

# **FRIENDLY BOMBS**

*A comedy*

*Cast of characters:*

Oliver Potter - Prime Minister  
60s / modest, honest, forgetful

Joanna Potter - Prime Minister's Wife  
50s / efficient, supportive, loyal

Edward Baker - General ('Teddy')  
50s / steady, pragmatic, humane

Marigold Butcher - General ('General Butcher')  
40s / brisk, ambitious, belligerent

*Props and costume:*

On a shelf, an assortment of ornaments, knick-knacks, books of verse (including one in which there is an old envelope)

2 x printouts (communications from SIS)

A post-it note (the Twitter password)

Mug of cocoa

Military caps / hats (for Edward & Marigold)

Dressing-gowns (for Oliver & Joanna)

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**Oliver**, wearing a suit, shirt & tie and glasses, enters stage right. He is looking for something. He picks things up and puts them down but can't find what he's looking for.

As **Oliver** exits stage left to continue his search elsewhere, **Marigold** enters from the front, speaking on her mobile.

**Marigold** (clipped) Okay. Yes. Got it. Now listen up. We move to 'Alert Red'. // Understood. In that case, move to 'Red Two'. // Very well. Make that 'Red Three.' // (steely) Listen to me. Whatever the present level is, move it up a notch. Better still, move it up three notches. Got it?

As **Marigold** ends the call and exits stage right, **Edward** enters from the front, speaking on his mobile.

**Edward** (slow and calm) Yes. // I see. // No, not at this stage. Don't want to be hasty, do we? // You've got it. Masterly inaction. That's the plan. No need to panic. (ending the call and exiting stage right) Not yet at least.

**Oliver** re-enters stage left and resumes his search.

**Joanna** enters stage right, holding a printout. For a moment, she pauses to watch **Oliver**.

**Joanna** What have you lost?

**Oliver** (surprised) Oh. Joanna. (airy) Lost? No, nothing. My glasses.

**Joanna** You're wearing them.

**Oliver** (checking) So I am. (beat) My reading glasses.

**Joanna** Your reading glasses are being repaired. You sat on them last week.

**Oliver** Oh, yes. I'd forgotten. Rather a lot on my mind.

**Joanna** We've had another communication from SIS. I've printed it out. Shall I read it?

**Oliver** (weary) Oh, dear. I suppose you'd better.

**Joanna** (reading) "From: Secret Intelligence Service." In brackets: "SIS." "To: The Right Honourable Oliver Potter. Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. First Lord of the Treasury. Member of Parliament for — "

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- Oliver**                    (*interrupting*) I know who I am, Joanna, but what does it say?
- Joanna**                    Don't get tetchy with me, Oliver. I'm simply reading the thing.
- Oliver**                    Sorry, my dear. I'm a little on edge.
- Joanna**                    (*continuing*) "Top secret." In brackets: "Very."  
"Confidential." In brackets: "Strictly." "For your eyes only."  
In brackets: "Exclusively." Shall I go on?
- Oliver**                    Please, Joanna. If you wouldn't mind.
- Joanna**                    "Situation as previously advised." Signed: "X." In brackets: "Control."
- Oliver**                    Isn't that what the last message said?
- Joanna**                    Yes.
- Oliver**                    Not exactly helpful, is it?
- Joanna**                    No.
- Oliver**                    But then that's X for you. She does like to play her cards close to her chest.
- Joanna**                    Her rather ample chest. Yes, she does. "Semper Occultus."
- Oliver**                    I'm sorry?
- Joanna**                    "Always Secret." The SIS motto. It's there on their website, for the whole world to see.
- Oliver**                    Keeping the Prime Minister in the dark is taking things a bit far, don't you think?
- Joanna**                    X doesn't trust politicians. Not that anyone does these days. (*fondly*) With one or two exceptions.
- Oliver**                    Do you think I should warn the nation?
- Joanna**                    Maybe. There's no time for a broadcast. How about a Tweet?
- Oliver**                    I'm not much good at Tweets. I can never remember my password.
- Joanna**                    (*passing a post-it note*) I've written it down for you.
- Oliver**                    (*amused*) "Joan Hunter Dunn." Of course. How could I forget? You know, I'm not sure, Joanna. It might be better to leave the nation in blissful ignorance.

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**Joanna**                    Whatever you think, Oliver. A bedtime cocoa?

**Oliver**                    Why not? Although I don't think we'll be going to bed tonight, do you?

**Oliver and Joanna** exit.

**Marigold** enters stage left speaking on her mobile.

**Marigold**                    Stand by for the immediate deployment of our entire arsenal of missiles. // Yes, I do mean both of them.

**Edward** enters stage right speaking on his mobile.

**Edward**                    All okay with you fellows? // Red Six? Really? That's news to me. On whose orders? // Oh, I see.

**Marigold**                    Yes, I do know we need the activation code. // Yes, I am aware we haven't received it yet. It's on its way.

**Edward**                    Can't do too much harm, I suppose. Not until we've been issued with the code, that is.

**Marigold**                    Shortly. Any minute now. In the meantime ... standby. // Yes, I do appreciate that that's what you've been doing. What I'm telling you to do now is to carry on doing it. Got it?

**Marigold** ends the call.

**Edward**                    No point in getting too worked up at this stage, chaps. Steady as she goes. That's the ticket. Who knows? It might never happen.

**Edward** ends the call.

(grim) Let's pray it doesn't.

**Marigold** becomes aware of **Edward's** presence. She salutes him sharply.

**Marigold**                    Good evening, General Baker.

**Edward**                    Ah! Marigold. (*registering her displeasure*) I'm sorry. (*saluting*) Good evening, General Butcher.

**Marigold**                    Standing by.

**Edward**                    Yes?

**Marigold**                    Ready to be briefed.

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**Edward** Oh, I see. Well, nothing much has changed. A flotilla of nuclear missiles — travelling at snail's pace — is heading this way from the continent.

**Marigold** From Brussels?

**Edward** Odd, isn't it? I know things haven't been going too well and that the European Union is faintly displeased with us, but ordering a thermonuclear strike does seem like an overreaction.

**Marigold** Is the Prime Minister up to speed?

**Edward** Pretty much.

**Marigold** You don't sound certain.

**Edward** The old man can sometimes seem a little 'distracted'. I know he's tried phoning NATO HQ, but apparently all our international telecommunications systems are utterly buggered, and BT says they can't send anyone to fix the problem until midday tomorrow.

**Marigold** Can I be blunt, General Baker? Do you think the Prime Minister is up to the job?

**Edward** Who knows? But Oliver Potter is a good man. And, after the slew of sex scandals and sordid revelations over the last twelve months, he's all we have left.

**Marigold** He needs to be told that time's running out. Soon we'll be too late to launch our missiles. And then ...

**Edward** Then?

**Marigold** They'll get away with it, General Baker. We must show them what we're made of. Bloody foreigners.

**Edward** (*sadly*) Whatever we do to them, Marigold, it won't make much difference to us. Not once we've been reduced to shadows on the tarmac.

**Marigold** We have to punch above our weight. Defend our place in the world.

**Edward** Which looks increasingly as if it's going to be merely an empty space off the coast of Europe.

**Joanna enters with a printout stage right.**

**Marigold** The Prime Minister must be told to launch our missiles. Without delay. Immediately. At once.

**Edward** I'm sure he'll do what's best.

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- Marigold** I really must insist, General Baker.
- Edward** Insist all you like, General Butcher, but I am still in command.
- Marigold** Only until midnight. After that ...
- Edward** Don't you think it would be wiser to let me to see this crisis through to the end, Marigold?
- Marigold** The overall command of our armed forces is a job-share, General Baker. And job-share means job-share. At midnight I take over.
- Edward** (*weary*) As you wish. On your head be it.
- Marigold** *exits stage left.*
- Joanna** That woman! (*handing Edward the printout*) Oliver thought you should see this, Teddy. The flotilla has reached Ostend.
- Edward** Very puzzling. The missiles were launched three hours ago. It's a miracle they're still airborne.
- Joanna** Perhaps it's a negotiating ploy?
- Edward** (*musings*) It's all very odd. The M4 corridor wouldn't have been my first choice of target. Although there is a rumour that GCHQ is now based in Slough.
- Joanna** Shouldn't you know where GCHQ is based?
- Edward** Since privatisation, that's been classified as 'commercially sensitive information'. All I know is that G4S or Serco or Capita, or whoever won the contract, closed down Cheltenham and sacked half the staff. Since then, it's all gone terribly quiet. 'Teething problems', they say.
- Joanna** In other words, we're flying blind?
- Edward** That's the long and the short of it.
- Joanna** Poor Oliver. Such a responsibility. He never wanted the job, you know. He'd planned to step down at Christmas. Walking in the Alps. A little gentle gardening. Reading light verse in his armchair. And now this.
- Oliver** *enters stage right, wearing a dressing-gown and holding a mug of cocoa.*
- Oliver** Well, Teddy. What do you think?

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- Edward** To be honest, Prime Minister, I'm not sure what to think.
- Oliver** That Butcher woman keeps following me round, looking at her watch.
- Edward** She takes over command at midnight. In two minutes' time, in fact. She'll demand you authorise a nuclear strike.
- Joanna** What a warmonger. I've never liked her. Let me fetch you a mug of cocoa, Teddy.

*Joanna exits stage right.*

- Oliver** What am I going to do? We can't launch our missiles, you know.
- Edward** Butcher's going to make your life a misery until you do.
- Oliver** No, what I mean is that we can't launch, Teddy. I've a terrible confession to make. The nuclear code ...
- Edward** Yes ... ?
- Oliver** When I was first given the code, I knew I'd forget it so I'm afraid I wrote it down. Not what you're supposed to do, I know. But I hid it away somewhere secret. Somewhere safe. A 'logical' spot which I knew I couldn't forget.
- Edward** And ... ?
- Oliver** I've forgotten it.
- Edward** Oh, dear. Have you asked Joanna?
- Oliver** I can't. And please don't tell her, Teddy. She already thinks I'm a stupid old duffer.
- Edward** I'm sure she doesn't. In any case, it may not matter. I have a confession of my own. Our missiles probably won't work.
- Oliver** Won't work?
- Edward** With all the defence cuts, they've not been maintained properly. Bits have been going missing and the Americans won't replace them until we pay for the last lot. So ... even if you did find the code and authorise a nuclear strike, the likelihood is that when someone pushes the button, nothing will happen. Poof. They'll probably fall over sideways and fizz.
- Oliver** I really don't know if that makes me feel better or worse. Oh, God, Teddy. Here she comes.

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**Oliver** exits stage right, hurriedly. **Marigold** enters stage left.

**Marigold** Midnight, General Baker.

**Edward** (*resigned*) Yes, Marigold. Over to you.

**Marigold** (*exiting stage right*) Prime Minister! Prime Minister!

**Edward** watches and waits anxiously.

Pause, before **Marigold** re-enters stage right holding a slip of paper.

**Marigold** (*triumphant*) Here we are. Got it. Action stations, everyone. (*exiting stage left*) Action stations!

Beat, before **Oliver** enters stage right.

**Oliver** Well, that's that then. For the time being, at least.

**Edward** You found the code?

**Oliver** What? Oh, no. As I said, I've not the remotest idea where I've hidden it. "Joan Hunter Dunn."

**Edward** (*mystified*) Who?

**Oliver** My Twitter password. That's what I gave to the Butcher woman.

**Joanna** enters stage right, urgently, wearing a dressing-gown and holding a printout.

**Joanna** (*frantic*) Oliver, Teddy. That woman. She has to be stopped.

**Oliver** (*calm*) It's all right, Joanna.

**Joanna** It isn't all right. Well, it is and it isn't. But she mustn't be allowed to fire our missiles. (*handing the printout to Oliver*) There's been a terrible mistake.

**Oliver** Would you mind, Teddy? No reading glasses.

**Edward** (*reading*) "From: Secret Intelligence Service." In brackets: "SIS." "To: The Right Honourable Oliver Potter. Prime Minister of —"

**Oliver** Yes, Teddy. Thank you. But what does it say?

**Edward** "Terrible cock-up ... Disaffected ex-employee ... Schoolboy prank ... Situation NOT as previously advised ... Apologies from Slough." Signed: "X." In brackets: "Control." In brackets: "Oops. Sorry.") Thank God for that.

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**Joanna** (still panicking) But the nuclear missiles. The code ...

**Oliver** Slough! Yes, of course. That's it. I remember now. "With carefulest carelessness, gaily you won / I am weak from your loveliness, Joan Hunter Dunn." (*looking for the book*) Where is it? Here we are. (*finding the book*) The Collected Works of John Betjeman. "Miss Joan Hunter Dunn. Miss Joan Hunter Dunn. / How mad I am, sad I am, glad that you won." (*taking an old envelope from the book*) Here's the code. I knew I'd hidden it somewhere entirely 'logical'.

**Joanna** What are you talking about, Oliver?

**Oliver** Slough. The Betjeman poem. You remember it. "Come friendly bombs and fall on Slough!"

**Marigold** enters stage left, distressed.

(*tearing up the envelope*) But I don't think we'll be needing it now, will we?

**Edward** No, Prime Minister. Not now. I don't think we will.

THE END