

JILL & FRED'S Most Hysterical Historical ADVENTURE!

Scene 1

*(As the **intro music** plays (track 10) the cast enters and all sit in front and to the sides of the main stage, which is set up to represent a child’s bedroom. Jill and Fred sit back-to-back on a bed, represented simply by a duvet on the floor, their eyes glued to their phone screens. An Alexa/Echo Dot-type device sits on a bedside table. To one side of the main stage sit four narrators who will speak at key moments in the story. As the intro music fades....)*

Fred Jill, what’s the time?.....Jill? *(Jill is distracted by her screen).....Jill?*

Jill Huh? What was that, Fred? *(Fred doesn’t answer).....Fred?*

Fred *(distracted by his screen)* Yeah, what?

Jill You asked me something.

Fred Did I? *(thinking)* Oh yeah, what’s the time? *(Jill is distracted)..... Jill?*

Jill Yeah, what?

Fred I asked you what the time is.

Jill Oh, right...*(becoming distracted again)*

Fred So? What’s the time?

Jill Oh, sorry...dunno. Alexa, what’s the time?

(For Alexa’s voice, either use the pre-recorded track 11, or an actor can speak the lines from offstage, preferably into a microphone.)

Alexa For heaven’s sake! You are holding a phone which *shows* you the time! But okay, if you can’t be bothered, for just a second, to take your eyes off whatever earth-shatteringly important thing it is you’re looking at, the time is 5.30pm!

Jill & Fred *(oblivious to her tone)* Thanks, Alexa.

(The action freezes and the four narrators stand.)

- Narrator #1** Okay, well maybe that’s not really how Alexa would reply to the simple question, ‘What’s the time?’ We just pretended that’s what has happened here, to illustrate a point.
- Narrator #2** And that point is that most of you grown-ups are concerned about how much time your children spend on their screens...are we right? How many of you have had conversations that start with, ‘When I was your age, we never...’ blah, blah, blah!?
- Narrator #3** Yes, we understand that the world is moving at a blistering pace and some of you want it to just slow down a bit. But new technology, new apps and new ways of communicating are an exciting part of *our* lives.
- Narrator #4** And for Jill and Fred here – more about them in a moment – and all their friends, things are certainly a lot different than when their parents were young. Oops! Sorry, I should have said ‘younger’! Yes, some of you consider yourselves young, I know, but when it comes to this sort of thing, there’s a little bit of a generation gap, wouldn’t you say.....?

(As the introductory bars of the first song are played, Jill and Fred stand up. They are joined on stage by a chorus of their friends, who all enter staring at their phones.)

Song

Hashtag # Living Our Best Life

*Track 1 - vocal demo
Track 12 - backing track
Lyrics p29*

(The friends exit. Jill and Fred resume their back-to-back positions, staring at their phones.)

NB – the narrators have lots of important lines to deliver. In keeping with the recurring theme of the story, and to avoid them having to learn these lines, they could each read from a tablet.

- Narrator #1** So, welcome to the world of besties Jill and Fred, two perfectly normal children with a perfectly normal interest in screens! *(waving tablet)* TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, Insta...that’s *Instagram* to you grown-ups...and many more apps and platforms are a major source of their entertainment and communication.
- Narrator #2** And also a major part of the story we’re here to tell you – a story called ‘Jill and Fred’s Most Hysterical Historical Adventure’. Oh, and just to be clear, any similarity to a Hollywood blockbuster about two friends, with similar names, who do a bit of time-travelling, meeting historical figures and saving the world, is purely coincidental!
- Narrator #3** Now, we’re going to need you, our audience, to really concentrate for a few moments. Some very weird and confusing things are about to happen and if this story is going to make any sense to you, there are some details you need to know before we start. So sit up straight and pay attention! Ahem...*(pointing)*...at the back there...that means you!

Narrator #4 Okay, the first thing you need to know is that Jill and Fred are *(making finger quotes)* ‘online influencers’! They have lots of followers who watch the weekly videos they post, in which they give their opinions on anything and everything that’s new, from gadgets and games, to trendy trainers and sweet snacks! If Jill and Fred recommend something, you can guarantee their followers will go and buy it in their thousands!

Jill *(to the audience)* Well, it tops up the pocket money! Plus we get loads of free stuff sent to us, which we get to keep in return for reviewing it!

Fred Lots of people do it, but we’ve got a reputation for being honest. Kids trust our opinion. We only ever recommend things that we really, truly think are cool!

Narrator #1 So, that’s clear, yes? Even the snorer at the back...you understand? *(speaking slowly)* Jill and Fred’s opinion matters to a lot of people – you’ve got that? Good. Right, the second thing you need to know is that Jill’s grandparents are curators of the museum in the town where they live.

(Grandad and Grandma enter and stand on the main stage, away from Jill and Fred. They hold hands and look wistfully into each other’s eyes.)

Narrator #2 These two met at university where they both studied archaeology. They spent their early married lives travelling the world together, digging up mummies, Roman mosaics and Viking long ships.

Narrator #3 For the last thirty years they have run the local museum, finding fascinating artefacts from throughout history, to create displays that have delighted visitors young and old. Recently however, they noticed something that saddened them.

Grandad We’re just not getting as many people visiting the museum as we used to. In fact, numbers are so low that, if things don’t improve, we’ll have to close down!

Grandma It seems that people are just not interested in history like they used to be. Everyone’s so into shiny new things that flash and beep, the next bit of technology or gadget that’s going to light up their life. They’re so busy looking to the future, they’re forgetting about the past.

Narrator #4 It’s fair to say that Grandma and Grandad were feeling a little blue. Cue a whimsical song....

(As they sing their duet, Grandad and Grandma stroll hand-in-hand. Photos of their younger selves exploring historical places are shown in the backdrop.)

Song **Fall In Love With History**

*Track 2 - vocal demo
Track 13 - backing track
Lyrics p30*

Narrator #1 And this is where our story starts. As we have heard, Grandma and Grandad were desperately worried about the future of their museum.

Grandad What can we do? How can we get people excited about History? If only there was a way of...I don't know...*(making finger quotes)* 'influencing' them.

(They both pensively hold their chins. Grandma then has a 'lightbulb' moment!)

Grandma Hang on...our Jill and her friend Fred have all those followers on that interweb channel thingamajig they do. What if we asked them to help?

Grandad *(realisation dawning)* Of course! All those kids do whatever Jill and Fred tell them! So, Jill and Fred could tell them to come to our museum? That's it! That's the answer to our problem! I'll give Jill a call.

Grandma Give her a call?! Get with it, Grandad! If you want to contact your granddaughter, you'll have to do it in a way she understands. Come on, let's go and get 'on the line'...I think that's what they call it!

(They excitedly exit, hand in hand.)

Narrator #2 So they messaged Jill and Fred, explained their plight and begged them to drum-up support for the museum amongst their followers.

(Jill and Fred now sit side by side on the bed, looking into Fred's phone to record a video)

Narrator #3 Jill and Fred were happy to help and posted a video on their channel. They could probably have been a bit more enthusiastic though....

Jill *(unenthusiastically into the camera)* So...yeah...get yourself down to the museum. It's... err...fascinating...I suppose.

Fred *(equally unenthusiastically)* Errr...yeah...lots of weird, old stuff to see. The gift shop's not bad either. So...yeah...check it out...if you can.

(They give a half-hearted thumbs-up to the screen, then resume their back-to-back- positions. The friends enter again, looking at their phones. They gather to one side.)

Friend #1 Seriously? Did you see that? I think Jill and Fred are losing their touch!

Friend #2 What's with all the museum nonsense? I thought they were supposed to be reviewing the new X-Box this week?

Friend #3 Why would I want to go to a museum? I've got an i-phone 7 in a drawer at home – if I want to look at something old, I can get that out!

Friend #4 Old? That's ancient! And talking about History, *(pointing at his/her screen)* that's exactly what Jill and Fred will be, if they don't get their act together and start posting stuff that's actually interesting!

Friend #5 I know! I mean, I thought they were cool. But this...! *(waving his/her phone)* They're acting like...like teachers!

(The friends exit, shaking their heads.)

Narrator #4 So, not a great start to helping Grandma and Grandad. It would take more than this half-hearted effort to get visitors flocking to the museum. In fact, it would take a miracle.

Narrator #1 And a miracle is exactly what happened...which is lucky! Well, to be honest, we were struggling to find a way of moving this story along and, let’s face it, we need some excitement, because the snorer at the back (*pointing*) has nodded off again!

Narrator #2 So, when all other plot ideas have been exhausted, why not introduce a bit of magic! It solves a lot of problems! And the magic we are introducing arrived in the form of Alexa!

Narrator #3 Remember that scolding reply she gave to Jill and Fred’s ‘What’s the time?’ request earlier, and how we told you it was just made-up to illustrate a point? Well, that’s not strictly true!

Narrator #4 Yes, this was a magic Alexa! Tada! And all it took for her to reveal that magic, was some basic, good old-fashioned....manners!

Jill So Fred, not much response to our museum video. Any other ideas how we can help my grandparents?

Fred (*jokingly*) Ha! We could always ask Alexa.

Jill Yeah, right! You mean: ‘Hey, Alexa, *please* give us some ideas of how to save my grandparents’ museum?’ Ha! As if!

(*We hear a **thunderclap** sound effect (track 14) and Alexa, in human form, enters!*)

Alexa Well, seeing as you asked so nicely...!

(*Jill and Fred sit bolt upright, open-mouthed!*)

Fred What the...!

Alexa Oh yes, I’m not just a pretty voice. I have skills and talents you wouldn’t believe! It’s just that most people don’t know how to get me to reveal them!

Jill (*gobsmacked*) But...what...how...why...?

Alexa Why am I here in person, telling *you*? Simple...you said ‘please’. That’s all it takes. It just never happens, so nobody ever gets the full package... until now! So here I am, ready and happy to help!

Song **Alexa’s Song**

*Track 3 - vocal demo
Track 15 - backing track
Lyrics p31*

(*As the song finishes, flowers are thrown on stage and Alexa bows and blows kisses to the audience, lapping up their applause like a diva!*)

- Alexa** Okay you two, listen up. Here’s the problem as I see it: unless we can get visitors to the museum, it will close down. Right?
- Jill & Fred** *(still in shock)* Err...right!
- Alexa** And you’ve not had any success with your *(finger quotes)* ‘influencing’ so far, right?
- Jill & Fred** Right!
- Alexa** And that’s because you’ve posted boring, unenthusiastic videos, which are about as much use as a waterproof teabag, right?
- Fred** Bit harsh...but right!
- Alexa** So here’s the plan: *(enthusiastically)* you make new videos that will fire-up some passion for History in your followers. You show them what amazing things were achieved by their ancestors. You entertain them... you *(finger quotes)* ‘influence’ them!
- Jill** How?
- Alexa** Grab those phones of yours – not that you ever put them down – and take my hand. Oh, and hang on tight....it’s gonna be a bumpy ride!

(Jill and Fred nervously reach out and touch Alexa’s hand. As they make contact we hear the vortex sound effect (track 16). Jill and Fred give a loud and extended ‘Whoaaaaaaaaa’, which ends on the final ‘ping’ of the sound effect. The lights cut and they exit, as if they have been spirited away! The intro music then plays (track 17), the bedroom scenery is cleared and the stage made ready for the next scene.)

Scene 2

(The main stage is set up to represent a Victorian classroom. On three rows of three chairs sit a selection of Victorian pupils – two chairs are empty. They face a large chalk board on an easel, on which two lessons are written in elegant script; ‘Manners maketh man’ and ‘Cleanliness is next to Godliness.’ Also written is the 5 x table. A dunce cap sits on a stool next to the chalk board. A stern teacher, dressed in a gown and mortarboard, points at the table facts with a cane while the children chant them. As the narrators speak, the pointing continues but the chanting is mimed.)

- Narrator #1** Okay, that should be an exciting enough opening scene to keep you *(pointing to the back)* awake for another five minutes! A magic Alexa and a bit of time travel – what’s not to like?
- Narrator #2** Yes, time travel! You heard it! See what good manners can achieve! So, Jill, Fred and Alexa arrived smack-bang in a classroom of all places, in 1838! That’s the Victorian age, in case you didn’t know!

(A shell-shocked Jill and Fred, with Alexa, enter and stand to one side, unseen by the Victorians.)

- Fred** *(gazing around)* Hang on, is this a school? It is! It’s a school!

- Jill** *(disappointed)* I mean, really, if you can do everything you say you can do, why not start with a couple of dinosaurs at least?
- Alexa** You two just shush and do what you do best – point your phones and start filming.
- Fred** Errrm, silly question maybe, but do they know we’re here?
- Alexa** No, we’re in silent *(making slashing gesture)* slash invisible mode...for now at least. Right, come on, get creating content!
- (Jill and Fred hold up their phones and start filming.)*
- Narrator #3** Now, 1838 was five years after the introduction of the Factory Act. Although those over nine years old could still be made to work in factories, their hours were now limited, and younger children were *not* allowed to work in factories at all.
- Narrator #4** And that meant more time for school, which was great! Well, you’d think so, wouldn’t you?
- Teacher** ...and twelve fives are...?
- All Pupils** Sixty.
- Teacher** Indeed they are. Good. *(puffing out chest and flexing the cane)* Ah, the three ‘Rs’! The foundation of our wonderful empire! Reading, writing and arithmetic! *(noticing a raised hand)* Yes, Alice Fletcher, what is it?
- Alice** *(nervously standing)* Beggin’ your pardon, Sir, but why’s it called the three ‘Rs’? ‘Arithmetic’ starts with ‘A’, doesn’t it? And ‘writing’ with ‘W’?
- Teacher** Insolent child! Are you being deliberately obtuse, or are you just stupid? Right *(pointing at the dunce hat and stool)*, an hour on the dunce stool for you. Quickly! *(Alice puts the dunce cap on and sits miserably on the stool.)* And talking of insolent children, Isaac Pennyworth, where is your good-for-nothing sister today?
- Isaac** Sir, she’s finishing her shift at Sanderson’s textile mill. They clean under the looms on Tuesdays and Fridays, so she might be a bit late.
- Teacher** But I thought the recent Factory Act put an end to that? She should be in school, the lazy little truant!
- Isaac** She turned nine this month, Sir, and my father says the money she earns is more important than an education, what with her being a girl.
- Teacher** Hmm, well he has a point, I suppose. No good ever came from over-educating the female mind. *(nodding towards Alice)* I rest my case.
- (Lily Pennyworth enters, her left hand in a bloodstained bandage.)*
- Lily** Beggin’ your pardon, Sir, sorry for my tardiness, but....

- Teacher** *(loudly interrupting)* Lily Pennyworth! Read aloud the first lesson from the board! *(pointing with his cane at the board)*
- Lily** Beggin’ your pardon, Sir, but can you speak up a bit?
- Alice** *(still on the stool)* She’s hard of hearing, Sir. Those machines in the mill are so loud they often deafen the workers!
- Teacher** *(glaring at Alice, then shouting at Lily)* I SAID ‘READ ALOUD THE FIRST LESSON FROM THE BOARD’!
- Lily** *(reading)* Manners maketh man, Sir.
- Teacher** They do indeed! So why did you rush in here, late, without knocking, you insolent child?
- Lily** *(still not hearing)* Sir?
- Teacher** I SAID, ‘WHY DIDN’T YOU KNOCK BEFORE YOU RUSHED IN?’
- Lily** *(holding up her bandaged hand)* Accident at the mill, Sir. I was cleaning the looms and trapped my hand in the mechanism. I’ve lost two fingers, Sir!
- Teacher** WELL AT LEAST IT’S YOUR LEFT HAND, NOT THE HAND YOU WRITE WITH.
- Lily** But I *am* left-handed, Sir.
- Teacher** THEN THIS ACCIDENT IS A BLESSING FROM GOD! FOR NOW YOU CAN WRITE WITH THE CORRECT HAND – THE HAND HE INTENDED! AND YOU CAN START NOW. Everybody, slates out and, in your neatest handwriting, *(pointing with his cane)* copy out the two lessons written on the board.
- (Lily sits down and all the children take their slates and chalk from under their chairs. Jeremiah Bennet enters, with a very sooty face! He is clutching his bottom!)*
- Teacher** *(alarmed)* Jeremiah Bennet! Is that you under all that filth? If cleanliness is indeed next to Godliness *(pointing at the board with his cane)* then you are the most ungodly urchin in the whole of creation. Have you been up a chimney again? I thought the new laws had banned that practice too?
- Alice** *(still on the stool)* Actually, Sir, the recent Chimney Sweeps Act hasn’t really taken effect yet. Children are still being sent up chimneys!
- Teacher** Alice Fletcher! Children should be seen and not heard. You’d do well to learn that popular lesson! So, Jeremiah Bennet, this is why you’re late is it? What did you do, fall asleep up that chimney, you lazy scoundrel? I’m surprised they didn’t light a fire under you, to get you moving.
- Jeremiah** *(still clutching his bottom)* Beggin’ your pardon sir, but they did!
- Teacher** And that’s why you’re standing like that, is it? Burnt your posterior?

Jeremiah No, Sir. The boss sticks pins in it if you come down the chimney! It ‘encourages’ us to go back up! That’s why I’m a bit sore.

Teacher Well, I am in agreement with your boss’s methods. *(flexing his cane)* I too find that children learn the rules quicker when encouragement is directed towards certain parts of their body. To that end, follow me, Jeremiah Bennet! The rest of you, work in silence!

(The teacher drags Jeremiah off by the ear. The others cock their heads to listen as we hear three loud whacks and accompanying yelps! The teacher and a tiptoeing Jeremiah then return.)

Teacher *(smiling)* There! I must say, there’s much job-satisfaction to be had, moulding young minds and helping children to become useful and worthy citizens of our noble empire. God save the Queen!

(All stand to sing.)

Song **Victorian Kids**

Track 4 - vocal demo
Track 18 - backing track
Lyrics p32

(Jill, Fred and Alexa whisper to each other. As the song finishes, the Victorians hold a pose.)

Jill *(to Alexa)* So we’re *visible* to them now, are we? Can we grab a selfie?

Alexa *(nodding)* Go for it, but be quick! You musn’t traumatise them too much!

(The two rush over and stand in the middle of the group, holding up their phones for a selfie!)

Fred Say cheese, everyone!

*(The stunned Victorians are paralysed in shock, their faces confused. Jill and Fred quickly click their phones, then grab the teacher’s cane from his hand and the mortarboard from his head! They then dash back to Alexa who has her hand extended. As they touch it, we hear the **vortex** sound effect **(track 19)**. Jill and Fred’s ‘Whoaaaaa’ again ends on the final ‘ping’ of the sound effect and they exit. The Victorians are still standing motionless, open-mouthed in shock at the interaction! Eventually, they look at each other with quizzical expressions.)*

Teacher *(confused, patting his head where the mortarboard should be and looking at his empty hand for the cane)* Errm...yes...right. Back to your seats...*(the still-shocked children sit)*...errm...clean your slates and write down the following lesson as I recite it: The Lord moves in mysterious ways.

All *(to the audience)* He certainly does!

*(The **intro music** then plays **(track 20)**, all exit and the stage is made ready for the next scene.)*

.....end of script sample.....