

Humpty Dumpty

Jean Cowgill

*As is my custom, the play is adapted from a short story originally set entirely within Wensleydale in the Yorkshire Dales. This version includes two scenes in Bradford, West Yorkshire. The main character is tackling health issues common to many of us. I apologise for any medical or indeed any geographical inaccuracies. Humphrey has used part of my poem 'Bainbridge'.*

Characters

Archdeacon Humphrey Burton

Fiona Burton daughter of Humphrey

Dawn Grey

Doctor Twist

Mrs Upson, house-keeper

Mrs Thwaite, B&B owner

Patient in the doctor's surgery

Andrew Thorne, Bainbridge resident and friend of Humphrey

Act One

Scene One: Doctor's Surgery

Scene Two: The Archdeacon's Residence

Act Two

Scene One: B&B in Bainbridge, Wensleydale

Scene Two: Summit of Addleborough

Scene Three: B&B in Bainbridge, Wensleydale

Scene Four: 'Rose and Crown' Inn, Bainbridge

Scene Five: B&B and Bainbridge village centre

Act One

Scene One: A Doctor's Surgery

*(It is late afternoon. The surgery is quiet, a lull between the morning mayhem and the hour before closing. A mother and toddler are in the play area. A clergyman, Humphrey, sits in the middle of a row of seats, gazing in stupefaction at a plasma screen. A series of instructions are portrayed loop on loop: a famous tennis player pats tennis balls, he is warned of the danger of too much sun, encouraged to eat 'five-a-day', no home visits...Humphrey is mesmerised. Another patient enters and sits next to him in spite of there being a nearly empty room.)*

PATIENT: Afternoon. Quiet innit?

HUMPHREY: Yes, yes I suppose it is.

PATIENT: I allus bag late turns. To be honest I'm not right good at getting out of bed of a morning.

HUMPHREY: *(not too interested in the woman's habits)* Really. I'm an early bird myself. When I was younger, I always liked to take the morning services.

PATIENT: *(looking at Humphrey for the first time)* Oh, sorry I'm sure. I didn't realise you was a priest.

HUMPHREY: Didn't have time to change into mufti.

PATIENT: Mufti....ooh, err... I'm here to get signed off work for another week. It's me back, I'm a martyr to me back *(she looks enquiringly)* What you here for?

*(Humphrey is spared making a reply by the notice that Dr Twist will see Humphrey Burton in Room Seven. He wanders along a corridor and eventually finds Room Seven at the very end.)*

HUMPHREY: Good afternoon, doctor.

DR TWIST: *(an absurdly young man who has been busy interrogating his computer turns round.)* Good morning...sorry good afternoon. Please sit down, *(he glances at his notes)* archdeacon *(he continues to examine the computer screen, Humphrey waits patiently.)*

DR TWIST: So...er...

HUMPHREY: Please just call me Humphrey.

DR TWIST: Thank you. So, er, Humphrey, we've got the results of the tests we did for your MOT *(laughs)* that's what we call it in the trade. I notice you have not made an appointment prior to this for several, yes, eight years in all.

HUMPHREY: The church hierarchy has made it obligatory at the age of 55 and every three years after that. Not worth the paperwork I would have thought.

DR TWIST: *(Assumes an earnest expression)* So, how have you been in yourself?

HUMPHREY: In myself? Of course, I can't do as much as when I was thirty.

DR TWIST: *(steepling his hands)* Quite so. Who can? Well there seems to be two things in need of attention. Part of the answer lies in monitoring and medication and part possibly in a change of life style.

HUMPHREY: But what is wrong with me?

DR TWIST: You have high blood pressure and I'm afraid you are seriously overweight.

HUMPHREY: I'm not surprised by the weight, I never go near any bathroom scales but I've noticed suit and collar size have increased. *(He clutches his clerical collar).*

DR TWIST: Could your lifestyle have anything to do with it?

HUMPHREY: I live alone. Probably I drink too much wine, but a bottle lasts two days, mostly. Then there are the hazards connected with my job.

DR TWIST: Hazards?

HUMPHREY: Hospitality - too many scones at elevenses, far too many cream teas.

DR TWIST: One condition feeds off the other, if you'll excuse the pun.

HUMPHREY: *(faintly)* What?

DR TWIST: Being overweight increases the chance of high blood pressure the latter makes you less likely to exercise. An unholy alliance you might say. *(Humphrey is dazed)*. To be honest, your BP is sky high. We can get that down with medication. You must attend a clinic where the nurse will give you advice on diet and keep a check on things. With your permission I intend to write a report to your boss *(he looks at his notes)* the Bishop of Leeds.

HUMPHREY: *(quietly)* Sounds bad.

DR TWIST: It's a good job you had your MOT. But I believe we can get you straightened out. When I say **we**, Humphrey, I mean myself, the nursing staff but most of all **yourself**. I'm signing you off for two months. In that time I want you to follow instructions on these pamphlets, make sure you take your medication and do **nothing** work related. In about a month's time give yourself a treat.

HUMPHREY: You mean eat something nice?

DR TWIST: No. I mean tackle some project you have always wanted to do, especially if it involves exercise and fresh air.

*(Dr Twist stands, shakes hands with Humphrey and thrusts some pamphlets in his hand.)*

### Scene Two: The Archdeacon's Residence

*(This is a large Victorian house. The long drive has weeds appearing. In Humphrey's mansion, there are many rooms but he lives in only a small part. Two bedrooms, an ancient bathroom, a study and a large kitchen, with dining and sitting area form his quarters. The rest has been given over to a women's refuge. Some of the congregation were not in favour of this downsizing. His housekeeper, Mrs Upson, oversees both Humphrey's rooms and the refuge. She has sterling qualities.)*

MRS UPSON: So, Archdeacon, I think everything is up-to-scratch. Neat as a new pin *(frowns)* for the moment at any rate.

HUMPHREY: Thank you Mrs Upson. Are we straight financially? *(she nods)* As you know, my daughter is due from London this evening. At times like this, I wish I had a car.

MRS UPSON: I could have picked her up Archdeacon. *(she glances at her watch)*. Unfortunately I am due next door on telephone duty, in half an hour or so.

HUMPHREY: Run along Mrs Upson. At this rate, you won't have time for a meal. Speaking of which...did you?

MRS UPSON: When did I ever let you down? All the meals are prepared up to Sunday lunch time.

HUMPHREY: You are a treasure. I'm not sure Fiona will stay until Sunday. Normally it is my busy day. She may shoot off. As things stand, I have an empty weekend professionally speaking *(and an empty life he thinks.)*

MRS UPSON: Right ho. I'll be off then.

*(Humphrey sits at his kitchen table – by far his favourite spot in the house. He looks at a bottle of wine on the Welsh Dresser, he sighs. The clock ticks, Humphrey daydreams.)*

HUMPHREY: *(monologue)* What went wrong with my life? Hazel is the only woman I've ever loved. Perhaps we married too soon, straight after university. It was hard for her with my period of training and then life as a curate's wife. She didn't enjoy her time in the inner city, I found it one of my most fulfilling periods. Fiona was only two years old when Hazel demanded a divorce...I would have fought for custody but she did not even want her daughter. What sort of a woman does that?

*(His musings are interrupted by a loud hammering on the front door. Humphrey opens it.)*

FIONA: Hi Pops. The taxi needs paying and I've not got enough cash.

HUMPHREY: Why doesn't that surprise me? *(He goes out to pay.)*

*(Fiona dumps her rucksack on the kitchen table and sits down. She glances at her phone, mutters, replies to two text messages. Humphrey returns.)*

HUMPHREY: Well now, how was your journey? Would you like a cup of tea?

FIONA: Had to sit on my rucksack in the corridor most of the way from King's Cross to Leeds. No drink thank you I'm up to my eyeballs in British Rail tea.

HUMPHREY: I don't think it's British Rail anymore.

FIONA: Whatever, same difference. Actually, is there anything stronger? *(she smiles)* How about some communion wine? *(Humphrey also smiles at the well-worn joke.)*

HUMPHREY: I'm not drinking at the moment. I bought you a decent red but it will have to last you.

FIONA: Thanks, so I'm in for a fairly abstemious weekend. Never mind. My body can become a temple.

HUMPHREY: More of a temple than mine. Dr Twist has given me the Scarborough warning.

FIONA: What does that mean?

HUMPHREY: It's serious.

FIONA: You told me a bit on the phone. Sorry I didn't get back to you directly. Busy, busy. But I'm here now. *(she gets up and gives Humphrey a hug)*. So high blood pressure...overweight. I'm sure you'll conquer these conditions in your inimitable way.

HUMPHREY: Persuading the vicar's wives and various WI not to force their baking on me is hard.

FIONA: Vicar's wives. I have often wondered what happened to that rôle when the vicar is a woman.

HUMPHREY: *(rising to the bait)* Sometimes, the husbands bake. As you well know, occasionally they are lucky enough to have female partners.

FIONA: Wifettes you mean? Seriously, pop, what are you going to do? I worry about you, silly old codger.

HUMPHREY: I've already started to lose weight. Not easy, now you must be starving. How about you go to your room, recover from your journey and I'll have tea ready in about half an hour. *(Later)*

HUMPHREY: Mrs Upson has left what she calls a cold collation, looks enough to feed the five thousand. I've opened the wine, pour yourself a glass. I'm afraid my drink is water bright these days as they used to say.

*(During the following conversation, Fiona polishes off 2/3 of the bottle of wine and half the food. Humphrey eats a very small portion slowly as advised by the obesity nurse who is, herself, surprisingly slim given her job title.)*

FIONA: Good job you aren't still with mum. The last time I was there bottles littered the house. I heard her call matrimony a prison devised by patriarchy.

HUMPHREY: Hazel is a closed book to me. She left more than a quarter of a century ago.

FIONA: I know old thing. You didn't do too bad a job being daddy *and* mummy. Although some of the carers were a nightmare. They were so old.

HUMPHREY: Easier that way. I remember the worst one was Cora Field. When I had evening appointments...

FIONA: ...the dreadful woman locked me in the house and disappeared.

HUMPHREY: She went to the pub. Of course, she was dismissed as soon as I found out.

FIONA: I did not know she had done that, although come to think of it her breath smelled. *(pause)* You were great pops. Most of the time things went swimmingly. So... no alcohol, cut down on food, what else did the doctor say?

HUMPHREY: *(looks unenthusiastic)* I've got five weeks left before I return to work. Bishop Andrew has been very supportive.

FIONA: I should hope so. You were mates at 'uni'.

HUMPHREY: I knew him at Oxford. Afterwards we lost touch when he went to Africa. He has agreed to join me on a walking holiday in Scotland. *(Fiona giggles.)* Don't you dare laugh. Before then I'm going to have a week in Wensleydale, a village called Bainbridge.

FIONA: I remember the place it is on a Roman road. We went there when I was in the VI form.

HUMPHREY: I have booked in at a little B&B *(he opens his briefcase and shows her a brochure)*. Do you fancy coming with me, my treat?

FIONA: Sorry Pops. I couldn't get any time off work. Sorry.

HUMPHREY: Just an idea. I've bought an OS map. I'm really looking forward to a change of activity. I even resurrected my old walking boots from the attic.

FIONA: Do you mind if I check your walking gear? If necessary, we'll go into Bradford tomorrow morning and get what's needed.

HUMPHREY: Sounds good to me. You've no idea how wonderful it is to see you. Is it alright if we watch television? BBC2 are showing an amazing programme about 'Neanderthal Man'.

FIONA: *(Fiona had been hoping for 'Love Island')* Super.

## Act Two

### Scene One: In the dining room of a B&B in Bainbridge, Wensleydale

*(A honeymoon couple sit at the far end of the room. Humphrey has exchanged brief 'good mornings' with them. He is seated by a window overlooking the green. Two days of walking have not turned him into an Adonis but he looks to be in better shape than when we first met him in the doctors' surgery. The weather shows a crisp early spring day with not a cloud in the sky. The owner, Mrs Thwaite, enters and gives the honeymoon couple a full English breakfast for one and a boiled egg with toast for the other. She walks over to Humphrey's table.)*

MRS THWAITE: Now then sir, same as yesterday?

HUMPHREY: About half a full English and coffee, yes please Mrs Thwaite.

MRS THWAITE: If you are walking all day, you need a good lining. Are you certain that's enough?

HUMPHREY: More than enough. The sandwiches you gave me yesterday certainly hit the mark at lunchtime.

MRS THWAITE: Right you are *(she bustles off)*.

*(A few minutes later, she returns as the honeymooners leave.)*

MRS THWAITE: Quiet as lambs those two. Hope you aren't short of company. It's a quiet week and no mistake. Bit early in the season.

HUMPHREY: Not at all, makes a change, things can get hectic in my line of work. *(he starts to eat)*. Wonderful bacon by the way.

MRS THWAITE: Reared in the village they are, have to go away to Ripon to be processed of course. Do you mind if I sit down for a minute?

HUMPHREY: *(surprised)* No, not at all dear lady.

MRS THWAITE: Not often we get men of the cloth here.

HUMPHREY: *(startled)* How did you know?

MRS THWAITE: I was getting an extra blanket for Room 3. I store them in the top part of your wardrobe. I'm sorry if I was being nosey.

HUMPHREY: I'm an archdeacon in Bradford the togs are with me because I'm doing a service in the village at the weekend.

MRS THWAITE: Our vicar is like a beanpole, always chasing her tail trying to manage three parishes, poor lass.

HUMPHREY: Yes, I know Joan. Excellent woman, things aren't easy these days.

MRS THWAITE: So tell me archdeacon..

HUMPHREY: Humphrey, please call me Humphrey.

MRS THWAITE: So tell me...how far have you gone? *(there is a confused look on her face)* I mean where have you walked?

HUMPHREY: Two days along the River Ure; one upstream, one downstream. Today I'm scaling Everest.

MRS THWAITE: Everest?

HUMPHREY: According to the map, it is the hill southeast of here, 'Addleborough'.

MRS THWAITE: I remember going up there when I was a lass *(she smiles and looks at her swollen legs)* I couldn't do it now.

HUMPHREY: I'm not sure I can to be honest.

MRS THWAITE: Did I see you getting out of a car? I thought I recognised it but I can't be sure.

HUMPHREY: I arranged with the vicar's husband to give me a lift part of the way each day, too far for this old man to walk.

MRS THWAITE: So which walk did you like best?

HUMPHREY: Difficult to choose. I loved the walk up to Hawes, looked round the cheese factory and spent time in the churchyard. I found it a bit too busy for my liking.

MRS THWAITE: Wallace and Grommit have a lot to answer for *(they both smile.)*

HUMPHREY: Downriver to Aysgarth Falls was magnificent. I had a naughty ice-cream. There'll be no chance of anything like that on today's walk. Would you like to see some photographs? *(He extracts his camera from the rucksack on the spare chair.)*

MRS THWAITE: These are wonderful. As good as postcards I reckon. Aren't these new cameras clever? My son can put his on a computer. My granddaughter uses a telephone for taking pictures sometimes I think the world is mad.

HUMPHREY: Mine will go in a file called 'Bainbridge. I do hope the weather stays fine.

MRS THWAITE: Make the most of it. My husband says it'll be foul tomorrow. He doesn't need a weather forecast, his gout starts playing up and he knows for sure. Don't forget your packed lunch, on the hall table as usual.

*(Mrs Thwaite leaves Humphrey to the remains of his breakfast. She is happy in the knowledge she has managed a successful interrogation. The honeymoon couple were not as expansive.)*

Scene Two: The Summit of Addleborough

*(Humphrey is in a state of near exhaustion. The previous two days had not really prepared him for a prolonged climb. Even so, he felt proud of his achievement. A few feet from the trig point, he turned to review his route – and even sample one of the deadly sins, pride.)*

HUMPHREY: *(muttering to himself)* Just a pause before the last stretch. Blasted stiles, who knew they could be such a bother? One of the slipper stiles nearly had me stuck there for life. What an embarrassment – good job I was on my own. The ladder stile was like an epiphany – I could finally see the summit. Open country, no more obstacles. Thought the walking poles were over the top when Fiona and I bought them. Today they were a salvation.

*(Humphrey staggered the remaining distance to a bench. Achievement coupled with foreboding. He took off his rucksack and sank down gratefully. He was exhausted and slumped, feeling like a beached whale. He shuddered as he remembered his childhood nickname ‘Humpty Dumpty’ predictable given his name and girth. His poor father was ‘Billy Bunter’ at the same school.)*

HUMPHREY: I wish I had saved some of my sandwiches. Thank goodness for the seat. *(He twisted round to look at the bronze and read)* ‘Dawn Grey in memory of my husband, Charles.’ *(He took out his water bottle and drank greedily.)*

DAWN: Do you mind if I sit here?

*(Humphrey had been unaware of anyone approaching. He quickly removed his rucksack from the seat. Dawn smiled and sat down. She looked ahead apparently ignoring her companion. After a short pause, Humphrey made an effort to be sociable.)*

HUMPHREY: Amazing view. *(Although truth to tell he had been too busy trying to catch his breath to notice.)*

DAWN: I come up here nearly every day.

HUMPHREY: Nearly every day!

DAWN: Yes, weather permitting. I walk up here for the view so there is no reason to come in bad weather. I suppose it is a form of pilgrimage.

*(For a few moments each are lost in their private worlds. Humphrey was, for the first time, able to appreciate the scene set out before him. The valley floor was a patchwork of white dry-stone walls, edged by a series of limestone scars.)*

DAWN: I don’t think I’ve seen you in the village. What brings you to these parts?

HUMPHREY: Doctor’s orders I’m afraid. Need to lose weight P.D.Q. I’m staying at Mrs Thwaite’s B&B. Look, I’m sorry, how rude of me. My name is Humphrey, Humphrey Burton. *(He extended a plump hand towards her.)*

DAWN: *(hesitates at first)* Dawn *(shakes his hand.)*

*(Humphrey felt like the gauche young man of his university days. I must keep her talking whilst I gather my wits and composure he thought).*

HUMPHREY: *(starts in a high pitch before clearing his throat)* What...what makes you... walk up here every day? The view is stunning but why this particular walk?

DAWN: My husband and I made this journey often. I put this bench here to remind me of him.

HUMPHREY: So *you* are Dawn Grey.

DAWN: Yes, I'm afraid so. When Charles and I became engaged, my potential new name caused a certain amount of hilarity. Dawn Atkinson hadn't caused such a rumpus.

HUMPHREY: I know exactly what you mean. My ex wife's name was Hazel Wood. Maybe she married me to escape the name combination of childhood.

*(They sit for a few moments in silence.)*

HUMPHREY: May I show you some photos? I love the white blossom. *(passes her the camera)* I did not know it would be out so early.

DAWN: It is blackthorn. The earliest blossom round here, a sign winter is nearly over.

HUMPHREY:*(leaning towards her)* See the pretty dandelion. I thought they were later.

DAWN: Coltsfoot. Do you remember coltsfoot rock from when we were children?

HUMPHREY: I could go on 'Mastermind' and have sweets of post war Britain as my specialist subject. *(They both smile.)*

DAWN: I liked the penny loaf and liquorice sticks.

HUMPHREY: Unfortunately, I have a sweet tooth. Sherbert lemon sweets and kali crystals were my favourites.

DAWN: Some sweets turned your tongue purple. Do you remember?

HUMPHREY: Do I not. I couldn't wait for the tuck shop to open.

DAWN: Tuck shop! I had to make do with the village shop, not much choice there.

*(After looking at the rest of the photographs Dawn looks across the valley.)*

DAWN: I love the sense of space on this walk. Although as a botanist I drove my husband mad, he said sometimes it took two hours to cover a mile.

HUMPHREY: Didn't he care for plants?

DAWN: Oh yes he did. But his great love, his abiding passion, was geology. He taught me a lot even though most of his explanations seemed to be prefixed by phrases such as 'there is evidence that' or 'on balance there is a probability'.

HUMPHREY: I thought geology was an exact science.

DAWN: Geologists make cautious calculations, which change as new theories emerge, *(she gives a shudder)* unlike the creationists where myths seem set forever as eternal truth. Gosh, I don't know why I'm going on like this. I must have slipped into preacher mode I do apologise. I hope I haven't offended you.

HUMPHREY: No, no, not at all. *(Humphrey was pleased he was in 'civilian' clothes.)*

*(Dawn smiled a little uncertainly. From her coat pocket, she took out an energy bar and proceeded to eat with delicate bites. Humphrey was envious of both the bar and her method of eating. Honey and almonds scented the air. He restrained an impulse to seize and wolf down the remainder of the bar.)*

HUMPHREY: Dawn, tell me, what's that tower over there in the distance?

DAWN: *(Without glancing in the direction)* The remains of a chimney used in lead-ore smelting. Miners worked in dreadful conditions for paltry pay. There is a folk song called '4d a day' that sums everything up. Thankfully, the mining finished at the end of the nineteenth century.

HUMPHREY: Was it not profitable anymore?

DAWN: It never was profitable for the miners. The men had to walk up from the village and back down again after a long, arduous shift. Many were injured and some even killed. If they reached the age of thirty they were wracked by rheumatism or miner's lung.

HUMPHREY: Surely the owners provided work opportunities. My father was the third generation owner of 'Burton's Buttons'. His workers would have been destitute without his business management.

*(As Humphrey listened to himself he was aghast. Why oh why did he sound like his father? After all, he himself had eschewed a life in industry.)*

DAWN: I guess your father made a pretty penny on the backs of his workers. Look Humphrey I think we'll have to agree to differ. We probably come from different worlds. It *has* been good to meet you but I have to get back down to Bainbridge, my granddaughter will be home from school at 4pm.

HUMPHREY: Granddaughter, I wish I had one of those. I'm afraid my daughter has carved out a career in London. She shows no sign of acquiring a husband or a daughter or any combination of the two. Does she live with you?

DAWN: No, but she is at an awkward age...not quite old enough to be on her own after school. Her mother works in Hawes. I'll give Daisy some tea, then a piano lesson I'm afraid I really will have to dash.

*(Before Humphrey could catch his breath Dawn was up and away scurrying down the hill. Soon she was but a grey dot. At the top of the ladder stile, she turned and waved. Then she was gone. Humphrey would have liked to ask for her phone number, would have liked to see her again. Somewhere, behind the political fireworks, he felt there had been empathy between them. The beauty of the dale changed. Shadows were lengthening. Humphrey stood up and stretched unwilling legs. He slung his rucksack casually over one shoulder and started to totter down the hill. At the ladder stile, he looked back. He could just make out the bench seat in a tiny patch of sunlight.)*

### Scene Three: B&B in Bainbridge, Wensleydale

*(It is early evening at the B&B. Mrs Thwaite is sitting in her conservatory, taking a well-earned rest and drinking a pint of the local brew, 'Old Peculier'. Dusk has fallen and she is considering moving to her warmer, sitting room. The decision is made for her when she hears the telephone ring.)*

MRS THWAITE: *(In her posh telephone manner)* Hello, Thwaite B&B, how may I help you?

FIONA: Sorry to disturb you. I'm trying to contact my father, Humphrey Burton. His phone keeps going to voicemail.

MRS THWAITE: *(Glances at a mobile alongside the landline)* Ah yes, four missed calls.

FIONA: You've got his phone. Is he OK?

MRS THWAITE: He's fine and dandy. He left his phone in the hall when he came back from his walk. I've got it here in my sitting room for safe keeping.

FIONA: Thank goodness, I thought he must have had an accident.

MRS THWAITE: No, nothing like that, but he did seem a bit preoccupied.

FIONA: May I speak to him please?

MRS THWAITE: Afraid he is over at 'The Rose and Crown' my dear. He's having a meal with Andrew Thorne.

FIONA: Oh, the chap who has been giving him lifts.

MRS THWAITE: That's right. A thank you for the chauffeuring although I think he is also doing the service on Sunday to give Andrew and Joan a break. Going to the Lake District I heard. Hope the weather stays fine.

FIONA: Dad likes to keep his hand in.

MRS THWAITE: Shall I ask him to call you when he comes in?

FIONA: No, I'm out this evening. I just needed to know he is in the land of the living – especially as today's walks was a solo effort with no back up.

MRS THWAITE: *(Smiling)* Not all that solo apparently.

FIONA: What do you mean?

MRS THWAITE: He was *walking* on his own, that's true enough.

FIONA: But...

MRS THWAITE: Let's just say he started chatting to a local. My husband spotted them. I'll say no more.

FIONA: Come on, you can't leave me in suspense.

MRS THWAITE: T'wouldn't be fair. Probably nothing in it Mrs...

FIONA: Ms Burton, but Fiona for preference.

MRS THWAITE: Well Fiona, it's up to your father to tell you about his walk. No one has ever accused me of being a gossip. I'm going to have to go I have a pan boiling over *(a lie)* nice talking to you.

FIONA: But... *(telephone call ends)*

Scene Four: 'The Rose and Crown' dining room, Bainbridge

*(It is later the same evening. Humphrey and Andrew Thorne are the only two remaining occupants in the dining room. The remains of a substantial meal lay before them. Humphrey sips coffee whilst Andrew Thorne nurses a brandy.)*

HUMPHREY: Well Andrew I can't tell you how grateful I am for the taxi service. I couldn't have done the first two days without your help.

ANDREW: Only happy to oblige old man. It has given me something different to do. Gardening and attending meetings begin to pall after a while.

HUMPHREY: I expect it was difficult for you to make the decision.

ANDREW: Decision?

HUMPHREY: Early retirement when Joan got this living.

ANDREW: Not really. Things were changing in Higher Education I was beginning to feel like a dinosaur.

HUMPHREY: I know what you mean. My job is increasingly clerical rather than Clerical.

*(They both chuckle at the weak joke.)*

ANDREW: So today you tackled Addleborough?

HUMPHREY: Far harder than the previous days and no 'Uber' driver to give me a lift.

ANDREW: I think you did well. Did you get to the summit?

HUMPHREY: To the bench at the summit.

ANDREW: Ah yes, Dawn Grey's memorial to her husband. She had to move heaven and earth to get planning permission. After all, we would not want benches every few yards.

HUMPHREY: Wouldn't we? *(after a pause)* Actually, I met her.

ANDREW: Ah. I thought you seemed preoccupied.

HUMPHREY: I don't know what you mean.

ANDREW: Lovely woman, as kind as the day is long. She has a huge garden – she lets Joan's flower arrangers take whatever they need. Doesn't come to the services though.

HUMPHREY: I was wondering if I would see her on Sunday.

ANDREW: Afraid not old man.

HUMPHREY: *(glancing at Andrew's empty drink)* Another brandy?

ANDREW: Sorry, Joan will string me up if I'm much later.

HUMPHREY: *(attempts to delay Andrew)* What time is the service on Sunday?

ANDREW: Eleven am. That reminds me, *(he fishes in his jacket pocket)* here is the key. Old Tom, the verger, doesn't keep very good time. You might have to open up I hope that is OK?

HUMPHREY: Yes. Presume I don't have to play the organ as well.

ANDREW: No Mrs Pendegrass will be there...although she is not half as good a musician as your Dawn.

HUMPHREY: My Dawn...steady on.

ANDREW: You haven't told me where you are walking tomorrow. I think the outlook is gloomy. After three brilliant days, we must expect the worst. Why don't you take the day off?

HUMPHREY: Go into Ripon you mean?

ANDREW: Yes, or do some research. Joan and I would like you to have a copy of 'Bainbridge 2000', *(he reaches into his briefcase and hands Humphrey the book. He smiles.)* I think you will find it very interesting reading. Of course it was published before we came to Bainbridge to celebrate the millenium. We found it so useful, before we got to know everyone. Now I really must be off. Thanks for the meal. *(He stands, shakes hands with Humphrey and makes for the exit.)*

HUMPHREY: *(he opens the book)* Picture of the WI ladies, then all the houses with description and photographs of the inhabitants. Andrew and Joan are the kindest couple to give me a copy. But I wonder if Andrew had an ulterior motive. *(He flicks to the back of the book where there is an index. He eventually finds number 60, 'Addleborough House'. He gazes at a photograph of a slightly younger Dawn with her husband Charles.)* Says he taught in York, that's a long way to travel each day. She was head of science at a school in Ripon. The house looks so welcoming. Dawn only lives across the green from the B&B.

#### Scene Four: The B&B and environs of Bainbridge

*(Breakfast is over. Mrs Thwaite has cleared things away. She is hovering in the hallway, duster in hand, when Humphrey comes downstairs. He is dressed in clerical garb.)*

HUMPHREY: Glad I'm not walking today. The weather has certainly changed.

MRS THWAITE: I don't blame you, take a day off I say. Our Dan is walling up on the moor. You should have heard him swearing at the rain when he set off this morning. He was dressed like a deep-sea trawler man. I reckon he'll be home by three.

HUMPHREY: Not a day for hill walking certainly. You got my note cancelling the packed lunch I trust. Hope it is not too inconvenient.

MRS THWAITE: Not at all Humphrey. I see you are in your best bib and tucker. Are you going to the fleshpots of Ripon? Sorry sir, just a joke of mine. I wouldn't know a fleshpot if I fell over one.

HUMPHREY: *(laughs)* No I don't think that I would either. I want to have another look at The Meeting House and graveyard, after that I'm not sure. I discovered a poem set there, talks about life cycles.

MRS THWAITE: I don't know I'm sure.

HUMPHREY: Part of it goes:

‘Gravestones show uniformity in life and death.

Plain names for Shakers, Quakers, Friends

save Joseph Browne who sports an ‘e’.

At eight months of age Elliott Dickinson Lee

escaped a life of agricultural toil.

A long name cut short by death.’

MRS THWAITE: I don’t know any Browns with or without an ‘e’. But the Lee family are still in the village. Fancy writing about them.

HUMPHREY: Did you manage to do my alternative order.

MRS THWAITE: *(smiling)* Certainly did. *(she produces a cake box. Within are four slices of almond and honey cake).* I do hope they aren’t all for you. *(she gives him a knowing look. Humphrey turns a paler shade of red).*

HUMPHREY: *(ignoring the comment)* Thank you dear lady, all on the bill I hope. *(the smell of the cakes transported him back to yesterday’s walk.)*

*(Humphrey leaves the B&B. Mrs Thwaite gazes after him. She sighs and returns to her room.)*

*(After Humphrey has crossed the green he approaches ‘Addleborough House’. His steps quicken, any delay and he would turn tail. ‘Carpe Diem’ is his motto for today at least. The long garden gives a hint of the riot of colour to come. Humphrey hears a piano, Chopin he thinks. He presses the bell and waits. The music continues for a minute. Footsteps approach. The door opens and Dawn stands before him.)*

DAWN: *(puzzled expression)* Yes?

HUMPHREY: Dawn, I do hope that I’m not imposing on you. I really did want to meet you again *(pause)* send me away it’s inconvenient. *(smiles)* Would you care for some almond and honey cake?

**I chose to end the play at this point. What happened next is open to conjecture. Is the ending Mills & Boon? Was Humphrey thought to be a stalker? He seems a shy fellow and I imagine it took a great deal of courage to take this step. What about Dawn? Is she happy on her own?**