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SPRING CHICKENS *by Jonathan North*

Characters: FRED and CONNIE, both of indeterminate age. CONNIE is already on stage as FRED enters, banging his hands together and blowing on them

FRED – Brrr!

CONNIE – Is it still cold outside?

FRED – Just a bit.

CONNIE – Well, shut the door. Did you remember your woolly vest? We don't want to catch our death, do we?

FRED – No, Connie, I tell you, it's dangerous weather for brass monkeys.

CONNIE – Fred! No need for that kind of vulgarity.

FRED – I was just quoting that geologist.

CONNIE – *(sniffs)* Hmm. He was a very common little man. With a beard too. Definitely lowered the tone of the whole proceedings.

FRED – He did rather.

CONNIE – We must keep a sense of decorum. It's the only thing that separates us from the animals.

FRED – Yes, my sweet.

CONNIE – I mean, if we didn't hold onto civilised values at a time like this, where would we be?

FRED – No better than the savages, my dear.

CONNIE – Exactly. Did you have a good walk? See anything interesting?

FRED – Not really, to be honest. One penguin looks much like another.

CONNIE – I suppose so.

FRED – Mind you, other penguins must be able to tell them apart.

CONNIE – Yes. *(pause)* Er, Fred ...

FRED – Yes, dear?

CONNIE – You know I'm not one to complain ...

FRED – No, dear, you never do.

CONNIE – ... but I must say, this trip hasn't quite lived up to my expectations.

FRED – I know. I'm a bit disappointed myself, the way things have worked out.

CONNIE – In fact, when we get back, I'm going to have a word with the travel agents.

FRED – They'll deny all liability, of course.

CONNIE – I'll speak to that Tracey. I'll be civil, of course, but I do think we're entitled to a refund, considering.

FRED – I quite agree. *(pause)* So what's for dinner? The usual?

CONNIE – Yes, dear.

FRED – That special meal you did for our anniversary. That was something.

CONNIE – With the marine biologists?

FRED – An excellent repast. You excelled yourself, my love.

CONNIE – Well, I try, but it's not easy. We're rather limited for choice.

FRED – You do very well, considering. *(Pause)* It's very quiet, now they've all gone.

CONNIE – Yes. Just the two of us, alone.

FRED – *(briskly)* Things'll pick up in the spring, I expect.

CONNIE – Bound to. I wonder how long it will be?

FRED – Until spring? You can tell by the sun. That astronomer told me.

CONNIE – Oh?

FRED – It's the angle of elevation that counts, he said.

CONNIE – I'm not sure I want to hear this, Fred.

FRED – When the sun comes above the horizon, you see.

CONNIE – Good job I've got my WRI diary, although I can't really tell what date it is. Not with this six-month day, six month night thing. I might have missed the WRI jam-making competition, you know.

FRED – That's a shame, old thing, you never have done before. Mind you, there's not much round here to make into jam, is there?

CONNIE – No, only snow, really. Or penguins.

FRED – Yes. Lots of them. We won't run out of snow, anyway.

CONNIE – When spring comes, everything will be all right, won't it, Fred?

FRED – Sure. That's when they expect us back. When we don't turn up ..,

CONNIE – They'll send a search party, won't they?

FRED – Oh yes. They're bound to spot the plane wreck.

CONNIE – Only, if they don't ... well, I did the inventory again today, and we're running a bit low.

FRED – Hmm. We'll need to replenish supplies.

CONNIE – Draw lots for it, like we agreed.

FRED – The lottery of life, old girl. You or me?

CONNIE – I'm glad we can talk about it sensibly, Fred. You remember that social worker, when we first discussed it?

FRED – She went all hysterical. No use at all in a crisis.

CONNIE – Never are, social workers. Try and solve their own problems by interfering in other peoples, that's what I say.

FRED – At least she was useful in the end, wasn't she? For the first – and last – time in her life.

CONNIE – Naturally, we all found it a bit distasteful, at first ...but when needs must ...

FRED – You've just got to face up to it, haven't you?

CONNIE – The astronomer suggested it first, if I recall. They all do it, he said. Stranded travellers in the mountains, or the jungle or whatever ...

FRED – We'll have to draw lots, he said. Choose democratically. Survival of the fittest.

CONNIE – Ironic, really, as he then drew the first straw.

FRED – It was a pity he was so stringy. But luckily no-one was vegetarian.

CONNIE – Yes, that fat photographer was much tastier. Good job it hadn't been the old days, with huskies. I'd really have been sorry to eat them – they've got such nice faces.

FRED – You always were a soft-hearted old thing.

(Pause, then...)

CONNIE – Look! Fred! That glimmer on the horizon!

FRED – It's the sun! It's just turned spring!

CONNIE – They'll start searching for us! We'll be rescued after all.

FRED – That's a relief. I didn't really fancy eating you, you know.

CONNIE – Although I *have* missed the jam-making competition.

FRED – I suppose we'll be a bit, well, celebrities once we get back home. You know, local papers, on the telly ...

CONNIE – We might get asked to open the town hall flower show ...

FRED – ... or be invited onto *Strictly Come Prancing*. (he takes CONNIE lightly and twirls her round) Slow, slow, quick quick slow.

CONNIE – The WRI will probably ask me to give a talk about our experiences.

FRED – Though I don't think you should rush back to the shop. Not till you've had a chance to get your breath back.

CONNIE – No. In fact, I was thinking of writing a cookery book. They're very popular right now, you know.

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