

## SCENE ONE

*Light spreads onto the front of a quaint farmhouse in the middle of the countryside. The farmhouse is weathered but charming, with a front door upstage centre and a patio door to the left. Grimy patio furniture is scattered around the stage. A table and six chairs along with an unopened table parasol, covered in cobwebs. A set of gardening tools adorns the side of the farmhouse. A trestle table covered with a paper cloth has cardboard boxes and cake tins all over it. Getting ready for a feast suitable for royalty. A barbecue sits stage left, smoke trickles out of the vent.*

*The sound of birds chirping and the gentle rustling of leaves in the breeze fill the air. A soft, warm sunlight bathes the house in a golden glow. The atmosphere is serene, capturing the essence of a peaceful countryside morning.*

*Stage left, a dirt path meanders towards a road, lined with wildflowers and tall grasses. It disappears into the distance. On stage right, the fields stretch out, their vibrant green colours punctuated by the occasional tree or shrub. The farmhouse itself stands as the centerpiece, a haven of solitude amidst the vast expanse of nature. The sound of the sizzling Barbecue cuts through the tranquil air.*

*A speaker sits on the floor, by the trestle table. It lights up and music starts to play. Specifically it's Russ Abbot's 'Lets go to the disco' from his seminal album 'I love a party'.*

*Enter CLIFF, 50 years old. He looks like the sort of chap that will do anything for a quiet life. He looks fairly casual and is wearing a 'kiss the chef' apron. He enters through the patio doors with a tray covered in tinfoil. He can hear the song. It disgusts him. Disappointment in hearing the smugness of Russ' music. - He hasn't got time for this. - Noticing the garden furniture, he precariously balances the foiled tray ontop of the cardboard boxes. He begins to put the garden chairs by the garden table. Returning to the tray he takes it over to the barbecue and opens the lid. A tonne of smoke billowed into his face. Cliff coughs and splutters. He begins to humming along with the track. Not before he chides himself of course, how could he be enjoying this song! He lays the meats onto the griddle.*

CLIFF           Alexa. Stop.

*Pause. Nothing*

CLIFF           ALEXA...STOP.

*Nothing again...infuriating.*

CLIFF           ALEXA!!!!...Oh for goodness sake.

*He rushes over to the speaker and kicks it. The music magically stops as RAQUEL, late 40s enters. She's holding onto a notepad and pen religiously. A bit of a people pleaser, someone who agrees to do something*

*before realising how much a bother it will be. Hides herself behind her calm exterior, but inside she's raging. She too notices the garden chairs and begins to put them back where they were before. She looks over at CLIFF.*

RAQUEL Was that you?

CLIFF *(Still inspecting the speaker)* I think it was Russ Abbot actually.

RAQUEL Not the music, the chairs. I've just got them right.

CLIFF I thought you said it was going to rain later?

RAQUEL Possibly. It's possibly going to rain later.

CLIFF I just didn't think you'd want to get the seats wet, so I tucked them under.

RAQUEL *(Not listening)* I mean look at them Cliff, they could do with a wash as it is. - I thought you were going to do that?

CLIFF *(More interested in the speaker)* I yelled and yelled and that bloody thing didn't even acknowledge me.

RAQUEL Cliff, the chairs - no matter, you're busy - I'll sort them.

*RAQUEL walks back through the patio doors, wiping her feet several times. CLIFF has given up and returns to the safety of the barbecue griddle. Keeping a beedy eye on that speaker.*

CLIFF I don't know why you suggest these things.

RAQUEL *(Off)* Madness mainly. One minute I'm looking forward to some free time and the next thing I know I'm lumbered with organising an annual general meeting slash garden party. Definite insanity. But you know me, I will make these off the cuff decisions, won't I?

CLIFF Well you married me, so what does that say?

*CLIFF waits for a sweet response. Utter silence. Cliff is a little hurt.*

CLIFF *(Slightly firmer)* I said you married me...I said... bloody hell, I thought Alexa was bad, can't you hear me?

RAQUEL *(Poking her head through the door)* I heard you. I just wanted you to sweat a little. - Why are you cooking?

*Re-entering she's now carrying a bucket, a sponge and some cleaning spray.*

CLIFF *(Pointing at the apron)* I'm the chef.

RAQUEL It's only ten, lunch isn't for another few hours.

CLIFF I'll cook off some burgers and keep them in the oven.

RAQUEL If you do that, it won't be a proper barbecue

CLIFF *(looking at the barbecue, then pointing at it.)* Looks fairly proper to me Raquel. Briquettes? Yes. Blistering heat? Affirmative. And no matter where I stand, there's smoke in my eyes. But I suppose you're right, maybe it's just a clever disguise? - Perhaps it's actually Vladimir Putin's summer hideout? - Come out Vlad, we know you're in there!

RAQUEL I was hoping...I was expecting you'd be barbecuing during the party, that's all.

CLIFF I thought it was an AGM?

RAQUEL Well it is technically. Technically it's an AGM. An AGM with... party games, a quiz and knowing Ethel, a raffle.

CLIFF No one wanted an AGM then?

RAQUEL No one seems to! I tried everything to persuade people. I've told so many lies Cliff. I've promised drink, I've promised prizes, an awards ceremony. I even told Liz Stallard it was trip to Euro Disney.

CLIFF Disneyland Paris.

RAQUEL They all expect something for nothing. So now, Quiz, Raffle and a barbecue... Albeit now a *precooked* barbecue.

CLIFF But precooking the chicken in the oven is okay?

RAQUEL Well, that's different.

CLIFF *(Jokingly sarcastic)* Oh I see, the oven isn't a barbecue, unless it's cooking chicken. I always wondered why your Sunday roasts smelt so smoky.

RAQUEL *(Not impressed)* Firstly, rude. - Secondly, no one wants a barbecue with a side of salmonella, dear.

