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# Pilgrims

**Comedy/Fantasy by Diane Ney**

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“A wonderfully idiosyncratic take on love and marriage in a future age.”

— Gordon House, former head of BBC Radio Drama

# Pilgrims

**Comedy/Fantasy. By Diane Ney**

*Cast: 3 to 4m., 2w.* Snatches of poetry (“Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand”) found in a tiny box provide the inspiration for *Pilgrims*, a lighthearted fantasy about love and commitment. In a future world, marriage has been forbidden because The Ancients discovered it led to breakdowns, insanity and object throwing. Instead, people renew their coupling vows every seven years, often taking advantage of the escape clause. This seems perfectly natural to Celia, who’s celebrating her 20th birthday, her Woman’s Birthday, when she becomes legally free to choose her first coupling partner. She’s hoping that will be Mike, her fellow literary restorer, who’s working with her on creating a story for the upcoming Festival of the Ancients from the poetry fragments. Mike loves Celia but, inspired by those heady fragments and by a book on ancient coupling practices, he’s decided to convince her to marry him. Given that this radical practice will mean they must leave the City and live in the wilderness without any technology or rent control, Mike is going to have to do a lot of convincing. And fast. The boat leaves in three hours and they still have to take care of all the preliminaries listed in the book (like the “shower”). Complicating Mike’s plans is Celia’s muscular intended, Drake, who’s rarin’ to couple with the birthday girl himself. *Area staging. Approximate runningtime: 45 minutes.*

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# PILGRIMS

By  
DIANE NEY



**Dramatic Publishing**

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PILGRIMS was presented on BBC World Service Drama in July 1992. The director was Gordon House, sound balance was by Chris Lewis and the production assistant was Jo Hill. The cast was as follows:

MIKE . . . . . Dominic Ricard  
CELIA . . . . . Sue Broomfield  
DRAKE . . . . . Neil Roberts  
FEMALE CO-WORKER . . . . . Anne Winsor  
MALE CO-WORKER I . . . . . Peter Penry-Jones  
MALE CO-WORKER II . . . . . Peter Gun

# PILGRIMS

A One-act Play  
For 3-4m., 2w.

## CHARACTERS:

CELIA

MIKE

DRAKE

FEMALE CO-WORKER (briefly)

MALE CO-WORKER I (briefly)

MALE CO-WORKER II (briefly)

NOTE: The Male Co-worker characters can be reduced to  
one Male Co-worker.

TIME: The future.

PLACE: An office.



# PILGRIMS

SCENE: *Morning. An office with a table and chairs, perhaps a desk in the corner.*

AT RISE: *MIKE is looking out the window. CELIA enters.*

CELIA. Blest day, Mike.

MIKE. Blest day, Celia. *(They hesitate.)* I think we should be able to finish up today. It looks like it.

CELIA. Well, that's pretty good if we can. Festival projects aren't due until next week. And we had the hardest Restoration job of any of them, or at least I thought we did. We're a good team, aren't we? I mean, as Literary Restorers we work well together.

MIKE. Yes, we do. I think this may have been the hardest, but I think also it may have been the most interesting, too. *(He takes some small pieces of paper out of a tin box on the table. She watches him.)* With the poetry and all.

CELIA. I liked the poetry.

MIKE. I did, too.

CELIA. And now that we've done this one, maybe they'll let us do some others, if there are any others, although I guess there probably won't be. *(Standing close to him.)* You hardly ever see poetry anymore. My mother won't

have it in the house. But I like it. And this assignment was nice, too, because of the theater aspect— I mean, that it had a plot, that it was a play. Not like the poetry C Team did last year, that “Roses are red—”

MIKE. “—Violets are blue—”

CELIA. I liked this bunch a lot better. And it’s ten times better than those instruction manuals we had last time. (*She’s fingering the pieces. He’s watching her.*) It’s a shame people don’t poet anymore.

MIKE. Actually,—

CELIA. You never see it, except in cards—to you, a few, how do.

MIKE. True. But—

CELIA. I wonder if the Ancients watch us?

MIKE. When?

CELIA. Well, this whole idea of the Festival of the Ancients— I mean, haven’t you ever thought about it? Trying to replicate everything they did—digging up utensils and vision boxes and reconstructing cooking rooms. (*Fingering pieces.*) Or taking little pieces of paper someone’s hidden in a tin box and trying to piece them back together into some semblance of their original plotting. It’s funny the things people hide away. Do you ever hide anything? (*He hesitates.*) Maybe that’s—

MIKE (*simultaneously*). Actually,—

CELIA (*overlapping*). —too personal. It’s just one of those things I think about—the Ancients watching us, not your hiding—when we’re—not that I think you’re hiding something—when we’re working together. Do you ever think about things, when we’re working together? I wonder sometimes about that, too, and other things, not that

I'm thinking about what we're doing all the time. Why am I doing all the talking?

MIKE. You're faster.

CELIA (*laughs*). I guess. I'm in kind of a mood today.

MIKE (*over end of line*). I read a book last night.

CELIA. Did you? Was it one you've read before?

MIKE. No.—

CELIA. Really? It's so hard to find new ones, with no one processing books anymore.

MIKE. That's true. I—

CELIA. Maybe it's because we don't have wars anymore.

They used to say that all the good processors came after a war.

MIKE. Or love—processors come from. The point is—

CELIA. Maybe that's it. No more wars and, some would say, no more love, with so many arranged couplings. Although I guess it happens sometimes. But you weren't equating love with war, were you?

MIKE. No, I was trying to tell you about this book I read last night.

CELIA. Oh. Was it a whole book you read?

MIKE. Yes. I just got started and I couldn't stop. I'll tell you why.—

CELIA. I'm like that with salted nuts.

MIKE. Celia!

CELIA. What? Oh—sorry. I'm just kind of— Today's kind of different, for me. I'm not—calm. It's—well, I guess you wouldn't know—

MIKE. It's your birthday.

CELIA. Yes! How did you—

MIKE. Right. (*Slumps into a chair.*)

CELIA. What's the matter?

MIKE. I knew it was your birthday—I just wasn't ready to talk about it. I don't understand why it is we can work so well together on Literary Restoration but when we try to work on something personal we plot in completely different directions.

CELIA. What personal?

MIKE (*overlapping*). You never let me build. You just jump in.

CELIA. I'm a jumper, I'm sorry.

MIKE. I worked so hard on this last night. I had it all worked out.

CELIA. I thought you were reading last night.

MIKE. That's what I'm talking about—switching subjects.

CELIA. But I thought you wanted to talk about—

MIKE. I need to build up to it, OK? I'm not a jumper.

CELIA. OK.

MIKE. A little subtlety, a little nuance—not just— Look at these— (*the pieces of paper*) —look at them, touch them—it's not just A to B to C—it's an intangible—something—that builds in you—that carries you with it and then you're there and you can't even see the path you've come by. It's wonderful!

CELIA. It is kind of exciting not having stage directions, although I don't know how they ever knew what they were doing.

MIKE. Because the words—there's a natural build in there. It's—

CELIA. I know—even in these fragments you pick up on their intensity—on the electricity between them, especially in that scene we figured must be a party— (*picking up the pieces*) —where they first meet and there's—

*(Senses something. Stops, looks at him.)* Did you want to say something?

MIKE. Yes.

CELIA. Please, go ahead.

MIKE. OK. OK. Well, seven months, we've been doing this. Working—together. And occasionally, we've had lunch—together. *(Pauses. She waits. He's stopped.)*

CELIA. And I've already admitted how much I've enjoyed it. *(He nods, hesitates.)* And I see, from my point of view, no stoppage ahead. I intend to continue enjoying it—working—together. *(She waits. He's looking at her but not saying anything.)* Is that what you wanted to say?

MIKE *(turning away)*. Damn! *(Walks to window.)*

CELIA. There's a problem.

MIKE. No, no. Let's get to work—finish this. Complete it. End it. Do it and have it done.

CELIA *(watching him)*. Maybe it was that book last night. Maybe that's why people don't read anymore—it gets them too excited.

MIKE. I'm not excited.

CELIA *(joining him)*. Aren't you?

MIKE. Well, I wasn't last night. Well, I was, but it—there wasn't— *(Stops.)*

CELIA *(closer to him)*. Won't you tell me about it?

MIKE. OK. What happened was I was reading, and I felt an almost passionate—

*(The door bangs open and DRAKE strides in carrying a large brown paper bag. He throws it on the table, lifts CELIA off her feet and kisses her long and passionately.)*

DRAKE (*putting her down*). I have brought lunch. Blest day, Mike.

CELIA (*to DRAKE*). A little early for lunch, isn't it?

MIKE. Drake, I don't appreciate the way you're always coming in here distracting my associate.

DRAKE (*to MIKE*). I'm a very distracting man. This I can't help.

MIKE (*to DRAKE*). Well, we're just getting started.

DRAKE (*over end of his line. To CELIA*). I'm going to be in the Festival. I've been chosen for the team.

MIKE (*to DRAKE*). Pulling a cart?

DRAKE (*to CELIA*). I wanted to tell you.

CELIA. Is it dangerous? Drake, you could be hurt.

DRAKE. Not where it counts. My heart can only be hurt by you.

MIKE (*to DRAKE*). She can jump on it later. We have to work now.

CELIA (*to DRAKE*). I'll look forward to hearing all about it.

DRAKE (*to CELIA*). Also, our mothers are expecting us tonight. Lots of celebrating. I like your mother, you know.

CELIA (*to DRAKE*). I know. You've said.

DRAKE (*to CELIA*). I think she is a woman of exceptional taste and great strength.

CELIA (*to MIKE*). Mother can crack nuts with her elbow.

MIKE (*to CELIA*). Salted? (*They laugh.*)

DRAKE (*to BOTH*). I'm not sharing the joke so I'll leave.

CELIA (*to DRAKE*). Well, it's just that we should be working.

DRAKE (*to CELIA*). I have a lot more to tell you. I'll tell you later.

CELIA (*to DRAKE*). That's fine.

DRAKE (*to CELIA*). Be ready. (*He grabs her and kisses her passionately, then releases her, grabs his lunch bag, and strides out.*)

MIKE. That man is an idiot.

CELIA. Our mothers think we're well-matched. (*Laughs. He doesn't say anything.*) I guess that's why they want us to couple.

MIKE. Let's finish this.

CELIA. You were going to tell me about the book.

MIKE. "Drake, you could be hurt." There's no—

CELIA. Well, those Festival games—

MIKE (*overlapping*). —time. We want to get this plot decided if you're going to be taking a long lunch.

CELIA. I didn't say I was going to take a long lunch.

MIKE. Well, you never know, do you? Right, so— (*Consulting print-out.*)

CELIA. I know.

MIKE (*overlapping*). —what do we have here? Well, what we have here are two good plots and we just have to agree on which one makes the best sense. What do you think?

CELIA. I think you give up awfully easy.

MIKE. No, I don't. I still think my plot makes the best sense.

CELIA (*looks at him a moment, sighs*). And I still think it's a Western.

MIKE. And you're basing that entire opinion on one line, one word.

CELIA. I am not. Now, listen, listen— (*reading one of the pieces of paper*) —it's the whole feel of the thing where he's new in town—just being introduced—something,

something—can't read it—then "...To smooth that rough touch with a tender—" something—and Juliet says, "Good Pilgrim, you do wrong your hand—"

MIKE. "Good Pilgrim"—having someone called "pilgrim" does not make it a Western.

CELIA. No, no, this one, too—here— (*reading another piece*) —"fiery-footed steeds,/Towards Phoebus' lodging; such a waggoner/As Phaethon would whip you to the west" and—where—here—and this one— (*reading another piece*) —this one with something "raven" and then "wolfish-ravening lamb"—wolfish-ravening lamb! It's Plot 27—the cattlemen and the sheep herders—probably this Phoebus and Phaethon.

MIKE. A few phrases, and stretching even for that.

CELIA. Well, it works better than your idea about the coven and bewitchment and tragic love.

MIKE. Then how to you explain all the dead men we've got here?

CELIA. Westerns are ninety percent dead men.

MIKE. For love? These men died for love.

CELIA. Oh, please. Men have died and their ashes been urned but never for love. How do you know they died for love? "Thy husband in thy bosom there lies dead and Paris, too." Where does it say they died for love? They didn't die for love—they died in a range war.

MIKE. How about the poetry? How do you explain that? That incredibly strong sense of passion, of longing?

CELIA. Well, they were very attached to their horses. We know that.

MIKE (*picks up one of the pieces and reads*). "Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,/Having some business, do entreat her eyes/To twinkle in their spheres"—some-



thing, something— “The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,/As daylight doth a—” something.  
(*Looks at her.*)

CELIA (*pauses*). How do we know that piece even goes with the others?

MIKE. It goes with the others.

CELIA. You know.

MIKE. I know.

CELIA. Well, maybe you're right. But for the Festival they want action plots—something that moves.

MIKE (*standing close to her*). Poetry moves. Love moves. Some love.

CELIA. Does it?

MIKE (*turning away*). Witness Drake.

CELIA. What does he have to do with it?

MIKE. I think he has a lot to do with it.

CELIA. Then you haven't thought about it much.

MIKE. That's all I was doing last night was thinking about it!

CELIA. I thought you were reading a book. That's all I've heard since I got here. “I was reading a book, I was reading a book.”

MIKE. Oh, shut up! (*Slight pause.*)

CELIA. If I took myself as seriously as you do, I'd be insulted by that.

MIKE. I'm sorry. And I don't—

CELIA. You do. You take everything seriously—get all tangled up in things. Do you know that? I've said it often enough, you should know. Unless you never listen to what I'm saying. Do you listen?

MIKE. I listen more to what you don't say.

CELIA. What don't I say?

MIKE. You're twenty years old today. Your Woman's Birthday. Legally free. You should start saying what you want.

CELIA. You've been legally free the whole seven months I've known you. Do you say what you want? How are you plotting now?

MIKE. I'm not—or maybe I am—I don't know. Maybe I thought we had a bewitchment plot here because there's something about these pieces— I know it sounds crazy but I worked late last night and being alone here with them—

CELIA. You should have said something. I would have stayed with you.

MIKE. Well, anyway, I was here with—

CELIA. —the book.

MIKE. Yes. Well, no, the book was at home.

CELIA. You read it later.

MIKE. Yes. Well, not—that's later in the story. The thing is I was sitting here with these pieces and I felt something— (*Hesitates.*)

CELIA. Magical?

MIKE. And then I went home and read the book and it all came together. But the thing is, while I was here I felt a kind of—

CELIA (*over end of line*). All what came together?

MIKE. What?

CELIA. All what came together? You said—

MIKE. Well, all of it, but that's later in the story.

CELIA. Later in what story? You keep bringing something up and then you say, "Oh, no, that's later." What's later? What are you trying to tell me? You're driving me crazy!