

It's Harder To Deal With The Living - Lee H Smith

IT'S HARDER TO DEAL WITH THE LIVING

A play

by

Lee H Smith

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CHARACTERS

- 1 - Narrator/Thought - Male
- 2 - Mr Eric Simcox - Male (Mr Simcox is aged around 90)
- 3 - Anne, Social Worker/Emily/Undertaker - Female
- 4 - Matron/Mary, Social Worker - Female
- 5 - Pharmacist/Undertaker - Male (preferable) or Female

Apart from the Narrator/Thought, one of others could double up as the Organist mentioned in the opening Scene

SCENES and ACTORS

1	The Crematorium	Actor 1	Narrator
2	The Transition	Actor 1	Narrator/Thought
3	At The House	Actor 1,2,3	Thought, Mr Simcox, Anne
4	The Care Home	Actor 4	Matron
5	Combat	Actor 1,2	Thought, Mr Simcox
6	At The Council Offices	Actor 3,4	Anne, Mary
7	The March	Actor 1,2	Thought, Mr Simcox
8	The Pharmacist	Actor 3,5	The Pharmacist, Anne
9	The Camp	Actor 1,2	Thought, Mr Simcox
10	Emily	Actor 2,3	Emily, Mr Simcox
11	Committal	Actor 1,2,4	Thought, Mr Simcox, Matron, Undertakers

PROPS

Organ or Funereal Music
Briefcase with a pen and a document for signing
File/Folder for Case Notes
Coffee Mug
(First Aid) Stretcher

COSTUMES

A lot of the suggestions appear in the text. Once the character is understood, the right type of costume can be selected to match - and for the practicalities of needing to change between Scenes. It would be best if the character of Matron does have on such a costume, simply because the audience will be able to identify what she is quite quickly - more especially when she re-appears later. Mr Simcox needs to be dressed in uncolourful, drab rags as most of Society imagines such people to dress (no need for them to smell vile, though!). Where an actor has to portray multiple talking characters, the costume should be employed to mask the individual taking dual roles.

FURNITURE

One armchair for Mr Simcox, preferably with a tall back upon which Thought can rest and to give him something solid on which to lean during his non-scenes.
One smaller chair for Anne, the Social Worker.

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In memory of Lieutenant John Eric Proctor RNVR (22.6.1908 to 19.08.2001)

SCENE ONE - The Crematorium

[The sound of cheesy music can be clearly heard in the background, the muffled non-descript organ music that pervades most pre-service moments when the crowds are gathering before the 'final event'.

If the music is being played 'live', a degree of humour may be brought in to proceedings at certain points (but not at every opportunity) by interjecting tunes like 'O, I Do Like To Be Beside The Seaside', '(We're All Going On A) Summer Holiday' and 'Roll Out The Barrel' - even 'A Whiter Shade Of Pale' - where the main pauses are in the monologue, and at a volume that impinges on the audiences' attention.

These are clearly marked 'Musical Variation'.

At such a point - and definitely if the audience pick up on the inappropriateness of the music - the Narrator should facially express bewilderment at the current choice in various ways.

Even if no change in the tune is possible, the notation shows clearly the division of sections and some change of position or activity should be employed there.

The Narrator should, preferably, be clothed in black. After this scene they will be putting on more clothing and, as that will be on for the duration of the play, something light - like a plain black tee-shirt - would be the most practical.]

Narrator *[starting loudly and boldly but the voice grows more depressing, sinister and low as this section progresses to its conclusion]*: The living are dead.

Passing gently in the night, muffled cries from loved ones, discovering as they turn in sleep or returning from the bathroom after a pee.

Fighting for life with every breath, the cancerous spread that sapped the functioning organs of a socialite.

Illness, infection, senility.

Hit by speeding cars in towns and cities, the bloodied corpse emptying into gutters where rain cascades the lifeblood to the sea.

Or the sewage farm.

Mangled bodies in twisted wrecks, spent beyond identity by violent forces unleashed like hell.

Victims of evil, subjects of hate, bludgeoned by brutal acts beyond comprehension. A piece here, a piece there, limbs not fully matching those in life, police tape round history, reconstructing a sickening fate.

Bodies never found, discarded by those who've had their fill, who find no more use. Ditches filling with abuse, unmarked graves deep in woods, incendiaries cooking the final push towards the breaking of the Front.

The living die and so we come to this, this final event.

The last act.

The departing gesture.

[Musical Variation]

Narrator *[Back to the start as loudly and boldly, the voice continues in a brighter tone, albeit serious]*: No matter what the living were, in death they are the righteous.

Our minds bid us to not speak ill of the dead, beckon us to find some flickering spark towards which - like moths - we fly, battering our brains against their incandescent brilliance - when they were more the perpetrator than the victim, the cause of what they now are.

[In a mock sad voice showing a sarcastic care for someone the Narrator clearly didn't know]
Poor little Johnny, thirteen years old and barely alive, everyone loved him, everyone thought him

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a cute kid.

[More seriously in counterpoint] Except, of course, the bullied who inwardly chuckle that such a fate has consumed him, the neighbour who now can take their ease in Summer months in lounging chair, the shopkeepers who no longer need to chase the heartless thief.

[In a mock sad voice showing a sarcastic care for someone the Narrator clearly didn't know] And Sarah, bless her soul, gunned down barely yards from home, mourned by family, adored by workers, a Mother Theresa of the city streets. We are not worthy that such a light should live and breathe and walk amongst us.

[More seriously in counterpoint] And now the files are put away, destruction date that's clearly marked on notes and photographic plates no longer to be used in proceedings of the Crown.

[As a conclusion] I tell you that, in death, they are the righteous.
No matter what they do in life, in death they are the just.

[Musical Variation]

Narrator *[Staring now above the heads as if to someone far away. There needs to be a contrast with this section and the speech in the next that needs to be emphasised as directed at the audience]:* And pity we the young who die before they're old with time. A shame, we say, that such a life should see short days and never grow to teenage years.

But, I say, better the dead - better they who think the world is innocent than for them to see the evil man can do to man.

Better they should die before the inward scars, the crushing soul that, burdened with the weight of life that thrusts itself upon, despairs of hope itself and seeks to rid itself of breath.

Yet better still the one who, never having seen, lives in darkness and departs there from, who's seen naught of evil - neither smelt nor tasted - for surely they find rest more than the birthed.

[Musical Variation]

Narrator *[Speaking now directly to the audience as if they're the gathering crowd of mourners coming to pay their last respects]:* Let those who come today consider long that death may well be shunned, the final destination pushed away from conscious thought for years while lives are lived and profits made, while children raised and marriage made.

But, in the end, death comes to all, reminders beckon, time to time. The departure of our family, acquaintances and even closest friends - we are reminded that there is but one last place to which we all are bound.

And now, as we listen to the Reverend's words, we consider - for too brief a moment - the afterlife, having fled all thought until such time as this, forsaking our deposit in breath that would secure the journey upon our body's death.

[Loudly] Run! Run! Flee the thought of impending doom! Get as far away as you can! Make yourself comfortable, cosset yourself against all thought of that day.

But, all too soon, be reminded of the fact of dust.

[Musical Variation]

Narrator: And we, who believe that life has come by happy chance, must surely not believe in an afterlife of any sort and yet, as we approach our thoughts of death, so anxiously do we desire to continue on, to exist on some ethereal plain beyond the grave where fluffy bunnies bounce in meadows sweet and angels with their harps strung tight, float majestically in peace and hope.

Yet we have no hope.

Not in reality.

For what we believe must lead us to that sad conclusion that from dust we've come and to

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dust we must go - that all we've worked and strived for, all we have invested in will disappear from conscious thought and there will be no recollection *[Pause]*, no memory *[Pause]*, no existence.

And those who follow after will enjoy all we have left until, they too, go the way of all mankind, cheating death as long they might, but arriving at that same day, that same place, that occasion to which we come this day.

This day of oblivion.

This day when those will gather round and speak of us as if we were the righteous on the earth, not deserving death and hoping that - against belief - we all might live again.

[Musical Variation]

Narrator: And what of this poor wretch who lies so stiff upon the slab, wrapped within this wooden box today, before the worms will gnaw at flesh and melt into cadaverous eye?

That, my friends, is why I'm here.

Here, I confess, is my story to tell.

In all too brief a time, I must compress this life and show tonight that easy it is to perform the rites of death.

How easy!

But dealing with the living is harder than the dead.

SCENE TWO - The Transition

[The music of the crematorium fades out while the Narrator walks across the stage, dons a change of costume (that need be nothing more than putting on a couple of articles such as a Hawaiian shirt and a hat) and begins this short scene.

The clothes put on must convey not only a change of location but a change of mood, although this short scene is but a pronouncement of what is about to transpire in the rest of the play, a link between Scene 1 and 3 when he will be joined by the other players.

Think of the clothing transition to be that of the contrast between death and life - it should be that stark.

The clothes can be put on during this scene rather than at the beginning, so long as frequent pauses are interjected so as not to distract the audience from the weight of the words.]

Narrator/Thought: One of us will die.

[Pause] And, in a few short moments, before your eyes, you will see the end from which I've come.

Set in motion as these events have been, unalterable as they surely are, choices made before concluding scenes unfolding here upon this stage.

Let me not change a dot, not a comma, of all that comes about.

Let me show you - full and plain - the outcome of response that pushes, leads, cajoles that fateful one to meet their final end.

SCENE THREE - At The House

[The Narrator becomes Thought, the active brain life of Mr Simcox, the Hermit. His actions should match the dialogue but, even so, he shouldn't be too far detached in physical proximity from him so that there is no suggestion that he's not associated with him.

Mr Simcox should be dressed shabbily as befits a person who has closed his doors on the outside world and who cares very little for appearance (or personal hygiene!).

The Social Worker will be carrying a briefcase, inside which is at least a document and a pen, and she should have the look of being relatively affluent so as to contrast the two characters and their chosen lifestyle.]

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[The Narrator from the last scene takes his place behind the armchair that's sited a little to one side of the stage. He can do this while Mr Simcox shuffles on stage with the Social Worker in tow.

Mr Simcox should move carefully and slowly, perhaps with a slight limp and maybe with his head on his chest suggesting a physical impairment. A walking stick would be advantageous. Throughout this scene as he sits in the chair, he should have little contact with his surroundings and very little eye contact with the Social Worker. He must remain distracted in appearance and demeanour and should be shown not to be paying any attention to them.

Even when he speaks, his voice should be detached - perhaps almost longingly for the reality of the memory. Some of Thought's speeches could prompt Mr Simcox looking around or up, depending on what Thought is doing, as if watching the scene like it's happening at that moment. This is true of all their Scenes together.

The Social Worker should be officious but kind - she's come as an outworking of her employment and has certain matters that she wants to get through. Her pleasantries are demanded of her, whether she would want to give them or not.

As she comes in behind Mr Simcox, she should be looking around her - to the side, upwards - and showing on her face how revolting she finds Mr Simcox's residence. She could even hold her nose for a short moment or two to show what smells are pervading the air.

However, when she's in eyesight of the Hermit, she is nothing other than friendly and good-natured.

When Thought speaks, the Social Worker must remain frozen as if suspended in time. The idea being conveyed is that the thought processes are so far removed from reality and are working at much faster a pace, that they occur in the mind of the Hermit in the blink of an eye. The Social Worker should remember that whatever pose they are adopting will need to be held for what could be a long enough time - so something comfortable and easy to maintain is advisable.

The short interjections of Mr Simcox could allow for the Social Worker to move but this may be hard to pull off and could distract from the speech. It could be very effective, though.

A (spot)light should now be faded in that shines directly down upon Mr Simcox's chair.]

Social Worker *[as they enter behind Mr Simcox]:* ...and that was why I sent you the letter, Mr Simcox. So that we might discuss how we can facilitate your removal to a Care Home. For your own benefit, you understand, sir. The Council realises that a person such as yourself needs help to live and enjoy all the days they have ahead of them.

[The Social Worker sits down, swivels the suitcase/briefcase on to her lap and opens the lid to retrieve something from within.]

Thought: I remember the autumn skies painted like a marigold in early Spring. It was...

Mr Simcox *[looking up but far in to the distance]:* ...a beautiful time.

Social Worker *[Looking up momentarily from her briefcase and following Mr Simcox's gaze as if out a window]:* Yes. I do love Summer *[She returns her gaze into the case as she continues]* Although I do get affected by the pollen. Don't care much for Winter, though.

Thought: Two weeks' leave they gave us before we returned to the Front - and I took my opportunity as eagerly as a kid with a sixpence in his pocket, running off to the sweet shop.

In those days, you could get married really quick. I mean, *really* quick. Well, there was a War on, you see? They made...

Mr Simcox: ...exceptions...

Thought: ...they looked after you. They knew to make your life as easy as they could because - well, let's face it - some of us simply weren't coming back.

Perhaps even some of the lucky ones weren't - not when you saw what we came back with...

Social Worker *[Removing a paper document from the briefcase and checking the front to make sure it's the right one]:* I don't suppose you're on the Internet, are you, Mr Simcox? *[Pause. No response.]* No, I thought not. Good job I brought along this hard copy that you can sign...

Thought: Sign? I signed up a few months before, did basic training at the army camp and thoroughly enjoyed it. We didn't think about where it was leading - we just saw the pride in the uniform, marching off to War for King and Country.

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No thought of the guns and horror, the blood, the dismembered limbs. Photographs back then were all in black and white but, I can assure you of this, that if you were in the thick of it, it was most definitely...

Mr Simcox: ...in colour.

Social Worker: It most certainly is. We got our first colour printer a few days ago and we make sure we spare no expense. Like I always say, if it's worth doing, it's worth doing properly. If you'll pardon my French [*Giggles*], sod the cost.

Thought: The ultimate cost? That was paid by a few. But those who returned paid...

Mr Simcox: ...a greater cost.

Social Worker [*Looking puzzled*]: I'm not sure what you mean, Mr Simcox. [*The Worker skips through the pages to the signature page, clicks open a pen and is about to hand both to Mr Simcox for him to sign - but in gesture only as they are too far apart.*] Anyway...

Thought: Anyway, those few short days were the most pleasant of my life. And yet, at the back of my mind, that gnawing fear that it would be...

Mr Simcox: ...over, all too quickly.

Social Worker: Don't worry about that, Mr Simcox, we'll do it all at a speed that doesn't pressurise you in anyway at all. Now, I wonder if you would just sign...

Thought: Sign? I signed up a few months before, did basic training at the army camp and thoroughly enjoyed it. We didn't think about where it was leading - we just saw the pride in the uniform, marching off to War for King and Country.

No thought of the guns and horror, the blood and dismembered limbs. Photographs back then were all in black and white but, I can assure you of this, that if you were in the thick of it, it was most definitely...

Mr Simcox: ...in colour. It's all in colour.

[*The Social Worker gets up from her seat and walks over with document and pen in hand, kneels beside Mr Simcox and places it into his lap, offering him the pen that he never takes. She looks up at him, tries to make eye contact, but his face is turned, staring in to the distance.*]

Thought: You lie so still, young jumper from the air,

Your helmet cocked, so oddly debonair,

A shroud the parachute about your feet -

That once-smooth silken dome, a mottled round

Which bore you down 'ere bullet sped to meet

Your dangling wide-legged shape from olive ground.

Thus stopped your quickened beats; dead flesh you came,

Descended, sprawled, and lay. And now - what now?

What Fatherland will raise your little name?

You lie so still, blue death across your brow.¹

Social Worker: Mr Simcox? Mr Simcox? Can you hear me, sir? [*Drawing closer, the Social Worker clearly catches a whiff of body odour and recoils slightly, with appropriate body language that gives the audience no uncertain way to misinterpret.*] Mr Simcox? Would you just tell me [*The next words need to be said with an interpretation that matches perfectly the weight of meaning that Wilfred Owen intended them to have so that they join perfectly with Thought's continuation of the quote*] if you could hear...

Thought: ...at every jolt, the blood

Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,

Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud

Of vile, incurable sores on...

¹ The poem 'Fallschirmjaeger' (translated 'German Paratrooper') by H R Horne from 'Selections from The Quill' edited by EGC Beckwith TD, published by London: Country Life Limited as a 1750 limited edition in 1947, page 54. 'The Quill' was a PoW penned magazine that was written and distributed by the PoWs in various German PoW camps while in captivity.

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Mr Simcox: ...innocent tongues...²

Social Worker [*Starts to repeat the phrase but thinks better of it*]: Inn-o-ce...

Mr Simcox, I think it's best I go and think about how best we might, er, help you to get the care you need. I can see this must be difficult for you, sir. [*The Social Worker turns and over the course of the next words, puts the form and pen away in the briefcase.*]

Let me discuss this with my supervisor and we'll work out a plan that will get this all sorted for you. Now, don't let me get you out of your seat, Mr Simcox, I can show myself out. Your care workers will be coming as usual in a couple of hours to prepare your meal. I can assure you that everything will continue just like it has been until we can resolve this matter.

[*Exiting the stage from the direction she came on.*] Goodbye, sir, it's been a pleasure...

[*Thought and Mr Simcox stay exactly where they are and have no need to move until their next scene. The light over Mr Simcox's chair is dimmed.*]

SCENE FOUR - The Care Home

[*The location is a Care Home for the Elderly and the occasion is the showing round of a group of various relatives who've come to see if the place is suitable for their surviving parents. It probably will be suitable because the fees are nice and cheap. The audience should be used as the group that are being led round the Home, Matron addressing the relevant comments to them.*]

The residents and members of the group are imaginary figures - as are the various locations they visit - located around the stage as appropriate.

[*After the light fades over Mr Simcox, Matron walks on stage from the opposite wing that the Social Worker has both entered and exited. As she does so, she begins her informative talk to those following her...*]

Matron: Well, as you can see, our Meeting Area is very well appointed and has sufficient seats that are both comfortable and practical for the elderly resident in need of rest and relaxation.

After all, here [*slower, so the relevance of the name hits home with the audience*] at Crippen's Care Home for the Elderly, we put the person first with ourselves as their servants for the sake of a healthy lifestyle and an ever-active mind. We like to think that we contribute - albeit in a small way - to your loved ones enjoying the sunset days of their lives.

[*Turns from addressing the audience/group to come abruptly face to face with an imaginary resident*] Oh, hello Mrs Chidsworth.

[*Turns to the audience as if to the group she's leading round the Home*] Now, Mrs Chidsworth is one of our oldest patrons. She's been here for over ten years and has never missed a Bingo Session.

[*Turns back to the lady*] Is your hearing getting any better, dear?

[*Pause, then with a raised voice*] No, not the butter, Mrs Chidsworth. I said...

[*Pause as if being interrupted, then in the same raised voice*] I didn't mention butter. I said [*rather shouting but trying to announce very articulately as if the deaf old bat is going to understand*] **'Is your hearing getting any better, dear?'**

[*Without waiting for a reply and immediately upon ending the line, the Matron turns her back on the resident, walks on and says*] She really is the most delightful old lady and I'm sure your relatives will spend many pleasant afternoons talking to her.

[*A couple of steps further on, she continues...*]

And here is the Dining Suite.

Residents have a good, three course meal at all sittings - even breakfast. Good, nutritious food that's supplied locally from nationally outsourced producers.

² 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' by Wilfred Owen, taken from an online text. The last words of the Social Worker ('if you could hear...') are actually the start of the quote.

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As you can see *[she points to an imaginary board on the wall]* today's lunch menu is a starter of curried egg dumplings with fried onion rissoles - I must confess to that being one of my particular favourites - followed by a wholesome serving of pickled beef, a side portion of mushrooms and sprouts, resting on a bed of mustard and horseradish.

And that's all rounded off with a prune and fig puree served on a bed of stewed rhubarb chunks. And custard. *[She smiles reassuringly although no one would feel reassured]* We always serve custard.

They're always very substantial portions and I'm sure a menu like that will keep every resident going - at least until the evening sitting. *[Looks in to the distance]* Yes, I can hear the old people sounding their approval now.

I'll introduce you to Cook later - but she'll be busy preparing. She came to us very highly recommended and we verified all her versions of events in the establishments she'd worked prior to coming here.

[Matron walks on as if leading her group to a new location, talking all the while and emphasising the Home's motto] Here at Crippen's Care Home for the Elderly, we always put the person first with ourselves as their servants for the sake of a healthy lifestyle and an ever-active mind.

Ah yes, let me show you one of the typical rooms that your loved ones will occupy, to come and go as they please.

[She beckons with her hands and smiles to encourage them to take a look] Please, please - go in and walk around. Try the bed and see how comfortable it is. All of our beds are orthopaedically approved by the NASA Space Program. And I'm sure you'll have to admit that it just doesn't get any better than that, does it?

[There's a pause as if the Group are looking around the room. Matron can smile as they pass her or something else to while away a short space of time] Now, do any of you have any questions? *[Pauses as if listening to an enquiry from the group - which are positioned as if in the audience.]*

No, not at all. We are a Care *[takes time to emphasise it]* Home and not a Rest *[takes time to emphasise it]* Home. The difference is obvious to everyone so I won't waste your time by explaining it. *[Another slight pause]*

No, I'm sorry, we don't allow pets. We used to, but they always seemed to go missing when food was being prepared and we could never locate them. It always caused the residents too much stress to lose their loved ones so we had to make an across-the-board rule and ban them all. *[Another slight pause]* Even hamsters. *[Another slight pause]*

Well, if there are no other questions, let me take you back to the Entrance Hall and thank you all for coming.

Here at Crippen's Care Home for the Elderly *[as she walks off the stage with the Group in tow]* we pride ourselves on putting our residents first *[fading as exiting the stage]* with ourselves as their servants *[fading further]* for the sake of a healthy lifestyle and an ever-active mind *[a whisper, almost indiscernible]*.

SCENE FIVE - Combat

[Mr Simcox is still sat in the chair where we left him, with Thought standing behind in the same position. A few moments should be given between the ending of the last scene and the beginning of this. If lighting is being employed as suggested above, the return of the light over the chair will signal this scene's commencement - but it mustn't be done too quickly.]

Thought will need to accompany the speech with appropriate movements and actions - some I've suggested. A lot of this is War Scene so throwing oneself about the stage wouldn't be a bad idea if it can be done effectively and without too much bruising on the part of the actor (especially when this gets a lengthy run in the West End <cough>).

Mr Simcox and Thought share a fair few scenes together and the general rule of thumb is that, while Thought is bold and demonstrative, Mr Simcox is withdrawn and hesitant.]

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Thought [*Loudly*]: Yes, sir! I will, sir! [*Salutes and pauses*]

[*Issuing a command, speaking over the sound of gunfire*] No! No! Take Johnny over there [*Points*]. The Red Cross are coming down this line once they've moved Sergeant Cross [*Pauses*]. [*Shouting*] Take cover, men! [*Throws himself on to the ground and covers his head*]

[*Looks up*] Strewth! That was close!

Mr Simcox [*As usual, much quieter and reflective*]: We could all be at the Gates tonight, Boys!

Thought: Mind how you go, now. [*Raises himself to a crouch and talking as if to those beside him*] At the first sign, take cover - don't be stupid!

[*Raises his hand over his shoulder as if beckoning an advance of men under his charge - but very quietly now*] Forward men. Not a peep, now...

Mr Simcox: ...not a fart, a belch or a cough...

Thought: ...or we'll all be shot.

[*Crouches down and beckons two to his right, two to his left, the second of which he signs his finger across his throat as if determining the way the enemy's end is to be brought about*]

[*Pause*]

My Dearest Emily, You find me at the Front again...

Mr Simcox: ...in need of sleep.

Thought [*now standing*]: These four days we have fought until these very rifles have cleaved themselves to our skin as if to become a part of us. We dare not fall asleep for someone has to watch and stay awake in case the enemy should try and break our lines, get behind us and, well...

Mr Simcox: ...that would be a sorry tale to tell.

Thought: They advance so strongly as if they have no thought of defeat and, though our planes have struck them time and again, I fear that our backs are against the wall - a wall that retreats ever further West and North, as if to push us into the sea, as if to drown us all in a watery grave.

Mr Simcox: My Dearest Emily, don't fret for me.

Thought: Someone has to stand against this force and give their life to try - if at all possible - to stem the evil that threatens our very way of life.

[*Pause while Thought looks heavenward trying to think if there's anything that needs to be added*] I have no further news.

This single page seems so small upon which I would write you every detail of my time and share with you every incident, however small.

Mr Simcox: How I long to see your warm, smiling face again.

Thought: Perhaps, before too long, this evil war might end and we, the damned, might be redeemed.

Don't forget to pray for us - as I'm sure you're doing constantly.

Yours, Eric...

[*Pause*]

[*Crouches very rapidly to the ground. Half-shouting*] Keep down, boys! They have us pinned. Our only hope now is if they turn away onto worthier ground.

[*Now more calmly, Thought speaks as if detached from the scene in which he's speaking*] Wait til we get back home. We'll laugh about it, then. Over a pint or two. How we'll reminisce of this time when, seeing our lives flash before our eyes, there was hope at hand from the most unlikeliest of source. I'm sure there will be.

Mr Simcox: There is *always* hope.

Thought: *Never* lose hope.

[*In the distance, something catches his eye, far away above the heads of the audience and, where there was panic and fear, an acceptance comes over the face as a realisation hits him that this will be the last action he sees. He hangs his head and then slowly rises to his feet, raising both hands in surrender and stepping slowly backward to a point where he will be able to step behind the chair where he was standing prior to the commencement of this Scene*]

Mr Simcox [*In a German Accent*]: My friend, for you the War is over.

[*The light above Mr Simcox fades out.*]

SCENE SIX - At The Council Offices

[Anne, the Social Worker who has just returned from visiting Mr Simcox and Mary, a colleague and fellow Social Worker, enter the stage on the opposite side from which Anne has entered in Scene Three (with some stages, that could be a feat in itself).

Mary should be carrying a tea mug and, although it doesn't have to be semi-full, it might be advantageous to be (but not full of gin), so its presence and use helps to convey the idea of a more informal and friendly chat rather than anything official.

Anne should be carrying some sort of object that would be construed by the audience as a Case File - being that of Eric Simcox - and she may wish to flick through it or refer to it at points to lend some weight to the idea that the discussion is based upon observation and reports stretching back many years.

Referring to items in the file isn't specified in the text, however, and the main use of the file is to point out a mark on the front - the front of the file, therefore, shouldn't be blank and must have the appearance of being from an official caseload.]

Mary *[As they both enter the stage]*: And John said to her 'Why aren't you wearing a Nurse's Uniform?' And she said that they were very informal at the Hospital, that there was no obligation on their part to do so.

Anne: So, what did he say?

Mary: He said he'd prefer if she'd wear a uniform. So she said - real serious, cos John had this dead pan expression, even I was taken in - 'Would you feel you were getting a better level of care if I was wearing a Uniform?'

Anne: And would he? Is that what he said?

Mary: Oh no *[laughing]*. He said to her - I mean, honestly, he really did say this to her - 'I'm not bothered what level of care I get, luv, I just think the Uniform would be a turn on.'

Anne *[laughing]*: He didn't!

Mary: Oh yes, he did. What a scream! *[Pause]* She just walked off. Some other Nurse hooked him up to the drip.

Anne: I bet you can't go back there again!

Mary: Well, he'll be on his own next time! *[The mirth gradually subsides]* I meant to ask you how you're getting on with the promotion. A bit different from filing the cases away, isn't it?

Anne: You can say that again. Oh yes, I have all the course work, all the theory, but it isn't til you get out there and start trying to apply it that you realise people just don't fit in to the systems we have.

Which is rather a good way of bringing the matter up. *[Raises the file in her hand to show the problem at hand]* I've been wanting to ask you about this case I inherited. Seems the last effort anybody made to get this guy into a home was over three years ago. The file had been buried at the back of the Dead Run as if nothing further was to be done.

Mary: So?

Anne: So, the man's not dead. Although, judging by my last visit, he may well be dead in just about every way possible apart from a Death Cert being issued.

Mary *[Takes the file into her free hand and stares over the front cover]*: What's the problem? Nothing on the front to indicate anything other than it being a straight forward Home admission. Hey! Look at this! *[Holding the file up to Anne's face so her eyes meet a point halfway down the file cover]* What's that mark mean?

Anne *[Taking the file back]*: It's an old mark the Social Workers used to use in the last place I worked. Seems the file was transferred in when the boundaries changed. He's a Vet.

Mary *[Sounding incredulous]*: No! Is he still practising, still licensed?

Anne *[Looking puzzled initially, then bewildered as the penny drops]*: A Veteran, you dodo. Of the War. Not a... *[breathes out deeply, exasperated]* There's a note in the file that he did something in the War.

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Mary [*smiles at her own stupidity*]: Does it say what?

Anne: No, I don't know. It's never come up in conversation - although 'conversation' might be pushing the description of my interaction with him a bit. These kinds of notes can mean anything from a stay at home Dad's Army type to a VC winner. But you can bet it isn't the latter.

It's only there so I can look into any entitlement to a War Pension.

Besides, I think I would have heard of him before now if he'd been someone really famous and done anything important.

No, don't worry about that. My problem is that I can't get him to sign the papers to voluntarily go in to a Home. And the only surviving relative died in between the last time this file saw any action and now.

He's a problem of the State. That means *my* problem, *my* responsibility.

Mary: What about the GP?

Anne: *What* GP?! I've rung round all the Surgeries within a ten mile radius and he's never registered with one - so there's nothing up-to-date. Even if we were able to locate his records somewhere in the UK, it wouldn't tell us much about the current state of his mental health.

Not that that's too hard to work out from a brief meeting with him.

It's really strange. There *should* be some medical records cos he's lived in the same house since just after the War.

Mary: Those cases are just too damn tricky. We don't get involved with them at this level.

Anne: No? Isn't there something I could do to speed it all up? I really do fear for his personal safety.

Mary: Pass it up the chain, my dear. That's a case for the people who get the big bucks. They'll need to appoint a GP to go round and see him, make an assessment. Could take months.

Anne [*looks at the case paper as if concerned for the person that the file represents*]: Months? I didn't realise...

Mary: Years, even. All the red tape makes my skin creep sometimes. When it's obvious a person's a danger to themselves, they should let us cut corners - it's like they don't trust us.

The GP'll assess whether he's of a sound mind, whether he's capable of making a reasonable and rational decision. Once he's satisfied with his mental state, he'll sign the papers and he can be moved on to a Home.

Anne [*Pausing and then quietly*]: It just seems so...so sad.

Mary [*Placing an arm around her and gently guiding her off the stage*]: It's the best thing for him. Don't beat yourself up about it.

Anne [*Pauses to make a slight gap in delivery and also stops walking for a moment, caressing the file as if it's a real person*]: No, I won't. But, it just seems...well, it just seems so sad...

[*End*]

SCENE SEVEN - The March

[*One of the 'forgotten' facts of WW2 is that there were multitudes of Prisoners of War that were taken captive by the Germans immediately before, during and shortly after the evacuation of the Allied Troops from the shores of Dunkirk.*

Our consciousness seems to think rather linearly that those who went to War in France either died there or were able to embark back across the Channel on the mishmash of the Armada that came across.

Indeed, the Battle Of Britain almost immediately took place along with the heroic defence of Britain by the RAF in Southern England and that's what we tend to move on to until, finally, we remember D Day and the landing in Normandy which, ultimately, resulted in the defeat of the Axis Forces.

We have no information - not that we have the knowledge and choose to forget but we have never been told - that those captured in France were subject to the most appalling conditions, not only in their march across Europe into holding camps and PoW facilities, but in those destinations themselves where food was short and German guards were not sympathetic to the plight of those

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captured.

Mr Simcox was one of those soldiers, captured shortly before Dunkirk, who remained in German captivity until the liberation of the advancing Allies in 1945.]

[If lights are employed, the spotlight over Mr Simcox fades in to denote the beginning of the scene.]

Thought: We were a rag-taggle band of renegades. The Germans certainly didn't want us - they would rather have shot us in the head and concentrated all their efforts on breaching the Channel and thrusting into Britain. We were an embarrassment, off-scourings of a War in which they were Victors. Unapproachable, unshakeable, undefeatable.

Mr Simcox: They didn't want us.

Thought: All we had were the clothes in which we stood - perhaps a few fags for the journey, some with half-dressed wounds - the blind and lame, the half-dying and desperate. They didn't need to guide us, we would gladly have...

Mr Simcox: ...laid down and died...

Thought: ...to save them the trouble of moving us. In such a rapid advance, there's never adequate food, never enough support. How much less for this our disillusioned bunch of rogues, retreating East, back from where the Germans had only just this moment come. And in the hands of the expendable, the troops that High Command had deemed less worthy of battle praise, the unreliable, the unstable, the untrusted.

It was never going to be an easy march, even though we hoped that trucks would pull up any moment and give us all a lift. It was one long trudge...

Mr Simcox: ...across the hidden pages of history...

Thought: ...now a forgotten people, an army no one thought existed, we who had been destined to escape by boat, by ship...

Mr Simcox: ...by seaside paddle-steamer...

Thought: ...but who'd missed that final call to make it home for tea.

O, how that hunger ate at our soul! Some of us hadn't eaten for days before the March and none of us ate for days to come.

Men, spent in battle, exhausted by the strain, young lads disillusioned by the terrors of what they'd seen. One and all, weary men, tramping and trudging foreign roads and byways as if out on a Summer's Walk - in title only. In title only.

Mr Simcox: The lucky ones died...

Thought: There! I've said it. And it has to be said. When natural thoughts go to survival in the present, reflective thoughts recount what would have been better served in death. But we clung to life, as if to something more precious than the final end, the end to which we all must come, no matter how we strive.

And, finally, we came to makeshift tents, dilapidated sheds and rotten barracks. A true army of the dead, with skeletal masks upon tired youthful bodies. Not caring.

Mr Simcox: Not hoping. No, not hoping.

Thought *[Turning towards Mr Simcox and clearly castigating him for his pronouncement]:* Never lose hope, I said. Never lose hope.

Mr Simcox *[Turns to look in to the face of Thought]:* But we had...

[The light above Mr Simcox fades out. Thought needs to be stood behind the chair at this point, even though he is free to wander about the stage through the scene to bring more life to it.]

SCENE EIGHT - The Pharmacist

[Enter someone with a mysterious demeanour, a sinister persona. Someone looking around the audience slowly, stealthily - someone who moves quietly, eerily about the stage with a hard face, out-staring those who watch him walk purposefully to the centre.

The image portrayed will be destroyed in a few, short words but the opening delivery relies much on that impression being given.]

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Pharmacist *[In a tone resembling the voice-overs that introduce horror movies that try to conjure up sinister goings on that would make you want to go see the film]:*

I am the healer of thousands.

I strengthen the weak and soothe the distressed.

I calm the anxious and give solace within.

I numb the pain.

I raise up the afflicted.

I am many things to many people - yet only one thing to most at any given time.

I am *[Pause for greater effect, delivery to be lengthened]...*

...the Phar-ma-cist.

[Laughs loudly, voice now changes to normal]

No, don't panic. I'm not some kind of mystical shaman. I'm your local Pharmacist.

The one who dispenses that prescription you've been handed by your Doctor. The one you can chat with about those embarrassing personal problems in hushed tones that no one else will listen to - and I'll find you something on the shelf that you'll *think* is helping once you take it.

I'm the one whose eyes you try to avoid when you buy the multi-coloured twelve-pack of condoms - the chocolate flavoured ones - not realising that I've deliberately not priced them up so the girls on the Till have to ask me loudly how much they are.

Well, you have to have some fun with it, don't you?

It could even be said that I raise the dead when I dispense Viagra.

I know more about you from the things you buy than you'd ever like to reveal to your most intimate of friends. But I'm your confidante, your protector. The one who looks out for you more than your Doctor ever can.

I see you many times a month, he only sees you once a quarter at the most.

[Enter Anne, The Social Worker. She needs to stand well on the stage but be far enough away from the Pharmacist to infer that she's at the shop front while he's round the back.]

Anne: Excuse me. I wonder if I could have a few words with you in private. I'm a Social Worker from the Council Offices and I'd be grateful for some information.

Pharmacist: Well, I hope I can help. *[The Pharmacist moves towards Anne as if coming from his work area to the shop floor where the customers stand.]*

Anne: I'm sure you can. I'm making one last effort to resolve a problem I have with a case before I hand it over to those above me. It's about a gentleman who lives about a hundred yards down the Street, in that old dilapidated bungalow on the corner of Rosemary Drive.

Pharmacist: Ah yes, Mr Simcox.

Anne: You know him?

Pharmacist: Why, yes. He comes in here from time to time, just before closing. Has the effect of getting rid of the customers so we can close on time *[Smiles]* If you know what I mean?.

Anne *[Smiles back]*: Yes, that would be the one. *[Pauses]* I can't locate a GP for him and I wondered if he had his prescriptions dispensed here. You're his nearest Chemist.

Pharmacist: I don't recall ever seeing one. I think I'd remember, I know most of the repeats.

Anne: But you said he comes in here?

Pharmacist: Oh yes. Simple things - paracetamol, laxatives, cough syrup, lozenges. Things like that. *[Pauses]* By the way, did you know that you should never sell laxative to someone with a cough unless you first suggest they buy some Benylin? *[Anne looks at the Pharmacist in exasperation, shakes her head]*. Sorry, bad joke. The serious nature of the work sometimes gets the better of me.

Anne *[Ignoring the comment]*: Would you say he's mentally stable?

Pharmacist: Look, Miss, er, Miss...?

Anne: Anne. My name's Anne.

Pharmacist: Look, Anne, it's not for me to assess people's mental state. So long as they pay their money, don't cause trouble or give my staff a hard time, that's all I ask. No questions asked, no expectations warranted, *[emphasises the following strongly]* no mental state assessed.

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Anne: But, I thought that...

Pharmacist: ...you thought wrong. If the Council want to take issue with anybody's lifestyle, let the Council take the appropriate action. But don't get me involved to do your dirty work for you.

Anne: It wasn't that, I just wanted...

Pharmacist: I don't really care what you wanted.

Anne [*lifting a hand to stop any further talk*]: Okay. I'm sorry to have bothered you. [*She exits the stage. The Pharmacist watches her go with anger clearly on his face. On her exit, his face softens as he turns back towards the audience.*]

Pharmacist: I am your confidante, your protector. The one who looks out for you more than your Doctor ever can.

I am...the Pharmacist.

[*End*]

SCENE NINE - The Camp

[*If lights are employed, the spotlight over Mr Simcox fades in to denote the beginning of the scene. Again, Thought must move freely about the stage as he sees fit. He only needs to be back behind the chair in which Mr Simcox sits at the close of the Scene.*]

Thought: My Dearest Emily,

Your letter found me in good health. Thank you for the chocolate that the Red Cross delivered. It was so touching that you sought to deprive yourself of such a luxury when we're really very well cared for here.

Mr Simcox: Well, you had to put on a brave front, didn't you?

Thought: Hopefully, this War will soon be over and we can get back to our way of life once more - although, we will have to learn how to become an old married couple. I long to spend a greater time with you as my wife than the two short weeks we had in Spring.

Please take heart, my darling, and don't lose hope. We will surely be together soon. Love, as always, your beloved Eric. Third of March in the year of our Lord.....

Mr Simcox: ...nineteen hundred and forty-one.

[*Slight Pause*]

Thought: I couldn't know it would be another four years.

[*Pause*]

Thought: You had to find something to do, make an interest. That was the secret of surviving. Even if it was lining up the ticks and bugs after squishing them on the wall and counting them to see if you could beat yesterday's record. Or the all-time one.

Taking wood from the stack earmarked for the stoves was a court-martialable offence. Even if you wanted it to whittle away into a small object with a penknife. In such a barren wasteland, with freezing winters, wood...

Mr Simcox: ...was like our lifeblood.

Thought: We didn't get much in the way of food so we needed the warmth when our bodies had no reserves to produce it. When you saw those who were weakening fast, you hoped they'd last until at least the Spring when you'd have a chance to dig their grave into the soil that was solid as a rock til May.

You kept your head low, tried not to stand out. If you were told to do something, you did it. No reason to enrage the guards to whom we were the expendable...

Mr Simcox: ...little more than the detested and abusable.

Thought: Of course, that all changed when we landed in Normandy. When we advanced through France. When we threatened the Homeland.

Then, they started reasoning - 'What if they defeat us? What if they win the War? What if the abused become the victors?'

Mr Simcox: A little kindness...

Thought: ...although they had so little to give. But the kinder they became, the more we

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knew the War was going our way. You didn't need the whispers, the snippets of news from home shrouded in carefully worded phrases to beat the Censor. You knew. You just knew.

Mr Simcox: And that was when we hoped.

Thought: We had long forgotten that we could.

Mr Simcox: But, at last, we hoped again.

[The light above Mr Simcox stays on but Thought has retreated slightly behind Mr Simcox's chair so that there's space between himself and the backrest. It would be also advantageous if he is removed in to shadow. Alternatively, he could crouch or sit down for the next scene.]

SCENE TEN - Emily

[Another of the War's forgotten heroes - those who went unremembered and unhonoured until very recently - were the girls and young women (along with many other young lads and men not fit for military service) who volunteered or who were conscripted into working in the munitions factories throughout the UK.

Many moved hundreds of miles to the industrial plants that were sited as far from airstrike as possible - although some were within the bombing range of the Luftwaffe - and received physical suffering through their contact with the chemicals that were employed in the making of the munitions.

Emily was one of those girls who volunteered for Service - for some very specific reasons that we learn about in her monologue.]

Emily [A simple scene. Emily comes on to the stage at the same side where Mr Simcox is sat. Thought has ended the last scene slightly behind the back of the chair (see the stage direction at the end of the last Scene) to allow Emily to be able to put her arms around Eric from the back, to hug him and kiss him lightly on the top of his head. She is free to wander back and forth as is thought necessary but should, at least once more, stand behind where Mr Simcox, her husband, sits to hug and hold him at an appropriate point where she describes what she was doing to speed his return]: The Canaries, they called us - yellow skinned and yellow haired, we worked morning, noon and night to keep our boys supplied.

We never thought of what it was doing to us, slowly but surely poisoning our bodies with hives, amputations, death. We only saw it as part of the War Effort, part of what it meant to be at war.

And bringing Eric back.

After weeks of despair not knowing - with no word from friend or foe - I realised that he wasn't coming back. At least, not until the War was over and the captives were released.

Working on Munitions was the best way to quicken the end.

That's the way I thought. My reason for volunteering at the start.

Call it selfish if you will, I don't mind. There were a lot who never thought about the reasons why they worked. With me, there was always a purpose, a pride in what I did.

I knew that, if I didn't make that shell perfect as it sat in front of me, one of ours might die - if it exploded in the barrel. Or dozens would if a careless slip sparked the cordite and took out half the factory.

You were careful because you trusted everyone else to be. You didn't mind the label 'Canary' because our song was winning the War. We kept in tune with one another and achieved our goals.

[Emily changes position on the stage to denote the start of a different section of narrative.]

After Dunkirk, the first weeks were the worst.

The not-knowing. Every moment expecting a telegram to say that, unfortunately, a tag around a recovered body had been identified as your newly wedded husband.

But, as time went by, despair turned to hope - never lose hope, my parents said, for while nothing is certain then all is possible.

And hope fulfilled that grateful day when a card arrived with the simple words that said, in

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German, something that we could scarce comprehend. But, there, alongside such strange words, was Eric's clear mark and the date that proved beyond all doubt that he was living after we had thought him dead.

Yet, it was clear that he wasn't coming home, save for the end of War itself.

And that was when I decided that, if it might be possible, I would do my bit to speed the day when I would see him face to face once more, hoping that, with each shell made, a day, an hour or minute might be taken off the wait.

Did I hasten the end?

That, I will never know.

But, in some small way, I'm sure that all us girls did.

All of us, whether small or great, each did our part to bring about the end.

[End - the lights stay on above Mr Simcox.]

SCENE ELEVEN - Returning Home

[The spotlight over Mr Simcox is on from the previous scene and should continue to shine. Again, Thought must move freely about the stage as he sees fit.]

Thought: I remember the first time that I set my feet back on...

Mr Simcox: ...England's Green and Pleasant Land.

Thought: There was no one to greet us, no one to shake our hand, no private reception committee to wish us all the best. We got out on a Lancaster, one of many ferrying supplies in and taking little else back except us.

We were the forgotten. Cared for, provided for - but forgotten.

We reported to Command, left our particulars and received a small allowance to use to...

Mr Simcox: ...get back home.

Thought: I didn't have a home, if truth be told. Emily had gone to live with her parents once I'd left on Service and I wasn't sure that the shock would do her any good if I turned up on the doorstep, so I went back to Mum's.

I sent a telegram to both, though. I had enough money for that.

Seeing Emily again was like...

Mr Simcox: ...I was reborn. Like light had come...

Thought: ...from the darkness.

It took a few years to get enough together to put a deposit down on this house. Yes...

Mr Simcox *[Looks around his surroundings in one of the few active responses he shows]:* ...this very house. *[Pause - as if he's reflecting on the walls. Thought needs to allow time before continuing.]*

Thought: But the country needed manual workers - was crying out for them - and, although I still had a few months of recuperation to get my strength back, it wasn't long before I was straining at the leash to do something to pass the days.

Mr Simcox: But the memories...

Thought: ...never left. You don't forget that easily - all the hardships, hunger and suffering. You just...

Mr Simcox: ...don't forget.

Thought: In the middle of the night, I'd wake up screaming, sweating in a cold, clammy liquid that covered the sheets. Emily never gave up on me - never asked me questions about it, never thought I was putting it on.

She knew - just as all the women knew. They all knew what the authorities wouldn't say - that the price of freedom was more than the human losses and physical destruction. They knew that the War had taken its toll on us...

Mr Simcox: ...within.

Thought: We carried the scars of victory, in our very minds. Pushed down for so long to make us look half-human but inwardly knowing that we were...

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Mr Simcox: ...the living dead.

Thought: Ah, this house holds my memories! Good and bad, no matter. Of Emily, her smiling face and sweet caress, her warmth and kindness. Her love. Too bad there were no children - she would have made the perfect mother just as she did...

Mr Simcox: ...the perfect wife.

Thought [*These last four lines grow increasingly melancholy and quiet so that the voice of Matron opening the next scene should make the audience jump*]: This house is the memory...

Mr Simcox: ...this house...

Thought: ...this house holds my life...

Mr Simcox: ...my very life.

SCENE TWELVE - Committal

[The light remains on over Mr Simcox from the previous scene. There needs to be a slight pause after the final words that are broken by the booming voice of the Matron as she enters on the opposite side that Anne, the Social Worker, entered with Mr Simcox in Scene Three.]

Matron [*With the sonic boom of a voice, she delivers her lines as she enters the stage and walks firmly and confidently - some would say cockily (I wouldn't say 'cockily' cos I've been brought up properly) - across to where Mr Simcox sits. Her voice is in contrast to the sombre and quiet tone in which the last scene has ended*]: Now then, Mr Simcox, we can't be waiting about all day for you to feel like you want to get up. We have a timetable to keep to. We must have you back at the Care Home before lunch is served.

We have your place set and Cook will be none too pleased if her food goes to waste.

[Matron will be exiting the opposite side of the stage to which she entered so she needs to walk over to that side of Mr Simcox's chair. She grabs under Mr Simcox's arm to try and raise him up but has no success. He looks up in to her eyes and tries to speak but, although his lips move, no sound comes out. At the same time, Thought tries to make his voice known but he only wheezes and coughs, points to his throat as if suddenly hoarse.]

Now, come on, Mr Simcox. Resistance is futile. [*Then, louder, almost in a German accent - or, perhaps, in a mild one that's clearly discernible by the audience - to remind the audience of the words of the German soldier who took him in to Captivity during the War*] For you, the stay in this house is over.

[Mr Simcox again tries to speak but is unable to. Thought, likewise, hacks, coughs and wheezes, grabs at his throat and begins to clutch at the back of the chair. Thought is clearly struggling to live and will use the back of the chair as a prop, being clearly in discomfort, then pain. This continues throughout the rest of the scene and grows worse. Holding on to the back of the chair as he slips to the floor, he grasps at the back to keep upright but doesn't succeed. He will eventually lie crumpled on the floor as Mr Simcox is led away. There needs to be a progression that accompanies the rest of the Scene and no further directions will here be given. Mr Simcox will also be trying to communicate, pointing to his mouth as he fails to make sound from his moving lips. Matron will ignore everything.]

Up we get, Mr Simcox [*Matron finally manages to lift him to his feet*]. There! [*Patronisingly*] That wasn't so difficult, was it? Just a few short steps now, out the front door and we'll get you settled in the Taxi.

It's perfectly natural to feel sad. You go ahead and have a cry if you want. No one's going to think any less of you.

[Now moving Mr Simcox across the stage to exit, Thought is in the last stage of dying] One step at a time, sir. [*Condescendingly*] That's it! That's the way! You'll be starting your new life in no time.

[Mr Simcox looks back at Thought who's now almost motionless, Mr Simcox still trying to make a sound] Did I tell you that we have lots of young ladies at the Home? And they're all so excited to meet fresh young talent like you.

[Pause] Don't worry if you feel sad, Mr Simcox. Don't worry at all. It's perfectly natural.

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[As they finally exit] Just remember - never lose hope. Never, never give up hope.

[As Matron and Mr Simcox disappear from site, two undertakers enter the opposite side of stage as the cheesy funeral music begins. The undertakers are carrying a stretcher - or carry a folded one that they unfurl - that they lay out behind Thought. They roll him on, his arms draping down to the floor as they lift it up and carry him away, across the stage. Thought faces the audience with staring, dead eyes and delivers one final line, the opening sentence of the Play.]

Thought *[only half alive, perhaps in half-whisper, half-speech]*: The living are dead.

[Once all have exited the Stage so that it's totally devoid of characters, the light slowly fades over Mr Simcox's chair at the same time as the funeral music gradually fades - until both are extinguished together.]

[Curtain.]