

PAULINE. — Alan?

RACHEL. Yes, Alan. And the pain you feel now will be forgotten in a couple of weeks' time. The night always seems darkest just before dawn.

PAULINE. What?

RACHEL. That bit of the night, you know, just before dawn, always seems really dark, although it isn't, it's just the contrast with the light of morning.

PAULINE. I don't understand! *(Scene change in which the skiffle band plays 'My Old Man's a Gannet'.)*

Scene 4

A first-floor aperitif bar squeezed between two private dining rooms. The rooms are called Dennis Compton, stage right, and Donald Bradman, stage left. They both have photographs of their heroes fixed to the door or above the door. Upstage centre the stairs go down to the ground floor and the kitchens. There are autographed cricket bats on the wall. Upstage left is a life-sized plywood cut-out representation of W.G. Grace with the face cut away. Francis enters from the stairs, in a panic. Goes to the door of the Compton suite.

FRANCIS. Roscoe has insisted on having lunch with Charlie, up here, in private. Mr. Stubbers is having a lie down, which I guess you have to do a lot of when you're lying low. I've been nil by mouth for sixteen hours. I'm only alive 'cause me gall bladder's worked out a way of eating me kidneys. But! The good news is it's lunch time. There's gonna be food everywhere, and all I've got to do is organise a stash, you know leftovers, the odd whole course going missing. Hide it under here maybe. *(He looks under the table. Comes up with a mouse trap.)* A mouse trap with a chunk of CHESHIRE CHEESE! My favourite. All white and crumbly. And this bit's only slightly nibbled. *(He licks the cheese with an extended tongue. Enter Stanley.)*

STANLEY. Henshall! *(Francis jumps in fright, the mouse trap goes off on his tongue. He takes the trap off his tongue.)*

FRANCIS. Aaaargh!

GARETH SIDE

STANLEY. How come a mouse trap went off on your tongue?

FRANCIS. It's a personal thing guv.

STANLEY. Understand! I too enjoy pain. Have you found Paddy?

FRANCIS. I've arranged to meet him after LUNCH.

STANLEY. I've got no time to waste on lunch. I'm going down to the pier to look for him myself.

FRANCIS. *(Aside.)* Now this suits me! Get this guv'nor out the way while I serve the other one.

STANLEY. By the way, what does Paddy look like?

FRANCIS. He's a big lad, smells of horses.

STANLEY. Smells of horses? Or smells like a horse? The former is respectable and an indication of family money, the latter is just poor hygiene.

FRANCIS. At the end of the day, it's the same thing ain't it.

STANLEY. *(A mini epiphany.)* Good point.

FRANCIS. Now take your time guv. There's two piers, I can't remember which pier he said now. Do you want me to order food for you for later?

STANLEY. Order what you like. When I dine I need to eat in private, waited on by you and you alone. What's this Don Bradman room like? *(He looks into Bradman room.)* Perfect. I'll eat in there. *(Takes out envelope of money.)* I don't want to take all this cash with me.

Can I trust you with it, Henshall?

FRANCIS. Is it edible?

STANLEY. I doubt it.

FRANCIS. It's safe with me then guv.

STANLEY. I'll slip out the back. *(Stanley slopes off down the service stairs. Enter Gareth and Alfie. Gareth is thirty-something, and a trained Head waiter type. Alfie is old, slow and dodderly.)*

GARETH. My name's Gareth. I'm the head waiter. This is Alfie.

ALFIE. I'm eighty-six.

GARETH. No you're not. You're eighty-seven.

ALFIE. I thought I was eighty-six.

GARETH. No. That was last year. Be patient with Alfie, please, he's a bit deaf, so don't turn your back, he's gonna lip read.

ALFIE. I ain't never going back there! *(To Francis.)* It was a bloody massacre.

GARETH. During the First World War he was at Gallipoli. He has balance problems, he is waiting for a cataract operation, and he's got one of them newfangled pacemakers for his heart.

FRANCIS. Is that all I need to know?

GARETH. One other thing.

FRANCIS. What's that?

GARETH. It's his first day. I've been told to set places for Mr. Clench and your guvnor.

FRANCIS. In there, the Compton room, and my other guvnor will eat alone in the Bradman room later, and they've both insisted that I personally wait on their tables.

GARETH. (*Impressed.*) You've got two employers?

FRANCIS. Yeah. I'm that good. I was trained by the legendary French waiter, Jean Jacques Jim. (*Phonetically soft Js for all three names.*)

GARETH. In France?

FRANCIS. Of course.

GARETH. Which town?

FRANCIS. (*Made-up French.*) *hum de di dum sur la pont de la bourbonne*

GARETH. That's near Montreal.

FRANCIS. Is it?!

ALFIE. Do these guvnors of yours know you've got two jobs?

FRANCIS. No, that is our secret for today.

GARETH. What's in it for me and Alfie?

FRANCIS. It's less work for you and you still get paid.

GARETH. What about our tips?

FRANCIS. You'll get a pound each from me at the end of the afternoon.

GARETH. Deal! Alfie! Set one place in the Bradman room. I'll get some wine lists. (*Alfie starts walking towards the Bradman room very slowly, rattling cutlery on the plate. Enter Lloyd with menu.*)

LLOYD. How many courses do you think Roscoe and Charlie will want?

FRANCIS. Seven.

LLOYD. Seven?! *A la carte?*

FRANCIS. No! They're gonna eat indoors. I'll order for them.

LLOYD. The menu is in French. How many languages do you speak?

FRANCIS. I speak two languages actually. English and French. The menu, *por favor*.

LLOYD. *Por favor* is Spanish.

FRANCIS. (*Aside.*) Bloody hell! I can speak three languages. (*Francis is given the menu. He spends a couple of beats looking at it, frowning, sweating.*)

LLOYD. Alfie!

FRANCIS. He's in the Bradman.

LLOYD. Oh. He'll need a menu then. (*Lloyd opens the Bradman door to find Alfie leering out.*) Alfie! Jesus! Put this menu and wine list on the table. (*Lloyd gives Alfie a menu and wine list. To Francis.*) Are you ready to order then?

FRANCIS. (*Closing the menu with a snap.*) Yes! Can I have a lot of hot food, and, you know, just keep it coming.

LLOYD. My pleasure. (*Exit Lloyd down the stairs. Enter Gareth from the Compton.*)

FRANCIS. So, Gareth. Alfie! Bring the food to here, this table, and I'll serve it.

GARETH. Alright. Alfie, bring the soup to here. (*Alfie exits. Enter Charlie and Rachel. Francis puts a finger to his lips to inform the waiters. Exit Gareth.*)

RACHEL. You ain't got the money have you Charlie?

CHARLIE. This is my problem, I'll have it slapped by three o'clock. And, I'm paying for lunch, I insist.

RACHEL. Francis! Charlie said he gave you some cash earlier. In an envelope.

FRANCIS. (*Aside.*) Oh no! I can see what's going to happen! Roscoe's gonna take Mister Stubbers's money! That's a disaster! No, wait, it is Roscoe's money. Yes! (*To Rachel.*) There you go. (*Hands it over.*) I've set two places in here, the Dennis Compton room.

CHARLIE. Agh! (*Charlie has taken a big emotional hit. Maybe held up by Rachel.*)

RACHEL. What is it Charlie?

CHARLIE. When Jean, (*Breaking up.*) when she left me, she ran off with a geezer called Dennis Compton.

RACHEL. You can't eat in there then. Let's eat in the Bradman room.

FRANCIS. NO!

RACHEL. Why not?

FRANCIS. The gentleman from Room Ten has already booked this room.

RACHEL. He's not here is he. When Room Ten arrives, he can have the Compton room. You got anything against the Aussies Charlie?

CHARLIE. No. As it happens, I quite like opera. (*Charlie strides into the Bradman room, Rachel follows and closes the door.*)

FRANCIS. (*Aside.*) Oh shit! (*Enter Alfie slowly up the stairs with the soup.*) Come on, Alfie, you can do it?!

End