Climbing to God
by Dave Carley
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Characters:

Mabel – older and fed up
Rose – younger, pregnant and just as fed up

Time and Place:

The late 1800s. Oxgodby, Yorkshire. The roof of the local church tower, which the women are using to get a head-start on their climb. They have erected a ladder and are about to begin their ascent. The ladder should be wood; a step ladder will do.

Synopsis:

Mabel and Rose are sick of their lives in the tiny Yorkshire village of Oxgodby. More to the point, they’re sick of their husbands, Alf and Alf. At Mabel’s behest, they’ve decided to visit God, whom they believe resides six miles above earth in a small box. The women are adherents of the Muggletonian faith, which holds that women can be returned to life on earth as men. Mabel and Rose both have their own reasons for wanting to make the change. The play opens just after they’ve begun their ascent.

The Muggletonians:

A small Protestant Christian sect, the Muggletonians began in 1651, when Lodowick(e) Muggleton and a tailor-colleague announced they were the last prophets, as foretold in *The Book of Revelation*. Among other beliefs, the Muggletonians held that God had appeared directly on Earth once as Jesus Christ, and that thereafter He could care less about everyday events on this benighted planet. In fact, God apparently wasn’t planning to make another appearance until it was time to bring the world to an end. In the meantime, He lives in a small box six miles above Earth.

Devout Muggletonian women like Mabel and Rose could be reborn as men, which author J.L. Carr said contributed greatly to the sect’s attraction for the fairer sex. Muggletonians didn’t have church services, but would meet in pubs for socializing, endearing the faith to many men.

Playwright’s note:

I would not have discovered the eccentric sect known as the Muggletonians were it not for J.L. Carr. The author of the Booker-nominated novel *A Month in the Country,* Carr also self-published a series of small books, wonderful curiosities of facts and foolishness. A brief teaser of information on Lodowick Muggleton, the sect’s eponymous founder, can be found in Carr’s *Welbourn’s Dictionary of* *Prelates, Parsons...* (The full title is a lot longer.) For more information on Carr and his books, visit the publishing house he founded and which is now operated by his descendents: <http://www.quincetreepress.co.uk/>

The locale of this play is atop the church tower in Oxgodby, a nod to the fictional village in Carr’s masterpiece, *A Month in the Country.*

*Climbing to God* is dedicated to J.L. Carr.

Eponymy:

This play is one of a series of Eponymy plays. Others include the Standhal Syndrome, De Clérambault’s Disease and Kirtland’s Warbler. More information at http://davecarley.com/plays-short/eponomy/

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*The play opens with MABEL and ROSE securing their ladder.*

ROSE: Do you think it’s wood or metal?

MABEL: What.

ROSE: God’s box.

MABEL: I never thought about it.

ROSE: Wood, I’m guessing. Metal would attract lightning.

MABEL: True true. Though He’s the one throwing out the lightning so He’d hardly be aiming it at himself.

ROSE: Metal would get hot, being so close to the sun.

MABEL: Not at night.

ROSE: No.

MABEL: Anyway, he’s only six miles up. The sun’s a lot further.

ROSE: It does seem a bit odd, Him just sitting in a box six miles up, waiting.

MABEL: The ways of God are a mystery.

ROSE: They weren’t to Ludowicke Muggleton.

MABEL: True true, but Muggleton was a prophet. We’re not prophets. We’re just two women who want to see God.

ROSE: Yes. But won’t God think we’re a bit – sneaky?

MABEL: Why!?

ROSE: We’re not really going up to see Him, are we. We’re climbing up to get the change.

MABEL: I think he’ll be impressed by our get up and go. And our faith in His miracles.

ROSE: Imagine becoming a man. It’s why I switched over to the Muggletonians. As soon as you told me about it, I thought, “Now that’s the religion for me.”

MABEL: I know! When my Alf told me I’d get to come back as a man, I said, “Well, there’s a bonus.”

ROSE: What will you do? When you’re a man.

MABEL: First thing? I’m getting drunk at the Swan, then I’m going home and showing Alf the back of my hand.

ROSE: I want to come back as a man so I can find a woman and really treat her right.

MABEL: You mean, not bang her about?

ROSE: Good things, too. Take her walking. Stay home some nights and talk sweet. And, when she gets pregnant, don’t say, “Rose is just having a mood cuz she’s got one in the oven”. Oh, and when I’m a man I’ll bathe regular. I love my Alf but he’s no field of daffodils!

MABEL: My Alf too. Between April and October I never stand downwind of him. Funny that we both married Alfs.

ROSE: Is this steady enough to hold us?

MABEL: I think so.

ROSE: I don’t like heights.

MABEL: Did you just discover that?

ROSE: This is the highest I’ve ever been. Except on top of Oxgodby hill. Mabel. If we come back as men, does that mean that our Alfs were women once too?

MABEL: I never thought of that. I don’t think so. I certainly don’t see any of it in their behaviour.

ROSE: The vicar down there might have. The way he was screeching at us when we started up his tower.

MABEL: The vicar can’t have been a woman; he’s not Muggletonian, he’s C of E.

ROSE: But who’s to say he wasn’t a female Muggletonian who came back as a male Anglican?

MABEL: True true. Do you want me to go first?

ROSE: I suppose.

MABEL: I read in one of my Alf’s Muggletonian tracts that it’s the Quakers who are keeping us from gaining paradise. It’s apparently written in the Bible, black and white, though I looked and didn’t find it. Alf tore some pages out once and it was likely on them.

ROSE: Why would he tear pages out of a Bible?

*(MABEL looks down on ROSE balefully.)*

Your Alf’s disgusting. But you read up on the Muggletonians somehow.

MABEL: Oh, like I say, Alf had pamphlets. The Muggletonians love their pamphlets. We reject the Doctrine of Trinity and Immortality of the Soul.

ROSE: Do we. What else?

MABEL: God’s five feet tall.

ROSE: You’d think He’d be taller.

MABEL: He has to fit in the box.

ROSE: He’s not a very convincing God.

MABEL: He’s a bit lazy too, if you want the truth. According to my Alf, God doesn’t like to get involved with things on earth. When the time comes to end it all, He’ll emerge to do that, but otherwise He’s just going to sit in his box and wait.

ROSE: And I thought my Alf was dull.

MABEL: He gets the odd visitor.

ROSE: Women wanting the change.

MABEL: Yes.

ROSE: Are we both going to crawl into the box with him?

MABEL: Yes.

ROSE: It seems a bit intimate.

MABEL: We can take turns if you’re shy.

ROSE: No no, I’m happy to go in with you. I won’t be so nervous if you’re there. I’ve had enough of men in small spaces. Before my Alf they were always asking me down the lane or getting me in the shed behind the Swan. Convincing me to do things.

MABEL: I’ve only ever had my one Alf and that’s it. Though I have to say, my Alf has managed to convince me to do some pretty strange deeds.

ROSE: Like what.

MABEL: I’ll never say.

ROSE: Tell me.

MABEL: No.

ROSE: I won’t climb another step until you tell me.

MABEL: You’ve only gone three steps as it is.

ROSE: I’m not moving, Mabel.

 *(MABEL whispers something.)*

ROSE: Oh my.

MABEL: I know.

ROSE: Is that even possible?

MABEL: Oh yes.

ROSE: I’d never have credited your Alf with the imagination.

MABEL: He grew up on a farm.

*(They take a step or two.)*

ROSE: That’s the first thing I’m going to try when I come back as a man.

MABEL: What.

ROSE: What your Alf did.

*(They climb a couple more steps.)*

MABEL: Should we rest a bit?

ROSE: I’m quite puffed. We could go back down and have our lunch.

MABEL: It might be a good idea.

*(They start back down.)*

ROSE: Get our strength up.

MABEL: Six miles is a fair distance.

ROSE: Considering I’ve never been more than three miles out of Oxgodby.

MABEL: I went to Kettering once.

ROSE: I get so hungry because of my condition. Mabel, what’s that?

MABEL: What’s what.

ROSE: That. See?

MABEL: No.

ROSE: Follow my finger. About an inch to the left of that hill.

MABEL: Looks like a steeple.

ROSE: Yes. And those are houses around it. A lot of them.

MABEL: That must be Thirsk!

ROSE: Thirsk! Have you ever been there?

MABEL: I told you, I’ve only been as far as Kettering.

ROSE: Do you think men are any different in Thirsk?

MABEL: It’s possible.

ROSE: They couldn’t be any worse than here.

MABEL: True true. Did you want to go visit?

ROSE: I wouldn’t mind. I really don’t like heights. Even coming up this tower was giving me the willies. And that ladder... We could go down to the road and wait for a wagon to come along, get a ride over to Thirsk and have a look at the men.

MABEL: If they’re just like here, we’ll come straight back.

ROSE: Or keep going.

MABEL: True true.

ROSE: Mabel. I don’t think our faith was very strong.

MABEL: I wouldn’t say that Rose.

ROSE: But Mabel: we were all set to climb six miles to find God and we only got this far.

MABEL: Perhaps Muggleton got it wrong. Perhaps God’s not six miles up, he’s six miles sideways. I can’t believe Thirsk was that close and I never found the time to visit.

ROSE: Apparently, you were too busy taking it up the arse.

MABEL: You can’t tell people!

ROSE: I know. But when I come back as a man, it’s the first thing I’m trying. “Bend over my dear, we’re doing a Mabel.”

MABEL: I thought you were going to talk sweet.

ROSE: That was talking sweet. Oh Mabel. I’m tuckered. Let’s spread out our lunch and then head to Thirsk. Maybe after a nap. It’s so nice up here. It’s a bit high up for my taste but, you know, I hardly care when I’ve got such pleasant company.

MABEL: That’s a kind thing to say. Oh Rose - you’re going to make a wonderful man.

*They smile at each other and start into their lunch.*

The End.