

LITTLE DONKEY RUMBA

A Christmas Comedy in One Act

by

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Little Donkey Rumba

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THE CAST

Fred Foskett

Hannah *His wife*

Joyce *A neighbour*

Katy Melders

Jim Tasker

Marvin Lemm

Beryl *His wife*

Arnie Podmore

Harvey Grain

Stig Taplin

LITTLE DONKEY RUMBA

by Roger Poole

The scene is the living room of FRED and HANNAH FOSKETT at about 7.00pm on Christmas Eve. There is a coffee table centre left with easy chairs at either side, these three items of furniture arranged at an angle of roughly 45 degrees to the audience. On the table is a bottle of wine and two empty glasses. A small table right bears a telephone and a container of nuts. Floor-length curtains at centre back are drawn together as it is evening and centre right is a Yamaha organ. Up right near the telephone table is a stool or chair. Up left is the door to the hall and kitchen. There is a Christmas tree down left and festive decorations complete the picture.

(FRED is fussing over the Yamaha, adjusting its position, checking that it is plugged in correctly. Finally, he drapes over it several pieces of seasonal wrapping paper sellotaped together into a single sheet large enough to cover it. Satisfied with the effect, he is pouring out two glasses of wine as HANNAH enters in a winter coat).

Hannah: Brr It's cold. One or two snowflakes in the air. Don't think it'll be a white Christmas, though. *(She has removed her coat and goes out to hang it up. She hasn't noticed the Yamaha. From off:)* I pushed the card through number 49's letter box. Shouldn't think we'll get anymore cards from people we haven't sent to, do you?

Fred: Well, if we do they'll definitely be after-thoughts.

Hannah: You'll have to look at this front door again, Fred. It's still not shutting to properly.

(HANNAH re-enters. FRED strikes a pose, arms outstretched to draw HANNAH's attention to the Yamaha).

Fred: Di-daaaaa!

(HANNAH sees it and acts with schoolgirl delight).

Hannah: That's my Christmas present? Ooh, Fred, whatever is it? It's too soon yet - we always wait till Christmas Day.

Fred: I know, but I couldn't hide this thing any longer. I nearly bust a gut dragging it in from the garage as soon as you'd left the house. I was worried in case

you came back before I'd got it in here.

Hannah: Oooh, Fred! You've had that hidden in the garage? I never noticed.

Fred: Sorry it's not wrapped very elegantly. It's an awkward shape and size.

Hannah: I'd better go and get my present to you.

Fred: Tomorrow. Open this now.

(HANNAH touches her present tentatively).

Fred: Just pull the paper off - it's not wrapped properly.

Hannah: All right - here goes! *(She removes the paper and squeals with delight).*

Oooh, Fred, a Yamaha! Oooh, it's lovely - really lovely!

Fred: Well, I knew that's what you wanted.

Hannah: Oh, it's lovely, Fred. Fancy you buying me this. Must have cost a few bob. Why d'you spend so much?

Fred: Because you're worth it!

Hannah: Aaah! *(She kisses him affectionately, then sits at the keyboard).* Thank you, love. Is it plugged in? Oh, yes. *(She plays a few notes).*

Fred: Go on, give us a tune *(He takes the stool or chair and places it in position for her).*

Hannah: O.K. Sit down and be an audience. *(She sits and prepares to play).* Here goes!

Fred: Oh, hang on. Have a sip of this first and tell me what you think. *(He passes her a glass of wine. She tastes it).*

Hannah: Hmm, that's nice. Where's it from?

Fred: Tesco.

Hannah: No, I mean, where was it brewed?

Fred: Blimey, you don't brew wine, love. You're thinking of beer.

Hannah: Oh, all right. So, beer is brewed and wine is what?

Fred: Well, it's it's er *(He picks up the bottle and glances at the label).* It's "produced". This wine is, anyway. "Produced in Italy".

Hannah: Right. Well it's very nice, Fred. We're coming up in the world, I must say. Italian wine and Japanese organs. *(She strokes the Yamaha appreciatively).*

Fred: You like it?

Hannah: It's lovely, Fred. The best Christmas present you've ever given me.

Fred: Top of the range. I know I should have kept it till tomorrow. I'll have to think of some other surprise.

Hannah: *(Rising and giving Fred a peck on the cheek).* You're the surprise, Fred, giving me a Yamaha. *(She sinks into an armchair left and picks up a magazine).*

Fred: *(With mock formality).* A Yamaha CVP-210, to be precise, with digital effects, registration memory and 261 accompaniment styles. Your very good health, Mrs Foscett, and may this Christmas bring comfort and delight to you and that remarkable husband of yours.

Hannah: I'll drink to that, Fred, and to our first Christmas in the Avenue.

Fred: *(Stands behind the easy chair right, striking a pose, facing the audience and speaking as if delivering a speech).* I think I can safely say, as we approach the end of another year, that things have gone very well for the Fosketts. Their beautiful new home in Glenthorne Avenue, *[He could add the name of the town or district where play is being performed]* is the envy of all their neighbours.

Hannah: Is it?

Fred: *(Normal voice).* Well, it would be if they got in and saw it. *(Orating).* One gazes in spellbound admiration at the quality of the furniture and fittings Fred Foscett has provided for his dear wife; one marvels at his refinement and - er

....

Hannah: Taste.

Fred: And taste; one gasps in amazement at the lavish decor and - er -

Hannah: State of the art lighting.

Fred: State of the art lighting, and one wonders -

Hannah: Where the idle sod got the money for it all?

Fred: Where the idle - *(Normal tone).* People don't think that, do they?

Hannah: *(Rising and moving to sit in a chair downstage side of the coffee-table).*

Well, I don't know, Fred, do I? I mean the neighbours are bound to wonder what you do for a livin', aren't they? We've been livin' here six months now and the whole Avenue's seen you polishin' the Merc every Sunday afternoon, but they never see you drivin' off to work in it on a Monday morning.

Fred: *(Rising and moving to sit in a chair at the downstage side of the coffee-table).* Mrs Foscett, you speak truly, ma'am. *(Normal tone).* Mind you, a lot of people work from home nowadays, don't they? Everybody round here will naturally assume that from Monday to Friday I am engaged constantly in the sphere of commerce, surfing the internet, brokering deals with New York from the seclusion of Maison Foscett.

Hannah: Is that what you tell 'em down the pub?

Fred: Not exactly, no - I'm not sure the subject of work's ever come up.

Hannah: It must have. You know what the other fellers in this street do.

Fred: Do I?

Hannah: Well, you told me Jim Tasker's a solicitor and Marvin Lemm's an estate agent.

Fred: Oh, that's right, so I did. And Lonnie Melders is a store manager. I remember now and Arnie Podmore now what's he do?

Hannah: So what about you?

Fred: Eh?

Hannah: Well if they told you what they did, they must've asked what you did.

Fred: Yes, I suppose so.

Hannah: (*With mounting impatience*). And what did you say?

Fred: I haven't a clue. Something I suppose.

Hannah: (*Exasperated*). Well, that's marvellous, isn't it? You must've told 'em something but now you can't remember what.

Fred: Well, is it all that important?

Hannah: Important? 'Course it's important!

Fred: I probably just told 'em I'm following in the footsteps of my dear old dad and his father before him.

Hannah: Which is true.

Fred: Absolutely.

Hannah: You're a crook.

Fred: I'm a crook look, do you have to be so blunt about things, Han? I am not a crook. I'm a -

Hannah: - Receiver of stolen property.

Fred: I'm a dealer - in goods of various kinds. I handle a wide range of high - class merchandise - jewellery, electrical goods, computers, etcetera - all of which I obtain from -

Hannah: - Thieves.

Fred: business clients whose integrity I trust. (*HANNAH snorts, cynically. She rises, picks up her wine glass by now almost empty, drains it and moves to make unnecessary adjustments to the Christmas Tree decorations*). Look, I have confidence in the people I deal with. I don't question their business practices and they don't question mine. I have a good working relationship with my clients and that relationship is based on mutual respect.

Hannah: Respect? For the likes of Stig Taplin and Harvey Grain? You must be jokin'!

Fred: (*Affronted and absurdly formal*). Not at all! My business dealings with those gentlemen go back many years, Han. We have prospered by respecting each other's privacy.

Hannah: You mean the less you know about each other the less the police can get out of you!

Fred: The police? Where do the police come in?

Hannah: (*Leaving the tree and preparing to take her empty wine-glass out to the kitchen*). Through this door one of these days.

Fred: (*Annoyed*). Oh, now you're just being silly, Han, I tell you

Hannah: (*Gesturing to FRED to hand her his now empty wine-glass*). Why can't

you just do an honest job like everybody else round here?

Fred: *(Forcing a laugh as he hands her his glass).* Honest? I am honest, compared with the likes of Jim Tasker and Marvin Lemm, a solicitor and an estate agent! They make me look like the Angel Gabriel's white haired old grandma.

Hannah: Ooh, Fred - don't blaspheme! You didn't ought

(The phone rings. FRED answers it. HANNAH goes out to the kitchen).

Fred: Fred Foskett Oh, hello, Stig, Happy Christmas *(Amiably)*. What can I do you for? What? All right, all right, calm down - what's the matter? Yes? Right Yes? *(Suddenly agitated)*. What! The law! 'Ere, you're not ringing from your place, are you - you're phone might be tapped? Yes. What? They're checking the warehouse? well, as long as you and Harvey aren't keeping' anything in there over Christmas you've got nothing to worry about, have you? The last lot of goods? yes? no, I've got nothing moved it all on *(With mounting unease, he looks around the room)* At least, I moved most of it on! *(His gaze is fixed on the Yamaha)*.

(The front door bell rings).

Joyce: *(From off stage).* Yooeee! It's only me. The door's not shut properly.

Hannah: *(Rising and crossing to the door).* Hello, Joyce, come on through. *(To FRED, whose attention is wholly taken up with the telephone conversation).* You'll have to do something with about the front door, Fred. *(Standing at the door addressing JOYCE who has not yet appeared).* Happy Christmas, Joyce and thanks for the card, why don't you take your coat off a minute? Hang it up there.

Fred: Look, Stig, I don't see you've got a problem. I mean, none of the goods came out of this area, did they? What! Local? How local? Glenthorne Avenue! You perishin' moron! Do you realise! Glenthorne Avenue - that's where! Now listen, this is what

Hannah: Do you want to see what Fred's given me?

Fred: *(Hearing this, in alarm).* I'll have to ring you back there's somebody Stay where you are!

(He puts the phone down and rushes to stand in front of the Yamaha as HANNAH and JOYCE enter).

Joyce: *(Cheerfully garrulous, almost without taking a breath).* Hi, Fred. All ready

for tomorrow? Just had to mend a tear in Jim's cape he's off round the estate with the Friends of the Donkey Sanctuary, singing carols and collecting. They'll be down here soon, I expect, so get your money ready. They've got a sleigh, all lit up. Marvin Lem's horse pulls it. They wanted one of the donkeys but they get nervous if they're made to pull things. Arnie Podmore sits on the sleigh in whiskers and Santa gear looking' a wally only don't tell him I said so The others dress up in capes and ring doorbells and shake collecting tins - and sing carols, of course except Arnie; he couldn't sing to save his life - that's why he's Father Christmas in the sleigh. I wonder you don't join the Friends, Fred; they raise a lot of money for the donkeys. I bet you know most of them. You'd have a lot in common - with the Friends, I mean, not the donkeys. What was that you wanted to show me, Hannah? I mustn't stay too long. Only popped in to wish you Happy Christmas. I say, doesn't your lounge look lovely!

(While she has been speaking, FRED has taken off the cardigan he was wearing and has draped it over the Yamaha - without turning his back on JOYCE and therefore not very effectively. He leans back on the instrument, spreading himself over it as best he can so as to hide as much of it from her as possible).

Fred: *(Desperately, before his wife can reply).* Well now!

Joyce: What?

Fred: Er - well now, are you Joyce? Feeling well and all that?

Joyce: I haven't been ill.

Fred: Good. I'm glad you're well - er, not under the weather or anything. Er - weather's quite good, isn't it? Forecast says it's going to be a mild Christmas. Dry - no rain - or - er - snow.

Joyce: Oh I wouldn't mind a bit of snow. Can't remember when we last had a white Christmas, can you, Hannah?

Fred: Don't ask her - she's colour-blind.

Hannah: Fred, let me show Joyce

Fred: "White Christmas" - I love that film, don't you? It'll be on telly sometime this week. *(Sings).* "*I'm dreamin' of a white ah - Christmas, just like the ones - ah we used to know* "

Joyce: *(Amused).* Oh, dear me, Fred - where's it hurt?

Hannah: *(Mystified).* You like "White Christmas"? You've always said you can't stand it? Now, move out of the way, Fred, and let Joyce see -

Fred: *(Gazing wildly at the fourth wall).* - the Christmas card from Ibiza? Yes, of course, she can see it. We've got friends who live there.

(He steers JOYCE Down Centre. They face the audience as if looking at unseen Christmas cards arranged on an unseen piece of furniture).

Fred: Ever seen a Christmas card from Ibiza, Joyce? Look at that - fascinating, isn't it?

Joyce: *(Unimpressed).* Shepherds - Wise Men - Mary and Joseph Oh, yes, really different, isn't it, Fred?

Fred: Yes. Well - you don't normally see angels in spangled bikinis.

Hannah: *(Becoming annoyed).* Fred!

Fred: Intriguing, the way cards from far flung countries reflect their cultural history. Now, look at this one from the Isle of Man

Hannah: Fred - what's the matter with you? I want to show -

Fred: Ever been to the Isle of Man, Joyce? Beautiful place. We spent our honeymoon there. Chap who owned the hotel was a real character. What a voice he'd got. You could hear him a mile off. In his spare time, he was the local town crier.

Joyce: Douglas?

Fred: No, Bernard, I think his name was. Marvellous fortnight - I'll never forget it.

Hannah: *(Sourly).* You already have - it was the Isle of Wight, not the Isle of Man. Now then, Joyce -

Fred: I can hear your dog barkin' something frantic, Joyce. *(He ushers her towards the door, steering her clear of the Yamaha).* You'd better go and check.

Joyce: *(Bewildered).* We haven't got a dog only a gerbil.

Fred: That's what I can hear, then. You'd better see if it's all right. Pop round for a drink on Christmas Day. *(As Fred almost pushes her out).*

Joyce: We'll be at Jim's mother's on Christmas Day.

Fred: We'll make it next Christmas, then. Don't forget. Bye, Joyce!

Hannah: *(Aghast).* For goodness sake, Fred, what's goin' on? Why d'you shove her out like that?

Fred: Nosy madam - we don't want her pokin' around.

Hannah: What you mean - pokin' around? What's there to poke around into? We've got nothing to hide. I only wanted to show her - *(The penny drops).* The Yamaha! *(Almost a snarl).*

Fred: *(Defensively)* Now, Han -

Hannah: You didn't want her to see it. It's nicked, isn't it?

Fred: No -

Hannah: My Christmas present! You bought me a hot Yamaha for Christmas!

Fred: I didn't -

Hannah: *(Almost tearful in her anger).* You tight-fisted rotten - You couldn't even

get me a nice Christmas present without

(During the following lines, the sound of carol singing ("Good King Wenceslas") gradually grows louder).

Fred: I didn't know! Honest, Han, I didn't know - not till Stig rang.

Hannah: *(Furious)*. You got it from Stig Taplin and Harvey Grain and you didn't know it was nicked!!

Fred: And what's worse, the stupid devils nicked it from round here.

Hannah: From the Avenue? So anybody might drop in and recognise it! We've got to move it out of here quick!

Fred: We're not moving it. Those cretins Stig and Harvey can move it. *(He picks up the phone and dials)*. They got me into this mess, so they can get me out. Hello - Stig? Fred - now listen - that Yamaha I had off you - I kept it for yes, it's round here now Look, I want you at 24, Glenthorne Avenue on the double to get it away what? The police are still there? Want to see your paperwork? Have you got any paperwork? Well, that's a relief! Not for you maybe, but it is for me: I mean, if you haven't got any paperwork, they won't trace anything back here, will they? What's Harvey doing? Is he there with you? Well, try and get him out of there with the van yes, the van understood? And send him round here to shift the Yamaha pronto. *(He puts the phone down and groans. To HANNAH)*. Better give us a hand to move this, love. Temporary, like.

(They each take an end of the Yamaha and are about to start moving it when the doorbell rings. HANNAH screams).

Fred: This way!

(They struggle to move the instrument but tug in opposite directions. The bell rings again and KATY MELDER's voice is heard singing the final lines of the carol).

Katy: *Ye who will now bless the poor
Shall yourselves find ble-ess-ing.*

(She rings the doorbell).

Hannah: *(Agitated)*. It's Katy Melders. Don't answer it!

Fred: She'll know we're in.

Katy: *We wish you a merry Christmas,
We wish you a merry Christmas
We wish you a merry Christmas
And a Happy New Year.*

(Leaving the stool / chair where it is, FRED and HANNAH shove the Yamaha over to the window and drape the floor length curtain over it. KATY peers round the door as HANNAH moves to the stool / chair and sits).

Katy: Yoo-hoo! It's only me. The door wasn't properly shut.

Fred: *(Weakly).* Hello, Katy.

Katy: *(Entering).* 'Lo, Hannah. *(KATY is holding a collecting tin. She surveys the room).* You look ready for Christmas, I must say. Tree looks nice. Where's the mistletoe? Now if there'd been a bit of mistletoe over where you're standing, Fred, I'd have come and taken advantage of it.

Fred: *(Quickly).* How's the carol singing going?

Katy: Quite well. Better than last year mind you, we could have done with a rehearsal. We're a bit rusty, musically speaking. But the collecting's going well which, of course, is why I called. *(She rattles her tin).* I knew you two lovely people would want to support our fundraising *(Proffering the tin to FRED)* at this season of good-will to all donkeys.

(HANNAH finds her handbag [beneath the coffee table perhaps] and searches for a donation. FRED delves into his pocket).

Katy: You're very kind. Thanks ever so. *(As coins are put into her tin).* I'd love to stop and chat but I'd better catch up with the others or they'll be in some other street and I'll lose them. Now, be sure to have a wonderful Chris - hey, what's that?

Fred and Hannah: *(Following the direction of her gaze in alarm).* What?

Katy: That! What have you got over there behind the curtains?

(She moves over to the bulging curtain covering the Yamaha. HANNAH rapidly joins FRED in getting between her and the instrument).

Hannah: It's a secret!

Katy: What?

Hannah: It's a secret. It's Fred's Christmas present. I mean it's the present I'm giving Fred but it's a surprise. A surprise present. From me. To Fred.

Katy: Yes, I think I get your drift.

Fred: Well, all the best

Katy: But is that a good place to hide it? I mean, isn't it a bit

Hannah: I'm not really hiding it. I mean, Fred knows it's there only he doesn't know exactly what it is.

Fred: Hence, the surprise.

Katy: Well, I hope you'll like it, Fred. It's big enough, whatever it is. I couldn't just take a peep, could I? I mean, it wouldn't matter if I knew what it was, would it?

Fred and Hannah: No! (*KATY starts*).

Fred: (*Steering KATY towards the door*). You don't want to lose the others, Katy. Why don't you and Lonnie pop in after Christmas and you can have a go on it then.

Katy: Have a go on it?

Fred: I mean, you can see it er, whatever it is.

Katy: You said "have a go on it".

Hannah: He meant

Katy: If it's a surprise present, how do you know it's something you can have a go on?

Fred: I don't! I haven't a clue what it is. It could be anythin'. I just thought

(FRED'S attempt to eject KATY from the room is thwarted by the entrance of JIM TASKER. He is holding a carol book).

Jim: Hey, is that a Yamaha CVP-210 you've got in the window' Fred? Just been having a sly peep at it from the outside. Don't mind, do you?

Fred: Er Er well

Jim: Digital effects, registration memory and 261 accompaniment styles you don't want to leave it on show like that. You'll have it nicked.

Katy: Now you've given the game away, Jim: it's supposed to be a surprise present for Fred. Hannah's got it for him on the quiet.

Hannah: (*Alarmed*). No! I didn't get it!

Katy: But, you said

Fred: Er what she means is

Jim: Marvin Lemm's had one stolen.

(A brief but excruciating silence).

Katy: Marvin's had an organ stolen?

Jim: A Yamaha. Somebody pinched it last week. He'd only had it a fortnight.

(The phone rings. FRED answers it. During the telephone conversation that follows, it is obvious that the update FRED is receiving from STIG is anything but cheery).

Fred: Hello, yes? What! I mean, er what was that you said? *(Pause)*. Harvey's doing WHAT? *(FRED glances in alarm at JIM and Katy, then turns his back on them)*. Yes, I know that's what I told you to do but, er, on second thoughts, I don't think that's a good idea at all. It's not convenient not convenient at all just now Try and get him on his mobile. *(FRED turns briefly and meets the gaze of those listening to his side of the conversation)*. Hello? Sti er hello? Are you there? *(Trying to sound calm and business like)*. Yes, now, explain to Mr Grain that it would be very desirable to re-schedule the collection time *(STIG is clearly puzzled)*. To re-schedule the collection time Well, *(He looks at his watch)* for an hour, to be on the safe side er, I mean, to fit in with present circumstances Yes? Never mind that, just see to it! *(FRED puts the phone down)*.

Katy: *(After an embarrassed pause during which it becomes plain that FRED intends making no comment on the above call)*. Really? Marvin was burgled last week and lost his Yamaha?

Jim: Er yes. So you want to be careful with yours, Fred. Got it security coded?

Fred: *(Weakly)*. Oh, yes.

Katy: How d'you know?

Fred: What?

Katy: How d'you know it's coded. I thought it was a surprise present from Hannah?

Fred: Well, it's like this

Jim: Yes, but Hannah says she didn't get it.

Hannah: What I mean is

Katy: And we never knew you were musical, Fred. You've been hidin' your light under a thingy, haven't you?

Jim: Joyce and I thought it was you who played, Hannah?

Hannah: Well, I er

Fred: We both do! Both of us play. *(Floundering)*. Sometimes duets and sometimes er, not duets er singlets. She plays a singlet, then Ier play one. So er the organ's a surprise present for both of us, really.

(Pause while KATY and JIM consider this).

Katy: Who from?

Fred: What?

Katy: Who's it a surprise present from?

Hannah: (*Wildly*). That's the surprise!

Katy: Oh.

Jim: Yes, but what I don't get is

(*He is interrupted by BERYL LEMM entering the hall calling*).

Beryl: (*Loud but expressionless*). Coooooo! It's only me! The front door wasn't properly shut. (*She enters the room, with a collecting tin and a carol book. To KATY and JIM*). Oh, you're here. Arnie wondered where you'd both got to. We're having a rest at the corner of Lobelia Grove; then we're singing *Little Donkey* and moving on down Delphinium Crescent. Mind you, we need to practise *Little Donkey* I think Marvin assumes we all know it but some of us have never sung it before. (*To HANNAH*). You wouldn't have any vaseline, would you, Hannah? Arnie's complaining about the Santa Claus whiskers making his chin sore.

Hannah: (*Eager for an opportunity of even a brief escape*). There's a jar in the bathroom. I'll pop and get it.

Fred: (*Hastily*). You're all right, Han, I'll go.

(*But HANNAH is already on her way. Exit HANNAH. BERYL stands Up centre*).

Katy: Fred, can I have a look while she's out of the room

Fred: What!

Katy: A teensie weensie look?

Fred: (*Anxiously*). She'll be back in a sec

Katy: (*Coaxing, in a baby voice*). An eenie-meenie, teeny-weeny peek?

Beryl: Peek at what?

Katy: There's an electronic organ behind that curtain. It is a surprise present for Fred and Hannah from a mysterious well-wisher. They don't know who sent it, do you Fred?

Fred: Er, well, I (*Moves to block any attempt at unveiling the Yamaha*).

Beryl: Marvin Lemm's had an organ nicked. You want to be careful.

Fred: Yes, I know.

Beryl: He's dead upset. He says the only funny thing about it is whoever pinched it'll have to get it repaired before they can make any money out of it.

Fred: (*Weakly*). Oh, yes?

Beryl: Yes, it's meant to have a whole range of different rhythms you can choose from when you're playing, but it's stuck on the rumba beat.

Katy: (*Amused*). A rumba beat, honestly?

Beryl: No matter what you want to play, it's got a rumba beat.

Katy: How marvellous! That's one thief who's in for a bit of a surprise, then, Fred.

Fred: (*Desperately feigning amusement*). Oh, yes, definitely.

(*HANNAH enters with a Vaseline jar, which she hands to BERYL*).

Hannah: There you are, then, Beryl.

Beryl: Oh, thanks, I'll make sure you get it back. While your back was turned we were trying to persuade Fred to give us a peep at the Yamaha. I don't suppose ...

Fred: (*To HANNAH*). Beryl was sayin' that whoever's stolen Marvin Lemm's Yamaha ...

(*The telephone rings. FRED answers it. The others stand in silence hearing every word FRED says. During the conversation, FRED grows increasingly agitated*).

Fred: Hello? You can't contact him? But I told you to ... he's not answering his mobile? ... so he's still on his way ... Well, that's your lookout ... it's all your fault, anyway! Hello? Hello? (*He is talking to himself; STIG has put the phone down*).

(*FRED realises that he has an attentive audience*).

Fred: Er ... just my old mother ... wanted to know what time I was picking her up tomorrow ... to bring her round for Christmas dinner ...

Hannah: But she's at your sister's in Australia!

(*FRED glares at her in fury*).

Fred: (*With immense self-control*). Oh, did I say my mother? Sorry, I meant yours.

Hannah: But my mother's been dead five years.

Fred: Just as well we only got a small turkey, then, isn't it? (*Laughs feebly*). She won't have much of an appetite.

Hannah: (*Angrily*). Who was that on the phone?

Fred: (*Snatching at any straw in his eagerness to change the subject*). Perhaps you ladies could have a quick glimpse of the Yamaha ... er, before you go on your way. Though I know you want to get off as quickly as ...

(A ring of door bell is followed immediately by MARVIN LEMM and ARNIE PODMORE pushing the door open. ARNIE is in Father Christmas outfit, complete with whiskers).

Marvin: Sorry to intrude the front door wasn't shut properly. We're looking for our lost troops. Ah, there you all are. *(To FRED)*. I say, Fred, I like that Yamaha CVP-210 you've got in the window it's just like the one I've had stolen digital effects, registration memory, 261 accompaniment styles. Only thing is mine's got a fault needs a bit of attention. Good organ otherwise. *(To ARNIE)*. Any lead on that, by the way, Arnie?

Arnie: *(In a muffled tone which the audience should find barely coherent)*. We think we may be on to something *(He pulls off his whiskers)*. I say, we think we may be on to something *(Noticing the Vaseline)*. Is that Vaseline, Beryl? Thank the Lord! My face feels like it's on fire!

Beryl: He's got really tender skin for a policeman. *(She hands ARNIE the jar. He sits on the stool / chair and begins to rub his face with Vaseline)*.

Fred and Hannah: *(Horried)*. A policeman!!

(This outburst causes all present to stare at FRED and HANNAH).

Beryl: Detective Inspector, actually.

Hannah: *(Attempting to sound calm)*. A police inspector? Oh, good just what we need round here, if people's homes are being broken into. Don't know what the world's coming to, really I don't, when there's no respect for private property and your possessions are nicked by scumbags like Stig

Fred: *(A deafening sneeze designed to stop HANNAH in her tracks)*. A-TISH-OO!! A-TISH-OO!!

Katy: Got a cold Fred? Sounds nasty.

Fred: No, just a tickle bit of dust got up my nose.

Hannah: *(Resenting any implication that her home is dirty)*. Dust! What dust?

Jim: *(Attempting humour)*. What "dust" mean, Fred? "Dust" imply thy wife's parlour is dusty?

Hannah: He'd better not.

Joyce: *(Entering in a state of agitation)*. Ooh, excuse me bursting in like this - the front door was open, by the way but I've had a shock! I'm all of a dither! Something very funny's going on!

Fred: Tell me about it, I could do with a laugh.

Beryl: What's wrong, Joyce?

Hannah: Here, sit down you look all shook up.

(JOYCE perches on the chair downstage of the coffee table).

Jim: What've you been up to, love?

Joyce: Oh, Jim, I've I've had a funny sort of man at the door. He said he'd come for an organ.

Fred: *(Agonising to himself)* Oh, no!

Marvin: Organ? What organ?

Joyce: Well, that's just it, Marvin! I knew your organ had been stolen and this man looked a right villain if ever I saw one so I said: "I don't know what you're talking about. The only organ I know anything about is a Yamaha that Mr Lemm up the avenue had stolen recently." So he said: "That's probably the one." Then I said: "Well, why've you come here for an organ that's not ours and that's been stolen anyway?"

Beryl: And what did he say?

Joyce: Well, he gives me a funny sort of look and says he must have come to the wrong house.

Fred: *(To himself)* You can say that again.

Jim: Perhaps he came to see Fred and Hannah's organ.

Joyce: Fred and Hannah have an organ?

Marvin: A Yamaha. Same model as mine.

Joyce: Oh well, yes perhaps that's the one the fellow was on about. *(She looks at FRED enquiringly).*

Arnie: *(Preparing to move to the door).* Where is he now?

Joyce: I dunno. He went off up the avenue. I just shut the door, waited a minute or two, then came round here.

Katy: It's a bit weird, isn't it?

Fred: *(Who has been covering his face with his hand).* I don't believe it!

Arnie: What?

Fred: *(Alarmed to realise that ARNIE heard his last remark).* Er I don't believe it's weird. I er I think er

Marvin: *(Rather agitated over possible developments in the case of his stolen Yamaha).* What? What do you think, man?

Fred: Well, it's just that *(He is interrupted by the door-bell).* I think it's my brother

Hannah: Brother!

Fred: Harvey my bother Harvey. I invited him round for

(HARVEY appears in the doorway an amiable dimwit).

Harvey: Hello, Mr Foscett.

Fred: An organ recital.

(A shriek from HANNAH, who staggers to the upstage chair and sits).

Harvey: Stig sent me round

Fred: *(Desperately).* For a look at the organ, Harvey. Yes, that's right.

(FRED leads HARVEY downstage. ARNIE stands and moves out of their way, taking up a position where he is actually leaning on the Yamaha).

Fred: First, let me introduce you. This is Joyce. Joyce, this is my brother Harvey. Katy, my brother Harvey.

Harvey: Brother?

Fred: *(Pushing HARVEY on to the stool / chair).* Hannah, my brother Harvey

Beryl: Haven't they met before?

Fred: *(Uncomprehending).* Wha ...?

Beryl: You're introducing Hannah to her own brother-in-law. Haven't they met before?

Fred: *(With exaggerated mirth).* Ah, of course! How stupid

Arnie: Why does he call you Mr Foskett?

Fred: Pardon?

Arnie: *(Suspiciously)* Why doesn't your brother call you Fred?

Fred: Er respect. He's my younger brother. It's the way we were brought up.

Harvey: *(His face twisted in incomprehension).* Excuse me, Mr Foskett, I don't understa

Fred: Harvey, it's Christmas New Year soon. Why don't we scrap the old family tradition. Call me Fred.

Harvey: *(Smiling inanely).* Oh, all right Mr Foskett, if that's what you want.

Fred: Fred, brov, Fred. Happy Christmas. How're the kids?

Harvey: *(Mystified again).* What kids?

Arnie: What I want to know is

(The next four questions are all directed at HARVEY in rapid succession).

Joyce: Why did you come to my house? Don't you know where your brother lives?

Marvin: Why did you say my stolen Yamaha was "probably the one" you'd come about?

Arnie: Who's Stig?

(HARVEY stands open-mouthed. FRED pushes him down on the stool again).

Everyone turns for an answer to FRED).

Fred: *(picking up the brazil nuts from the telephone table).* Brazil nut, anyone?

Hannah: *(Suddenly inspired at the sight of her man defeated)* It's obvious!

(Now all heads turn to HANNAH, including FRED's).

Fred: Is it?

Hannah: *(Ignoring him).* Fred and I have only lived in the Avenue six months. Harvey hasn't been here before and got the number of the house wrong. He's very hard of hearing so when you, Joyce, asked if he'd come about a Yamaha stolen from Mr Lemm, he said "probably" because he thought you said "a Yamaha token from er Sister Em." Emmie's the sister of Fred and Harvey, see, and she's giving Harvey a token a voucher for organ lessons as a Christmas present, like. And Harvey's come round to hear our Yamaha and have a go on it.

Fred: *(Impressed).* Pure genius!

Joyce: He doesn't seem very hard of hearing to me. *(To HARVEY)* You can hear what I'm saying, can't you?

Harvey: Yes. *(FRED nudges him vigorously).* I mean, beg pardon?

Arnie: *(Unimpressed)* Who's Stig? Not Stig Taplin, by any chance?

Fred: *(As HARVEY opens his mouth to reply).* You'll have to speak up, Arnie. *(He points to his own ears to make his meaning clear).*

Arnie: *(Louder).* Who is Stig? Do you mean Stig Taplin?

(HARVEY looks anxiously to FRED for help).

Fred: No, he's referring to his er to his dog. Yes, that's right, his pet dog, Stig.

Arnie: But he said Stig sent him round here. When he came in he said: "Stig sent me round".

Hannah: *(As FRED struggles for inspiration).* "Round the bend!" He was about to say "Stig sent me round the bend." He's a terrible dog barking all the time

Arnie: What kind of dog?

(FRED and HANNAH together).

Fred: Corgi!

Hannah: Rottweiler!

Fred: It's a cross between a Corgi and a Rottweiler very strange looking animal!

Arnie: *(With more than a touch of sarcasm).* It must be!

Hannah: Sends Harvey crazy barking at him all the while.

Beryl: Well, why doesn't he shut it in another part of the house?

Fred: He'd still hear the dog barking.

Arnie: But he's supposed to be deaf!

Fred and Hannah: Not that deaf!

Jim: *(Interrupting).* This is ridiculous! We're supposed to be carol singing and look at the time! *(Consulting his watch).* It'll be too late to do much more if we hang around any longer.

Marvin: Yes, but I think this guy *(indicating HARVEY)* knows something about my Yamaha. What do you say, Arnie?

Arnie: *(Fumbling under his Santa outfit for a notebook and pencil).* I say you lot carry on without me. I'll take down a few details about this gentleman *(indicating HARVEY)* and catch you up in a while.

Jim: Fair enough. Don't be long, though.

Arnie: *(To HARVEY).* Step into the next room for a minute, will you, Mr Foskett.

(HARVEY doesn't realise he is being addressed)

Arnie: *(Raising his voice).* Mr Foskett, I said we'll just step into the next room, shall we?

Fred: *(Bewildered)* All right, Arnie, coming.

Arnie: Not you your brother.

Fred: Brother? Oh, yes, Harvey. *(Stands beside HARVEY, speaking quietly into his ear. HARVEY stares at the audience)* Harvey, go into the next room with Arnie er, Mr Podmore Detective Inspector Podmore, that is. He wants to ask you a few questions so just watch ... what you're saying!

Katy: Can he hear you, muttering like that?

Fred: What? Oh certainly. He lip-reads.

Katy: But he wasn't looking at your lips.

Fred: Er he was watching me in the mirror. He's a reflective sort, is Harvey.

(ARNIE ushers HARVEY out).

Beryl: Before we go, can we run through "*Little Donkey*"? I wasn't there when you rehearsed it.

Katy: Good idea. I could do with another go at it before we inflict it on the general public.

Marvin: Well, I don't know

Katy: It wouldn't take a minute.

Beryl: Just the first verse would do.

Marvin: That all right with you, Fred? Hannah?

Hannah: (*Beginning to lose her grip on events*). Yes 'course it is.

Katy: Hey, Fred we couldn't have it played on your new Yamaha, could we?

Jim: How about playing it for us, Fred? Here's the music. (*He waves a carol book at FRED*).

Fred: (*Stares, mouth agape, bleating pathetically for a few moments. Then*): Certainly er, yes. Only I can't. I mean, I could but I've got a splinter in me finger. (*Indicates a finger on his right hand*). Very painful can't put any pressure on it. Sorry about that. Otherwise

Katy: Want me to take a look at it, Fred? I am a nurse, after all.

Fred: (*Cries out in panic then pretends he is crying out in pain*). No, actually Hannah got the splinter out earlier but the finger's still very sore.

Jim: What about you then, Hannah? You play as well, don't you? (*Offering her the book*).

Katy: Ooh, yes, go on, Hannah.

Hannah: Well, I don't know

Jim: (*Turning on the charm*). We'd love to hear you play, Hannah. I know I would.

Hannah: (*Yielding*). I don't mind

Fred: (*Alarmed*). She's not had a chance to try it out yet.

Hannah: (*Keen to play*). No, I know, Fred, but

Fred: (*Vainly trying to sound light-hearted*). Don't want to loose yourself down, do you, love?

Katy: I'm sure she wouldn't loose herself down.

Fred: She's nervous playing in public.

Marvin: Never!

Jim: We're not the public. We're just riff-raff.

Beryl: Speak for yourself.

Fred: Brings her out in a rash.

Arnie: Blimey!

Hannah: (*To FRED, confused*). I don't get a rash

Fred: Yes, you do bright scarlet all over your face you've probably never noticed.

Hannah: (*Indignant*). What d'you mean, never noticed?

Marvin: Look, don't worry. Fred Hannah d'you mind if I play? We just want a quick run through of "*Little Donkey*", then we'll get out of your way and let you enjoy Christmas Eve in peace.

Fred: *(As JIM and MARVIN ease the Yamaha away from the window).* No you can't!

Jim: Why not?

Fred: Er the neighbours! Mustn't disturb the neighbours.

Jim: Fred, this is a semi. Joyce and I live next door. We're your neighbours and we're both round here.

Fred: Yes, I know, but

Marvin: *(Moving the stool / chair to the organ).* 'Scuse me, Fred. *(He seats himself at the Yamaha).* Are we plugged in?

Jim: *(Handling the connecting cable).* I'm doing it.

Marvin: Just like mine, this is. Be nice to play something without a rumba beat. *(To the singers).* Okay, everybody "**Little Donkey**" I'll play it over first, then we'll try a verse.

(As MARVIN prepares to play, FRED edges towards the hall. Puzzled, HANNAH mouths "Where are you going?" at him. He indicates, with furtive head movements, that she is to follow. She remains where she is).

(We hear the tune of "Little Donkey" with a rumba beat. MARVIN stops, stands, examines the Yamaha closely, then).

Marvin: Hey! This is mine!

(General reaction. All heads turn to FRED).

Fred: Naaaah that's impossible, Marvin.

Marvin: *(Examining the instrument even more closely).* Here's the scratch marks where our cat tried to sharpen its claws.

Hannah: *(Lamely)* That's the trouble with cats, isn't it? My sister's got a Burmese

Marvin: Never mind your sister's Burmese. How does my Yamaha come to be in your living-room?

Fred: Er perhaps if we all had a nice cup of tea and a mince-pie

Marvin: Mince-pie be blowed

(ARNIE enters, holding his mobile phone).

Arnie: Well, that's interesting. Some of my men have apprehended one of the villains we think are responsible for the robberies that have been taking place round here lately. Unfortunately, about fifteen minutes ago he managed to

give them the slip, but they're on his trail and are in hot pursuit. It's only a matter of

(There is a dramatic banging on the front door. This should be as loud as practicable. No one moves).

Jim: *(Unnecessarily)* Someone at the front door, I think, Fred.

Fred: Hmmm? Didn't hear anything.

(The banging is repeated. Then the door-bell is rung).

Arnie: *(Heavily, after a pause during which no one moves).* I'll answer it, shall I?

Hannah: *(Nervously)* It's all right it's only carol-singers little scroungers we don't open the door it only encourages them! They shouldn't be allowed.

Marvin: What shouldn't carol singing?

Hannah: Yes. *(Then realises what she has said)* Oh, I don't mean

Fred: No, no she doesn't ! After all, you're different you're all well, you're all

Hannah: *(Trying to help him out but failing miserably)* in here.

(STIG's voice is heard in the hall, shouting).

Stig: Are you there, Fred? The door wasn't shut properly. The coppers are after me, Fred they've rumbled the whole she-bang. Have you seen Harvey? He's not come back. They don't know about you, though, Fred. Fred!

(STIG, dishevelled and in a state of panic, now appears in the doorway. ARNIE grabs him).

Arnie: Merry Christmas, Mr Taplin, come and join the party.

(From his Santa outfit, he produces a pair of handcuffs and cuffs himself to STIG. FRED moves across to HANNAH and grabs her hand. They begin edging towards the door. Then).

Fred: Run for it!

(FRED and HANNAH disappear through the door and are pursued by ARNIE, yanking STIG along behind him followed by the others. When the stage is

clear, HARVEY enters, wide-eyed with alarm and bewilderment).

Harvey: Where's everybody gone? *(He peers around the room foolishly. Then he sits at the Yamaha). How's it go?*

(With one finger he tries to pick out the tune of "Little Donkey" and sings rather gratingly as many of the words as he can remember, whilst FRED and HANNAH return with the others still in hot pursuit. They run round him and exit again).

[If possible, the chase could be conducted through the audience, a final exit taking place at the back of the auditorium].

The End

