

# WALKING TALL

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or **FULLY STRETCHED**

## ACT 1

### Scene 1

*7. 00 p.m. on a Friday in late October at the Back o' Beyond Youth Hostel, somewhere up North. The kitchen/dining area. The decor and amenities are basic. The kitchen area L, has an old cooker and whistling kettle, and a primitive sink unit and cupboards with a microwave oven, and a toaster, etc. arranged on top. The window has an opening top light. The tatty curtains are drawn. The dining area R, has a table and non-matching simple wooden chairs, and an old-fashioned kitchen cabinet and other bits and pieces that give the place an air of rude simplicity. On the back wall hang Clive's and Steve's cagoules and hats, and beneath them on the floor are their bulging rucksacks. A door UL leads upstairs while a door R leads to the office, reception and hostel entrance. There is the faded picture of a youthful Queen on the back wall.*

*As the curtain opens Clive is seated on a chair at the side of the table. He is a big lad dressed in corduroy trousers and a thick sweater. He is contentedly applying dubbin to his walking boots and listening to a tape of The Spinners on his portable radio. He is quietly singing along to the music. He pauses in his task to take a sip of tea from his flask, then returns to the*

*business of polishing and singing. Steve enters UL, hands plunged deep into pockets. He is dressed in jeans and a tee-shirt. He looks anything but content. He goes over to the window, parts the curtains a little and sighs.*

**STEVE.** Bleak...! bleak...! bleak!

*( Clive looks up and pauses in his polishing and singing, but does not respond. He then continues with both. Steve comes over and turns off the radio. Then with great emotion.)* God! *( After another pause Clive continues polishing and singing unaccompanied. Steve appeals to him.)* What the hell are we doing in this place?

**CLIVE.** I've known worse.

**STEVE.** Kazakhstan? *( Clive is determined not to be drawn. Steve paces about.)* I can't believe I let myself get talked into this! It seemed like a good idea after a few pints in the Dog and Ferret. You do realise it's blowing a gale out there?

**CLIVE.** It'll have died down by morning.

**STEVE.** That's not what the weather man reckoned. "Conditions worsening over night," he said. "May cause some structural damage," he said. What's it going to do to us out there in The Devil's Pantry or wherever it is we're going?

**CLIVE.** Hell's Kitchen.

**STEVE.** Even worse.

**CLIVE.** You're determined not to enjoy this, aren't you?

**STEVE.** Enjoy? Look Clive, mate, I spent my last holiday basking on a beach in Benidorm with topless girls cavorting round me playing beach volley-ball, and Bacardi and Coke on tap. You're not even allowed the consolation of a can of beer in this place. "Enjoy" isn't a word you should use lightly.

**CLIVE.** Well, as you're here, and as there's no getting out of it, I suggest you try to be a bit more positive. Have some tea.

*( He offers his flask.)*

**STEVE.** It beats me how you can drink that stuff.

**CLIVE.** There's nothing like the taste of flask tea.

**STEVE.** God! *( He moves back to the window and looks out again. Clive takes a drink.)* Couldn't we postpone it till the weather improves?

**CLIVE.** You'd never be able to show your face in the Dog and Ferret again.

**STEVE.** You're right. I'd be the laughing stock of the dominoes team.

**CLIVE.** October is unpredictable.

**STEVE.** You'd think he'd turn the heating up a bit, the tight bastard!

**CLIVE.** You should put a jumper on.

**STEVE.** At least the bedbugs will all have died of cold!

**CLIVE.** That's not fair. In my experience hostels are always very clean.

**STEVE.** What about the squashed banana under the bed?

**CLIVE.** That's the guests, not the management. You can't blame Eric for everything. Guests are expected to tidy up after themselves. It's what keeps costs down.

**STEVE.** Guests?

**CLIVE.** That's what we are, yes.

**STEVE.** He makes me feel like I've just crawled in from out of the garden.

**CLIVE.** (*holding his boots up*) There, that should do it.

**STEVE.** If you rub them any more they'll go into hole.

**CLIVE.** You've got to look after your boots Steve. Keeping your feet warm and dry is half the battle. (*He puts his boots down on the table.*) I hope you've dubbinned yours?

**STEVE.** They're new.

**CLIVE.** You're asking for trouble wearing new boots. You're going to end up with blisters. Make sure you wear two pairs of socks.

**STEVE.** Yes, mother.

**CLIVE.** I'm serious. It's eighteen miles of hard slog.

**STEVE.** Good God! I haven't walked eighteen miles in my whole life! Are you sure we know where we're going? Have we got a map?

**CLIVE.** Don't worry about that, I'll do the map-reading. Your only problem' ll be if you lose sight of me in the mist: you'll need to keep your whistle handy.

**STEVE.** It sounds a bit more serious now than in the Dog and Ferret.

**CLIVE.** Of course it's serious. People have died doing this you know.

**STEVE.** Bloody hell!

**CLIVE.** But only because they weren't properly prepared. Just make sure you've got enough layers on and all your equipment's adequate.

**STEVE.** Nothing wrong with *my* equipment.

**CLIVE.** I mean your walking gear, waterproofs and so on.

**STEVE.** It's all brand new, all state of the art, straight out of Millett's. What about rations?

**CLIVE.** It's a good job you've got me to take care of you: I did it this afternoon. Just the flasks to fill before we set off at first light.

**STEVE.** Ay, ay, Cap' n!

**CLIVE.** We'll bunk down early tonight.

**STEVE.** Bunk down!

**CLIVE.** It's a hostelling term. It's a way of life is hostelling.

**STEVE.** If you say that once more....

**CLIVE.** (*rising quickly*) I'll get the supper on.

**STEVE.** Now you're talking! Good lad! Supper! What a lovely word! What's the recipe today, Clive?

**CLIVE.** Beans.

**STEVE.** Beans?

**CLIVE.** I thought we'd keep it simple.

**STEVE.** My cup runneth over! I mean I wasn't expecting paella or anything, but beans for God's sake! I thought you said you were a dab-hand in the kitchen?

**CLIVE.** Only with beans. D' you want them plain or with Marmite?

**STEVE.** God!

**CLIVE.** Safer with plain, perhaps.

**STEVE.** I bags the bottom bunk! (*he selects a cigarette.*)

**CLIVE.** On toast.

**STEVE.** Oh good, he does toast! Well pile on the butter.

**CLIVE.** I never thought of butter...

**STEVE.** Bloody hell!

**CLIVE.** Yes plain beans on toast I think.

**STEVE.** A classic!

**CLIVE.** It's always very acceptable is that.

**STEVE.** (*applauding him*) An intriguing decision chef...most exciting!... And for accompaniments? Roulé de poulet flambé? Fricassée de pommes de terre Ariadne?

(*Steve takes a chair over to the window.*)

**CLIVE.** We haven't brought anything else with us Steve.

**STEVE.** I need a smoke. I wonder if I could sneak a quick one? (*He puts the cigarette between his lips, stands on the chair and opens the window, and the wind howls in. He shuts it quickly.*) Perhaps not.

**CLIVE.** If Eric sees you with that we'll both be out on our ear.

**STEVE.** (*putting the chair back*) I think I'll have one outside while you're warming the plates.

**CLIVE.** You can't be that desperate.

**STEVE.** Who can't? Everything about this place makes you desperate.

(*He pops the cigarette between his lips again as he makes for the door R. Eric enters with Rita. Her coat is wet with rain.*)

**ERIC.** I hope you weren't about to light that thing?

**STEVE.** Just enjoying the anticipation.

**ERIC.** The hostel has a no smoking policy.

**STEVE.** I'm going outside...to chat up a Yeti.

**ERIC.** Well away from the building, please.

**STEVE.** I'll go up a mountain and cling to a rock. (*to Rita, appreciatively*) Good evening! (*He exits R.*)

**ERIC.** I'd like to see him light it in that wind!...You've got your boots on the table.

**CLIVE.** I was just going.

(*He exits rapidly U L clutching his boots and flask.*)

**ERIC.** Tcha! I mean he wouldn't do that at home, now would he? You have to be firm with these people or you just get taken advantage of.

**RITA.** Yes, I can see your point.

