

# **ONCE UPON A LIFETIME**

## SCENE 1

FX: Elsie's voice on tape

OLD ELSIE ENTERS with a Hoover. She is singing as she Works. She begins Hoovering and then switches the Hoover off.

OLD ELSIE: As soon as I finish here I'm going over to clean for Mrs Frobisher. I do her on a Monday and Mr and Mrs Taylor, I do on Thursday. Saturday, I get my sister in law's shopping in the morning, Maggie's, 'cos she can't get out see, and Sunday I always do a roast for my granddaughter, that's Clare and her two little ones. She lives two floors down in my block.... Well you gotta make a fuss of people, haven't you? Doesn't matter whether they're young or old. Young people want to be made happy too, you know? Not just old people and you can make people happy by doing a little kindness. True! My Mum taught me that.

ELSIE hoovers

OLD ELSIE (Cont) : Not far away now, is it, this Millenium business? I think something's going to happen when the year 2000 comes in. I said it all the way along. Something's going to go bang!

**SONG: LILY OF LAGUNA**

ENTER MUM

OLD ELSIE: (pointing) That's her! That's me Mum!

ENTER DAD

OLD ELSIE: And there's me Dad!

DAD kisses MUM  
Music continues underneath scene

MUM and DAD pose for photograph  
**LX: FLASH**

OLD ELSIE: Long time ago, that photograph. Turn of the century. Last century.  
When they was courting.....

**SONG:REPRISE OF LILY OF LAGUNA**

MUM: (Out) Bob was the one I finally married, but his brother Jim was after me and all!!  
Jim was an undertaker. Bob was a bricklayer. And they was both fighting over  
me! Imagine! I'd be sitting on the bench, waiting for Bob, and Jim would  
come up in his big top hat, 'cos they wore top hats at funerals. Ever so  
handsome he looked and he was always trying to beat his brother to it. But it  
was Bob that won me in the end!

**Refrain of SONG:LILY OF LAGUNA into  
ROSES OF PICARDY**

DAD puts on a soldier's hat

DAD: (Out) 1914. I was called up to fight in France. The war lasted four  
years and ten million men died before it was over.

DAD kisses MUM goodbye.  
MUM EXITS

DAD: (CONT)1916. On the first day of the Battle of the Somme 20,000  
British soldiers were killed as they advanced in a line towards German  
machine guns.

MUM ENTERS

MUM: 1916. My third child, Elsie was born that year. "Pudding" we always called her cos she used to cry for pudding! And I had another five after that! We had this photograph taken of me and the three girls.

**LX: FLASH**

MUM: (Cont) We was all dressed in white. I sent it over to Bob

DAD: And I carried it all through France with me. I went through a lot out there. We all did.

MUM: He used to fight his own shadows. Used to think they was the Germans, didn't you love?

OLD ELSIE: Both my Dad and his two brothers fought in the Great War and when I was little I can always remember Armistice day. Everything stopped for two minutes, the traffic and all. My Dad used to make us go up to Beckenham Cenotaph and we'd lay a poppy there.

Pause as DAD EXITS

OLD ELSIE: (CONT) My Mum was marvellous! I couldn't have wished for a better Mother. But ooh she worked hard and she never had a holiday. She was in service all her life. She did a bit of cleaning. Used to go top to bottom for half a crown. But of an evening she was a cook in a Gentleman's home.

FREEZE MUM

OLD ELSIE: (CONT) I'm eighty-three now and I work as a cleaner. Same as my Mum did.

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**CHILDHOOD**

**SCENE 2**

MUM: (Calling) Beatty Ethel Elsie Helen Peggy Bobby Teddy Tiny!!!!

OLD ELSIE: That's how my Mum used to call us all!

MUM: Beatty Ethel Elsie Helen Peggy Bobby Teddy Tiny!!

OLD ELSIE: She used to call. 'Til she got the right one and I'd to say to her:

#### ENTER YOUNG ELSIE

YOUNG ELSIE: Which one do you want, Mum?

OLD ELSIE: She used to get so mad with herself !!

Y.ELSIE: (Out) We all lived at number 25 Eden Road, Elmers End. They used to call it "Dead End" 'cos everybody went to bed about eight o'clock.

MUM: Elsie. It was you I wanted. Here are your socks. I've darned them so they should last a while longer if you're careful.

Y.ELSIE: Thanks Mum.

During the following speech MUM is cooking/cleaning and DAD is also busy bringing in coal etc. ELSIE talks to the audience while walking around the house and occasionally getting under her parent's feet.

Y.ELSIE: We lived in a cottage. There was a front room.

MUM: You're not to go in there, Elsie.

Y.ELSIE: Just looking, Mum.

(Out) It was the best room, and a best room **was** a best room in them days.

Then there was the kitchen...and a scullery where you did the washing up and the cooking.

DAD: No hot water, mind.

Y.ELSIE: And in the kitchen there was an old fashioned sofa, you know, like doctors have in their surgeries, and there was a big old table that seated ten. White top, wood. Had to be scrubbed. We all used to sit round it when we was doing our homework. Mum used to play ludo with us or Snakes and Ladders.

MUM: If I wasn't too busy...

Y.ELSIE: (Out) She'd always find time to play with us...  
And we had a beautiful front garden.

DAD: We had the best front garden in the road!

Y.ELSIE: And the toilet was out the back. Used to go out in the garden. Bit creepy at night, that was!

MUM: You couldn't take a candle because it used to blow out.

Y.ELSIE: And upstairs was the bedrooms. Two of them and then four of us in each bed. Two at the bottom and two at the top.

MUM: Elsie, ducks, I am trying to clear up in here. Why don't you go outside for a while and leave me in peace?

Y.ELSIE: Alright Mum.

MUM EXITS

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### SCENE 3

OLD ELSIE: My friend Grace Piper, she lived across the street from me. She's eighty-eight now! Last week she sent me, what's it called?..... a census from 1925. All the names and addresses of the people in our old street when we was growing up. Where did I put it now?

## OLD ELSIE EXITS

(During the following speech Young Elsie and the other two actors act out the characters talked about possibly amidst snippets of songs or nursery rhyme)

YOUNG ELSIE: Grace had a younger sister, Margie Piper. Then in her family there was Wen, Grace, Billy and Freddy Piper. They all lived at number sixty one. There was Willie Everest. He used to sit next to me at school. Used to say

WILLIE: “But Miss, I can’t sit next to Elsie because she keeps on laughing!

Y.ELSIE: Freda Saunders....She’d knock on my door and say

FREDA: “Can your Elsie come out and play?”

Y.ELSIE: And my dad’d let me go out and we used to play Jimmy Knack Knack. (Sings) “One Two Three...All over.All over.

Y.ELSIE: Mrs Hughes. Now she was a nosey old thing. Lived opposite she did and she didn’t miss nothing. Used to be kissing goodnight in the doorway and she’d tell my Mum:

MRS HUGHES: “I saw your Elsie in the doorway”.

Y.ELSIE: And the old fever cart used to come up the road, take people away that’d got the fever. Go off to the fever hospital and you wouldn’t see ‘em for months.

Y.ELSIE: Then there was Mr Folger at number 37.

ENTER MR FOLGER

MR FOLGER: Elsie!

Y.ELSIE: Yes, Mr Folger?

MR FOLGER: You haven't forgotton my paper, have you?

Y.ELSIE: I was just going!

MR FOLGER: Only at this rate it'll be yesterday's news by the time I get to read it!

Y.ELSIE: I'm on my way!  
(Out) Every day I'd get Mr Folger's paper. He'd lean over the gate with his arms folded waiting for me to get back then...

MR FOLGER gives ELSIE some money

MR FOLGER: There you are.

Y.ELSIE: I'd get my ha'penny! Thank you Mr Folger!

(Out)And after school I used to collect dirty washing in an old pram.

ELSIE, accepts washing from MISS HAYES and mimes pushing barrow across stage.  
She sings "T'was on a Monday morning " as she goes.

MISS HAYES: Are you sure that's not too heavy for you, Elsie?

Y.ELSIE: I'll be fine, thank you, Miss Hayes.  
(Out) Half the people I collected from taught at my school!  
There was Miss Hayes, Mr Gooch, Mr Shamrock!  
I'd take the clothes over to an old lady in St Margaret's Road

ELSIE pushes the cart across the stage to the WASHERWOMAN'S house

WASHER  
WOMAN:

Is that the lot?

Y.ELSIE:

Yes. I've been to everyone you said.

They both unload the washing

Y.ELSIE:

(Out) Then she'd wash the clothes and I'd go back the next day and they'd be all ironed and I'd take them back all clean.

ELSIE takes the washing back  
across the stage

Y.ELSIE:

That's yours', Miss Hayes.

MISS HAYES:

Thank you, Elsie.

MISS HAYES tips ELSIE

Y.ELSIE:

Thank you! (Out) Miss Hayes and the other teachers would tip me tuppence each time I went. And I'd get two shillings a week from the old girl on top, which was a lot of money!

SONG: I'VE GOT SIXPENCE

Then there was Herbert's Dairies....I worked for them too. Unloading the milk barrows . The lorry would come up at half past four in the morning ....and again at about half past eight.

MR HENDERSON:

Can you work tonight, Elsie?

Y.ELSIE:

Yes, Mr Henderson. What do you want me to do?

MR HENDERSON: Same sort of thing, but it'll just be emptying the barrows when they come back off the road. Put the bottles in the crates and put the crates up on the lorry for them to go away and be washed. Is that clear?

Y.ELSIE: Yes, Mr Henderson.

MR HENDERSON: (Giving her some money) And that's for this morning. You're a good little worker, Elsie.

Y.ELSIE: Thank you Mr Hehderson! And all them jobs I used to do...All the money I got I gave it straight to my Mum.

ENTER MUM

YOUNG ELSIE gives her money.

MUM: Good girl.And here's a penny for you ducks.

Y.ELSIE: Thanks Mum!

**DAD**

**SCENE FOUR**

Y.ELSIE: Every Christmas Dad would give me half a crown.

DAD: (Giving her money) That's 'cos you're my best girl. Don't tell the others.

EXIT DAD

Y. ELSIE: (To MUM) Look what Dad's just given me.

MUM: Aren't you the lucky one! He don't give ME nothing ducks!

Y. ELSIE: Here, you can have it.

MUM: No, love. He meant it for you.

Y. ELSIE: But I want you to have it, Mum. Here.

Y. ELSIE gives MUM money

Y. ELSIE EXITS

MUM: (Out) He wasn't mean though, my Bob. Oh no. I thought he was one of the kindest men that ever walked.

DAD ENTERS

DAD: (Out) I was a bricklayer by trade. ... My Father had taught me bricklaying. Me and my two brothers, George and Jim, we all served as apprentices for him..But when it was frosty I was out of work. About three months of the year in all, and during that time we weren't paid.

MUM: The Winter months were the hardest. But we got by somehow. They used to give you what you called a ticket, worth a pound, and you'd go up to Beckenham, to this special place and they'd give you a pound of groceries.... A bit of marge, bit of sugar, bit of tea, you know, to keep you going 'til the weather got better.

DAD: Didn't make me feel too good that, asking for charity, but the wife said we didn't have a choice.

MUM: He used to look out the window and say:

DAD: There's no break in the weather yet.

MUM: And even when it wasn't Winter the jobs were short term, weren't they love?

DAD: When one was finished I'd have to go and find something else.  
Used to walk along for miles with my tools on my back looking  
for work.

**SONG: THE DOWN AND OUT BLUES**

DAD walks around stage then throws his tool bag down.

MUM: No luck?

PAUSE

MUM: (CONT) Don't let it get you down, ducks.

DAD: I've had enough of this. I'm off.

MUM: Where are you going?

DAD: Don't wait up.

DAD EXITS

MUM: And off he'd go... down the pub. Just when we needed  
every penny.....and he'd come back later in a right old state.

DAD ENTERS singing a Pub song.

MUM: Keep the noise down, for heaven's sake! You'll wake the  
whole neighbourhood.

DAD carries on singing

MUM: Oh Bob! What am I going to do with you?  
You go out 'til all hours spending money we haven't got and  
what am I supposed to give the children for their dinner  
tomorrow? Eh? You tell me that!

DAD: Oh don't fuss so....It's not surprising I don't want

to come home when this is what I get as soon as I walk through the door!

**FX:** Baby crying (from backstage)

MUM: And now you've gone and woken the baby!

MUM EXITS  
Y.ELSIE ENTERS

DAD: Elsie girl! There you are! You'll give me a hand with my boots, won't you?

Y.ELSIE: Of course Dad.

She helps him

Y.ELSIE: (Cont) You silly old thing. Coming home like this!

DAD: Your Mother's cross with me about something...

Y.ELSIE: Here. Let me undo that collar of yours'. Now, let's get you ready for bed.

Y.ELSIE helps DAD off stage

MUM ENTERS with sleeping baby

MUM: Elsie could always manage to calm him down when he got like that. She said it was no good nagging....

It wasn't the easiest of times...Bob in and out of work, eight children to feed . I can remember standing at the door,1926 it was, the day of the General Strike, and I said to little Elsie "Look ducks, there's nothing moving..."

ENTER DAD

DAD: Unemployment was at it's worse in the early 1930's. Four million men out of work! One in six families living on the dole. That was fifteen shillings a week with a bit extra for the wife and kids.

**REPRISE OF SONG  
DOWN AND OUT BLUES**

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**GRAN AND GRANDAD**

**SCENE 5**

OLD ELSIE is cleaning around the stage

OLD ELSIE: One couple I do are Mr and Mrs Taylor. They're a wonderful old couple! She's ninety-two and he's ninety. They look forward to seeing me Thursdays. 'Cos she's had a stroke, see. She sits in her chair and he sits in his and they sit close together. Touching really. When it got to eleven o'clock I said to her "He hasn't made you tea yet, has he?" I said to him "You'll lose your job! You'll lose your job!"

I've always had time for old people. 'Cos it's hard for them sometimes, isn't it? My own Gran and Grandad lived in Shirley. I was the only one of all of us who used to go over there and help her. I loved it there. She's always greeted me with open arms, made a fuss

of me every time I went.

ENTER GRAN

She starts washing at a washboard

O.ELSIE: That's my Gran. She came over to our place every week. She'd bring her own bit of tea, because my Mum had eight of us, and her own biscuits and a bit of marge for my Mum. And she always wore a white apron...starched.....like a nurse's apron....

ENTER GRANDAD

(Smoking a clay pipe)

O.ELSIE: And that's Grandad.

GRANDAD sits on a three legged stool  
and mimes chopping wood.

O.ELSIE: Grandad used to sit up in the shed nearly all day on his milk stool chopping wood, all in little pieces, ready for the fire.

GRANDAD: When I was young I used to work on a farm. I'd get up at three o'clock in the morning and go and milk the cows. Used to sit on this very same stool I did! . I worked as a cowman right up 'til I was sixty-five and was kicked by one of the blighters. Had to have an operation and that, but, well, just look at me now! I'm still going strong. Like I said to the Doctor "I fought in the Boer War **and** The Great War .....It'll take more than some silly heffer to knock the wind out of my sails!"

GRAN: And he could always tell what the weather was going to be like by looking up at the sky .

GRANDAD does so

GRANDAD: mm.....Rain tomorrow.

GRAN: And he was never wrong!

**REPRISE OF SONG:  
IN THE SHADE OF THE OLD APPLE TREE**

GRANDAD EXITS

GRAN: I did the washing on a Monday. I was at the washing board all day.... and Tuesday I did the ironing. Then I wouldn't touch a bit of laundry all week, not 'til the next Monday. I'd take on a bit of sewing from time to time, mend gentlemen's shirts.

GRAN demonstrates this

GRAN: (Cont) Take the fronts out and put new collars on. Get a shilling a shirt for them, I would. But I never did no sewing or mending on a Sunday. Day of rest, that.  
And I used to keep chickens. Rhode Island Reds they were and every day they'd lay me a lovely brown egg.

GRAN gets egg from chicken  
(Bk Bk Bk noises?)

GRAN: (Cont) Thank you for my lovely egg!  
And at night I'd have them in the house. Well I didn't like to think of them getting cold. They'd come and sit on the arms of my wooden chair and I'd feed them bread and butter, I would. Even when there was rationing.

GRANDAD: I'll give them bread and butter!!!

GRAN: Don't you have a go at my lovely hens!

GRANDAD: Wasting good food on bloomin' chickens! Just as soon have 'em for

Sunday roast.

GRAN: You know that if it was a choice between keeping my chickens or keeping you.....

GRANDAD: I know .....I know.

GRAN: Now are you just going to sit there and smoke that thing all day or are you going to lend a hand? You haven't forgotten that it's Bank Holiday today and young Elsie's coming over?

GRANDAD: Is she?

GRAN: Should be here any minute.

GRANDAD: Well why didn't you say?

GRANDAD EXITS  
(Carrying his stool)

Y.ELSIE ENTERS

GRAN: Elsie, love!

GRAN hugs ELSIE

GRAN: (CONT) Am I glad to see you! There's still so much to do!  
You don't mind helping, do you love?

Y.ELSIE: Of course not, Gran.  
(Out) On Bank Holiday Mondays she used to do teas and wash and brush ups and mind people's bicycles while they went to the fair on Shirley Hills.

GRAN: Four pence a day for the bike to be minded and four pence for a wash and brush up.

GRAN and Y. ELSIE lay  
a table cloth and set out some cakes.

Y.ELSIE: She'd lay out beautiful white table cloths on wooden benches and  
serve teas. She was a marvellous cook. She made her own rock cakes and  
coconut cakes. Beautiful cook!

GRAN: There. Now we're ready for them!

Y.ELSIE: (Out) And before she died, Gran said to us all:

GRAN: Just as so you all know. When I go I want to be laid out in my white  
nightie and my white cotton socks. I've put them out in my bedroom  
so you'll know where to find them and exactly how I want it all.

YOUNG ELSIE and GRAN  
EXEUNT during OLD ELSIE's  
following speech.

OLD ELSIE: (Out) She lived to be ninety-five and Grandad died shortly after.  
They only died 'cos they were tired. Didn't die of any illness.  
They're both buried in a little churchyard in Shirley under a privit  
bush.....and I remember the vicar saying "What a wonderful age!.  
A wonderful couple and a wonderful age!!"

**SONG: REPRISE OF  
IN THE SHADE OF THE OLD APPLE TREE**

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## **FIRST JOB**

### **SCENE 6**

OLD ELSIE: I was fourteen when I left school. Couldn't get out quick enough!  
The last day of school was just an ordinary one, then it was time to look for my first job. You know I would have loved to have been a nurse. My Dad wanted me to be a maternity nurse but you had to pay for your own training in them days. Buy your own uniform. Didn't bear thinking about!  
So I'd seen this advertisement for a job down Eden Park way and I went down there and knocked on the door.....

ELSIE knocks on door. It is  
opened by MRS SLARK

YOUNG ELSIE: Good afternoon Ma'm. I erm...I saw your advert for a nurse maid and I wondered ..er..if the position was still vacant?

MRS SLARK: Come in.

Y.ELSIE: Thank you Ma'am.

MRS SLARK: It's Mrs Slark. Now tell me a little about yourself...

Y.ELSIE: What was you wanting to know?

MRS SLARK: Well your name for a start?

Y.ELSIE: Elsie. Elsie Jones Ma'm.

MRS SLARK: And where do you live, Elsie?

Y.ELSIE: Eden Road. Elmers End.

MRS SLARK: And your age?

Y. ELSIE: I'm fourteen...but I've done lots of jobs before.

MRS SLARK: And do you have any experience in looking after children?

Y.ELSIE: Oh yes!

MRS SLARK: And where was that?

Y. ELSIE: Well.....Just at home but I'm the third of eight, see. I've got five younger brothers and sisters and I'm always helping my Mother out with them. And I love babies! I really do! And my youngest sister, she's just four and.....

MRS SLARK: I see. Well let me tell you a little about the work you'll be doing here. Roy is three now and Keith is eleven months. You will need to start work at 7.30 in the morning. We'll pay you five shillings a week.It's Monday 'til Saturday and we'll need you to do some additional babysitting on some Sundays. Your dinner will be provided every day and as well as caring for the children you will also perform general cleaning duties around the house. Are you good at cleaning, Elsie?

Y.ELSIE: Oh yes, I can do that.

MRS SLARK: Oh and in this household no work is done on a Saturday.

Y.ELSIE: Why's that then Ma'm? I mean if you don't mind me asking.

MRS SLARK: Not at all, Elsie. You see we are a Jewish family and after sunset on Friday 'til sunset on Saturday we leave everything as it is. No cleaning is ever done between those hours.

Y. ELSIE: Not even the fireplaces?

MRS SLARK: Nothing at all.

ELSIE: I started the very next day. The little one, Keith, I'd take him out in his pram, oh, he was a beautiful baby! He had lovely curly hair and he'd won first prize in a Baby Show!....The pram was one with pumped up tyres and it had his initials on the side of it! "K.S." I used to be ever so proud pushing that pram with the pumped up tyres!  
All 'round the park we'd go. We used to be out for ages.....two or three hours. Come back dinner time. Mr Slark would come home at that time too. He had his own business at the Fish Market and every day:

MR SLARK ENTERS  
(He is carrying a straw bag containing fish)

MR SLARK: Hello there Elsie!

Y. ELSIE: Hello Mr Slark

MR SLARK: Lovely bit of halibut I've got for us today!

EXIT MR SLARK

Y. ELSIE: (Out) Mrs Slark did all the cooking. I'd have my dinner in the kitchen while the children were upstairs with their parents. Then I'd clear away and wash up and when the youngsters were asleep in the afternoon I'd get on with the cleaning.

ENTER OLD ELSIE  
Music underscores the following speech

## AMAZING GRACE

OLD ELSIE: My first weeks wages I spent on my little sister, Tiny. She was my favourite. I bought her a beautiful pram and a doll and a new dress. And when I got married and had my baby I said to her "You're my nursemaid" and she really thought she was my nursemaid! But she suffered terrible with fits. Epilepsy. When she was five she started going to school and she fainted as soon as my Mum put her coat on. We thought it was a fear of going to school, but that was the beginning of it. She kept fainting. Oooh, she suffered. Then she died at twenty-one. Tiny was my closest sister, my favourite....such a dear little soul she was.

Music ends

YOUNG ELSIE: Some Sundays I'd go down to Camber Sands with the whole family. They had a car with two seats in the front and it had a dickie seat at the back. No roof. Lovely times we had down at the seaside, and the Slarks, well they treated me like I was one of the family.

MRS SLARK: Elsie?

Y. ELSIE: Yes Mrs Slark?

MRS SLARK: You know how pleased we are with your work.....

Y. ELSIE: Oh! Thank you!

MRS SLARK: And we were thinking that....if it's not a problem with you or your parents ....we'd like you to come along to the Synagogue with us on Saturday.

Y. ELSIE: No, Mrs Slark, it's no problem at all!

Y. ELSIE: So, the following Saturday

MRS SLARK takes ELSIE's hand  
and takes her to the Synagogue.

ELSIE looks somewhat bewildered  
as MR SLARK from the other side  
of the stage starts chanting in Hebrew.

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## **SECOND JOB**

### **SCENE 6**

OLD ELSIE: It was sad when they had to let me go. They they couldn't afford to keep me on any more. That's when I went to work as a kitchen maid for Mrs Evans. She lived in Shortlands, Bromley. I got a bit more money there, about ten shillings a week. You ever seen that programme "Upstairs..Downstairs" ? Well it was like that! I used to have to call them Madam and Sir, and the children were Miss Winnie, Miss Connie, Master Ronald and Mister Oliver. Gentry....all gentry! And Mrs Evans, now she was a real lady.....

### ENTER MRS EVANS

YOUNG ELSIE: Little stout lady, and when she walked she wobbled!

MRS EVANS: You are permitted one afternoon free a week on a Wednesday and a half day every other Sunday. But before you leave on a Sunday you will ensure that afternoon tea is laid out for the family in the drawing room. Is that all quite clear?

Y. ELSIE: Yes Madam.

MRS EVANS: You are required to wear a green dress with a white apron in the morning, but in the afternoon however...

Y. ELSIE: (Out) You changed into a little black dress with a white apron like the Nippies used to wear, and a

little thing 'round your head .....

MRS EVANS: As well as the kitchen duties there is the silver to be polished....

Y.ELSIE: (Out) Once a week I had to do that. Took it all down to the parlour....like a Butler's pantry...

MRS EVANS: And the beds are to be made and the fireplaces cleaned out...

Y. ELSIE: (Out) All coal fires, they had. I used to have to do them in the morning...get there early.

MRS EVANS: Not forgetting the steps!

Y. ELSIE: (To MRS EVANS) No, Madam. (Out) Six white steps out the front, and a big drawing room they had with all lovely parquet flooring....and one day I had to wait table. Had to go 'round holding the vegetable dishes. I was so nervous! My hands were shaking! Then I went and dropped the bloody potatoes!

MRS EVANS: Oh dear!

MRS EVANS EXITS

Y. ELSIE: Sorry Madam!! (Out) I was only seventeen. Not very old. They wanted me to train as a cook, but it meant sleeping in and I didn't want to do that. I wouldn't leave me Mum, so I left that job and got another one where I didn't have to work Sundays at all, which was just fine by me because

### **BEST FRIENDS/BOY FRIENDS**

#### **SCENE 7**

ENTER MARGIE

Y.ELSIE: (Cont) I used to like to go cycling every weekend. Out into the countryside or sometime even down to the coast. I used to go with my best friend, Margie. We were sworn pals, we were.

MARGIE ENTERS. She is  
rubbing a cream on her face.

MARGIE: (To ELSIE) Is it working yet? Be honest....

Y. ELSIE: I can't see any difference. Perhaps it just takes a while?

MARGIE: I've been doing it a while! Over an hour I've been rubbing it on!

Y. ELSIE: I think freckles are lovely. I can't see why you want to get rid of them!

MARGIE: You would if you had them, believe me. Oh blow it! I'm never sending away for another potion again!

Y. ELSIE: You say that every time !

MARGIE: Fancy a ride somewhere?

Y. ELSIE: We could go down to Westerham? It's pretty there.

MARGIE: We can go primrosing!

Y. ELSIE: I'll go and get Princess Marina.

MARGIE: Meet you back at my house!

MARGIE EXITS

Y. ELSIE: (Out) Princess Marina and Prince George were what we named our bikes!  
Mine was light blue and Margie's was dark blue and cream. Now are we going  
or not?

ENTER MARGIE

**SONG: BYE BYE BLUES**

MARGIE: We used to swim in Keston Lake, swim right across it.

Y. ELSIE: One day we were getting undressed there.....

They mime this

MARGIE: What the....!!!!

Y. ELSIE: Who's throwing them stones?

MARGIE: Look! Over there!

Y. ELSIE: It's a bunch of boy scouts!

MARGIE: What a cheek! You just wait 'til we catch you!!!

They dress again

Refrain of **SONG: BYE BYE BLUES**

MARGIE: Then we both had fellas with motorbikes. (FX: Motorbike arriving)  
Frank was my young man.....

Y. ELSIE: And Gordon was mine.

MARGIE: We used to go out to Layham's Farm and Keston with them two.

BOYFRIEND: (Calling from offstage) Oy, Margie! Get a move on!

Y. ELSIE: I've got my name on a tree trunk somewhere over at Hayes Farm! (To MARGIE) Just hope my Dad never goes past it!!!  
(Out) Gordon was my first real boyfriend. Oooh, I liked him!  
He had a two stroke Francis Barnett motorbike. Used to be a freezing cold, frosty night, and the old moon would be shining bright. There we'd be. Cuddling up. I'd be inside his big leather coat.

### SONG: SWEET AND LOVELY

Y. ELSIE: (Cont) Then when we got back we used to get off the bike up the road and walk down. My Dad would be at the door and he'd ask me where I'd been and I'd tell him I'd been over to see my Gran with Margie.

FX: Motorbike noise

Y. ELSIE: (Cont) Um "Sounds like it" he'd say!

Y. ELSIE: (Out) Then there was Harry. Not Harry, my husband to be, another one. Harry French. He was ginger. Lived in the same road as me.....number 35. I was brought up with him but, well... it just never felt right. Know what I mean?

ENTER HARRY FRENCH  
He is a bit of a geek.

HARRY F: Ah, there you are. I've been looking all over....

Y.ELSIE: (Unenthusiastically) Hello Harry.

HARRY F: Nice day for it!

Y.ELSIE: Yeah.

HARRY F: So....what have you been up to since I last saw you?

Y ELSIE: You mean since yesterday?

HARRY F: Was it only yesterday. Oh! It seemed longer than that...

Y ELSIE: Did you have something to say to me or not, Harry French?

HARRY F: Oh yes. Right. Um...Now, I was wondering if perhaps.... maybe.... if you weren't otherwise engaged....if you'd like to come to the pictures with me sometime. I mean tonight if you like....or tomorrow.....or maybe some other time?

Y ELSIE: Yeah, I'll go to the pictures with you. But I have to get straight back home right after the film....

HARRY F: (Cheery) Right! I'll come by for you at seven o'clock then and that way we'll be first in the queue.

Y. ELSIE: (Wearily) Seven o'clock.

HARRY F EXITS

Y. ELSIE: (Out) He used to think the world of me. Take me to the pictures. I could have had anything, but well....I don't know....I just couldn't imagine....you know?

**FX:** Film soundtrack ELSIE sits down next to HARRY F in the cinema. He puts his arm around her and tries to get closer. ELSIE avoids his advances.

Y. ELSIE: I'm just going to the toilet.

HARRY F: Don't be long! I'll keep your seat warm for you....

Y. ELSIE: (Out) Then I'd nip out of the cinema and get on the bus home! Next day he'd say:

HARRY F: Where did you get to?

Y. ELSIE: Oh I don't know. I must have just missed you.

#### EXIT HARRY FRENCH

Y. ELSIE: (Out) He would have married me. They all thought I was going to marry him. I mean he was alright to go to the pictures with but that was all. I just couldn't kiss him!!!

#### ENTER MUM

MUM: Aren't you going to tell me his name then, ducks?

Y. ELSIE: Whose name?

MUM: Whoever you're getting all dressed up for?

Y. ELSIE: He's ever such a nice boy, this one. Really, Mum.

MUM: Now is this your Gordon fella or Willie? I can't keep up with them all!

Y. ELSIE: No, he's called Ron. Ronald True he said his name was.

MUM: Oooh, the cheeky so and so. He must have seen you coming!

Y. ELSIE: What do you mean?

MUM: Well Ronald True is that murderer they keep writing about in all the papers.

Y.ELSIE: What?

MUM: Yeah! He's having you on, that one. You don't want to be seeing anyone like that, ducks.

EXIT MUM

ENTER HARRY

Y.ELSIE: Oy! I've got a bone to pick with you! My Mum told me who Ronald True really is....

HARRY chuckles

Y.ELSIE: So?

HARRY: So what?

Y.ELSIE: So come on....What's your real name?

HARRY: It's Harry. Harry House.

Y.ELSIE: Not another one!

HARRY: What do you mean?

Y. ELSIE: Never mind! (Out) We courted for six years.....

HARRY: Always looking for somewhere to be alone...

Y. ELSIE: In the winter we did our courting in the empty houses up Eden Park Avenue. All ready for people to move in, they were, but in the summer...

HARRY: We'd be up Beckenham Heights way in the haystacks there.

They both enact this

HARRY: At last....Just you and me.

**SONG**  
**YOU MADE ME LOVE YOU**

ENTER BERT, a young boy

BERT: I know what you're doing. I know what you're doing.

Y ELSIE: Oh no! That's that horrid boy, Bert Taylor from number 26!

BERT: Elsie Jones....I'm going to tell your Mum!

Y. ELSIE: He will and all!

HARRY: Oy! Bert? Is that your name? Here's a penny to keep your mouth shut. What do you say?

BERT: Make it tuppence and I'll think about it.

HARRY: Why you little.....

Y ELSIE: Give him the tuppence, Harry.

HARRY throws the money over to BERT

Y. ELSIE: And when I got home, well I didn't know if he'd said anything to my Mum or not.

MUM ENTERS

MUM: Ah, there you are, ducks.

Y. ELSIE: Hello Mum.  
HARRY: Mrs Jones.  
MUM: Where have you two been then?  
Y. ELSIE: Nowhere really.....  
MUM: So what are you looking so guilty for?  
Y. ELSIE: I'm not!  
MUM: Well, you'd better be getting off home then, Harry.  
HARRY: Right you are, Mrs Jones.  
MUM: Elsie, say goodbye to the young gentleman.....

With her eyes ELSIE hints for her MUM  
to leave them alone. MUM EXITS.  
HARRY goes to kiss ELSIE  
MUM ENTERS

MUM: Did I put the milk bottles out for the morning? Oh yes,  
so I did!

MUM EXITS  
HARRY goes to kiss ELSIE  
MUM ENTERS

MUM: (Shouting) Here Kitty Kitty! Here Kitty Kitty!  
Oh! Are you still here, Harry?

HARRY: I'm just on my way, Mrs Jones.

MUM: Ta ra then, ducks.

HARRY EXITS

MUM: (To ELSIE) It's so hard to find a decent honest upright  
young man these days, wouldn't you agree, Elsie?

Y. ELSIE: If you say so, Mum.

MUM: Harder than finding a needle in a haystack, if you know what I mean, and I think you probably do!!!!

EXEUNT

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MARRIAGE

SCENE 8

HARRY: Saturday night we used to go to the Shilling Hop at Royston in Penge.

Y. ELSIE: Lovely dance hall! Beautiful floor! We always wore long dresses then.

HARRY: And we danced waltzes and foxtrots.

HARRY and ELSIE dance to  
**SONG: IT'S A SIN TO TELL A LIE**

FX: AIR RAID SIREN

Y.ELSIE: (Out) On the third September Britain declared war on Germany.

HARRY: Will you marry me now, love?

Y.ELSIE: Yes.

They turn out to face audience.

FX Wedding bells

MUM ENTERS with ELSIE's veil

HARRY: (Out) So we finally tied the knot. The wedding was at St George's church , Perry Hill. October 1939.

PHOTO POSE

Y.ELSIE: (Out) 'Course there was no knees up, nothing like that.... because the war took the novelty.

HARRY: You couldn't very well....Not when you know people are being called up, could you?

Y.ELSIE: But we had a nice little spread, didn't we Mum?

MUM: (Giving Elsie a present) Here ducks.It's not much. It's from your Dad and me.

Y.ELSIE: (Opening it) Oh Mum, it's lovely!  
(Out) It was a one and eleven penny tablecloth. It's all they could afford, but the thought was there.

MUM EXITS

HARRY: (Out) We spent our honeymoon in Bedford.

Y.ELSIE: Staying with Harry's Aunt for a few days.

HARRY: When we came back we moved to Perry Hill. Them days you could walk up any road and pick what flat you wanted. So many people had gone away during the war. Used to be "To let...To let...To let..."

ELSIE picks up something heavy,  
possibly a pile of linen?

Y.ELSIE: Here, love, give us a hand with this would you?

HARRY helps her with it

Y. ELSIE: (Out) I didn't get married 'til I had everything. All the linen, pillow cases, sheets, towels and that.

HARRY: (Out) But the furniture you didn't get, not before you got your flat.

They both rearrange the set and props  
to make their new home look just right.  
Then they sit down exhausted, in silence.  
They both smile meekly at each other.

HARRY: I'm just going over to see how my Mum's doing. I won't be late.

Y. ELSIE: Bye then....

After a while we hear ELSIE  
weeping softly.

**SONG: SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME**  
(Underneath following scene)

Y.ELSIE: (Out) After I was married I cried every day for a fortnight. Couldn't get used to it. I missed the company of all me brothers and sisters.

I missed coming home from work to a nice warm fire.... I missed my Mum.

ELSIE gets up and puts her coat on.

Y.ELSIE: (Cont) Then one day I was on my way to work and I thought "I'd give anything to see my Mum!". And a bus comes along, not my one for work, a number 194 to Elmers End where she lived and I got on it and went to see her.

MUM ENTERS  
She hugs ELSIE

Y.ELSIE: Oh Mum!

MUM: There, there, ducks. What is it now?

Y.ELSIE: I don't know. I think I'm just homesick. Is that usual?

MUM: Of course it is. But that young man of yours' Is he treating you right? 'Cos he'll have me to answer to if he isn't.....

Y.ELSIE: No, it's nothing like that, Mum. It's not Harry, it's me! Harry's a gentle soul, and he's straight, straight as a die. I couldn't have found a nicer man.

MUM: Well, if you say so.

Y.ELSIE: I do, Mum. And you'll never guess what, he likes to have a white tablecloth on the table.....starched...just like....

MUM: Your Father likes it!

Y.ELSIE: Yeah! Isn't that strange?

MUM: Um...well maybe he's not so bad, after all.

Y.ELSIE: He's a pet. Really. Look, I'd better get back. Thanks, Mum.

MUM: Any time ducks, I'll always be here for you.

MUM EXITS

Y.ELSIE: (Out) And I was alright after that!

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## AMBULANCE SERVICE

### SCENE 9

#### **FX: DRUM and SIRENS**

YOUNG ELSIE and HARRY face out as they say the following speeches.

**SONG:QUARtermasters STORE and PRAISE THE LORD AND PASS THE AMUNITION** are hummed underneath the following scene.

**Y. ELSIE:** When, the war come along I was going to join the Land Army 'cos I liked the countryside, but well...it was leaving me husband, wasn't it? And you had to do something if you had no children so I decided to join the Ambulance Service. They were desperate for staff. They asked me if I could cook and I said yes, even though all I knew was from my Mum. We did two hot meals a day and I had to cook for about forty people on a shift. The only thing I did wrong was I didn't cook enough at first, but I soon learned. My husband was in London during the war.

**HARRY:** They didn't let me join up. I failed on the eye test, so I worked at the Woolwich Arsenal filling shells with TNT.

Y.ELSIE: At the Ambulance Station the dinner had to be ready at one o'clock, but of course if the drivers were out after a raid you had to give it to them when they came in .

HARRY: Every shell I filled at that place , I thought "This is going to kill somebody" I hated that job. I hated the whole blomin' thing. All them bombs dropping everywhere.....

Y.ELSIE: He was petrified of the war, my Harry. He used to go deathly white.....

#### HARRY EXITS

I saw no fear, I didn't. I used to walk from Forest Hill to New Cross with me tin helmet on and I used to duck under the table and laugh when anything dropped! It was good working there, but I finally had to stop because. I was six months pregnant. When I was expecting I had morning sickness and on my way to work I used to be sick over everybodys' privet hedge!!!

#### ELSIE EXITS

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### **THE WAR YEARS: BABIES and BOMBS**

#### SCENE 10

OLD. ELSIE: My baby was born in 1943.I went off to Woking to have it 'cos it was too dangerous in London. The bombs were dropping everywhere and I went to a Canadian Lord's home, made into a hospital .

I'd always loved babies. When I was a girl I used to walk along and look into prams. Used to go 'round Beckenham Nursing home and the babies would be out on the grass in their little cots and I'd walk 'round and see which one I wanted. I saw a lovely baby there with dark hair, brown eyes and I went home and I said to my Mum "I've seen a lovely little baby! Do you think we could have it?" I really thought you bought babies!

I spent years trying to get pregnant with my first, so when I found out I was expecting I was over the moon. I was so happy it sent my blood pressure sky high!

ENTER YOUNG ELSIE with baby

Y.ELSIE: I had to have a Caesarian , and the little one was as fair as a lily. He had to be washed in nut oil, 'cos he was so fair you couldn't put water on him.

ENTER NURSE with HARRY

NURSE: Congratulations, Mr House.

HARRY: Thankyou.

NURSE: Now you do know that it was a very difficult birth?

HARRY: I hear you had to cut the old girl open?

NURSE: Yes. The baby's head couldn't drop. To be perfectly frank , Mr House, it nearly cost two lives. The doctor has asked me to have a word with you because, well.....you must be aware that it would be far too dangerous for your wife to ever have another child.

HARRY: Oh. Oh I see. Thank you. Thank you nurse.

NURSE EXITS

HARRY goes over to ELSIE and puts his arms around her.

**LX:** Photo flash ?

Y.ELSIE: My little boy was nearly a month old by the time I came home. I changed after he was born, cos me baby, well he was me life, you know? Before he come along I'd only had meself to worry about, but you'd throw your body over him when the bombs were dropping. My sister Helen had her baby round the same time as me....

HELEN ENTERS.

HELEN: (Out) I looked after my little one on my own all through the war. My husband had been reported missing, presumed dead. It wasn't 'til the end of the war that I heard from him. Found out he was a prisoner of war, and my little girl never saw her Daddy for five years. Both our brothers had been called up. Bob and Ted. Nobody wanted them to go, but they went with a good heart.

Y. ELSIE: Bob was in the Air Force overseas and Ted was down at Southampton docks, bringing the wounded over from Dunkirk.

HELEN: (To ELSIE) I got a letter this morning saying you and me are going to be evacuated down to Wales on account of the little ones.

Y. ELSIE: Yeah. I got one too. They couldn't have moved us further away from London if they'd tried. I've never been so far away from my Harry. I'm going to miss him something rotten. Oh sorry! I didn't mean.....

HELEN: It's alright.

Y. ELSIE: (Out) So that was it! We all went down on the train and we stayed with complete strangers. We'd only been there two days when.....

HELEN: Elsie! There's a telegram for us.....

Y. ELSIE: Oh God, no!

HELEN: (Reading it) To whom it may concern.....This is to inform you that Edward Jones died this day the 17th July 1944 in the course of courageous service to his King and Country.

Y. ELSIE: No! Not Teddy!!! He wasn't even overseas...

HELEN: (Out) We found out later that he was knocked down by an American lorry in the docks. Got crushed underneath it.

HELEN slowly folds the letter up and  
then hugs ELSIE

HELEN: He was only nineteen.

Y.ELSIE: Just a boy....

HELEN: Does Mum know? I suppose she does.

Y.ELSIE: We'll need to go up and help them with the funeral and that.

HELEN: We'll take the train and ask Mrs Flute to look after the babies. I'm sure she won't mind.

Y.ELSIE: I still can't believe it....

HELEN: I know. Come on, let's start packing.

Y. ELSIE: (Out) When I got to London I said to Helen : I'm just going to pop over to my place to get some decent clothes for the funeral.....

ELSIE sets off and reaches her road

Y.ELSIE: Oh my God!!!! My home! What's happened to my home?

ENTER AIR RAID WARDEN

WARDEN: Mind out love! You don't want to be wandering around here, there's still masonry falling down everywhere.

Y.ELSIE: But that's my house! Number 84!

WARDEN: Not much left of it now, Miss. Anderson shelter was hit as well last night. Five killed in this road alone. You didn't have any relatives staying there, did you?

Y.ELSIE: No, no....My husband was at his Mothers' and my baby's in Wales.....

WARDEN: Talk about good luck then! You must have a guardian angel looking over you!

Y. ELSIE: (Out) And I suppose he was right! If we had been there we would have been killed..... The whole place was demolished. And the strange thing was I'd dreamt it all the night before. I'd woken up in the middle of the night and said to Helen "My place has been bombed"

ENTER HELEN in mourning

HELEN: "You go back to sleep" I'd said, but she was right. Then we found out that the undertakers at Penge, where our brother Ted was laid out, they got a direct hit as well. Ted was blown up with it!

Y. ELSIE: So much for "Rest in Peace".

MUM ENTERS  
She gives HELEN and ELSIE hats to wear

**MUSIC**  
**OH GOD OUR HELP** under following section

HELEN: The undertakers told us what had happened , but we decided we didn't want Mum to find out...

Y. ELSIE: And at the funeral she had no idea that Ted wasn't in that coffin. Didn't know 'til the day she died.

MUM EXITS  
ENTER HARRY

HARRY: On the 8th May, 1945 it was Victory in Europe Day.

MUSICAL MEDLEY

**SONGS: WHEN THEY SOUND THE LAST ALL CLEAR  
WE'LL GATHER LILACS  
ROLL OUT THE BARREL**

HARRY: There was nothing left of our house, just rubble. Elsie had to go and stay with her sister and I stayed with my Mum 'cos it was nearer the Arsenal. We had to wait for the Council to find us a place. Had to fight for it! 1945 we finally got a prefab in Lee. We loved it there. We had a dining room, a kitchenette and a bathroom with a fire that heated the water.

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**MUM'S DEATH**

**SCENE 11**

OLD ELSIE: Lovely little prefab, it was. Lovely garden. I had nice memories there. It was just like a little dollhouse! The day I moved the Gas man come to cut the gas off and he said "You're not leaving all this, are you?" I said "I've got to go, they're going to pull 'em all down."

ENTER HARRY

HARRY: 1952: The year King George died.

OLD ELSIE: 1952: That was the year my Mother died. Dad had gone two years before. Broke her heart. I know he used to get drunk and that, but she loved him, and she missed him.  
And one night I said to my husband:

Y. ELSIE: (putting her coat on) I'm going over to Elmer's End.

HARRY: Are you sure love? It's quite late.

Y. ELSIE: I know. (Out) I had a funny feeling. And when I got there she was at the bedroom window and I went in the gate and upstairs, 'cos she didn't lock the door or nothing.

ENTER MUM

MUM: I knew you would come, ducks.

Y.ELSIE: Are you alright, Mum?

MUM: Well... I've eaten a banana and I've got terrible pains.

Y.ELSIE: Should I call the doctor?

MUM: No no. I'll be fine in the morning.

Y.ELSIE: Well if you're sure....

MUM: No, you get back home. You'll miss the last bus.  
It's been nice to see you, ducks.

MUM sits down on chair and sleeps.  
ELSIE puts a blanket round her, kisses  
her and leaves.

Y.ELSIE: Next day there was a knock at the door and it was a policeman.  
He said "Mrs House? It's your Mother." "Not my Mum" I said  
I only saw her last night. She was alright then." But he  
said she'd died. Just like that. She'd been sitting in her chair  
with her glasses on and the Daily Sketch on her lap. And my  
brother Bob who lived there, he was upstairs in bed. He'd  
been on lates and he'd asked Mum to give him a call, and  
he'd come downstairs...

ENTER BOB

BOB: (Shaking MUM) For heaven's sake, Mum, I asked you to call me.  
You know I wanted to go to the pictures...Mum!!!

BOB realises that MUM is dead.

BOB: MUM!!! MUM!!!!

He goes into shock.  
YOUNG ELSIE goes over to him to  
comfort him.

**SONG: THE LORD'S MY SHEPHERD**  
sung is underneath the following speech

OLD ELSIE: The shock sent him. He couldn't stay in that house.

BOB, MUM and Y.ELSIE EXEUNT

OLD ELSIE: (Cont) He went into lodgings. He missed my Mum. And so did I. First few years I couldn't stop crying, then I went down to the Spiritual Church to get a message, 'cos I believed in Spiritualism and she said "There's somebody here..the name of Elsie" She said "Your Mother's here, and all the while you cry you're upsetting her". And from that day I didn't. But I never got over her. I felt it with me Dad, and me husband later, but you feel it more with your Mum. 'Cos your Mum's you, isn't she? You're a part of your Mum and when you lose your Mum you want the world to open up and swallow you. You do. You just can't believe it.....

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## PAGODA CAFÉ

### SCENE 12

OLD ELSIE: When the prefabs were pulled down we had to move. I went down the Spiritualist again. Blind Annie, she was called, and she said “Nothing but hustle and bustle. You’re going to move where there’s trees and railway lines” And that’s where I went! I’m still there now. Blackheath. A lovely little Council flat along the railway line and the trees are all in front.... After I moved there I took a job at The Pagoda Café in Blackheath Village.

Y.ELSIE: I worked there as a cook. People would come in for their dinner and we’d do ‘em fish and chips or steak and kidney pie.... meat puddings...

**MUSIC underneath scene**  
**ROCK AROUND THE CLOCK**

Y.ELSIE: (Cont) Five o’clock in the morning I used to go round there to get the puddings all ready in a big steamer. Then I’d make rock cakes and scones and people from outside used to come and buy them . Oooh I worked hard there. The owner Mr Williams he used to say to me:

MR WILLIAMS: If you do a hundred dinners today I’ll give you ten bob.

Y.ELSIE: One day I did ninety-nine, but he never gave me the ten bob. He was a tight old so and so! I used to work with a girl named Hilda. We was good friends, Hilda and me.

MR WILLIAMS becomes a CUSTOMER  
ENTER HILDA who waits on him.

HILDA: (Out) I was the waitress and Elsie was the cook and when the nice bank managers came in I'd say: (To ELSIE) Give 'em a bit of extra meat, Elsie!

Y.ELSIE: And I'd put a bit of extra meat under the potatoes and she used to take it out ....

HILDA: Holding it high like this.(She demonstrates )  
Swoop it down. Never spilt nothing.

ENTER MRS WILLIAMS

Y. ELSIE: And Mrs Williams, she used to look on the plates to see we weren't giving them too much. And if she saw it she'd say:

MRS WILLIAMS: You gave him five prunes. You know you're only supposed to give him four!

HILDA: She'd seen the stones on the plate and counted them!

MRS WILLIAMS: Four prunes, Hilda. Not five, four.

Y.ELSIE: Oy, Hilda! Give us a bit of ice-cream.

HILDA: Just a tick!

Y.ELSIE: Don't let Mrs Williams see you.

HILDA: Here you are.

ELSIE begins eating icecream  
MRS WILLIAMS approaches  
her from behind. HILDA tries to warn  
her but ELSIE is oblivious.

MRS WILLIAMS: A little less eating and a little more cooking might make this restaurant run more efficiently, Elsie.

ELSIE: Oh! Yes Mrs Williams.

HILDA: Sorry Mrs Williams.

MRS WILLIAMS EXITS  
HILDA and ELSIE giggle

Y.ELSIE: Oh we had some fun there.

HILDA: We used to have a laugh, didn't we?

HILDA EXITS

ELSIE: Then in the evening I worked across the road at The Welcome Inn.

During music ELSIE changes her apron for another

Y.ELSIE: It was busy there too. Had the world come in. Run by two ladies, Miss Roberts and Miss Schmit. They used to sit and hold hands under the table and they'd look in one another's eyes... Yeah.... It was known in the village. Well known in the village.

ELSIE takes her apron off

Y.ELSIE Then after that I worked in Sainsburys at Lewisham. Twelve years I worked there. Pricing all the stuff to put on the shelves. Worst paid job, that. But the happiest! We used to sing all day. All the girls and me.

ENTER HARRY

HARRY: 1966. Harold Wilson was re-elected as Prime Minister and England won the World Cup!

ENTER OLD ELSIE

O.ELSIE: 1966 That was the year that my Harry died.

**SONG**  
Unchained Melody

O.ELSIE: (Cont) He died of cancer of the liver.....  
I nursed him at home right up 'til the end, and when he was gone I thought I've got to get another job. Partly 'cos I needed the extra money now but also 'cos I just couldn't bear Saturdays on my own. I didn't mind the rest of the week but when it come to Saturdays.....So I got a Saturday job at The Army and Navy in Victoria, and I ended up working there nineteen years. I used to come home about six o'clock on a Saturday night and I was ready to have a bath and something to eat and the evening had gone. Sundays wasn't so bad 'cos you did what you had to do to get ready for Monday again.

PAUSE

But you take my tip. If you ever come up against any trouble...work. Don't pack up. Keep going. Get out and work and help people. True. You can do little things in this world and you can be happy doing 'em.

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**MRS FROBISHER**

**SCENE 13**

O.ELSIE: One lady I clean for now, Mrs Frobisher....She eighty-two, a year younger than me, I do her on a Monday.

**ENTER MRS FROBISHER**

O.ELSIE: She calls me her best friend.

MRS FROBISHER: Well it's true. You are. I don't think of you as my cleaner, You're my best friend.

O.ELSIE: Won't have it I'm a cleaner! No way will she have that.  
(To MRS FROBISHER) How are you doing today then?

MRS FROBISHER: Not too good, to be honest with you, Elsie.

O.ELSIE: Come on then. I'll put the kettle on in a minute.  
(Out) She wanted me to move in with her.

MRS FROBISHER: Oh please Elsie! At least consider the idea...

O.ELSIE: Sorry, Mrs Frobisher. I couldn't.  
(Out) I just couldn't be tied down like that. I have to have my bit of freedom.  
(To MRS FROBISHER)I'll go up and change your sheets in a bit so you'll have a nice night tonight.

MRS FROBISHER: Oh you are wonderful. Whatever would I do without you?

**PAUSE**  
As ELSIE cleans

O.ELSIE: Look out there.

MRS FROBISHER: Where?

O. ELSIE: There, in the garden. See your crocuses?

MRS FROBISHER: Oh yes. Lovely, aren't they?

O.ELSIE: Look there. One little crocus. A sign of life, that one.  
That's the good old stick. He's woken up.

MRS FROBISHER: Oh you mean Mr Frobisher?

O.ELSIE: Yeah. That's him saying hello!  
(Out) He was a good man, her husband. I said to her once  
"He's a good old stick, ain't he?" and she said she'd never  
heard that saying before, and from that day we've always  
called him "The good old stick".

MRS FROBISHER: Yes, I can see it. The yellow one?

O.ELSIE: That's right. That's him!  
(Out) He used to run me to Lewisham every Wednesday  
when I finished. Treat me like a lady he would.  
And even the cab people now, when they come 'round for  
me they pull right up outside the front door for me to get in.  
I feel ever so important!

MRS FROBISHER: And so you are, Elsie! You're VERY important to me  
And don't you ever forget it.

## SONG

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**END SCENE**

## SCENE 14

OLD ELSIE:            Anyway, I really can't stand around here and chat all day. My granddaughter Clare, she's bringing her babies 'round this evening and I'm making them all a meal. Clare's only twenty- one now. She was nineteen when her husband George died .Imagine that! I still tell her "He's not gone. He's with you all the time. Guiding you."I say. Somebody's got to guide you through this world, haven't they? Everybody...Not just me. And her little 'uns , they're called Gemma and Sunny. They're lovely, they are! I have to give 'em a kiss! They both love me, they do! They call me Nan, and you know if you give a child something small they think more of that than they would a bike. It's the little things that count in life. Little things you do for people, not big things what you do.  
They like me to tell 'em stories about the old days. Like how me Mum used to call us all when we was children...

ENTER MUM

MUM:                    Beatty Ethel Elsie Helen Peggy Bobby Teddy Tiny.

O.ELSIE:                That's her! And that's how she used to call us. 'Til she got the right one. They love hearing that story...

ENTER YOUNG ELSIE

Y.ELSIE:                Which one of us do you want, Mum?

MUM:                    You're all to come in now. It's time to get ready for bed.

Y.ELSIE:                Oh Mum....Can't I play outside a bit longer?

ENTER DAD

DAD: You heard your Mother...Bed!

Y.ELSIE: (Out) We would all bathe in front of the fire in a big tin bath.

MUM: (Out) And they'd fight over who was going to be first to get the cleanest water!

Y.ELSIE: All my brothers and sisters would stand there with their faces shining. Really shining! And their hair brushed ....with clean nighties on.

DAD: They all looked a picture. Like butter wouldn't melt in their mouths!

MUM: Come on now. Up the wooden hill.

Y.ELSIE: We never called it bed. We called it the wooden hill.

DAD: Four in a bed. Two at the bottom and two at the top.

Y.ELSIE: We'd take a hot brick to bed with us. All wrapped up in a piece of thick blanket because it was ever so hot. And Mum used to come up and tuck us all in. One two three four five six seven eight...She used to count our heads to see if we were all there!

MUM: Night night, now. Sleep tight.

O.ELSIE: Beatty Ethel Elsie Helen Peggy Bobby Teddy Tiny.

I can remember it as if it were yesterday. I can't believe I'm as old as I am and I've been through so much..... Can't explain it really but it's like... well I feel I've just been born.

**THE END**

ACTRESS 1: OLD ELSIE  
MISS HAYES  
MARGIE  
BERT  
HELEN  
MRS WILLIAMS

ACTRESS 2: YOUNG ELSIE

ACTRESS 3: MUM  
WASHERWOMAN  
GRAN  
MRS SLARK  
MRS EVANS  
NURSE  
HILDA  
MRS NANCE

ACTOR 1: DAD  
WILLIE EVEREST  
MR FOLGER  
MR HERBERT  
GRANDAD  
MR SLARK  
HARRY FRENCH  
HARRY HOUSE  
WARDEN  
BOB  
MR WILLIAMS

# **ONCE UPON A LIFETIME**