

# CAUTIONARY TALE

A new musical about growing up and growing glum

Book and Lyrics by Rebecca Atkinson-Lord  
Music by Rebecca Applin

With additional material by Mark Iles

## Script extract 1: The Worselmans

### COPYRIGHT NOTICE

*Cautionary Tale* is a show about finding hope and spreading joy when all seems lost. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, we've lost our chance, for the time being, to work on developing the show as we had planned but we'd still like to share the joy.

For a limited time, we're sharing extracts from the score, lyrics and script of *Cautionary Tale* online so you can get a flavour of this show by reading, rehearsing and performing some of it in your own home.

These works are copyright and the use of the materials included here is strictly for personal, non-commercial use. Please do not copy, share, publish or distribute them without explicit written permission from the author. Once we are ready to go back into production all online resources will be removed.

In the first instance, all licensing enquiries should be directed to Rachel Daniels at Berlin Associates [racheld@berlinassociates.com](mailto:racheld@berlinassociates.com).

*The Worselmans are thin and faint. They're living on rations of just half a potato each per day because last year Aunt and Uncle Worselman refused to let the children calculate the number of potatoes they'd need and thus many mental arithmetic mistakes were made.*

*It's a bitterly cold evening of exceptional greyness on the farm. The wind whistles and whines around them.*

AUNT WORSELMAN:

One, two, three, four, five... *(She continues counting throughout, only pausing when other lines are required, immediately picking up where she left off).*

UNCLE WORSELMAN:

Eight hundred and ninety seven, Eight hundred and ninety eight, Eight hundred and ninety nine, nine hundred.... *(He also continues counting throughout, pausing only when other lines are required, before picking up again.)*

*Understandably, because AUNT and UNCLE are counting aloud at different paces, they sometimes confuse each other and lose their place. When that happens, they just carry on as if nothing happened and hope no one noticed the mistake.*

WINIFRED: *(Throwing down her garden fork in exasperation)* The ground's too hard.

UNCLE WORSELMAN: Put your back into it lass. You'll have a potato mountain in no time.

WINIFRED: The ground is so frozen I can't even get the fork in the soil. How am I supposed to find potatoes?

WILLOW: She's right Uncle. We've left it too late again.

UNCLE WORSELMAN: Too late? I'll have you know that Worselmans have been digging this field in the first week of January for hundreds of years. I don't think they were all wrong. Do you?

*The children clearly do.*

WINIFRED: The potatoes are all black and frozen too. We should have harvested them ages ago.

AUNT WORSELMAN: Don't contradict your uncle you ungrateful girl. Or there'll be no potato for any of you tonight.

WINIFRED: Oh what a disaster. I don't know how I'm going to live without another potato.

*Everything stops. Everyone stares at Wilhelmina in horror. She has gone Too Far.*

AUNT WORSELMAN: *(Together)* Shut your potato hole!

UNCLE WORSELMAN: *(Together)* Quite right Wilhelmina!

UNCLE WORSELMAN: Why, potatoes are the most delicious and versatile vegetable known to mankind. They are eaten all over the world. You can eat them mashed or boiled or roasted or fried or creamed or pureéd. They can be chips or crisps, gnocchi, dumplings, hash browns, latkes or jackets. Sauteéd, au gratin, julienne, dauphinoise, tartiflette, aloo gobi, saag aloo, potato curry, potato salad, potato waffles, potato soup, potato wine, potato vodka, poteen, boxty, potato pie, potato cake, potato pancakes, potato parmigiana. With butter, without butter, bubble and squeak... It's all to play for with the potato.

WINIFRED: Well, we could eat them like that if we ever grew enough. All we ever get is boiled potato mush.

AUNT WORSELMAN: Ungrateful!

WILLOW: Look, won't you just let us work out how many we actually need?

WINIFRED: Yes the algebra is quite easy.

AUNT WORSELMAN: Algebra?! *(faints)*

WILLOW: It's a really simple formula. It's just, bracket, number of / people, ex, times number of potatoes each, why, close bracket, times number of days we need to eat for.

*Perhaps Willow traces her calculation in the earth somehow? Or maybe even in the drizzle?  $(X \times Y) \times d = Pn$  (Potatoes needed)*

UNCLE WORSELMAN: Look what you've done now.

*(Attempting to wake her)*

Sister! Sister!

*(Bringing AUNT WORSELMAN round and helping her back to her feet)*

Your Aunt can't be expected to cope with your nonsense. You know she's been under a lot of pressure.

WILLOW: It's not nonsense. It's the simplest algorithm. / If you just let us...

AUNT WORSELMAN: Oh! *(faints again)*

UNCLE WORSELMAN: Oh cripes! Again?

WILLOW: (*gently shaking her*) Aunty? Aunty it's alright! No more maths. We promise.

WILLOW and WINIFRED don't look too happy about that. AUNT WORSELMAN comes slowly round and sits up. She frantically tries to count on her fingers. Then looks up, desperate...

AUNT WORSELMAN: I've lost count. It's no good Brother.

UNCLE WORSELMAN: We'll have to start again.

[SONG: THE WORSELMAN'S SONG]

CHILDREN:

One potato

Two potatoes

Three potatoes

Four potatoes

Five potatoes

Six potatoes

Seven potatoes

Eight potatoes

Nine potatoes

Ten potatoes

Eleven potatoes

Twelve potatoes

Thirteen potatoes

Fourteen potatoes

Fifteen potatoes

Sixteen potatoes

(*Counting continues etc etc...*)

Twenty nine potatoes

Thirty potatoes

Thirty one potatoes

*Etc etc...*

UNCLE WORSELMAN:

You think that life is all about  
Those glowing screens; you have no  
doubt

The future's full of easy answers

BOTH:

But really it's just

Hard work.

Twenty years of

Hard work and still there's more to  
come

UNCLE WORSELMAN:

We have no use for cleverness

There's no solution to life's mess

Your numbers don't mean anything

At all.

CHILDREN cont.:  
Thirty seven potatoes  
Thirty eight potatoes  
Thirty nine potatoes  
Forty potatoes  
Forty one potatoes  
Forty Two potatoes  
Forty three potatoes  
*Etc etc...*

AUNT WORSELMAN:  
Just keep your nose hard to the soil  
Don't try to dodge a life of toil  
You can't multiply the food to make  
Some more

It has to be hard work  
Twenty years of hard work  
And still there' more to come  
Twenty years of hard work  
And still there' more to come

DRAFT

*As Uncle Worselman sings this next section, Cousin Agatha materialises around them. She dances happily with her beloved pocket calculator until Uncle Worselman reaches over and, on the appropriate line, stabs her in the eye with his pitchfork.*

UNCLE WORSELMAN:

My cousin Agatha would laugh at me for working hard each day  
She thought it quite Irrational to labour in this way

She spent her Prime bewitched by dancing numbers on her screen  
But she hadn't Calculated on the failure of her dreams

She spent so long in plotting all those exes against whys  
That the heat from her computer screen burned holes right through  
her eyes

AUNT WORSELMAN:

We don't care about your Programming of aps to make life easy  
The thought of all that Data is enough to make us queasy

BOTH:

The formula for happiness aint in the Golden Ratios  
It's in digging through the mud to find a bucket of pot-atios

And really it's just  
Hard work  
Twenty years of  
Hard work and still there's more to come

*The potato counting continues inexorably as the Worselmans drag their sacks/buckets of potatoes off.*

*As the Worselmans leave, Winifred reaches down into her bucket and pulls out a sleek and beautiful gift, wrapped in white (Imagine if Apple made giftwrap) that's in stark contrast to the muddy children. She signals her siblings and they fall behind their aunt and uncle, wiping their muddy hands carefully on their (muddier) clothes before very very carefully unwrapping the sleekest pocket calculator imaginable.*