

CALL GIRLS

Written by James Carrick
Edited by Liz Cannon
© 2024

*Dedicated to Lilibet,
who told me I could.*

Stage plays by the same author:

Fall Out
Welcome to Hellansville

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Call Girls was first produced from 17 to 26 October 2024 by Phoenix Theatre and was staged at The PumpHouse Theatre, Takapuna, Auckland, New Zealand.

Call Girls was first directed by Liz Cannon and first performed by:

PAULINE	Kate Birch
IVY	Helen Anne Davies
ANGELA	Ayesha Heblé
ROSE	Ami Coster
SARAH ELSWICK	Rebecca Wright
CARLA/PIP/KIRSTY	Alexandra Chrystal
COUNCILLOR LEONARD	Duncan Preston
PRIEST/JACK/MAYOR	Jimmy Carrick
GLEN/TIM	Aidan Allen
PHILLIP DINKLE	Oliver Roberts

Reviews

Glenda Pearce, BroadwayWorld, 18 Oct 2024:

<https://www.broadwayworld.com/new-zealand/>

Andrew Whiteside, 20 Oct 2024:

<https://www.andrewwhiteside.com/theatre-review-call-girls/>

CHARACTERS

- PAULINE** *Resident. Creative, flamboyant, pompous, arrogant, delusions of grandeur; elegant, an 'artiste'. In reality, a retired boarding school art teacher. Divorcee and widowed. No children. Ostentatious yet stylish outfits.*
- IVY** *Resident. Quick-witted, sarcastic, feisty, fiercely protective, a single mum before it was accepted. Slightly soft around the edges, close to her granddaughter. Retired odd-job 'career' - lollypop/dinner lady, cleaner - whatever to make ends meet. Mismatched, comfy clothes. A little quirky.*
- ANGELA** *Resident. Sharp-minded, financially business-savvy, secretary/accountant to her ex-husband - a philandering con man who had a 'port in every storm' plus the illegitimate children to prove it. Divorced, widowed and childless. Smart and sensibly dressed.*
- ROSE** *Resident. Gentle, kind, appears to be an innocent. Widower to a lovely man, and lost her son, Ian, in a motorbike accident. Her daughter Stephanie has no time for her - she's just too busy. Suspicion of early onset of dementia. Old-lady look about her.*
- SARAH** *Owner/operator of Beach Haven Rest Home. Kind, generous, patient, dedicated. A touch naive with a heart of gold, but strong too. Single.*
- CARLA** *Yoga instructor - exuberant, energetic.*
- PIP** *TV producer - professional, efficient.*
- KIRSTY** *Ivy's granddaughter - a uni student, she's the perfect granddaughter.*
- LEONARD** *Town Councillor. Official, odious, sneaky, on the take. Covets both Sarah and her house.*
- PRIEST** *Stereotypical Irish priest.*
- JACK** *Recent widower, scared, lonely and vulnerable.*
- MAYOR** *Mayor; a larger-than-life small-town politician. A good friend of Dinkle.*
- GLEN** *Local reporter - grubby, greasy local rag news hack.*
- TIM** *Kirsty's boyfriend - IT nerd/web developer, super sweet.*
- DINKLE** *Famous TV celebrity/personality. Presenter of the TV programme 'Hidden Gems', similar to Antiques Roadshow. Suave, dashing, debonair, lady's man. David Dickinson/Lovejoy-type character.*

PLOT

Four senior ladies are long-time residents of Beach Haven Rest Home, a small, old-style, traditional, privately owned old people's home. Located on prime beachfront real estate, it's ripe for re-development but is proudly and defiantly owned and operated by Sarah. She is dedicated to her business and the well-being of her residents, whom she genuinely cares for and loves. She's under pressure from macro, corporate aged-care retirement village developers Shady Glades, with the underhanded support of Councillor Leonard, who makes life difficult by trying to legitimately put the home out of business to make way for a new retirement village for his own financial gain. The owner and residents have to raise money to stave off the developers to ensure their home has a future. The stakes are high for all the ladies; they have nowhere else to go. Little do they know their thwarted plans to raise money eventually come to fruition with the most surprising and satisfying of outcomes.

SET

Beach Haven Rest Home - an old-fashioned, beautiful villa; a remarkable 'old lady' in her own right, but in need of care and attention. Rather tired, but with hints of true character in a lovely old seaside heritage town somewhere on the south coast of England. *Permission to alter specific locations/dialects considered on request.*

Act One and Two - communal lounge area.

Offstage - kitchen, French doors to garden, corridor, internal access, bedrooms, toilet
Four mismatched armchairs, pouffe, coffee table, bookshelf with stereo, drinks cabinet with assorted bottles including Sherry and glasses, mantelpiece clock, magazine rack, phone table with landline phone, hat stand, standard lamp/table lamps. *Scene changes within each act are transitional, not heavily defined. The actors set the stage as required, with no stage hands visible. Lighting and sound effects denote time passing and times of day. The original lighting/SFX plan is available upon request.*

PROPS

Ladies: Knitting needles, wool, knitted garments; 3-legged trousers, jumper - no hole for neck, snood, conjoined beanie, booties, bonnets, shawl. Mobile phones. Royal crest-embroidered pillowcase, royal memorabilia. 'Green Lady' Tretchikov sketches/artwork folder. Ring box with large 'diamond' ring. Box of old records, cine film, photos, hand-written lyrics. **Sarah:** Tea towel, duster and polish. Letter. Mobile phone. Tea trolley, mugs, plate of biscuits (including Hobnobs, custard creams, garibaldiis). **Carla:** Pompoms, CD. **Pip:** BBC headset, clipboard. **Kirsty:** Hollywood stars' pictures and props: Sophia Lauren headscarf, Ava Gardner kitten sunglasses, Marilyn Monroe diamond bracelet, Lauren Bacall cigarette holder. **Tim:** Mobile phones and headsets. **Glen:** Camera, notepad and pen. **Leonard:** Clipboard and pen, instamatic camera, tape measure. Blindfold, babygrow, dummy. **Dinkle:** Mobile, lectern and gavel. **Lyle Clarke:** Mayoral chain. **Jack:** Flat cap, walking stick, carnation. **General:** Newspapers, magazines, sudoku/crossword puzzle books, jigsaw puzzles, pads of paper, pens. Sweetie jar of mints. Raffle items, assorted bric-a-brac, jumble clothes rail, large flatscreen TV cardboard box. Display board with 'Pollock' paintings (Pauline). Loo roll (Ivy).

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

Curtains closed. 'Magic Moments' plays, fades into the soft sound of waves on a stony beach, then morphs into the 'plink plink fizz' of Alka Seltzer being dropped into a glass. Curtains open. Tuesday morning, bright and sunny, communal lounge after breakfast. Pauline sits in her armchair, positioned slightly away from the other residents' chairs. Her eyes are closed as she enjoys the morning sun streaming through the French doors. She's nursing a slight hangover. Rose perches on a chair next to the telephone table, trying to make a call on a new mobile phone - she's unsuccessful.

PAULINE. *(Deep breaths in and out, half asleep, serene)* Hhhmmmm. I do love a Tuesday.

IVY. *(Enters, brusquely looking for the morning papers)* What's so special about a Tuesday?

PAULINE. *(Eyes stay firmly shut)* A Tuesday is not a Monday. Nobody likes a Monday, Ivy.

IVY. How would you know, Pauline? You spend most of it asleep.

PAULINE. Not at all. I nap in the morning. An active mind like mine needs the three Rs... rest, recovery and recuperation, especially after an evening session of intense creativity.

IVY. Is that what you're calling it? *(Settles into her chair between Angela and Rose)*

Enter Angela, looks for her sudoku book, then settles into her chair between Ivy and Pauline.

PAULINE. *(One eye opens)* I know what you're insinuating.

ANGELA. *(Age-old witness of the clash between them)* What are you insinuating now, Ivy?

IVY. Monday night is Pauline's 'Sherry with Perry' night. Like, Wednesday evenings are 'Gin with Errol Flynn'.

ANGELA. What on earth are you talking about?

PAULINE. Take no notice of her, Angela darling. She's goading me.

IVY. I'm not! I'm just saying your Monday evening entertainment is provided by Perry Como and a bottle of sweet sherry.

ANGELA. Oh, I like his songs. Not too keen on sherry, though. Gives me a terrible headache... and wind.

IVY. His music has the same effect on me. The most 'magical moment' of a Perry Como song is when it ends.

PAULINE. Very droll, I must say. 'Magic Moments' was our wedding song, I'll have you know. Frank bore a striking resemblance to the young Mr Como. Oh, he was so handsome.

IVY. Perry or Frank?

PAULINE. Frank. Although he couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. Awful singing voice. It's why I divorced him.

IVY. One of the many reasons you divorced Frank.

PAULINE. We were married for forty years. I must've liked him once, but...

ANGELA. What about his snoring?

PAULINE. Dreadful. I didn't sleep a wink. It's why...

IVY. Don't forget his pigeons...

PAULINE. Vermin with a good sense of direction. It's why I...

IVY. Better than his, by all accounts.

PAULINE. Blind as a bat, even with his glasses on. It's why I div...

ANGELA. Which he wasn't allowed to wear because you thought he looked ridiculous.

PAULINE. Because he did. It's why I divorced...

IVY. So, he was a short-sighted, pigeon-fancying, Perry Como look-alike with sinus issues.

TOGETHER.

PAULINE. It's why I divorced him!

IVY, ANGELA. It's why she divorced him!

ANGELA. Why on earth did you marry him?

PAULINE. I thought I could change him.

ANGELA. And did you?

PAULINE. I did. He became a terrible alcoholic. (*Sympathetic murmurs in favour of the long-suffering Frank. Sharp barb in reaction*) Maybe I should've stayed single. Had a child 'out of wedlock'. Not even worried about who the father was. Hmmmm, Ivy?

IVY. It was a whole lot easier than being married. I didn't want the engagement ring, the wedding ring, or the suffering. (*Holds a finger up for each 'ring', ending with the middle finger*)

PAULINE. Well, unlike you, I stuck with it. Quite the little trailblazer, weren't you? Courageous for the time - I'll give you that.

IVY. (*Strong feeling and pride*) It took guts, Pauline. And I was fearless. (*Distinct, intentional change of focus*) Are you all right back there, Rose?

ROSE. Oh, I give up. My Steph bought me this new phone. I can't see the buttons properly, and the screen's too small. Not that it matters, I suppose - she never answers anyway. I'll try the landline.

PAULINE. I doubt she'll answer that one, either.

ANGELA. (*Ignores Pauline*) Did you really not know who the father was, Ivy?

IVY. I had an idea, but it wasn't important. It wasn't as if I needed a husband. Not one like him, anyway. A bit too 'handy', if you know what I mean. No. It was just me and my daughter. Now it's just me and my granddaughter.

ROSE. Hello? Stephanie? (*Suddenly animated*) Steph? It's Mum! Yes... Fine... That's okay... I understand. Well... Of course, dear. I'll call back later. Love y... (*The line goes dead. Slowly takes her seat next to Ivy*)

IVY. (*Kindly*) At least you got through this time.

ANGELA. I expect it was nice to hear her voice.

PAULINE. That was the longest chat you've had in ages! Seriously, you get more conversation out of your son. (*Ivy and Angela stare at Pauline, aghast. Rose sags and crosses herself*) I'm sorry, Rose. I wasn't thinking.

IVY. You never do.

ROSE. The worst thing is, you're right, Pauline. It's true. I do still speak to Ian through my prayers. Same with his Dad - God rest their souls. Even though they're... gone, I like to think they can hear me.

IVY. I'm sure they can, Rose. I'm so lucky I've got my Kirsty. She's a treasure, she really is.

ANGELA. What about Steph? How is she?

ROSE. I don't really know. She's very busy. No matter. I'll call back when she's got more time.

ANGELA. There never seems to be enough time, does there? I told Bruce I wanted a baby, but he always said, 'We've got plenty of time for kids, Angela! Let's put us first for a bit, eh?' Once the business took off, it got harder. We travelled the world together, then he travelled the world alone. Or that's what he told me. Apparently, he was a great father to his kids.

PAULINE. I didn't think you had children.

ANGELA. I don't. I was his 'secretary-come-accountant' first and his wife second. *(Beat)* I think I'd have been a good mother.

SARAH. *(Enters from the kitchen)* Now, ladies. It's Tuesday, which means Carla will be here soon for your armchair yoga session.

IVY. Oh, she's so irritating.

SARAH. Yes, we need to talk about that, Ivy.

IVY. No, we don't. If we all agree she's irritating, there's nothing to talk about.

SARAH. She's enthusiastic.

PAULINE. I like her.

IVY. You would! She reminds you of your boarding school days - all jolly hockey sticks and gym knickers.

PAULINE. My girls didn't wear gym knickers.

ROSE. It must've been terribly draughty.

PAULINE. Don't be so vulgar, Rose. They wore shorts, stiff and starched.

SARAH. Carla doesn't have to come here, you know.

ANGELA. Yes, she does. That's what you pay her for.

SARAH. I don't pay her. She comes as a favour to me.

IVY. There's no need to beg for favours on our account.

SARAH. Ivy, you know the exercise does you good.

IVY. I think I'll be the judge of that.

The doorbell chimes, it's on its last legs. Sarah exits to answer the door. Angela, Ivy and Rose immediately pretend to be asleep. Pauline starts her yoga poses. Enter Sarah with Carla, who's wearing bright gym clothes and carrying a bag of pompoms and a Glenn Miller CD.

CARLA. Good morning! How are you all today? Raring to go?

Noises of appreciation from Pauline alone, who's mid-downward dog.

SARAH. Come on, ladies.

PAULINE. *(School teacher command)* Wakey, wakey girls!

Reluctantly, they begin to stir.

SARAH. I'll leave you to it. Have fun! *(Exit)*

IVY. Fat chance.

PAULINE. Speak for yourself.

CARLA. Okay! We're not doing armchair yoga today... *(Pauline groans in disappointment)*

ROSE. Oh, thank goodness for that. I get my 'worrier pose' and 'downward duck' mixed up.

CARLA. No, ladies! Today, we're going to be... cheerleaders! Yay! *(Hands out pompoms. She puts the CD into the lounge's stereo, ready to go)*

IVY. *(Deadpan)* No, dear. We're not.

ANGELA. Cheerleading? How American. Mother had a terrible time with the Yanks during the war.

IVY. Did they ask her to shake her pompoms?

ANGELA. Amongst other things.

PAULINE. (*Effusive, performs cheerleading poses*) My mother loved the American boys - so polite, so handsome, and very generous! Whatever she wanted, she got - nylons, sugar, cigarettes. In return, she'd give one-on-one lessons. She taught a lot of those boys how to paint. She had a very particular stroke... (*imaginary 'brush strokes' up and down*)

IVY. I bet she did.

Carla presses play, and Glenn Miller's 'In The Mood' booms out. She leads, singing 'shake shake' in time with the 'dah dah' of the music. The ladies dance along, trying to keep up.

CARLA. Come on - let's shake it out! Up you get! On your feet, ladies! Get those joints moving. Hands in the air! One, two, three, four... and shaaaaaake! Dah dah dah, dah dah dah, dah dah dah, dah dah daaaaa... shake, shake!

ANGELA. Ooh, it's quite exhilarating, isn't it?

IVY. We look ridiculous.

CARLA. Lift your feet off the floor! Let's march, two, three, four!

ROSE. Should we still be shaking our pompoms, dear?

CARLA. Absolutely! Shake, shake!

PAULINE. Rhythm, Rose. Rhythm!

ROSE. I'm trying.

IVY. Very. I'm decidedly NOT 'in the mood'.

CARLA. To the left, two, three, four... shake, shake!

IVY. (*Faux enthusiastic*) Let me guess...

CARLA. To the right, two, three, four... shake, shake!

IVY. (*Dedapan*) Who'd have thought?

Cheerleading builds to a comedic crescendo and a big finish.

CARLA. Yay! Well done, ladies. Good job. High five!

IVY. (*Leaves Carla hanging*) Dignity was all I had left.

CARLA. Oh, come on! It does you good to get the blood pumping.

ROSE. Isn't that the pacemaker's job?

CARLA. Hah! That's what I love about you ladies. You're still so full of fun - it's inspirational. You're here to live, not to die... (*trails away*) diet.

PAULINE. Thank you, Carla. You certainly keep us trim, and that's just what some of us need.

IVY. Oh, shut up.

CARLA. Well, on that note, I'll say cheerio cheerleaders! You did good!

PAULINE. Well, darling. You did well.

CARLA. What a lovely thing to say, Pauline. Thank you. Same time next week?
(*Breezes out*)

IVY. Do we have a choice?

The ladies settle back into their armchairs and rest their eyes for a snooze. Pauline starts a low, barely audible snore that runs throughout Scene 2.

SCENE 2

Same day, mid-afternoon, softer light. Sarah enters and walks across the room, half-heartedly tidying, contemplative and worried. She pulls out a well-read letter and sighs deeply. Rose reacts whilst Ivy and Angela secretly listen in. Pauline remains undisturbed.

SARAH. (*To herself*) This is never-ending. What on earth am I going to do?

ROSE. (*Quietly responds*) About what, dear?

SARAH. (*Starts*) Oh, Rose, I'm sorry. I thought you were having a snooze.

ROSE. Just resting my eyes, dear. What's the matter?

SARAH. Nothing for you to worry about. I've got a few things on my mind, that's all.
(*Puts letter away*)