

FIGHT THEM FOR THE BEECHES

A comedy drama by

Kathy Reid

Acknowledgements

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CHARACTERS

Lord Christopher Cornwallis becomes the owner of The Beeches Manor House including the residential home. He is vain, proud and hides his empathic side well.

Lady Caroline Cornwallis The kindly and seemingly rather frail mother of Cornwallis.

Sam Harris Home Manager of The Beeches who is professional, efficient, organised and always wants to do 'the right thing'.

Honey Potter Chef and General Assistant of The Beeches Residential Home who is caring and kind.

The Colonel Resident of Room 1 who after his experience of war is commanding, instructive and still has a lot of fight in him.

Walker Resident of Room 2 who knows everything and everybody and is always in the middle of a deal.

George Resident of Room 3 who is new to the home as a vacancy was created on the death of Cecil (a good friend of the other residents) and is quiet and secretive.

Iris Resident of Room 4 who is intelligent and private with a love of words and crosswords.

Cassandra Aka Woo Woo. Resident of Room 5 who is colourful, larger than life and spiritually connected.

The first performance of *Fight Them For The Beeches* was given on 11th May 2023 by Twyford Drama at Loddon Hall, Twyford, with the following cast:

Lord Christopher Cornwallis	Marc Reid
Lady Caroline Cornwallis	Hazel Evans
Sam Harris	Jac Rampton
Honey Potter	Sam Gittins
The Colonel	Richard Rudman
Walker	Mike Higgins
George	Ian McDonald
Iris	Laura Glasby-Rogers
Cassandra	Rebecca Down

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE

Forest Lounge of the Residential Home of The Beeches Manor which is grand but faded and rather shabbily furnished with a portrait of Lord John Cornwallis on the wall. Enter Sam who has called an early morning meeting and Honey who will busily and cheerily hand out coffee to the assembled residents.

HONEY Good luck.

SAM Thanks.

HONEY You look ever so pale.

Sam shrugs.

HONEY Whatever it is, it'll be fine.

SAM I'm sworn to secrecy.

HONEY I understand.

SAM Sorry.

HONEY It'll be fine.

Sam turns away to look up at the portrait. Enter residents who complain how early it is. Colonel walks with an exaggerated swagger, looking at his watch and muttering loudly about the time, Cassandra wafis around 'sensing the early morning energies' and then meditating, Walker is texting, Iris is slow but very businesslike as she sorts crossword books by her chair and George looks lost, sits in the wrong chair and is told to move. All eventually sit in 'their' chairs.

COLONEL We'd barely finished breakfast.

SAM Sorry.

COLONEL Coffee. Forest Lounge 10.30. On the dot. And certainly not 9.22.

SAM Sorry.

COLONEL What the dickens is going on?

WALKER *(to Sam)* Cheer up. You look like somebody's died.

Awkward pause.

SAM The owner wants to talk to you all.

COLONEL What about?

- WALKER** Lord John's coming 'ere?
- COLONEL** He's back on his feet?
- CASSANDRA** A miracle, a wondrous miracle.
- SAM** The owner will explain.
- COLONEL** Iris, he's talking in riddles. That's your department.
- IRIS** A riddle soon to be solved Colonel. It isn't difficult to answer this one I'm afraid.
- COLONEL** Give us a clue then.
- IRIS** Seven letters 'Going by into God's acre'.
- COLONEL** Going by into God's acre.
- IRIS** Anybody?
- All mumble and shrug shoulders.*
- IRIS** The answer is obvious. It's 'Passing'.
- COLONEL** You're going to have to explain that one Iris.
- IRIS** Going by is passing and into God's Acre is going into a Churchyard so passing as in dying.
- COLONEL** Right?
- CASSANDRA** That one was hard Iris. Why did you choose that?
- IRIS** You're the psychic.
- Cassandra stops to concentrate on what Iris has said.*
- COLONEL** Too hard for 9.23 am!
- GEORGE** Is this normal for a Tuesday morning?
- CASSANDRA** Iris is right. Something's up. How did I miss it? Look at Sam's energy.
- George approaches Sam and looks him up and down. Sam has his head buried in paperwork.*
- GEORGE** His what?
- CASSANDRA** His energy. Look about him. The colour is very dark. It feels heavy. Sam's being is literally under a cloud.

GEORGE Dark? No. Heavy? No. No cloud either. *(aside)*
Only cloud cuckoo land. *(to Iris)* There is no
scientific evidence for....

IRIS Cassandra has the gift. However, you don't
need the gift to know what's going on today.

George looks clueless.

GEORGE Let's look at the facts.

CASSANDRA Wait...

George jumps out of his skin and is affronted.

CASSANDRA Cornwallis will come here with very bad news.

COLONEL Good chap. Haven't seen John in ages.

Cassandra makes a big display of focusing on her premonition.

CASSANDRA It's not clear. I'm getting Lord Cornwallis but it's
not him.

GEORGE Hold on! Let me get this straight. You're saying
you can tell who's coming through that door and
what they're going to say? Prove it.

CASSANDRA *(to herself)* No, I don't understand. Need to
focus.

Cassandra goes into a trance and moves away from George.

GEORGE Typical. As soon as you ask for proof, there's
nothing. It's all fantasy.

IRIS *(to George)* You'll have your proof just wait.

Sam is silent and pacing by the door. Walker approaches Sam.

WALKER 'Ere mate, what's the deal?

Silence.

WALKER What's going down?

Silence.

WALKER Come on Sam, time's precious. Less time, less
deals. Time is...

COLONEL Money. We know! We've heard it often enough!

IRIS Only ten times a day!

CASSANDRA *(to Walker distractedly)* Move beyond the
material into the realms of the eternal.

WALKER I like the material. Feel that.

Walker holds out his clothing to Cassandra.

CASSANDRA Walker. You are impossible. Let me focus.

GEORGE Bonkers.

Cassandra nudges Walker, points to Sam and sits to meditate.

WALKER Looks like Sam needs a drink?

Walker opens a secret stash and pulls out a bottle of whisky.

SAM I'm on duty. I didn't see that.

WALKER See what?

SAM Exactly.

WALKER Tell us the scoop.

SAM Can't say.

COLONEL Can't or won't?

SAM Just can't.

WALKER Yes you can!

Honey pushes the tea trolley / tray into Walker.

HONEY Oops, pardon me Walker. Coffee?

Sam shoots Honey a smile of gratitude.

WALKER Ta.

HONEY *(to Walker)* We'll find out soon enough.

Honey carefully guides Walker away from Sam.

WALKER *(winking lasciviously)* Aye, aye. Somethin' good is it?

HONEY I really don't know.

COLONEL *(getting up)* Can't or won't Sam?

SAM Not now Colonel.

COLONEL As good a time as any.

Honey swiftly moves across to The Colonel and lightly pushes him back into his chair.

HONEY Sit Colonel. Do make yourself comfortable. I could rustle up your favourite coffee. Shall I?

COLONEL *(excited)* A Masters?

HONEY One Master's Mochaccino coming up.

COLONEL Right on. And it's not even a Bank Holiday.

HONEY Cassandra can you do the usual?

Honey rushes back to the tea trolley, where Cassandra, still in a trance, shakes a flask and waves her hand over it then pours the contents into a cup onto which Honey squirts cream and crumbles a flake.

COLONEL With cream?

HONEY With extra cream Colonel.

COLONEL And....

HONEY Chocolate shavings!

CASSANDRA Whole slabs of choc... (*silence*)... Take care. Bad news is ahead. Not just today. More is circling around us.

IRIS Fatally bad.

COLONEL Can you give me that clue again Iris?

Iris is unimpressed. Honey helps before Iris loses her temper.

HONEY Here, your Master.

COLONEL Love it when you say that. Got to stick to the old routines. There'd be chaos otherwise. Boy, that hits the spot.

The Colonel becomes lost in his coffee and forgets the clue. He gets cream on his face.

CASSANDRA (*to Iris*) You felt something bad coming too?

IRIS Felt? No. Worked it out. Plain as the cream on his face.

Cassandra and Iris laugh.

WALKER (*taking the mick*) I feel it.

CASSANDRA Then it must be bad.

GEORGE (*aside*) Tosh! I've landed in a mad house.

Noise near the door. Sam coughs. All stop.

COLONEL Positions everybody.

SAM Behave! All of you. Please.

COLONEL (*indignant*) Of course.

WALKER Why wouldn't we?

CASSANDRA Naturally.

CORNWALLIS *(off)* Sam!

IRIS As always.

SAM I'll be straight back.

Sam exits anxiously.

WALKER That's a threat. 'Ere, while the cat's away...

Walker opens another secret stash and takes out a small whisky bottle.

WALKER Did a deal on this great malt. Comes from a class distillery in the Outer Hebrides - dark, peaty.... Anybody?

Everybody nods except Colonel. Walker dishes it out.

COLONEL Incurrable.

IRIS Think we'll need this.

CASSANDRA Love a good earthy malt.

GEORGE Mine's a double.

Walker goes to put the bottle away.

COLONEL Don't miss me man.

Cassandra sips her whisky and then stops in her tracks.

CASSANDRA No!

George particularly jumps out of his skin.

GEORGE *(to Cassandra)* No need to add to the drama.

CASSANDRA It's the worst news.

IRIS *(aside)* You're only just catching up with me!

Sam enters and opens the door to Cornwallis who enters dressed in mourning suit and black tie and confidently stands before residents.

SAM *(stresses the title)* Lord Christopher Cornwallis.

COLONEL Lord....He can't be.

CASSANDRA He is.

GEORGE No!

- IRIS** God bless Lord Cornwallis. *(aside)* He has passed. I knew it.
- WALKER** 'E can't leave us.
- HONEY** *(loudly)* He can't be I saw him last night. He was in great spirits.
- CASSANDRA** And now at peace with the spirits.
Honey rushes out in tears. Sam turns to Cornwallis.
- SAM** Might I leave?
- CORNWALLIS** You're needed here.
- GEORGE** *(aside)* We're in for it now. So is the Manor. You don't need psychic powers to know that. Christopher Cornwallis will not be the same Lord as his father.
- WALKER** *(loudly)* Well informed, aint you George? Seeing as you've only lived 'ere five minutes.
- GEORGE** *(hesitant)* Well, um, it's obvious.
Cornwallis looks down his nose at George clearly not knowing who he is and clears his throat proprietorially.
- SAM** Quiet everybody, please. There's an important announcement.
- CORNWALLIS** I am the bearer of sad news. *(coughs)* Very sad news. It is incumbent upon me to inform you all that Lord John Cornwallis passed away in his sleep last night. His passing was mercifully peaceful. God rest your soul Father.
- COLONEL** Yes, God rest Lord Cornwallis' soul.
- ALL** God rest Lord Cornwallis' soul.
One by one Colonel, Walker, Cassandra and Iris stand, place one arm across their chest, bow their heads to the portrait.
- IRIS** To The Boss.
- COL/W/CAS** The Boss.
Pause with few sobs and tears including from Cornwallis.
- CORNWALLIS** I know this will hit you all hard. The City has taken so much of my time in recent years and I haven't been able to visit my dear father as often as I would have liked.

WALKER *(aside)* Never saw you.
GEORGE *(aside)* You never liked the manor.
CORNWALLIS However, I do know how highly he respected
you all. God rest your soul Father.

COLONEL Yes God rest Lord Cornwallis' soul.

All residents whisper the same. Cornwallis stands back nods at Sam who moves forward.

SAM We are now privileged to call you Lord
Cornwallis of Beeches Manor Estate.

George collapses into a chair. Silence.

IRIS How will you manage the estate?

CASSANDRA Iris! It's too soon.

CORNWALLIS As Lord of this estate I will continue my
father's legacy.

COLONEL We're very pleased to hear that.

IRIS When will Lord Cornwallis be laid to rest?

CORNWALLIS You will be informed in due course.

SAM I'll let everybody know as soon as possible.

CASSANDRA Thank you. I'm sure we all wish to attend.

IRIS How is Lady Cornwallis?

CORNWALLIS Mother is fine.

COLONEL Fine? She'll be devastated.

IRIS Is she well? We haven't seen her in such a long
time.

WALKER Lord and Lady Cornwallis loved coming 'ere for
a good old chat.

COLONEL Lady C's not been here since The Boss became
ill.

IRIS When can we give Lady Cornwallis our
condolences?

CORNWALLIS In due course. My first priority is the welfare of
my darling Mama. Thank you again for your
kind words and condolences. I will pass these
all on to Mama.

COLONEL This is a sad, dark day.

CORNWALLIS So much sadder and darker to his family don't you think. I must leave. There is a great deal to organise.

Awkward pause. Cornwallis turns to exit.

SAM Thank you for coming to tell us Sir. We appreciate Lord Cornwallis taking the trouble at this difficult time. Don't we everybody?

ALL *(mumble)* Thank you.

Cornwallis nods and exits.

SAM I know you will all be very upset at this tragic news. We all loved Lord John. Such a fine man. His legacy lives on in every stone of this manor. Lord Christopher Cornwallis assured us he will continue running the estate just like his father.

GEORGE *(to himself)* Sure.

COLONEL That is one blessing. None of us are up for change in any shape. We all have a long association to this house. Apart from George of course.

GEORGE What do you mean? I...

COLONEL You're new here.

GEORGE Yes of course.

SAM I must go and find Honey. Check she's okay.

WALKER Go comfort 'er Sam.

SAM As her manager I will check that she is fit to carry on her duties. If that's alright with you Walker?

WALKER Course. I'm sure you'll comfort 'er well.

Sam is annoyed and exits.

SCENE TWO

The same. Following.

CASSANDRA You can't help yourself can you?

WALKER I am what I am.

COLONEL As subtle as a V2 rocket.

WALKER Just telling it like it is.
CASSANDRA Feel the room and you will sense when to stop.
IRIS Even I know when to stop!

Iris looks around at the disbelieving faces.

COLONEL When's the funeral, how will you manage the estate, can we see Lady Cornwallis?

IRIS They're only questions. Questions that need answers.

GEORGE We need answers. Don't just believe what you're told. Dig, dig, dig that's what must be done. Unless of course Cassandra already has the answers.

Everybody ignores George's weird behaviour.

IRIS You still don't believe in her. Even when she...

GEORGE *(dismissively)* No. It's fantasy.

CASSANDRA *(to distract)* The year 2000 is clearly a time of challenge. First Cecil and now The Boss pass to the other side. *(speaks to heavens)* We will miss you Lord John Cornwallis. And not only those delicious treats and great stories you used to bring us. We will miss your kind spirit. You are such a loving soul. A true gentleman.

WALKER Could The Boss spin a tale! 'Ilarious. Generous to a fault too. Specially with the old *(whistles and mimics pouring a drink)*. No alcohol ban in BS days.

COLONEL Thick chocolate biscuits in BS days.

CASSANDRA Scented candles in BS days.

IRIS All the dailies free too.

GEORGE BS days?

COLONEL Yes BS. Halcyon days.

GEORGE What?

IRIS BS. Before Stroke.

COLONEL The stroke changed him.

CASSANDRA Never came to see us after that. BS he'd be here nearly every day.

Cassandra sobs and Iris comforts her in an unemotional way.

COLONEL The stroke clearly affected his mind and his personality.

GEORGE I don't think so.

COLONEL How would you know? You weren't here! BS he would never have slashed the food budget, closed the swimming pool and cut the flowers, the Christmas decorations, the parties and even our weekly trips out.

Colonel points at Millennium decorations.

COLONEL We even had to pay for that ourselves and that's why it's not coming down for a very long time.

GEORGE I don't believe you. Lord Cornwallis was no ... I can't believehe was a penny pincher.

COLONEL Are you calling me a liar?

CASSANDRA It was the stroke George. Lord John was a very generous man.

GEORGE BS?

CASSANDRA Yes.

WALKER Life got 'arder.

IRIS AS.

GEORGE After Stroke?

IRIS Yes. AS it is all about the finances.

GEORGE *(aside)* I wonder why?

WALKER Could 'ave sorted out deals on food, trips, anythin, but 'e was never interested.

COLONEL You got to talk to The Boss?

WALKER No, only Sam...'Ey, do you think Sam was cuttin' the budget and pocketin' the difference?

CASSANDRA Our Sam? Committing fraud? How funny.

All laugh.

COLONEL Today's not funny though is it?

CASSANDRA No, we've lost the best of men. To The Boss.

All, except George, stand and face the portrait, bowing their heads with their hands across the chest.

- ALL** The Boss.
- WALKER** Good to 'ear 'is son will carry it all on.
- COLONEL** Maintain the course. That's the spirit.
- CASSANDRA** The spirit wasn't there. His words on his father and mother were heartfelt but I didn't get the same feeling when he talked about the legacy...
- COLONEL** Woo Woo hold the feelings. There's enough emotion flying around today as it is. I'm exhausted.
- IRIS** Good point.
- COLONEL** What point Iris?
- IRIS** I've read between the lines Colonel. You're saying we're all tired and could do with a rest.
- COLONEL** You're spot on. You deduced that before I knew it myself. Time for a rest and reflect troops.
- All rise to leave.*
- GEORGE** Why does he call you Woo Woo?
- CASSANDRA** Isn't it obvious?
- GEORGE** I haven't seen anything out of the ordinary.
- CASSANDRA** No?
- IRIS** You don't think Cassandra sensed the news before Cornwallis entered the room.
- GEORGE** I saw no substance to that. I'm a man of science, cold hard facts not all this airy fairy, weirdy, other wordly stuff.
- CASSANDRA** Really?
- GEORGE** If you can't see it, touch it, hear it, taste it or smell it then it doesn't exist.
- WALKER** *(to George)* 'Lectricity?
- GEORGE** *(to Walker)* You can prove that exists. You can't prove the existence of any of this extrasensory stuff.
- CASSANDRA** Is that so?

Cassandra waves her arms around.

GEORGE There is no scientific basis....

George is frozen.

CASSANDRA Perhaps science is too limited to prove the "extrasensory stuff".

Cassandra waves her arms around.

GEORGE to prove anything that...

George stops and looks puzzled and confused. All laugh.

CASSANDRA You're right George.

COLONEL Lesson over. Time to rest and reflect.

WALKER If we're reflectin' then...

Walker opens a cupboard and takes out some brandy.

WALKER You're welcome to join me.

CASSANDRA You'll pickle your brain.

WALKER I'd "relish" that! See what I did there Iris?

IRIS Congratulations Walker. Don't you have some deal to be sorting out?

WALKER Always. I'll just do a quick inventory.

All exit except George and Walker who checks a few stashes around the room. George stares up at the portrait/photo of Lord John Cornwallis and bows his head. Thinking he's alone George takes out his phone and Walker listens.

GEORGE James, it's me. You've heard the news from Beeches Manor? Thank you. Very sad day for us all. Thought you would know. Your ear is so close to the ground it's in Australia. First step, Newfield Housing. Set the wheels in motion now. Good. No I'm fine thanks, (*emotion building*) got to keep strong, especially now. Nobody suspects a thing. Got to make sure it stays that way too. Keep me posted.

George exits. Lights down.