

## FLAT SPIN 2 : RENEWING THE LEASE by MARSALI TAYLOR

### CHARACTERS

The Flatmates:

JILL - reading English. Normally the reliable one but presently a little love-struck, so not her usual efficient self

ALICE - reading law. Brisk and organised. Rather inclined to delegate to others.

NANCY - reading medicine. Scatty and inclined to flap

JAN - reading music. Generally not on this planet, too busy hearing music in her head

CATHY - supposedly reading English, but concentrating more on having a good time.

Other Characters:

HORTENSE - Cathy's Mum. A natural paranoid worrier.

MRS CAPALDI - the landlady. Italian, voluble, excitable and naturally dramatic.

POLICE OFFICER - a young woman used to the ways of students.

Like *Flat Spin*, which involves the same group of girl students, this play makes a good exam piece. It is funnier than its predecessor, concentrating this time on an intrinsically comic situation rather than, as last time, a potentially sad one.

Running time: approx 25 minutes.

Note: the part of Cathy is too short to be examinable, but she has very little to do and say - just appearing briefly at the beginning and end of the play. This part should be taken by someone who is not being examined. The main bulk of the play can be rehearsed without the need for the presence of the actress playing this character.

The part of the police officer is also too small, but it is easy to double this role with that of Alice.

The play thus ends up with the following examinable roles:

JILL

ALICE & POLICE OFFICER

NANCY

JAN

HORTENSE

MRS CAPALDI

making for a cast of 6, with a small extra part for a non-examinee: CATHY.

### EXTRACT ONE

***The scene is a student flat: a bed Up Right with, beside it, a door into the kitchen. Through this door we can see the end of a table piled high with dishes etc. The flat chores rota is pinned to the door jamb. A rather dilapidated sofa, centre, with a bucket on the floor beside it. Down left, Jill's table, with piles of books and papers. Down right, a mattress on the floor with Cathy fast asleep on it.***

***It's a grey day outside: we hear rain on the window and roof. The lighting suggests this dreariness.***

***Jill and Alice are sitting on the sofa and waking up slowly over a cup of***

**tea. Alice is dressed and ready to go, except for her boots, which are by Jill's bed. Jill is still in her dressing-gown. Jan is practising her scales off. Two radios murmur softly off - Nancy's Radio 1, Alice's Radio 4.**

**JILL** And after the film, we went to this Italian restaurant for supper....**[She breaks off into a huge yawn.]**

**ALICE** It was a good night then.

**JILL *starry-eyed*** Mmmmm. **[Sudden smile.]** Saw Cathy and her mates, with what looked like half a football team.

**Cathy turns over, mutters 'Rugby', and turns over again. A sudden short blackout accompanied by a scream from Nancy and both radios cutting out. Nancy charges in, in her dressing-gown.**

**NANCY** I nearly got electrocuted. I was just reaching up to put the light bulb in the socket when a drip came out and zapped right up my arm.

**ALICE** Jill, you were going to phone Mrs Capaldi.

**JILL** I'll tell her when she comes about renewing the lease.

**ALICE** When's that?

**JILL *vaguely*** Oh, next week - a couple of weeks...

**ALICE *sarcastically*** Thought love was supposed to waken you up.

**JILL *dreamily*** Mmmmm.

**ALICE** One of us is going to get killed.

**Nancy joins them on the sofa.**

**NANCY** It was horrible - like a red-hot wire running up the inside of my arm.

**ALICE** That's the radios gone again.

**JILL** I'll phone her.

**ALICE** Write a letter and send it recorded delivery.

**NANCY** Why?

**ALICE** So our parents can sue after we die, of course. If you're going to be a doctor you should know about this kind of thing.

**NANCY** I was hoping not to kill my patients.

**A pause. Jan stops playing. They listen to the water dripping into the bucket.**

**NANCY to Jill** Good night out?

**JILL** Fantastic.

**Another pause. Drip, drip. Nancy's eyes fall, vaguely, on Cathy.**

**NANCY** Cathy said to wake her.

**ALICE** Good luck.

**JILL** Why's Cath want waking so early?

**NANCY** She's expecting visitors. **[Thumping sounds off.]** Family.

**CATHY *turning over again, mumbling*** Mum. Ten o'clock.

**Jan appears, dressed, heading for the kitchen.**

**ALICE, JILL, NANCY *variously*** Mind the bucket!

**Cathy pulls the duvet over her head.**

**JAN stops just in time.** I knew it was there. **[She looks down into the bucket on the floor.]** It's almost full.

**JILL** It can't be. I emptied it when I got up.

**Jan lifts it to show her and gets a drip on the head.**

**ALICE** It's getting worse.

**Jan puts the bucket down and heads for the kitchen.**

**NANCY** The crack's bigger too. It's almost reached your desk, Jill.

**JILL** You're telling me. I was beginning to think I had dandruff, then I realised it was just flaking plaster.

**Drip, drip.**

**JAN *looking up*** It's spreading into the kitchen too.

**NANCY** And there's a patch of baccillium in the corner.

**JILL** A patch of what?

**JAN** This black spotty mould stuff?

**NANCY** A major cause of asthma and allergy-related syndromes. [***She rises and wanders off.***]

EXTRACT TWO

**JILL** Today's the day the landlady's coming in to check the flat...

**JAN *stopping playing*** Today?

**JILL** ... and give us our new lease.

**NANCY** Today?

***They all look around. Even Jan can see the landlady is not going to like what they've done to the flat.***

**NANCY** When?

**JILL** Ten o'clock. What time is it now? [***Nancy looks vaguely round.***] Twenty to. Right. [***She begins hauling her clothes on over her pyjamas.***] Get Cathy up and out and hide the mattress. [***She takes down the poster from above her bed.***] I'll go and buy furniture polish and air freshener and stuff.

**JAN** We could burn a joss-stick.

**JILL** She'd just think we were on drugs. *Sugar*, no money. Is there anything in the kitty?

**NANCY** There was a fiver...

**JAN** Oh, sorry - I needed some manuscript paper...

**JILL *tipping out a ton of 1p and 2p pieces*** Safeways will love me. [***She whirls out. From Off.***] Once you've got rid of Cath, tidy the place up a bit. See you in a minute.

**NANCY** What if she arrives before you get back?

**JILL *reappearing*** Oh, talk about the weather - the repairs - get her to look at the bathroom light and the ceiling.... Just don't mention Cath.

**JAN** No Cathy.

**NANCY** Right. [***A pause.***] You do the kitchen, I'll do Cath.

***Jan disappears into the kitchen; noises of dish-washing. Nancy shakes Cathy awake, ad-libbing an explanation of the situation. She is almost getting a reaction when the doorbell goes. Jan shoots out of the kitchen and she and Nancy look in horror at each other.***

**JAN** It's her! Come *on*, Cathy!

**NANCY** The fire escape - quick! [***The doorbell goes again, impatiently.***] Quick!

***They bundle a protesting Cathy, duvet and all, across the room and into the kitchen. We hear the rattling of the fire door. They shove her out.***

**CATHY** Listen!

***The fire door shuts. We hear Cathy banging against it.***

**JAN** What about the mattress?

**NANCY** On top of my bed.

***They grab the mattress and disappear out of the room with it. Another few bangs from Cathy, a last despairing wail.***

**CATHY off** My mum's coming today!

***The doorbell rings again.***

**JAN** I'll get it, I'll get it...

***Nancy tidies at frantic speed. We hear Jan, off.***

**JAN off** Good morning ... do come in ... have a seat...

***Jan shows a smartly dressed woman with a very strong likeness to Cathy into the living-room. It is Hortense, Cathy's Mum. She looks around critically and isn't very impressed by what she sees. Jan and Nancy exchange looks.***

**NANCY** Dreadful weather.

**HORTENSE** Appalling.

**NANCY** Very wet.

**HORTENSE** Not good driving weather.

**NANCY** Still, it is March.

**HORTENSE** Yes.

**NANCY** Lucky it's not snowing.

**HORTENSE** I suppose we're lucky it's not snowing.

***A pause in the conversation. Jan makes drinking mime.***

**NANCY** Have some coffee.

***She disappears into the kitchen. Jan spots Cathy's sheet and pillow and picks them up.***

**JAN** We've just been airing the bedding. Horrid day outside, isn't it? [***She exits rapidly.***]

***Cathy's Mum touches Cathy's jacket and stuff on the chair, smiles, shakes her head, dusts the sofa and sits on it gingerly. She takes out her mobile phone and dials.***

**HORTENSE** Albert? Yes, I've made it. Oh, Albert, I don't like the look of this area at all. The street is very seedy and there were teenagers lounging about in doorways. I'm sure half of them were on drugs. And there was an Arab man - you know half of them are in league with white slave traders. I'm sure it's not a suitable place for our Cath. And the flat is very run down. Yes, one of them's making me a coffee - yes, quite nice girls, but they seem to have a fixation on the weather - not quite normal - no, no sign of her, but it's a bit early for our Cath. Her stuff's all over the place, just like home. Yes - yes, I'll phone again later.

***She switches off the mobile and begins to look around again. Jan appears, just as she is looking at the bucket.***

**JAN** Er - we're a bit worried about that. There's quite a lot of water coming in. The crack's getting bigger too. And there's plaster coming out of it. [***She jumps up and down. Hortense brushes plaster off her hat.***] Oh, sorry.

**HORTENSE** It's a big crack. [*She follows it into the kitchen.*] This ceiling is covered in mould. That's terribly bad for asthma sufferers. [*She comes out again.*] That's terribly unhygienic. If you're going to keep staying here, something must be done about it.

*Jan and Nancy exchange pleased looks.*

**JAN** That would be really good.

**NANCY** The water's getting into the wiring too. It drips out of the light sockets.

**HORTENSE** That's appallingly dangerous. Yes, something must be done about that immediately.

**NANCY** Oh, yes please.

**HORTENSE** In fact, I'm not sure anyone should be staying here with the flat in this condition.

*Consternation from Nancy and Jan.*

**NANCY** Oh, no, it's a lovely flat!

**JAN** It's really handy for the University. Just five minutes' walk.

**NANCY** We'd hate to have to move.

**JAN** We're really comfy here. We don't mind the drips that much, honest. I know where the bucket is now.

**HORTENSE** It's quite small for five of you.

**JAN & NANCY variations on:** Oh no, there's only four of us.

**HORTENSE** I thought there were five. Jill and Alice and Jan -

**JAN** That's me.

**HORTENSE** - and Nancy -

**NANCY** Me.

**HORTENSE** -and Cathy, of course.

**JAN** Cathy?

**NANCY** Cathy?

**JAN & NANCY** There's no Cathy here.

**JAN** Definitely not.

**NANCY** Just the four of us.

**JAN** Yes, just four of us.

**HORTENSE** What? But her things are all over the place. That's her jacket.

**JAN** That? Oh no, that's my jacket. [*She puts it on. It's several sizes too big.*]

**NANCY** She likes her clothes loose.

**HORTENSE** Am I at the wrong flat?

**NANCY** Oh, no. This is the right flat, of course it is, but I don't know where you've picked up this idea about Cathy.

**JAN** She definitely doesn't stay here.

EXTRACT THREE

**JILL** Good morning, Mrs Capaldi. Horrid day, isn't it? Can I take your coat?

*Mrs Capaldi enters. She has constantly moving beady eyes and an air of suspicion.*

**MRS CAPALDI** No, I do not stay long. Have you been putting up posters on this wall?

**JILL** Oh no - just one poster, and I used blutack.

**MRS CAPALDI** It is new paint. You will not do this. It is in terms of lease. No posters.

**JILL** Of course not.

**MRS CAPALDI** Where is lovely painting of crying child?

***Jill fishes under the bed and displays it.***

**MRS CAPALDI** This is nice picture, gives tone to room. No poster of naked man.

**JILL** It wasn't ...

**MRS CAPALDI** And there is a burn mark on my new sofa. You have been having parties.

**JILL** Oh no ...

**MRS CAPALDI** I will not have parties. And see, see - the table that belonged to my grandmother. You have put rings all over it.

**JILL** I'm very sorry.

**MRS CAPALDI** And your bed is not made. A respectable girl makes her bed first thing. [***She continues round.***] What is this pail? Why do you have a pail on my good carpet? This does not look well.

**JILL** It's the roof, you see, Mrs Capaldi. It leaks a little.... it would be very good if you got it fixed... also, the light bulb in the bathroom...

**MRS CAPALDI** Complaints, complaints, nothing but complaints - I have fifty, a hundred young persons ready to rent this flat if you do not find it good enough for you.

Extract from Production notes

## **PRODUCTION NOTES + TECHNICAL CUES, ETC.**

### **INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTIONS**

For fans of *Flat Spin*, this play is a follow-up, featuring the same group of student flat-mates. However, it is not necessary to have read *Flat Spin* to appreciate this sequel. Fun-loving Cathy is camping out in the flat which is officially rented by Jill, Alice, Jan and Nancy. Cathy has a mattress on the floor of Jill's room and, being Cathy, has freely scattered her belongings around the space which should belong to the long-suffering Jill. In the first play, Cathy had inadvertently 'got off' with Dave, the boy that Jill has set her heart on. Realising this finally, Cathy relinquished any hold she may have had on Dave and manoeuvred a date for Jill with him instead. In this play, the time is a few weeks later. Jill and Dave are now an item and Jill is hook, line and sinker in love with him. Love renders her dreamy and most un-Jill-like, though as realisation of crisis comes to the fore, Jill becomes her usual practical self as the play progresses.

*Flat Spin* had lightness of touch but was basically a comparatively serious play with, hovering over it, always the potential for tragedy as Jill's happiness hung in the balance. In contrast, *Flat Spin 2: Renewing The Lease* is pure comedy, nearing farce at times. There are mistaken identities, concealments, lies and confusion as the flatmates work together to try to hang onto their flat for another year. Adding to the farcical confusions are the clashing noises of this group of people's different tastes in music and their wildly contrasting personalities, from vague musical Jan, to scatty medic, Nancy, to bossy delegator, Alice. Through it all Cathy sleeps and mutters, only to be concealed by being pushed out of the window, mattress and all. Add to these ingredients a suspicious Italian landlady and Cathy's neurotic mother, convinced her daughter will be abducted by white slave traders, and all the ingredients for comic farce are present - especially when Jan and Nancy mistake Cathy's Mum for the landlady.

As with all comic farce, the play needs a good fast pace and spot-on timing. Characterisation is broad and the character contrasts built in to the writing need to be exposed for full effectiveness of the piece.

**CHARACTERS** all the characters are about 19 years old.

JILL is studying English. She is a quiet girl, studious and organised - far more so than the others in the flat. There is a quiet strength in her. She is very much the hub of the whole sharing arrangement - the still centre-point around which the others revolve and whose

strength they rely on. Having said this, Jill is in love and in that first dazed state in which all her normal functions are on hold. This is the Jill we see in the first few pages, but as soon as the crisis of the lease signing penetrates her consciousness, she quickly becomes the organised person she really is. She, with Alice, are the only ones who have ever met the landlady.

Though she is organised, she is not bossy in the same way that Alice is; there is always something warm and likeable about Jill which should be kept in mind when playing her.

ALICE is studying law. The intellectual [Radio 4] she is already deeply in the lawyer's mind-set. Everything is negotiated - and if possible delegated. The way she speaks is terse, rather bossy. She is less likeable than Jill in her organisations - since she rarely takes any responsibility herself. She is the organiser of the flat rotas - who does what job in the house. Don't make her too unlikeable, though - her congratulations of Jan's success must be meant, though kept brief. She serves as a good contrast to the others in playing style - an upright, smartly dressed person with strong spare body language, a rather clipped manner of speaking, very definite and strong.

NANCY is studying medicine. Nancy is a fun character, rather scatty with girly mannerisms. She tends to over-dramatise and enjoys being the centre of attention. She does not like taking responsibility and allows Jill to do her thinking for her. She is also good at passing the buck; notice how she gives Jan the worst job of cleaning up the kitchen. She and Jan feed off each other's panic and their scene together should be taken at a good fast pace. Keep Nancy's voice light, her gestures large and dramatic [though not in the same league as Hortense], her voice and movement young and bouncy.

JAN is studying music. She is endearingly clumsy - always tripping over things - and vague. She is lost in a world of her own most of the time. Though she has to snap out of this to cope with cleaning up for the landlady, she needs to retain a fluttery vagueness to her movements, a tendency to dither, to move more slowly. Voice too is dreamier and slower than Nancy's, even with her delight at getting onto the TV masterclass. For the purposes of the script, she should be considerably smaller than Cathy - whose jacket swamps Jan and causes one of the major comic moments. Don't worry if you have no musicians in your group; one can get away with playing Jan without doing more than single notes on the violin onstage. However, take some coaching - these single notes need to look confident and correct.

CATHY is not a big character in this play, though she was the main one in the first *Flat Spin*. Drawing on this, we know she studies English and is very attractive - drawing boys to her like a magnet. Cathy's Mum is right to be scared of what she may get up to. Her tendency to sleep late features in both plays - because she is always out partying late at night. Make sure all her mutters are audible, even sounding as sleepy as they must - because each time she is actually answering someone in the room's question and is actually making sense, though no one listens. Cathy should be tall, and resemble her mother at least in hair colour and perhaps height.

HORTENSE is Cathy's Mum. Though French, presumably, there is no real need for a French accent. A very slight one would be nice perhaps, but she is a fluent English speaker who has presumably been in this country for at least 20 years to produce Cathy. However, her mannerisms can be very French, with plenty of flamboyant hand and arm gestures. She is an over-anxious mother, convinced that terrible things such as she may have read in the tabloids, are around every corner. She knows of the messiness of her daughter but has no idea of her gallivanting; if she did suspect, she would be horrified. It is clear she has come to check up on Cathy, perhaps suspecting that her daughter is likely to go off the rails away from maternal influence. She ought to be tall, like Cathy, and at least have the same hair colour as her 'daughter.'

MRS CAPALDI is the Italian landlady. Once again, though Italian, she has lived in this country for many years and should not have an overdone 'cod' Italian accent. However, some accent is indicated and she is Italian in her garrulity and her dramatic delivery of lines, accompanied by strong gestures. She is a canny landlady, able to manipulate situations to her own advantage. From the state of the flat, she is one of those nightmare landladies who are not prepared to do anything except rake in the money at the end of each month. She knows she holds all the cards and uses this to her advantage. She clearly enjoys having everybody hanging on every word she says - hence her manipulation of the girls through false kindness to them, which she uses to sweeten each punch that she pulls. Her body language is aggressive and voice sharp, the tone bullying.

THE POLICE OFFICER is a very small part [doubleable with Alice.] If using this doubling to make an examinable part out of Alice, make sure you make the most of contrast between the two - using different voice and mannerisms. The young officer could have a strong accent, whereas Alice clearly hasn't. The police officer is a firm young woman who knows her job and understands the situation quite quickly.

## **SETTING**

The playwright is quite specific in her description at the beginning. You could follow this precisely if you like. For *Flat Spin*, I did a detailed description as follows. There are one or two differences, because it was not clear from that play that Cathy is not a legitimate member of the flat and is simply squatting, using a mattress on the floor. In this play, that is the key feature.

Since the play is naturalistic and there are no changes, make it as full and detailed as possible...