

COUNTRY RELATIONS

WRITTEN BY DARREN BREALEY

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COUNTRY RELATIONS

Country Relations brings back those not-so-fond memories of family reunions. In a typical country abode, the nagging and overbearing host Mollie Watts makes small-minded observations in nasal country twang. Whilst her browbeaten husband Archibald is generally content to agree apathetically. Archibald and Mollie Watts are not your typical quiet country folk. As Dot the cow launches into labour, Archibald and Mollie attempt to continue with their family event assisted by the ladies from the Country Women's Association. Archibald is more interested in showing his stamp collection, and Mollie would like to show the family her slides from the Begonia Festival. As the opening speeches continue, family secrets are revealed.

Country Relations was first performed at the Trades Hall in the Annexe Room, Melbourne, on 6 October 1999 with the following cast:

MOLLIE	...	<i>Naomi Lopez</i>
ARCHIBALD	...	<i>Adrian Nunes</i>

Archibald and Mollie live in a well-appointed and clean country home. The family orientated interior design has taken Mollie many years to decorate and her pride in housekeeping is obvious to all who visit. Mollie is in a paddock behind the house, attempting to calm their old, yet prize-winner cow. Archibald attends to the needs of his hungry visiting aunts, uncles, nephews and nieces, ready for an onslaught of lunch.

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Archibald stands in front of the gathered family members, welcoming them to their humble abode. He fidgets with his hair as he speaks.

ARCHIBALD: Thank you everyone. Thank you for coming to our annual family gathering. Lunch will be served soon. We have a few surprises to share with you. They will come a little later. Mollie is outside at present, so I won't go on for much longer. She's tying Dot to the back of the trailer. Poor girl isn't well. It's time we sold her to the local stockyards however; I reckon she just needs a good...

MOLLIE: *(off)* Archibald. Archibald. Stop fidgeting and come out here.

ARCHIBALD: It's, Arch.

MOLLIE: *(off)* Archibald. Dot's carrying on again. Come out here and give me a hand.

ARCHIBALD: We must thank Mollie for the hard work she and the Country Women's Association ladies have done providing refreshments for this afternoon's family gathering.

Archibald begins to exit. Pause. He stops.

ARCHIBALD: Oh, yes. Thank you to Jennifer for bringing her triple chocolate and cherry cream puff surprise and to Frank for bringing his speciality - stuffed pig's hoofs. Again. Mollie said not to eat as much this time Frank, especially after the problems it caused last year. Sorry Frank, no offence, it's just that, well...

Pause.

ARCHIBALD: After lunch, if anyone would like to view the new additions from the United Kingdom and from the U.S.A. One special collectors stamp I acquired from the Stamp Collectors Club. I never thought that the opportunity to buy such a rare stamp like this one would come my way, but I got it. I was talking to Colin from the club; he was able to purchase a rare stamp from Russia. Not a very colourful stamp, but its rare colouring makes it. I also tracked down that rare stamp from France, the one I was talking about last time we met up like this. The stamp is from the early nineteen hundreds, an almost common stamp of its type and somewhat ordinary looking, though its colourings are amazing, but...

MOLLIE: *(off)* ...Archibald.

MOLLIE enters.

MOLLIE: I swear you get deafer as you grow older. Are you dear?

ARCHIBALD: No, dear.

MOLLIE: I could do with a cuppa. Fetch me a cup of tea.

ARCHIBALD: Yes, dear.

MOLLIE: Not too hot.

ARCHIBALD: Yes, dear.

MOLLIE: Only put one sweetener tablet in it.

ARCHIBALD: Yes, dear.

MOLLIE: Have you announced lunch?

ARCHIBALD: No, dear.

Pause.

MOLLIE: Don't stand there like a fool, what are you waiting for?

ARCHIBALD *exits.*

MOLLIE: I swear. I don't know how Archibald survived this world for as long as he has, without me. Welcome everyone, to our humble country abode. Thank you for travelling the distances you all have had to suffer to get here. Having all the family here makes all the difference. I know Dad would've been proud to see all the children here in one room, after such a long absence. I'm happy to see his family tradition has lived on. Of course, it would be much better if Mother could be here, but due to her failing health and arthritis, she can't make it this year. I know, I know, it's unfortunate however, Mother sends her best regards and her love to everyone. Though, we needn't miss out on seeing Mother, as Dennis has supplied us videotape of Mum's annual message. I believe Mum is going about her daily routine at the Home on tape. What's that Dennis? Dennis, I'm not going to mention Mum's indiscretion with Mr Hoddlesworth. I don't believe we need to be reminded of Mother's temper. I will have to fast-forward pass that bit. Dennis, I don't think watching mum hose down Mr Hoddlesworth, particularly funny. No, I don't want to watch her pushing Mr Hoddlesworth into her award-winning country-fate rose bush. I don't care if it took twenty nurses to get him out... shall we get on with things? Thank you Dennis. This is the third time we have all met here for our family reunion. One could say it is turning into a tradition to our humble country abode. And as we all know the

family tradition continues to grow with new additions to the family.

ARCHIBALD enters with a cup of tea.

ARCHIBALD: I don't think this is the time, Mollie.

MOLLIE: Put my tea down over there.

ARCHIBALD: Mollie...

MOLLIE: It's no secret Archibald. Jennifer and Michael choose to live a modern life style. That's what you get for city living. There's no need in trying to keep her protruding shape a secret. We all have eyes and we can all see her forthcoming tragedy. Though I'm sure Jennifer, with her education will not disappoint Mother. She will have the pleasure of hearing the announcement of their nuptials and their token love for each other.

ARCHIBALD: That's their affairs Mollie...

MOLLIE: Archibald, don't interrupt when I'm speaking to the family.

ARCHIBALD: Yes, dear.

MOLLIE: Put my tea down over there.

Archibald puts the cup of tea down on a table.

ARCHIBALD: Yes, dear.

MOLLIE: Did you put one sweetener tablet in the tea?

ARCHIBALD: Yes, dear.

MOLLIE: I must keep my cholesterol down.

ARCHIBALD: Yes, dear.

MOLLIE: You wouldn't want me having another pulmonary attack?

ARCHIBALD: Yes, dear... I mean no, dear.

MOLLIE: Andrew, could you please have another look at the Dodge. Archibald attempted to fix the transmission again however; it still seems to be playing up. I'm not sure what could be wrong. I've had a go at it, but the good Lord above only knows what's wrong with it. No Andrew, you can do that after lunch. Would you do that for me? Thank you Andrew, there's a good boy.

Joshua, stop pulling on the cats tail, I don't care if it bit you. Take the cat out of the cupboard and close the door. If you didn't stroke it the wrong way, it wouldn't bite you. Yes, Melissa? No, you cannot put Joshua in the cupboard. Your mother says that little boys should be seen and... well, I'll have a word with your mother. Little girls should know better than to stick little boys in cupboards. No, Melissa, you may not put the cat in the dishwasher. The cat will wash itself if it feels dirty. Dennis, please control your children.

ARCHIBALD: Do as Aunt Mollie says children.

MOLLIE: I have everything under control, Archibald.

ARCHIBALD: Yes, dear.

MOLLIE: Just as I have everything under control, you must pipe up and interfere. You always make everything so difficult. Are the slides ready for the... you know what? I can't see them out here you never have anything organised. When will you ever learn to be prepared?

ARCHIBALD: Sorry, dear.

MOLLIE: Now, before lunch is served, I would like to take everyone out to the paddock to see the progression of the garden and the pergola. One of Mother's off-cuts from her award-winning country-fate rose bush has begun to grow. The begonias have almost finished blooming and the rest of the garden is looking beautiful. Andrew has helped us with the construction of the pergola. It took young Andrew many hard working hours, yet his persistence has paid off. If Archibald has hooked up the lights properly, I'm sure the finishing touches will look superb. Thank you, Andrew. What's that Joshua? No, there will be no presents out in the garden, that's what Christmas is for. You have a secret about Christmas? Well, whatever it is Joshua, I'm sure it can wait until... Joshua, what Aunt Jennifer and Uncle Michael choose to do in the wood shed at Christmas is no concern of mine. Now, shall we proceed to the garden?

ARCHIBALD: Joshua, possibly you could tell Uncle Arch what went on.

Mollie slaps Archibald on the back of the head.

MOLLIE: We'll leave that one alone. Thank you. It's also nice to see that young Paul has bought his friend back again, this year. Tom, isn't it? Yes, that's right. What's that Paul? Tom has moved in with you. Oh, isn't that lovely, you two are flat-mates? Well, I'm sure the flat is a very happy one. It's nice to see my nephew associating himself with a nice, well-mannered young man.

Such a nice young Christian boy. Tom, since you are so good at gardening, if it isn't too much trouble, I would appreciate it if you could have a look at my award winning country-fate rose bush. You can put that green thumb of yours to work in my garden. I'm not sure they are getting too much sun.

Pause. A cow is heard calling out, off stage.

***** Truncated *****

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