

PAULINE. — Don't upset yourself, Dad. What you tryna say?

CHARLIE. I'm tryna say that love passes through marriage quicker than shit through a small dog.

PAULINE. But I love Alan.

CHARLIE. Marry Roscoe and you get a detached house in Essex and he won't ever touch you. You just gotta go to the boxing on his arm, show the world he ain't a nine-bob note, and at two thousand a year he's paying you more than Paul McCartney's getting.

PAULINE. I didn't know he was living with Paul McCartney.

CHARLIE. *(Aside.)* They've tried, but they can't make bricks thicker. *(To Pauline.)* Five years ago, you agreed to this agreement.

PAULINE. Five years ago I was young and stupid.

CHARLIE. So what's changed?

PAULINE. I'm a lot older now. *(Dolly enters.)*

DOLLY. Roscoe's back. *(Pauline starts wailing. Enter Rachel.)*

CHARLIE. Hello Roscoe! Come in, son. Did you get your bangers?

RACHEL. I did not get my bangers, no. And I didn't get no cashier's cheque neither.

CHARLIE. I give the bangers to that geezer of yours. The two hundred.

RACHEL. And the six thousand?

CHARLIE. Let's have lunch, at The Cricketers', I'll have it all signed off by then.

RACHEL. I'd like a word with Pauline, if that's alright. Alone.

CHARLIE. Alright, Roscoe. Take your time. *(Charlie exits.)*

RACHEL. Pauline —

PAULINE. — Piss off! I hate you! You've ruined my life.

RACHEL. I know what would make you feel better.

PAULINE. You bleeding well touch me, and I'll scream!

RACHEL. I have a secret.

PAULINE. I don't want to know anything about your life, I wish you were dead.

RACHEL. *(Aside.)* I can't bear to see her suffer any longer. *(To Pauline.)* I am dead.

PAULINE. Are you? No! Really? What's it like?

RACHEL. Roscoe, my brother is dead.

PAULINE. You're Roscoe's brother?!

RACHEL. Sister.

PAULINE. I don't understand!

RACHEL. All you need to know is that I am a woman.

PAULINE. So, hang on, that means, I can't marry you, dunnit.

RACHEL. More importantly it means you can marry Alan.

PAULINE. Can I?!

RACHEL. In the near future.

PAULINE. I'd better go tell him. *(Pauline makes for the door, but Rachel stops her, grabbing her sleeve.)*

RACHEL. No! My identity must remain a secret. I need your help.

PAULINE. I'll do anything to marry Alan. I love him.

RACHEL. I too am in love.

PAULINE. With Alan?

RACHEL. No. His name's Stanley.

PAULINE. It's weird, innit. Love. It's like being mad.

RACHEL. Insane. Look at me. Dressed in my dead brother's clothes.

PAULINE. Maybe this is your way of grieving for him.

RACHEL. Yes. I hadn't thought of that. *(They hold hands, consoling each other.)* We girls have to help each other. *(They hug spontaneously. Enter Charlie.)*

CHARLIE. Sorry, shoulda knocked.

RACHEL. Charlie, you can go ahead with plans for our wedding.

CHARLIE. Right?!

PAULINE. But I need time ... to choose a dress.

RACHEL. And the cashier's cheque is —

CHARLIE. — Roscoe, trust me, the money's no problem. I'd better go tell Laurence Olivier it's definitely off. **Charlie exits.**

PAULINE. What if Dad tells Alan, Alan might think we've had it off.

RACHEL. What would Alan do, if he were to think that?

PAULINE. He'd go into one. He's known as a dangerous actor.

RACHEL. I can look after myself.

PAULINE. I know, but still, I'd better get to him before Dad does. *(Pauline heads for the door. But is held by the arm by Rachel.)*

RACHEL. You swore to keep my secret.

PAULINE. How long do I have to go along wiv this lie?

RACHEL. Stanley and I are going to have to live in Australia.

PAULINE. Oh no! Australia?! Oh no! Oh my God! Australia? Uurgh! How awful!

RACHEL. It'll be a terrible outdoorsie life, sustained by lager, barbecues, and opera.

PAULINE. I sympathise wiv yer, but my Alan, he's suffering right now.

RACHEL. Trust me. My plan will deliver to you the husband of your choice —

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.")*

END

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!

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 guvnor 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 dodgy.)*

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.