

RIVER'S END RETIREMENT HOME

A Play by  
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This was taking place at River's End Retirement Home, about eighty miles north of Tampa on the Gulf Coast, also known as the Nature Coast, an area devoid of resorts and beaches.

### OPENING SCENE

The dining hall in the retirement home, Monday morning.

(A portly senior named Angus in a tartan housecoat, is holding it open for all but the audience to see. He is in a rage and now points at the female attendants. His toopee is dangling as he bellows in a strong Scottish accent)

Angus:       Where's my cock? Bloody sheilas stole my dick!

(Two gentlemen are seated at table 3. One grabs a salt shaker and the other a pepper shaker and they pretend they have microphones.)

Benny:       Good morning Floridians. It is a lovely spring day as Angus McPherson is back at it, exposing himself as our morning entertainment.

Jerry:       To go with our gourmet breakfast of prunes and toast. And technically Ben, it will be another week before we are truly in Spring.

Benny:       Thanks for that Jerry. We can't be moving our equinoxes around can we? Next thing you know we'll be rushing Thanksgiving like those crazy Canucks.

Jerry: Absolutely, I stand corrected. What do you think Benny, Angus must have had a single malt smuggled in on the weekend. He is in rare form.

(Miss Buttons at table 2 makes the sign of the cross and then coyly peeks at Angus.  
Ladies at table 1 have poked holes in their toast to make masks)

Nurse Cratchit: Joanie get the mirror out of the hutch.

Benny: A brilliant strategy is unfolding.

Jerry: Get a load of Miss Bottoms.

Benny: Surely you mean Miss Buttons.

(Joanie fetches the mirror and studies herself in it.)

Nurse Cratchit: Joanie! The mirror! And page Carlos immediately.

Benny: Hold on sports fans, she is handing Angus the mirror. He is doing an inventory and...

Angus: Oh Braveheart..Braveheart you're still there..My most precious belonging.

Ladies at table 1: There's nothing 'long' about his belonging.

(Carlos arrives. He is a muscular attendant of Cuban heritage.)

Benny: Folks, it looks like we have dodged the bullet. Nothing seems to be damaged. And Angus is being persuaded to return to his room.

Jerry: And thanks for tuning in for our morning broadcast from Rivers End Retirement Home.

( Now that Angus was propitiated, a new face appeared at table 3 and introductions were made.)

Murphy: Jimmy McMurphy but call me Murph for short. If I was short you could call me Smurf. Get it?

Benny: We have seen you around and heard you at karaoke. I'm Ben and he's Jerry

Murphy: What flavor? I'm only kidding. Me, I've only been here a month or so.

Jerry: Ben arrived on the retirement home's opening day, shortly after the Grapefruit League was finished last year. I came around Thanksgiving and it's been pretty entertaining so far.

Murphy: How do you mean?

Benny: Well other than the crazy Scotsman with his weekly shenanigans, we've had a suicide and...

Jerry:        Some spurious goings ons.

Murphy:     Suicide?

Benny:       Get this. One guy used to play the heavy in the movies and on television. He was so convincing that people despised him even in real life. It must have got to him after a while...a very good actor indeed.

Jerry:        And of course we have our own Nurse Ratchett whose real name is Cratchit, and et this, her boyfriend is nicknamed Tiny Tim. She was re-nicknamed Miss Scratchit after the scabies outbreak, which by the way never officially happened. That's a story itself.

(They finished their breakfast and were about to leave the dining room.)

Murphy:     So who's the hottie at table two? I've been checking her out all month. She seems to keep to herself except for the Cuban gardener, Carlos. He's a lot younger than her. Do you think...?

(Ben and Jerry laugh)

Jerry:        That's Julia Buttons, affectionately known as Miss Bottoms.

Ben:         At first we thought she had over-sized Depends, but in reality she wears a fanny pack that she keeps her papers in.

Murphy: I need to find a way outta here.

Jerry: What do you mean? We're not prisoners and actually, the living is good here. We get lots of activities and we have the nursing care as well.

Murphy laughing: Of course. I'll see you guys after naptime...I hope!

## SCENE TWO

On the patio in the same afternoon.

(The ladies from table 1 are trying to skip rope in a wheelchair while singing ‘Skip to my Tullamore Dew’.)

(Miss Buttons sits in the shade writing, her table covered in papers.)

(Murphy walks past and then walks backward doing a funny walk.)

Murphy:     Aren't you Julia?

Miss Buttons:     I'll have you address me as... Miss Buttons.

Murphy:     I'm sorry Julia. Did you say you wanted me to dress you ass?

Miss Buttons:     I clearly said 'Miss Buttons'.. as in the Buttons of Berkshire and late of the Hamptons. Vulgar man. Leave me!

Murphy:     I can't help it. I'm Irish and we have the gift of the gab as well as some hidden gifts I could bestow upon you.

Miss Buttons:     Go home and kiss your Barney stone. Just go away!

Murphy:     I not only kissed the Blarney Stone but I took it home for the weekend and had a torrid affair.

(Fondles the imaginary stone in his hands).

Murphy:     Oh so hot and firm. Warms the COCKles of my soul.

Miss Buttons: I'll call for Carlos.

Murphy: Alright I'm outta here. Didn't you call Carlos last night around midnight? A little room service maybe?

(Miss Buttons jumps up and hurries off with papers flying all over the place. Murphy heads over to where Benny and Jerry are playing cribbage.)

(Benny grabs his glass to use like a microphone)

Benny: It's a beautiful afternoon at River's End Park as Murphy strikes out with Miss Bottoms.

Murphy: So guys, where is this river I keep hearing about?

Jerry: There is no river. The confusion with the name stemmed from the owner, Doug Riversend, who hired some foreign labourers to make the sign for the establishment. The workmen absconded and Riversend was left with the spelling error.

Benny: And this is a hoot. His wife's name was Brooke.

Jerry: More hooters than hoot if you get my meaning.

Murphy sings: 'Thanks for the mammaries'.



Jerry: And talk about weird names. I had a friend that sold booze and cigarettes back in the day. His name was Mickey Butts...get it?

Murphy: So whats with all these umbrellas advertising a brand of rum I've never heard of?

Benny: A few months ago we had a scabies outbreak and Riversend gave all of us beach umbrellas to keep things hushed up...but we never go to the beach.

Jerry: And what is with the Blarney Stone story?

Murphy: Well I am bona-fide Guinness drinking Dublimite, as they call us in Ireland, and my mates at the castle let me take the stone home one weekend as a joke. No river eh? And only one road in and out of here? Forty miles of potholes to Sable City? Kinda isolated if you ask me.

(Carlos arrives)

Carlos: No, there is a fork in the road a half-mile back...Beech Drive...it goes to the treatment plant where you'll be getting a treatment if you don't stop bothering Miss Buttons.

Benny: Go check it out sometime. There's a special pond just for the governor cause he's so full of it.

Murphy: I'm outta here...Erin go braugh.

Jerry:       What a funny guy. He has the gift of hyperbole.

Benny:       Or maybe he's just high.

### SCENE THREE

The dining room that evening

Joanie: I have an exciting announcement to make.

Ladies at table 1: She never disappoints.

Joanie: St. Patrick's Day is on March 17 this year.

Ladies at table one: And Christmas is on December 25?

Joanie: And we will not be celebrating because of this Corona problem.

Angus walking by: That's alright... I'll drink Budweiser then.

Joanie: The good news is that we will all be getting free masks

Nurse Cratchit: Thanks Joanie. And more good news - you'll be getting ice cream for dessert tonight.

Ladies at table 1: Tiny Tim made ice cream from prunes again?

Nurse Cratchit: I'll not have you address Timothy like that. He does his best with what he gets.

Benny (quietly): and that includes Nurse Scratchit.

Ladies at table 1: Mangrove soup? Roast armadillo?

Angus: Prunes? Wrinkled plums for wrinkled bums.

Ladies at table 1 sing: Prunes for many happy returns.

Nurse Cratchit: OK, enough! The Lightning will be on tonight at 7.30 for those who like hockey.

Miss Buttons: I prefer football. The players are more well-rounded.

Laughter fro the ladies at table 1: Miss Buttons likes them well-rounded.

Miss Buttons: I mean most of the players in the NFL have gone to college.

(fade to table 3 )

Jerry: Hey Angus. Got a minute?

Angus: Nothing but time. I still hope I get my St. Paddy's Day delivery.

Jerry: What do you know about Dublinites and their Blarney Stone.

Angus: First of all they are Dubliners, not Dublinites. And the Blarney Stone is part of Blarney Castle, way down near Cork.

Jerry and Benny: You don't say! So on another topic, do you think this Corona crisis is real or are they just getting back at us for the melee on New Year's Eve? I know a few of us were taken away by ambulance but...

Angus: Oh, and don't forget the Fourth of July last year when Benny set the fireworks off indoors. I might be preaching to the kettle that the choir's black, or however that goes, but from my experience, alcohol and old age don't go together well.

(Angus departs.)

Jerry: There's something strange about that Murph and I don't think it's dementia...and that accent seems more Aussie than Irish.

Benny: But then what do we know about each other. Tell me about yourself Jerry.

Jerry: You first Benny. I don't want this ice cream to melt. It's not half bad once you get over the colour of it.

Benny: No family. I was in the military for most of my life...as a trumpeter in the various marching bands. I know every song by Sousa by heart, even though I can't remember squat from yesterday. In Vietnam, I was playing taps when Buzz and Neil were tap dancing on the lunar surface. I should have been in the jungle, terrifying the Commies with my horn...that's a joke. I've played at the White House and in a dozen different countries. I had a combo as well that played

Motown hits. We played Evalani's in Samoa, the grand ballroom at the Waldorf Astoria, and all sorts of places in Europe. What about you Jerry?

Jerry:        Hold on...What's this? The President is on TV. He is making a statement about the virus.

## SCENE FOUR

Morning in the kitchen at Riversend. Four days later and St. Patrick's Day)

Tim: Top of the morning!

Nurse Cratchit: And you know I like to be on top.

Tim: I made some Irish soda bread just for you.

Nurse Cratchit: You're such a romantic flour child... Flour...as in the stuff you bake with.

Tim: I get it...I think.

Nurse Cratchit: I don't need yeast to make you rise.

Tim: Guess what your little doughboy is brewing today.

Nurse Cratchit: Timmy, much as I love your entrepreneurial spirit, your liquid spirits are totally illegal and are going to get you deported. Furthermore, it's dangerous. Look what happened to Mr. Polk when he tried your tequila made from yucca roots.

Tim: He was old anyway.

Nurse Cratchit: They are all old here! And on top of that, you killed all the yucca plants on the patio.

Tim: There is still croton, dracena and ti. Carlos does a wonderful job here.  
Besides, it wasn't the tequila that killed him...it was poop.

Nurse Cratchit: What on earth are you talking about?

Tim: Pokey got into the hootch when I wasn't here. Witnesses said he was wandering down the road looking for the fountain of youth when he stumbled into the treatment plant. It wasn't the fountain of youth but a pond of ...

Nurse Cratchit: Stop!

Tim: You could say Pokey did the Hokey Pokey and ...really got himself turned around....ha.

Nurse Cratchit: Sick. Anyway it is nice to hear something other than elevator music over the P.A. this morning. Murphy had a cd by the Chieftans. And thanks for the soda bread.

Tim sings: That's what it's all about.

(she exiting bangs the bread on a table-clang)

Nurse Cratchit muttering: Another paperweight.

(Angus enters)



Angus: Did my package arrive?

Tim: It's back in the cooler. Angus, just a minute! Wait!

(Angus has already opened the cooler door)

Angus: Jeez es Timmy! There's a dead woman in here! What have you been feeding us?

Tim: Whoa! That's Denise, one of the ladies from table one. She died last night of the plague and we're isolating her until the ambulance gets here from the city.

Angus: Isolating as in covered in ice...I wonder who gets table one now. Do you want a wee one Timmy?

Tim: Close the door. Might as well have a drop of the craythur as they say in Ireland, before it gets stale.

Angus: Keeping our spirits up...literally!

(an hour later Joanie enters)

Tim and Angus bellowing: But come ye back, when summer's in the meadow and when...oh hello Joanie

Joanie: The folks are wondering when breakfast is going to be served.

(Tim passes out)

Angus: Joanie my darling....loveliest of lasses...lust, I mean love of my life.  
Let me take you away from here. Would you like to meet Braveheart?

(Joanie flees as we hear the ambulance arriving. Angus is left alone after the body is removed from the cooler. Next we hear the sound of Taps being played)

Angus: How's that go? Youth is wasted on the...what is it?...the young? No, that's not how it goes. Are darker times upon us again?

## SCENE FIVE

(Jerry and Benny are seated on the patio playing cribbage. As the ambulance pulls away, Carlos approaches)

Carlos: Spring came early this year.

Jerry: We've already had this conversation. Spring isn't officially here for another four days.

Carlos: No, I meant another type of spring. Mr. Bernstein, do you remember when we had a shipment of mattresses just before Christmas?

Benny: Yes. Mr. Riversend and his wife were here in Santa hats and made a big deal about the mattresses.

Jerry: That's when the Dickens' joke started about Nurse Cratchit, Tiny Tim and of course we know who Scrooge was.

Carlos: Well, the mattresses were used. They came from the retirement home in Miami where some folks died during Hurricane Irma a few years back. Remember, the air was off and some of the elderly residents suffocated?

(they nod as Carlos continues)

Well the springs are coming through those mattresses now and I've been instructed to duct tape them instead of throwing them out. Last night the mattress sprung on

Thelma, you know, from table one, and now she is on the way to the hospital in the ambulance with her frozen friend, late of table one.

Benny: I hope she sues Riversend, that tightwad. He spends more on his hairpiece than the annual budget for this place.

Jerry: I heard he spends a lot saving the manatees.

Benny: No, mammaries! His wife has had two boob jobs.

( Nurse Cratchit enters still banging her bread on the tables)

Nurse Cratchit: Gentlemen, sorry about breakfast this morning. Timmy got a bit of the flu.

Benny: Green prunes and grits...mmm

Jerry: No, prunes and green toast. I guess there'll be no more prune songs from table one.

Nurse Cratchit: Carlos, can you break off a piece of this for me please?

(Carlos tries without success and then exits shaking his head)

Jerry: Nurse Cratchit, Don't you think that Joanie's joke of the day this morning was in bad taste, considering Thelma's accident ?

Nurse Cratchit: Why are French mattresses so romantic? Because they have a bit of Paris in the springs? Bad timing rather than bad taste. She tries to keep our spirits up with her funny shirts and hats.

Benny: Last month when our friend Edward fell out of the canoe on the Homasassa River, Joanie called his partner the Ed-less oarsman. Funny I guess except that we all knew Edward.

Jerry: Remember when Eddie stole the gardener's shears and was going on about free castrations on the patio?

Benny: Well we still have Murphy and his hysterics. He snuck into the female dorm this morning, dressed as a leprechaun and singing 'when Irish eyes are smiling'. He's lucky he didn't get a black eye.

( Angus staggers onto the patio as his toupee is blown away)

Jerry: There's something you don't see everyday...a grey squirrel running around a patio in Florida.

Benny: You're right Jerry...now if it were a red squirrel...

(Carlos chases down the toupee and returns it to Angus. He can't get it on properly so he stuffs it in his pocket.)

(Miss Buttons enters and spreads out her papers on the picnic table)

Nurse Cratchit: Ah, Miss Buttons! I see you been having a bit of a problem with the wind.

Miss Buttons: Not anymore. I hide the prunes in the garden and I never eat beans now.

Nurse Cratchit: I meant the wind is always blowing you papers around.

Miss Buttons: Only when it blows from the south. You know, the pollution plant...nasty.

Nurse Cratchit: Well our special cook, Timmy made this soda bread this morning and I think it would be more useful as a paperweight.

Miss Buttons: I'll be sure and thank him next time I see him.

Nurse Cratchit: Oh no! Not necessary. I will thank him in my own special way.

Ben and Jerry quietly: I bet she will!



## SCENE SIX

Breakfast in the dining hall, the first day of spring.

Joanie:        Good morning y'all, it's the first day of Spring! Oh, and here's something interesting, it's the first day of Fall in Australia. It's like they're six months behind us! It's great to be American. And now Nurse Cratchit has an important announcement.

Nurse Cratchit:    Word has come down from management that we must all be masked while indoors at this establishment, for the safety of all.

(the diners murmur angrily)

Angus:        I think Mr. Riversend is more concerned with the vacancy rate than with our well-being.

Nurse Cratchit:    That may well be but we lost another resident to the virus overnight... Mr. Bonner and his great sense of humour will be missed.

Benny:        Old Bones bit the dust. He was a lot of fun. He had those plastic body parts he got from the dollar store. Remember he placed a hand reaching out of the toilet in the ladies dorm. Man, you could hear the screams all the way to Sable City.

Jerry:        He had that sleeping disorder though. ...terrifying nightmares. They built an anachroic chamber around his bed so he wouldn't disturb the other residents with his yelling.



Benny: I did not know that.

Jerry: That Murph told me. He seems to know everything about this place and the residents. Maybe he's writing an expose.

Benny: I thought Miss Buttons was doing that.

Jerry: I'm pretty sure they caught him snooping around the ladies dorm again the other night. The only reason the CNAs have a dorm is that it is too far to commute to and from Sable City.

Benny shouts across to table 1: Hey Angus, what do you think about this mask business?

Angus: It's hard to suck these prunes through the fabric. Bet it'll make your trumpet sound better and Jerry's face more presentable.

Jerry: You're a funny guy. Where's Miss Bottoms, oops, I mean Buttons this morning?

Angus: Mr. Bonner or old Boner as I called him, got her with one of his practical jokes just before he died.

Benny and Jerry: Tell us more.

Angus: Boner managed to slip a vibrator into Miss Buttons fanny pack and she was walking around with it sticking out. I guess she was insensitive to the vibrations.

Benny: Or was just plain enjoying it.

Angus: Carlos told her and she's been in her room ever since in an embarrassment fit.

Jerry: Or fitting something else. What's up with her and Carlos?

Benny: We all came about the same time. I'm pretty sure they knew each other before they got here. Maybe ask Murph. He seems to know everyone's business.

Jerry: Anyway, too bad about Boney. This place is getting to be depressing, the masks and all. No visitors, no gatherings. I even miss Murph at karaoke. Is there any talk about a cure for this virus? The President was talking about drinking bleach the other night.

Benny: Yeh, he didn't seem too concerned about it Others are calling it an out and out pandemic and calling for vaccines. We'll have to make the best of it. Oh, and you were starting to tell me your story just before the President interrupted.

Jerry: Yes, how insensitive of him. I'm a Floridian, late of the Keys by way of Marathon. No wife but a son down by Miami. More this afternoon at cribbage.

Hey Joanie, here's one for your morning funnies. How do you remember mnemonics?

Joanie: I don't know. Whats the punch line?

## SCENE SEVEN

The same morning in Miss Button's room

Murphy singing:            'It's like a morn in spring'.

Miss Buttons:        How did you get in here? Leave this moment! I know you.  
That mask doesn't fool me.

Murphy:        Miss Buttons of the Berkshires eh?

Miss Buttons:        Don't touch me. I'll scream!

(Murphy punches her in the head)

Murphy:        Don't flatter yourself you old cow.

(Murphy goes through the fanny pack)

Miss Buttons:        No, not them!

(Murphy strikes her again)

Murphy:        I said shut up! Whats all this secret stuff? Stocks, bonds, banking  
crap...and all this stuff in Spanish? Letters from Cuba...are you a spy?.and who is  
this Boton with the funny accent over the second'o'?

(Murphy goes to hit her again)

Miss Buttons whimpering: That's my real name. It's Spanish for 'Button'...I came from Cuba forty years ago with my husband and his little brother Carlos on the Mariel boatlift.

Murphy: Carlos is your brother in law?

Miss Buttons: We all got separated in Miami. They were confusing times. A lot of Americans did not want us here.

Murphy: What about the money? Did you think I came here for you? Ha, that's sick.

Miss Buttons: I don't have any money.

Murphy: The Berkshires and all that crap?

Miss Buttons: I worked there for thirty years and was able to get a job there for Carlos. I am a subsidized resident and Carlos helps out.

Murphy: What about your husband?

Miss Buttons: I have written letters for forty years trying to locate him...no luck.

Murphy: You must have something you can give me.

Miss Buttons: As a matter of fact.

(She goes behind Murphy, gets the sodabread and hits him in the head. He goes down as Miss Buttons heads for the door, opens it and shouts back)

Miss Buttons: Tularula you fraud. Carlos, Carlos, come quick!

## SCENE EIGHT

That same morning in the nursing office at the retirement home.

(Nurse Cratchit is checking the residents for signs of the virus.)

Nurse Cratchit:     So Mr. McPherson, no sore throat or any other symptoms?

Angus:            As fit as a fiddle...with maybe a few loose strings Nothing a single malt can't cure.

Nurse Cratchit:     Let me just check your reflexes now that you are here.

(She hits him in the knee and his arm goes out. She repeats the process and Agnus sticks out his tongue)

Nurse Cratchit:     Very funny. What do you think Joanie, should I put on the glove?

(Joanie is wide eyed and her cheeks are bloated. Finally she exhales)

Nurse Cratchit:     What on earth are you doing Joanie?

Joanie:            I am practising holding my breath. I can get a weekend job as a mermaid at Weeki-Wachee.

Angus:            I would go all week to watch ye.

Joanie: I'm a really good swimmer..and I can go down now for two minutes.

Angus: Braveheart would be glad to hear that.

Nurse Cratchit: Get outta here!

(Before Angus leaves, there is a disturbance in the hallway. Tim comes rushing in)

Nurse Cratchit: Catch your breath Timmy. You're not applying at Weeki-Wachee too are you?

Tim: It's Carlos! He's going to kill Murphy.

Joanie: No, try and hold your breath like this Tim.

Nurse Cratchit: Not now Joanie! What's happening?

Tim: Murphy's not Murphy and neither is Miss Buttons.

Joanie: I don't see why you'd think she was Murphy in the first place.

Tim: The guy who called himself Murphy is not Irish.

Angus: Well I knew that, but that isn't a reason for Carlos to kill him.

Tim: He assaulted Miss Buttons who is not Miss Buttons.



(Benny and Jerry enter)

Jerry: I should have told you this before. When I said my son was living near Miami, he is actually in the Miami-Dade Correctional Center. When I last visited him I saw the guy who calls himself Murphy...He was a prisoner there. I'm pretty sure his name was Jimmy Quickly or Jimmy the Quick.

Benny: I guess we all have our secrets here.

Tim: Carlos said Miss Buttons adopted him so to speak, after the Mariel Boatload disaster. He will hunt Murphy down.

Joanie: Do you think we should phone the police up in Sable City?

All: Joanie, that's the smartest thing you've ever said.

(An hour later the phone rings.)

Nurse Cratchit: He what? He didn't. Who was? The sheriff? Well I guess that's that. Thank you.

(Hangs up. The rest look at her in anticipation.)

Joanie, would you please go fetch Miss Buttons and maybe put your breathing practice on hold.

(Joanie returns a few moments later with a red-faced Miss Buttons)

Nurse Cratchit: Now all of you take a deep breath. No we are not going to Weeki-Wachee. That was Bert from the treatment plant. Remember he met us when Mr. Polk went for his fatal swim? He told me a crazy man tried to get into the plant on the way to the beach. Bert told him there was no beach but the guy insisted it was Beach Road. Bert told him it was Beech as in the Beechnut tree and there was no beach until Cedar Key, forty miles south of here. Then a muscular looking guy came down the road after him. The first guy ran into the mangroves like a scared rabbit and the second guy was about to go after him when the sheriff arrived. Then Bert said the strangest thing happened. Instead of arresting the muscle guy, the sheriff started kissing and hugging him. Miss Button, it seems we have found your missing husband...he's the sheriff in Sable City.