

Start

DANGLE. Happy engagement! Pauline and Alan!

~~ALL. Pauline and Alan.~~

DOLLY. Come on Charlie! Give us a speech!

LLOYD. Speech!

CHARLIE. I've only ever spoken three times, formally, in public, in my life, and each time I've been banged up by the judge straight afterwards! For twenty years, me and Pauline's mother, Jean, were happy, and then, unfortunately, just by chance, we met each other. *(Alternative: Me and Pauline's mum, had seven happy years of marriage, and at the end of the day, seven out of thirty-six ain't bad.)*

ALL. *(Laughter.)*

CHARLIE. I done me best bringing up Pauline, on me own, after her mumver ... *(Chokes.)* sorry...

LLOYD. — Doin' well Charlie.

CHARLIE. — I've had to be her dad and her mum after her mumver ... *(Chokes.)*

PAULINE. — It's alright Dad.

CHARLIE. — After her mumver left me and went to live in Spain. It's a disappointment that Jean can't be here in Brighton at her daughter's engagement party, and a shame she can't even afford a stamp for a card neither. But I'm not gonna go on about it. I'd like to thank Alan's father, my solicitor.

DANGLE. *(Coming forward.)* Ecce homo!

CHARLIE. No Latin! Please! I have enough difficulty understanding you when you're speaking English. But, seriously, wivout Harry, I wouldn't be here today, I'd be behind bars, where, let's face it, by rights, I oughta be. Over to you Alan. *(Charlie steps back. Applause for Charlie. Alan kneels, with a flourish, before Pauline.)*

ALAN. Pauline, I give you my hand. *(Alan holds out an upturned, closed, cupped hand towards Pauline.)*

~~DOLLY. *(Aside.)* He wants to be an actor.~~

~~ALAN. Captive within my hand, is a bird. This bird is my heart.~~

~~PAULINE. *(To Dolly.)* Is it a real bird?~~

~~DOLLY. No. It's a metaphor.~~

~~PAULINE. *(Excited.)* Oh! Lovely!~~

~~ALAN. I offer you the whole of my life, as your husband.~~

~~DOLLY. *(Aside.)* Ooh! I could do with a bit of this myself. *(Pauline opens his hand and takes out the imaginary bird, and presses it to her heart.)*~~

~~PAULINE. I accept your bird heart thing, and I promise to look~~

~~after it properly. *(Pauline kneels, and offers her hand to Alan.)* I got a bird in my hand an' all. — This bird is my heart, the only one I've ever had. *(Alan mimes taking the bird and presses it through his rib cage into his heart. They kiss passionately. Silence. A bit embarrassing. It is broken by the pop of a champagne cork.)*~~

~~DANGLE. May I propose a toast. To love! In Latin —~~

~~CHARLIE. — Oh no!~~

~~DANGLE. *Ars amandi.*~~

~~PAULINE. Not Mandy! Pauline.~~

~~ALAN. *(To Pauline.)* "Ars amandi" is the art of love.~~

~~PAULINE. I don't understand.~~

~~ALAN. *(Aside.)* This is why I love her. She is pure, innocent, unsoiled by education, like a new bucket.~~

~~LLOYD. To love!~~

~~ALL. To love! *(They toast. The doorbell rings.)*~~

~~CHARLIE. Dolly, get the door.~~

~~DOLLY. Bookkeeper? Or butler? Make your mind up.~~

~~CHARLIE. And if it's carol singers tell them to piss off. It's only April. *(Dolly exits.)*~~

~~LLOYD. You're Charlie's solicitor? *(They shake hands.)*~~

~~DANGLE. Harry Dangle. Dangle, Berry and Bush. My card.~~

~~LLOYD. *(Reading.)* No win, same fee?~~

~~DANGLE. That's us.~~

~~LLOYD. Charlie tells me you're good.~~

~~DANGLE. Put it this way, I got the Mau Mau off. Are you a friend of the Duck?~~

~~LLOYD. Yes, Me and Charlie go way back. *(Aside.)* Brixton Prison.~~

~~PAULINE. Dad! We're gonna go up to my room, to play some records.~~

~~CHARLIE. Do I look like I just came down in the last shower? No! Mingle! *(Lloyd takes Charlie to one side. Gets out invitation.)*~~

~~LLOYD. Man! What's going on! Last week I gets this invitation to an engagement party —~~

~~CHARLIE. — Put that away.~~

~~LLOYD. — Of Pauline Clench and Roscoe Crabbe, which was a shock because I always thought Roscoe was, you know, homosexual.~~

~~CHARLIE. That was the whole point, it was a gonna be a marriage of convenience.~~

~~LLOYD. But today and it's a different groom man!~~

~~CHARLIE. Because Roscoe's dead. Pauline and this Alan wanted to get engaged, so I thought —~~

LLOYD. — I've paid for the sausage rolls so why waste them?!

CHARLIE. Exactly! *(Enter Dolly, looking serious.)*

DOLLY. Some geezer from London. Says he's Roscoe's minder.

LLOYD. Can't be much of a minder, Roscoe's dead.

CHARLIE. Is he a face? Does he look handy?

DOLLY. To be honest, he looks a bit overweight.

CHARLIE. Check him out, Lloydie, see if he's tooled up.

LLOYD. Charlie, I don't work for you no more.

DOLLY. Leave it to me, boys. *(Dolly exits.)*

DANGLE. More guests?

CHARLIE. Roscoe Crabbe's minder.

DANGLE. But I was led to understand there was a knife fight and Roscoe Crabbe was mortally wounded?

CHARLIE. No! He was killed.

LLOYD. Good riddance!

CHARLIE. The cops are looking for his twin sister, Rachel, and her boyfriend.

DANGLE. Because?

LLOYD. Revenge! The boyfriend testified against Roscoe in court. Put him away for four years. Man! It's obvious! Who is Roscoe gonna get into a fight with on his first day of freedom?

CHARLIE. *(To Dangle, unnecessarily.)* Rachel's boyfriend. *(Enter Dolly.)*

DOLLY. He's clean. Shall I let him in?

CHARLIE. *(Nods.)* Yeah. *(Exit Dolly.)* What can I do?

LLOYD. She's a smashing girl, is Rachel! Nothing like that vicious little toerag of a brother!

CHARLIE. I think Roscoe was a bit whatsaname — you know, what's that word for someone who likes inflicting pain?

LLOYD. Police officer.

CHARLIE. No!

DANGLE. Sadist.

CHARLIE. That's Roscoe.

LLOYD. Unusual for twins to have such different personalities.

CHARLIE. *(To Dangle.)* They was identical twins, you see, Roscoe and Rachel.

LLOYD. Roscoe was a boy, and Rachel is a girl!

CHARLIE. So?

DANGLE. Identical means identical.

CHARLIE. What I want to know is, if Roscoe's dead, what's his

minder doing on my doorstep? *(Enter Dolly. Followed by Francis. Francis is suited and booted, but the suit is too tight, too sport. The room freezes. Francis is acting tough. Francis checks the room as if looking for hidden dangers. He's playing the role of hard-man minder. Everyone else is still, waiting for a cue from Charlie. Francis stops under the picture of the Queen. Points to it.)*

FRANCIS. Who's that?

PAULINE. That's the Queen.

FRANCIS. What a beautiful woman. Someone should write a song about her.

PAULINE. "God Save the Queen"?

FRANCIS. That's a good title. *(Francis picks a peanut from a bowl on the side and throws it in the air, catches it in his mouth.)*

PAULINE. This is my engagement party.

FRANCIS. Your engagement party? Phew! *(To Dolly.)* Phew 'cause I'm glad it ain't yours — "beautiful eyes."

DOLLY. Thank you.

FRANCIS. Don't ever wear glasses. Even if you need to, you know, for reading.

DOLLY. *(Aside.)* I know exactly what he's after, and if he carries on like this he's gonna get it. *(Francis throws a second peanut and catches that too. To Francis.)* What about glasses for driving?

FRANCIS. Are you one of them women's libbers?

DOLLY. Would that be a problem?

FRANCIS. I like a woman who can drive. That way I can go out, get drunk, and get home without killing anyone. Are you married? To er ...

DOLLY. — I'm single. I'm the bookkeeper here.

FRANCIS. So you're a single, working, driving, bookkeeping woman. That's my type. Do you want to go to Spain for a couple of weeks? Majorca. Think about it. *(Francis throws a third peanut in the air, which forces him to run backwards to catch it. He hits an armchair, goes over with it, and pops up the other side.)* Got it. *(He shows the peanut on his tongue.)*

DANGLE. *(To Charlie.)* This man is a clown. *(Francis turns on Dangle, grabbing his testicles in a squeeze.)*

FRANCIS. Everybody at the circus loves the clowns. So, when you say, "This man is a clown," what you're really saying is, "I love you." Are you Charlie the Duck?

DANGLE. No.

FRANCIS. No?