get it?

SPENCER                    Er yes - and do they just wander about?

WALTER                    Aye, no battery cages for me

SPENCER                    Incredible!

WALTER                    You're the first outsider that's seen it other than me nephew and me wife - she's not bothered though - she'd sooner have me back at Boothroyd's behind a desk

SPENCER                    If I'd known I'd have brought some champagne

WALTER                    Cham - ?

SPENCER                    For the opening ceremony,

WALTER                    Oh I see, I wondered what you meant

SPENCER                    There's quite a few, isn't there?

WALTER                    More than a few - three hundred to be precise – there's the cockerel - he's come to see what we're up to

SPENCER                    One cockerel among all those chickens?

WALTER                    Aye

SPENCER                    Isn't it rather tiring for him?

WALTER                    I don't think he'll complain - would you?

SPENCER                    What about the cost-effectiveness? Have you worked it all out?

WALTER                    Not money-wise, if that's what you mean, but everything has its uses - even the muck. There's a bloke from the allotments comes to fetch it. He's happy to have it and I'm happy for him to take it away everybody's happy - except the missus

SPENCER                    Should I close the door?

WALTER                    You've seen enough? There's lots more I haven't shown you

THE ECKERSLEY RISING

SPENCER                   Some other time perhaps

                                  (He closes chickens door)

FX 12                     (Sound of chickens quietens)

WALTER                  Aye, well its been nice meeting you Mrs. - ?

SPENCER                 Spencer - Georgina Spencer - and don't forget if there's anything we can do

WALTER                 "Do?"

SPENCER                 Well if you get any bother from Councillor Boothroyd and his friends

WALTER                 Oh him - I can handle him without any help, councillor or no councillor - he doesn't own me any more

SPENCER                 And might I say what a brave step you've taken

WALTER                 Giving up me job? You call it brave? That's not what my wife calls it

SPENCER                 It must have taken a great deal of courage

WALTER                 I never though of it like that

SPENCER                 And as I say, if you get any pressure, any threats of legal action or whatever, just give me a ring on this number

                                  (Hands him card)

WALTER                 That's very kind of you

SPENCER                 Right then, I'll be off

                                  (Flo approaches with tea tray)

                                  Hello Mrs. Midgley - I'm just off

FLO                        And I'd brought you some tea

SPENCER                 Another time perhaps - can I get out this way? My car's at the side

WALTER                 Yes, just down the lane and round the corner

SPENCE'R                Right - bye then - remember what I said Mr. Midgley

                                  (He goes)

FLO                        Do you know who that were?

WALTER                 Mrs. Spencer

THE ECKERSLEY RISING

FLO Georgina Spencer - the Georgina Spencer who owns all them jewellery shops - what is it you have to remember ?

WALTER Eh?

FLO She said "Remember what I said"

WALTER They're right behind me, she says

FLO Who?

WALTER Her lot – she thinks I'm doing some'at brave - I can't see what all the fuss is about

FLO That'll give them something to talk about - Georgina Spencer coming to our house - I think I'll just pop down to the corner shop.

END OF ACT ONE