

# The Chimney

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**Characters:**

*Belinda*

*Timothy*

*Ellen*

*Edward*

*Abigail*

*Tommy*

*Optional Extras - ancient ghosts who may wander unscripted*

**Setting:**

*A lounge with fire place, sofa, armchairs.*

*Belinda sits. She stands. She sits. She stands. She paces. She looks up the chimney. She paces. She looks up the chimney.*

**Belinda:** Are you there?

*She paces. She looks up the chimney.*

**Belinda:** Any one there?

*She paces. She sits. She knits. Timothy enters. Belinda stands.*

**Belinda:** Timothy!

**Timothy:** (*non-plussed*) Mmh?

**Belinda:** Timothy! It's...

*She goes to the chimney.*

**Belinda:** It's...

**Timothy:** What?

**Belinda:** The chimney!

**Timothy:** Huh!

*Timothy sits.*

**Belinda:** It's the chimney sweep. He's stuck up there.

**Timothy:** Where?

**Belinda:** There?

**Timothy:** Where?

**Belinda:** He's stuck!

*Timothy stands.*

**Timothy:** Stuck?

**Belinda:** Look!

*Timothy looks.*

**Timothy:** I can't see anything.

**Belinda:** He's just a boy. He climbed up and didn't come down. He's stuck!

**Timothy:** (*calling*) Is there any one there?

**Belinda:** He's stuck!

**Timothy:** (*returning to seat*) Yes, dear.

**Belinda:** Do something! I've waited three hours. The poor kid's stuck.

**Timothy:** Nonsense, dear. Nonsense.

*He reads.*

**Timothy:** He would've gone out the other end.

**Belinda:** He hasn't.

**Timothy:** He has.

**Belinda:** He called out "Help!" Just once.

**Timothy:** Then?

**Belinda:** Nothing. It went silent.

**Timothy:** Just knit. Sit. He would've gone out the other end.

*She sits and fidgets.*

**Timothy:** Settle down. He's gone.

**Belinda:** I'm cold.

**Timothy:** Light the fire.

**Belinda:** There's the chimney sweep stuck up the chimney and you say light the fire! I can't light the fire! He'll burn! Burn!

**Timothy:** Well if he's stuck up the chimney and not making a noise he's either dead or gone. So there.

**Belinda:** He'll be unconscious.

**Timothy:** This hasn't happened.

*Belinda goes to the fire place again.*

**Belinda:** Is there any body up there? Are you there? I can't see the sky.

**Timothy:** It's night.

**Belinda:** I can't see the stars.

**Timothy:** There's a bend in the chimney.

**Belinda:** It's blocked.

**Timothy:** You win. Light the fire. If the smoke comes into the room, he's stuck. If the smoke goes up, he's gone.

**Belinda:** *(returning to seat)* Smoke comes into the room, blocked or not.

*Timothy reads. Belinda knits.*

**Belinda:** Poor boy. His mother'll be fretting. He was only twelve. He was a nice boy.

**Timothy:** You'll find a chimney sweep in every chimney.

*Timothy reads. Belinda knits.*

**Belinda:** About so high.

**Timothy:** They haven't come knocking, have they? They haven't come looking.

*Timothy reads. Belinda knits. There is a knock on the door.*

**Belinda:** *(going to exit)* That'll be them now. That'll be his parents.

*Belinda disappears.*

**Belinda:** *(offstage)* Oh! It's you!

*Belinda enters with Ellen and Edward. Timothy stands.*

**Ellen:** Sorry we're late.

**Belinda:** What for?

**Ellen:** It is tonight, isn't it?

**Timothy:** Of course!

**Belinda:** We've had a terrible accident!

**Edward:** What?

**Timothy:** Dinner! A slight accident with the dinner. It'll be late.

**Belinda:** The chimney sweep came today.

**Timothy:** Aren't you going to offer them a drink?

**Belinda:** He's stuck!

**Timothy:** Stuck for money. Do you want a drink?

**Ellen:** Yes please!

**Timothy:** Belinda, hadn't you better check the dinner?

**Belinda:** God, I've been too busy to eat!

*Belinda exits.*

**Timothy:** What'll it be?

**Edward:** The usual.

**Ellen:** Edward will have water.

*Edward glares.*

**Ellen:** I'll have the same.

*Timothy exits.*

**Edward:** What did you say that for Ellen?

**Ellen:** You're driving, dear.

**Edward:** I'll spend my life drinking water.

**Ellen:** We must think of others.

*They sit. Silence. The Voice that comes from the chimney could be said down a tube to give the effect of echo.*

**Voice:** *(from chimney)* Help!

*They look as if they've heard but don't know where the noise came from.*

**Voice:** *(from chimney)* Help!

**Edward:** What was that?

**Ellen:** It sounded like Timothy.

**Edward:** No it wasn't. It was in the room.

**Voice:** *(from chimney)* Help!

**Ellen:** It's coming from the chimney!

*She begins to look up the chimney.*

**Edward:** Don't be silly, Ellen. Voices don't come down chimneys.

**Ellen:** Typical man. It's always "Me". Me! Me! Me!

**Edward:** At least I don't cry during the TV news.

*Timothy enters with water - and a whiskey bottle.*

**Timothy:** Here.

**Ellen:** There's a voice up the chimney.

**Edward:** That's lovely. Just what the doctor ordered.

*Belinda enters.*

**Ellen:** There's a voice up the chimney.

**Belinda:** You heard it?

**Edward:** Probably Father Christmas.

**Belinda:** It's the chimney sweep. He's stuck!

**Timothy:** My wife is an embarrassment.

**Ellen:** There's a voice stuck up the chimney!

**Edward:** Oh God! Shut up!

**Belinda:** It's the chimney sweep!

**Timothy:** Oh shut up!

*They all sit.*

**Edward:** Cheers!

*Silence.*

**Voice:** (*from chimney*) Help!

**Ellen and Belinda:** See!

*They rush to the chimney and look up.*

**Timothy:** Sit down!

**Edward:** It'll be the wind.

**Timothy:** Sit down! Bloody draughty thing, that chimney.

**Edward:** So's mine.

**Timothy:** Should board it up. It's done it's dash.

**Edward:** So's mine.

**Ellen and Belinda:** Is there any body there?

**Timothy:** Might do that.

**Ellen:** Yoo-hoo!

**Belinda:** Can you hear me?

*Timothy and Edward exit.*

**Belinda:** It happened this afternoon. He disappeared.

**Ellen:** I heard a cry for help.

**Belinda:** Yoo-hoo!

**Ellen:** Are you stuck?

**Belinda:** Yoo-hoo!

**Ellen:** Are you there?

*Timothy and Edward appear with boards, nails and hammer.*

**Edward:** This should fix it.

**Timothy:** Stop the blasted draught.

**Belinda:** You can't do that! There's a man up there!

**Ellen:** We heard his cry for help!

*The men begin to nail the boards across the front of the fire place. The women try to stop them.*

**Belinda:** Don't!

**Ellen:** Stop it!

**Belinda:** There's a boy up there!

**Edward:** The chimney's had it. There's a draught!

**Ellen:** Don't!

**Timothy:** Get a life.

**Belinda:** The poor boy!

**Ellen:** Don't you care!

**Timothy:** There.

**Edward:** That's fixed that?

*They return, with force against the women, to their seats.*

**Timothy:** How's your drink?

**Edward:** I think I'll have a bit of whiskey in my water.

**Timothy:** Thought you might.

**Ellen:** He's not having whiskey!

**Timothy:** Yes he is!

**Belinda:** No he's not!

**Edward:** I am.

*Edward pours himself a whiskey.*



**Timothy:** How's the dinner?

**Belinda:** Who wants dinner?

**Timothy:** I do.

**Ellen:** With a man stuck up the chimney?

**Edward:** It was a boy a minute ago.

**Belinda:** Oh the poor thing! The poor thing!

*They sit in a tense silence.*

**Timothy:** Dinner!

*A tense silence.*

**Edward:** Help Belinda with the dinner, dear.

*A tense silence. Edward and Timothy add more whiskey. The women glare.*

**Timothy:** Well?

*A tense silence. The women exit.*

**Ellen:** *(muttering, while exiting)* Male chauvinist.

**Edward:** *(after women have gone)* I just think she's nuts.

**Timothy:** Belinda's the same.

*Silence.*

**Voice:** *(from chimney)* Help!

**Timothy:** Shit!

*Silence.*

**Voice:** *(from chimney)* Help!

**Edward:** Shit!

*Silence.*

**Voice:** *(from chimney)* Help!

*They get up and push the sofa against the fire place.*

**Timothy:** Bloody draught.

*They sit on the sofa. The women enter with two plates and a few uncooked potatoes. They dump the plates in front of the men.*

**Timothy:** You call this dinner?

**Belinda:** It's all you're getting.

**Edward:** This is pathetic.

**Ellen:** It's all you're getting.

**Timothy:** This is pathetic.

**Belinda:** There's a man stuck up the chimney and all you want is dinner. Don't you care?

**Timothy:** No.

**Belinda:** Don't you care about someones life? He's got a family and he's stuck up the chimney.

**Edward:** It's a chimney sweep.

**Ellen:** It's a poor boy!

**Edward:** It's a chimney sweep. There's others.

**Timothy:** We won't be needing one in future any way. We've no fire place.

**Belinda:** Of course we've got a fire place. Because you board it up doesn't mean to say we haven't got one.

**Edward:** I want some dinner!

**Ellen:** Problems don't go away just because you've put a sofa in front of it. The poor man's got a family!

**Timothy:** You said he was a boy.

**Belinda:** You can't hide all your problems behind the sofa.

**Timothy:** Oh God, this is impossible.

**Edward:** Hysterical women claiming there's a bogey-man up the chimney.

**Timothy:** I want dinner.

**Belinda:** Well eat it!

*Sudden silence.*

**Belinda:** Eat it!

**Timothy:** Uncooked spuds?

**Ellen:** Pretend they're cooked. You seem to have no trouble pretending there's no one up the chimney.

*Long silence.*

**Edward:** It's always the same. I want a kid but she says there's too many people in the world all ready. Now the chimney sweep's dead, let's do it.

*Silence.*

**Timothy:** Come on, Eddie, we'll find our own food.

*The men exit. Silence.*

**Voice:** *(from chimney)* Help!

**Ellen:** Oh dear!

*Helpless silence. Belinda grabs the knitting and paces.*

**Voice:** *(from chimney)* Help!

**Belinda:** Oh dear!

*Helpless silence. They move the sofa back. They go to use the hammer to remove the boards. The men enter with some food.*

**Timothy:** What are you doing?

**Belinda:** We're saving the chimney sweep.

**Timothy:** You've had all afternoon to do that.

**Edward:** Leave it.

*The women exit. The men return the sofa to in front of the fire place. They sit on the sofa. They eat.*

**Voice:** (from chimney) Help!

*The men stand and put the armchairs on the sofa. They then cover the chairs with blankets so that the fire place is completely hidden from the audience. Women enter.*

**Ellen:** It won't go away you know.

**Edward:** What?

**Belinda:** The chimney sweep.

**Timothy:** There's no chimney sweep.

**Belinda:** Then why cover it?

**Edward:** Draught.

*Silence.*

**Voice:** (from chimney) Help!

*Silence. Abigail enters. All stare.*

**Abigail:** Have you seen my son?

**Timothy:** Your son?

**Abigail:** He ain't come home for dinner.

**Edward:** At least he's got some.

**Abigail:** He ain't come home for dinner.

**Timothy:** How should we know?

**Abigail:** He was coming here to sweep some chimneys.

**Belinda:** He's up the chimney.

**Timothy:** He disappeared hours ago.

**Ellen:** He's up the chimney.

**Timothy:** Lady, we ain't got no chimney.

**Belinda:** Of course we've got a chimney!

**Edward:** Who are you?

**Abigail:** Abigail.

**Edward:** Abigail who?

**Abigail:** Abigail Abigail. Have you seen my boy?

**Ellen:** He's up the chimney.

**Belinda:** He's stuck up the chimney.

**Timothy:** For once and for all, Mrs Abigail, we ain't got no chimney!

**Belinda:** We have! Look!

*Belinda and Ellen pull the blankets, chairs and sofa away. The fire place has gone.*

**Belinda:** There!

**Ellen:** Oh!

**Belinda:** Where's it gone?

**Timothy:** You see, dear. There is no fire place.

**Edward:** No fire place, no chimney sweep.

**Timothy:** No chimney sweep, no one stuck up the chimney.

**Edward:** Solved!

**Abigail:** Well I'll be going then. He said he was coming to clean your chimney. If you ain't got no fire place, you ain't got no chimney. If you ain't got no chimney, you ain't in no need of no chimney sweep.

**Edward:** A veritable Aristotle.

**Timothy:** Life's relatively simple.

*Abigail exits.*

**Belinda:** Where's the fire place?

**Ellen:** Come on! Where's the fire place?

**Timothy:** We've never had a fire place.

**Edward:** I've never seen a fire place.

**Timothy:** For as long as we've lived here, my dear Belinda, we've never had a fire place. You've always asked for a fire place, but we've never had one. Now can we have our dinner please?

**Ellen:** They live in cuckoo-land.

*The women exit. The men sit and pour another whiskey.*

**Voice:** *(from chimney which is not there)* Help!

*The men ignore it and drink.*

**Voice:** *(from chimney which is not there)* Help!

*Abigail enters.*

**Abigail:** You got a chimney on the outside. A chimney means a fire place, and a fire place means a chimney, and a chimney means a chimney sweep.

**Edward:** The return of Aristotle!

**Timothy:** It's an old house. The chimney was probably boarded up years ago. Boarded and plastered up.

**Voice:** *(from chimney which is not there)* Help!

**Abigail:** That's Tommy!

**Edward:** Tommy who?

**Abigail:** Tommy Abigail. My boy Tommy.

**Voice:** *(from chimney which is not there)* Help!

**Abigail:** Tommy!

**Timothy:** Poor woman. She's hearing things.

**Edward:** They get like that.

*Belinda and Ellen enter.*

**Voice:** *(from chimney which is not there)* Help!

- Abigail:** Tommy!
- Belinda:** There's that voice!
- Ellen:** It's the chimney sweep!
- Abigail:** Tommy!
- Edward:** They've all gone balmy.
- Timothy:** What voice?
- Voice:** *(from chimney which is not there)* Help!
- Belinda:** That voice!
- Abigail:** Tommy!
- Timothy:** There is no voice. There's no chimney. There's no fire place. There's no chimney sweep.
- Abigail:** Tommy!
- Timothy:** There's no Tommy.
- Edward:** Thank you, Mrs Abigail, but there's no Tommy. You may go. You may very well think you had a son called Tommy. But don't go bringing what you think you have to this house any more when you haven't any more.
- Abigail:** I'm sure these last twelve years I've had a boy called Tommy. In fact, I know it. He was a chimney sweep. I told him to be a mole trapper. But no. He said there were no moles in these parts. No moles, no need for a mole trapper he said. Moles or not, if he'd been a mole trapper I wouldn't have lost him. A chimney sweep, he said. I'll be a chimney sweep. Well, if he hadn't been a chimney sweep he wouldn't be lost up the chimney which isn't there.
- Edward:** But you just said the chimney was there.
- Abigail:** Well he wouldn't have been lost up the fire place, would he? I've lost him forever. We must get on with our lives. I'm too old now to have another child, so I'd better have dinner on my own and get used to it.
- Belinda:** *(disappointed)* Thank you, Mrs Abigail. Please don't come again. Leave your fantasies in your hovel.

**Abigail:** I have dreams too, ma'am. I have dreams.

*Abigail goes. They all sit. Silence.*

**Voice:** *(from chimney which is not there)* Help!

*Men ignore it. Women fidget. Silence.*

**Belinda:** Sometimes, in the dead of night, there's a shape at the end of the bed. Sometimes it seems to move. Sometimes, I hear it crying. It's just a shape. A shadow. It's calling for help.

**Voice:** *(from chimney which is not there)* Help!

**Belinda:** Help!

**Timothy:** It's not really there. It's imagination. In the night.

*Silence.*

**Belinda:** Help!

**Edward:** Your wife is a trick, Timothy.

**Timothy:** My wife?

**Ellen:** Your wife.

**Timothy:** What wife?

**Ellen:** Belinda.

**Belinda:** Help!

**Timothy:** I don't know a Belinda. I have no wife. You know full well I have no wife.

**Ellen:** But... Belinda?

**Timothy:** Belinda?

*Silence.*

**Belinda:** *(putting white on her face)* A shadow at the end of the bed. In the dark. A voice in the chimney. A spectral shape. Crying for help! Help! Help!

*Silence. The mood goes soft. It is as if Timothy and Belinda are not there.*



**Ellen:** *(softly)* We must be going, Eddie.

**Edward:** *(softly)* Going?

**Ellen:** We must go.

**Edward:** But we live here.

**Ellen:** Ah!

*Silence.*

**Ellen:** We can't! Not with someone suffering up the chimney! We can't **live** - here.

*Silence.*

**Ellen:** Doesn't Timothy live here?

**Edward:** Timothy?

**Ellen:** Timothy.

**Edward:** Timothy who?

*Silence.*

**Ellen:** *(taking up knitting)* I don't know, dear. I must knit for the poor. How the world suffers - and I must knit for it, knit for it, knit for it.

*Silence.*

**Ellen:** I'm not hard-hearted like you. I have compassion.

*Silence.*

**Edward:** Get a life first.

**Ellen:** How cruel.

*Silence.*

**Voice:** *(softly from chimney which is not there)* Help!

*Silence.*

**Ellen:** Did you have a nice day at work?

**Edward:** Mm? Mm?

**Ellen:** How heartless of you to have a nice day at work when others are jobless.

**Edward:** I'll get dinner.

*He gets up and exits. Belinda and Timothy exit - but not through the usual exit, and not together.*

**Voice:** *(from chimney which is not there)* Help!

*Silence.*

**Voice:** *(from chimney which is not there)* Help!

*Silence. Edward enters with two plates of dinner. He sits and eats. Ellen does not eat. She knits. Music.*

**Ellen:** Matthew was saying today...

**Edward:** Matthew?

**Ellen:** Matthew. He was saying he was sitting in a chair last month - in his room - and a blue ghost - a boy -

*Tommy enters with blue face, and passes through.*

**Ellen:** - came through the wall. Came through the wall, passed his chair, went out.

*Pause.*

**Ellen:** Came back in -

*Tommy comes back into the room.*

**Ellen:** - passed his chair and went back through the wall.

**Edward:** A ghost?

**Ellen:** It was blue.

**Edward:** I don't believe in ghosts.

*Pause. Belinda enters with face painted completely white.*

**Ellen:** So they took the plaster off the wall and there was a fire place behind it. With a chimney.

**Edward:** You get that in old houses.

**Ellen:** They found a thigh bone stuck up the chimney. Of a child. About twelve years.

**Edward:** Probably an old ham bone.

**Ellen:** That was all that was left. The rest had burnt away.

*Pause.*

**Ellen:** A charred thigh bone.

*Pause.*

**Edward:** The jaw-bone of an ass.

**Ellen:** How callous.

**Edward:** A funny-bone even.

**Ellen:** Don't you care?

*Tommy tries to get through where the fire place was.*

**Ellen:** Don't you care?

*Edward finishes his dinner.*

**Ellen:** Don't you care?

**Edward:** Nope.

*He gets up and exits with plates - including Ellen's uneaten meal.*

**Edward:** *(while exiting)* You should eat.

**Ellen:** I'm in mourning.

*Timothy enters and moves the sofa to in front of where the fire place was. He puts chairs on the sofa and put blankets over the chairs. He exits.*

**Ellen:** Don't you care?

*Belinda removes blankets, chairs and sofa to reveal... - no fire place. She stands there calling.*

**Belinda:** Tommy? Tommy?

*Edward enters and returns the sofa, chairs and blankets to in front of the fire place.*

**Ellen:** Why did you move the furniture?

*Belinda and Ellen return the furniture to its usual place. There is no fireplace.*

**Ellen:** Did you move the furniture?

**Edward:** No.

**Ellen:** I thought you were looking for the chimney sweep or something.

**Edward:** No.

**Ellen:** Funny.

*They sit. Edward reads. Ellen knits.*

**Belinda:** *(from where the chimney was)* Tommy? Tommy?

**Ellen:** You wonder don't you?

**Edward:** What?

**Ellen:** Nothing.

*Tommy enters.*

**Edward:** Wonder what?

**Ellen:** *(still knitting)* How best to bear the burden of the world?

**Edward:** Nope.

*Pause.*

**Ellen:** Life is unjust. It's... We...

*Pause.*

**Edward:** What?

**Ellen:** Nothing.

**Edward:** Precisely.

*Pause.*

**Ellen:** There's so little we know. About what goes on. It's best to be guilty about life.

**Edward:** Sorry for living.

*Pause.*

**Ellen:** It's a bit cold, isn't it.

**Edward:** We should do something about fixing the fire place.

*They read and knit.*

**Edward:** It's an old house. It's got a chimney you know.

**Ellen:** I know.

*Edward gets up and goes near where the fire place was.*

**Edward:** It's around here somewhere - the chimney.

*He sits again.*

**Edward:** I suppose it's too old to use.

**Ellen:** *(brightly)* We could find the chimney sweep! We could help the chimney sweep at last!

**Edward:** *(desperate)* Why not just a fire? A little... fire.

*Tommy goes behind Ellen's chair and watches her knit. Belinda goes to where the chimney was and tries to look up where it was. Timothy and Abigail cross the stage with butterfly nets. They exit happy - oblivious to the universe's compulsory suffering.*

**Tommy:** *(softly in Ellen's ear)* Help!

**Tommy:** Help!

**Ellen:** The news, dear! It's time for the news!

**Belinda:** *(softly, looking up chimney which is not there)* Tommy? Tommy?

*Edward reads. Ellen takes a tissue in preparation. We hear the television news begin. Ellen uses the tissue then hastily grabs her knitting. Lights fade.*

**THE END**

## APPENDIX

**Extract from letter from John Owens, Professor of Philosophy at Mount St Mary's College, Auckland University:**

Regarding the meaning of "The Chimney", I refer you to the saying of the Greek philosopher Anaximander:

*And the things from which existing things come into being are also the things into which they are destroyed, in accordance with what must be. For they give justice and reparation to one another for their injustice in accordance with the arrangement of time.*

The "injustice" in question is of course the injustice of existing, taking the air and water and material which might have belonged to something else. Anaximander points out that although we do this, we should not feel guilty about it - **eventually** we pay the penalty. In the meantime, we can do little else than get on with our life.

The play opens with a case of one who deserves **infinite** mourning. His passing is tragic - nothing could compensate it. But the survivors cannot live in perpetual mourning. They have to cook supper, get to sleep, get out and forage. This can seem hard-hearted. Always there are voices that want to stay in anguish forever, devote all their strength to remedying the tragedy of existence (especially women's voices). But these voices are soppy, ineffectual and boring. If there were no other voices there would be no play (what a bore it would be). Fortunately it is redeemed by the voices of the men. They realize that "compassion" can be anti-life in that it wants to stay and mourn, or to **do something about it** all. It refuses to acknowledge that we can do little about the real boundaries of human tragedy. So get on with it! And if we can get on with it with wit and verve, all the better.

The excuses the men give for not doing anything are very good (he's gone "out the other end" etc). Even Abigail, who holds an ambiguous position in the great divide, can rattle off a decent line (about the mole catcher). All this has the clear bitter feel of truth about it.

If humans face up to the conditions of their life and do not try to "remedy" them, the very grounds of mourning eventually disappear and are held no more in memory, so that we have no more access to them. The few who might remember make no trouble anymore. The fireplace, the scene of tragedy, has disappeared, and humanity has moved on, forgetful, refreshed (though conscious at times of a nameless discomfort).

So the play celebrates our dark relief at being delivered for a moment from the cloying pity/piety which stops us from breathing (compulsory worship every night at 6 pm - THE FULL NEWS HOUR). What heavy dues we pay, what fuelling of public anguish, what drivel. Behold the most recent shape of a society which does not believe in God, and therefore loads the human subject with unbelievable burdens. Formerly we spoke of "acts of God" and shrugged our shoulders and got on with it. Now we ask "is the government doing enough...?" The play lets us acknowledge WE have had enough.

...

Incest, mayhem and guilt (are the) traditional themes of our high cultural achievements. It becomes drama when we acknowledge we have to pull down their buildings, trample their graves, disturb their rest if we are to live at all (defile our ancestors). This is the way it is - we have no choice. (The forced sin - traditional stuff of tragedy).

...