

LIVES IN PIECES

by

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Characters:

Cast of 5 (3M/2F)

SIMON – 22 to 40

PENNY– 19 to 37

DEBBIE – 27 (*Essex accent.*)

DANIELLE – 31 (*French accent.*)

GEORGE – 22

GILES – 28

GARY – 29 (*Manchester accent.*)

GERHARD – 38 (*German accent.*)

Synopsis of scenes:

Act 1

Scene 1 – LAST ORDERS 1

The present. 10.00 p.m. The Beachy Head Hotel. Christmas Eve.

SIMON – 40

PENNY – 37

TRANSITION SCENE 1

Scene 2 – THE BIG MATCH

Eighteen years ago. 7.00 p.m. The living room in Simon and George’s flat in North London.

SIMON – 22

PENNY – 19

GEORGE – 22

TRANSITION SCENE 2

Scene 3 – DINNER DOUBTS

Fifteen years ago. 7.15 p.m. Bradshaw’s restaurant in North London.

SIMON – 25

PENNY – 22

GILES – 34

TRANSITION SCENE 3

Scene 4 – ENGAGEMENT TACKLE

Twelve years ago. 7.30 p.m. The Kitchen in Simon and Gary’s flat in North London.

SIMON – 28

PENNY – 25

GARY – 29

DEBBIE – 27

TRANSITION SCENE 4

Scene 5 – LAST ORDERS 2

The present. 10.30 p.m. The Beachy Head Hotel. Christmas Eve.

SIMON – 40

PENNY – 37

Act 2

Scene 1 – LAST ORDERS 3

The present. 10.30 p.m. The Beachy Head Hotel. Christmas Eve.

SIMON – 40

PENNY – 37

TRANSITION SCENE 5

Scene 2 – INTERNET CONNECTION

Six years ago. 11.00 a.m. Two office rooms in Penny and Simon’s flat in North London.

SIMON – 34

PENNY – 31

TRANSITION SCENE 6

Scene 3 – MEETING APART

Three years ago. 4.00 p.m. Two adjoining hotel terraces somewhere in Italy.

SIMON – 37

PENNY – 34

GERHARD – 38

DANIELLE – 31

TRANSITION SCENE 7

Scene 4 – A SYMBOLIC END

The present. 11.00 p.m. The cliff edge at Beachy Head. Christmas Eve.

SIMON – 40

PENNY – 37

Author's note: The set for each scene is simple, comprising two chairs, two square, easily movable tables (adjustable to form half-size rectangular one) and two freestanding, movable doors. Doors and tables can be on small wheels. Set and props in each scene should be kept to a minimum. What is utilised can be real, the rest imagined. Costume changes for PENNY and SIMON should be kept to a minimum and they are assisted by the other actors during the transition scenes. Actors are also responsible for moving furniture and dressing the stage during these scenes. The important thing is that scene changes are quick and seamless in order to keep the action moving.

Act 1

Scene 1 – LAST ORDERS 1

*Present day. The lounge bar in The Beachy Head Hotel.
10.00 P.M. Christmas Eve.*

The SR door is closed. This leads to the outside. The SL door is open. This is an internal door leading to the bar and rest of the hotel. PENNY sits at a table near the SR door with a glass of vodka and tonic. The room is otherwise empty of people. She wears a coat and a hat. A modern Christmas song plays. This soon fades as the scene gets underway. SIMON enters through the SL door. He wears a coat. He holds a glass of whisky. He sits at another table, drinks and thinks. He takes out his mobile and stares at it for a couple of moments. He dials. PENNY's mobile rings. SIMON glances across. PENNY takes out her mobile and checks it.

SIMON: Penny?

PENNY: Simon!

SIMON ends the call. PENNY's mobile stops ringing.

What are you doing here!

SIMON: What are you doing here!

PENNY: Are you following me?

SIMON: I haven't seen you in years, how can I be following you? I'm having a drink.

PENNY: Why?

SIMON: Because... I'm thirsty.

PENNY: Why are you *here* having a drink?

SIMON: Because I'm thirsty *here*.

PENNY: You *are* following me.

SIMON: I'm not.

PENNY: You just called me.

SIMON: I did. See, why would I call you if I were following you? I'd

know you were here, wouldn't I, so I wouldn't have to call you.

PENNY: So why did you?

SIMON: To say hello. I wanted to see how you were.

PENNY: It's been almost three years.

SIMON: All the more reason to call and say hello.

PENNY: You *are* following me.

SIMON: I'm not. Maybe you're following me.

PENNY: Why would I ask you if you're following me if I'm following you?

SIMON: You could be bluffing.

PENNY: What are doing here, Simon?

SIMON: I told you –

PENNY: And don't say just having a drink.

SIMON: I was in Brighton for the day and I thought I'd come up to the area to have a look around. I've spent some time in the area having a look around and now I'm in here... just having a drink. You?

PENNY: Yes.

SIMON: Yes what?

PENNY: Yes, the same.

SIMON: Pure coincidence... *again*.

PENNY: If it is pure coincidence.

SIMON: It is for me.

PENNY: You're not with anyone then?

SIMON: Here you mean or just generally, in life?

PENNY: Here, I mean.

SIMON: No.

PENNY: And generally, in life?

SIMON: No. You?

PENNY: No... and no.

SIMON: Perhaps I could... pull my chair slightly closer to your table?

SIMON does so.

(*Hat.*) No, didn't see you under there. Well, well... What are you drinking?

PENNY: Vodka and tonic.

SIMON: A dram of the hard stuff for me. Whisky. Don't usually touch it, but it is Christmas.

PENNY: It wasn't just to say hello, was it?

SIMON: What?

PENNY: Why you called. Was it?

SIMON: No. I wanted to apologise to you.

PENNY: For what?

SIMON: For... everything.

PENNY: Everything's a lot to apologise for.

SIMON: Everything I said – didn't say... to you. Everything I did – didn't do... for you. Since I didn't get through I'll say it in person. Sorry.

PENNY: And you're apologising now because...?

SIMON: Christmas, season of goodwill to all men... and women... and elves.

PENNY: So, here we both are on Christmas Eve, alone, drinking in a distinctly un-crowded bar in The Beachy Head Hotel, the number one end-it-all spot in the UK.

SIMON: Is it?

PENNY: It's no use denying it, Simon.

SIMON: Denying what?

PENNY: The reason you're here. It's the same reason I'm here. Simon?

SIMON: Why, Pen? I mean I can understand why me, but *you!* You've got so much to –

PENNY: No, I haven't. In fact I've got very little to... This in fact is a very good time to... exit through the gift shop, so to speak. No dependents, one or two friends – who'll soon get over it. My job certainly won't miss me.

SIMON: What about me?

PENNY: You?

SIMON: Yes, you don't think I'd be devastated to hear that you'd... exited through the gift shop.

PENNY: That's a bit hypocritical, isn't it?

SIMON: What?

PENNY: Well, you're hardly thinking about me now are you, with you just about to... You don't think I'd be devastated to hear that?

SIMON: Would you be?

PENNY: Yes, I would... a bit.

SIMON: A bit? A bit devastated?

PENNY: Okay, a lot, but that's not the point. My point is you're being just as selfish as I am.

SIMON: I suppose it's good then we're both thinking of doing it at the same time. It means neither of us needs be devastated about hearing either of us had...

PENNY: No.

SIMON: How long have you been... thinking...?

PENNY: Long enough. You?

SIMON: Since last Tuesday really. My birthday. The big four-o. I was sitting in a pub in the Elephant and Castle having a birthday drink... with myself. Everybody around me seemed so... happy, cheerful. They were probably drunk to be fair to them. And there was me, celebrating by myself, thinking about my life, what I've achieved... haven't achieved: failed career,

precious little money, few friends nowadays, all married or joined religious cults in the Far East, I'm talking about Geoff there principally.

- PENNY: I guessed as much. Have you tried to get help?
- SIMON: Help?
- PENNY: You know, professional help.
- SIMON: No.
- PENNY: Maybe you should.
- SIMON: Have you?
- PENNY: I don't need help.
- SIMON: You're just about to jump off a cliff and you say you don't need help. Look who's in denial now.
- PENNY: I've made up my mind, it's what I want to do. I don't need anyone to try to talk me out of it, therefore I'm not in denial.
- SIMON: Well neither am I. Denial of what again?
- PENNY: Denial that we're in denial.
- SIMON: Right. So you're just going to walk up to the edge and jump?
- PENNY: That's the idea?
- SIMON: I might attempt a double reverse dive with a toe tuck, or whatever they do in the Olympics.
- PENNY: I'm going to keep mine simple.
- SIMON: Not overthink it.
- PENNY: No.
- SIMON: Tastes good, doesn't it, one's last drink. Can I get you another?
- PENNY: We're not doing this together, if that's what you're expecting.
- SIMON: No, I was only offering to buy you a drink, that's all, no strings attached. Finish this one first, perhaps. No rush is there... to end it all. Do you think somebody up there's playing a little joke on us: *us* meeting like this... *again*? Certainly not your mother, I wouldn't say.

PENNY: Don't you say anything about her.

SIMON: I'm not going to. You'll be seeing her again shortly, if you believe in... So will I. It's a good job I don't believe in –

PENNY: I said don't say anything bad about my mother.

SIMON: I didn't. Have you thought about me... during the past three years?

PENNY: On and off, I suppose?

SIMON: Me too – about you, on and off. Funny expression: on and off. I get how you can think about somebody 'on' but not how you can think about somebody 'off'.

PENNY: Presumably when one's *not* thinking about them.

SIMON: Makes sense. You know what I was thinking about the other day: you and me, the first time. I don't mean *that* first time – I don't think I remember that... Oh yes I do: your friend Gina's party. You were bad.

PENNY: You weren't too good yourself, I seem to remember.

SIMON: True, but you were worse. You got the key to her garden shed. That was sneaky. Don't know how you managed that.

PENNY: It's where she kept her bike. We used to go cycling together, didn't we.

SIMON: Yes. No, I was actually thinking about the first time you came over, when I was living with... what's-his-face?... thingummy-jig?

PENNY: George.

SIMON: That's him.

TRANSITION SCENE 1

As SIMON and PENNY converse, GEORGE enters through the SL door. He examines his appearance in a (fourth wall) mirror.

SIMON: You had me at 'hello'.

PENNY: Yes, but it wasn't you I was supposed to be saying hello to though, was it?

SIMON: No, but by the end of the evening it was definitely me you were saying goodbye to.

PENNY exits. SIMON is divested of his coat and mobile phone. He is given another mobile phone of the period, a TV remote, a Chelsea scarf and any other article of costume to suit the following scene. Props from previous scene are cleared away. The doors remain where they are. The SR door leads to the outside. The SL door leads to the kitchen and the remainder of the flat. The tables are adjusted to make two rectangular tables and pushed together to make one square table. The chairs are placed where appropriate.

Scene 2 – THE BIG MATCH

Eighteen years ago. 7.00 p.m. The living room in Simon and George's flat in North London.

SIMON sits and is half-watching a (fourth wall) TV. The sound is low so as not to be intrusive.

GEORGE: What about this one then?

SIMON: Much better. It's a shirt that says: 'I'm ready for action, baby, stop me if you dare'.

GEORGE: I'm serious.

SIMON: It's good, George. It goes with your eyes.

GEORGE: And the trousers?

SIMON: They say to me: 'There's only one way this evening's gonna end for us, sweetheart, and it's not gonna be in the upright position'.

GEORGE: I don't know why I bother to ask you anything.

SIMON: The trousers are good, George, I've always been happy with the trousers. They're the centrepiece, pulling everything together.

GEORGE: This rash is getting worse.

SIMON: Don't scratch it.

GEORGE: It's all red and blotchy.

SIMON: If you don't draw attention to it she's not gonna notice it. Distract and bewitch her with your scintillating repartee instead. What's her name again?

GEORGE: It's... It's...

SIMON: George?

GEORGE: Ah... Ah... I can't... I can't remember her name!

GEORGE starts to panic.

SIMON: George, George, relax. Where's your thingy?

GEORGE takes out his asthma inhaler and uses it.

That's it, calm down. Breathe. We'll go through the alphabet together, okay? Shout out when a letter sounds familiar. A? B? C? D? E? F? G? H? I? Nothing there? Okay. Where was I? I? J? K? L? M? N? O? We're up to P, George.

GEORGE: P. It's P.

SIMON: Are you sure?

GEORGE: Yes.

SIMON: Patricia... Pamela... Pansy... Portia?

GEORGE: Penny, it's Penny!

SIMON: Are you sure?

GEORGE: Yes. Penny, Penny, Penny.

SIMON: Okay, try not to forget it. I always find remembering my date's name always helps the evening go that little bit better. Find a mnemonic.

GEORGE: A what?

SIMON: A way of remembering, through association: 'A penny for your thoughts', 'A penny for the guy', 'Spending a penny'. She will be tonight, eh, George, spent. You both will be if all goes according to –

GEORGE: This evening's not about that.

SIMON: What, not even a little bit?

GEORGE: We barely know each other.

SIMON: I find that sometimes helps.

GEORGE: Maybe for you. I personally like to get to know someone before I... I...

SIMON: Ravish them within an inch of their lives?

GEORGE: Please.

SIMON: You kissed, didn't you, at the party – if I'm to believe your braggadocio.

GEORGE: We did, but...

SIMON: You didn't make contact?

GEORGE: We were both...

SIMON: In gorilla outfits?

GEORGE: Quite inebriated. It was all... a bit of a blur.

SIMON: Well, obviously you did something right, George, she wants to see you again.

GEORGE: But maybe she won't when she sees me again.

SIMON: What?

GEORGE: Her memory of me might be a drunken one. She may be remembering me through a haze of vodka martinis.

SIMON: She was sober when she agreed to see you again, right? Take a tip from me, George, women even when they're seemingly completely ratted have part of their brain still focussed on who they want to see again and who they don't. It's hardwired into their genes. It's to do with selecting mates. She wants to see you again, she likes your genes, George... especially when they're round your ankles, hey hey!

GEORGE: Look, what are you doing here anyway?

SIMON: Er... I live here, remember.

GEORGE: You agreed to be out of the way.

SIMON: I will be. Don't worry, I'm not coming with you... wherever you're going. Where are you going?

GEORGE: We're not going anywhere.

SIMON: What?

GEORGE: We're spending the evening here.

SIMON: Here!

GEORGE takes the TV remote and switches off the TV.

GEORGE: Yes, so off you go, bye bye. She'll be here any minute.

SIMON: What, here in this pokey, rancid, bachelor pad of ours?

GEORGE: Here, where I've spent this afternoon cleaning and in the kitchen where I've also cleaned.

SIMON: George, this is no way to spend your first date: an evening in your flat – our flat – however clean it is. It's the equivalent to taking her to visit your parents on your first date. She needs wining and dining, a slushy film, a dance, a midnight walk in the park and then back here for a little... 'night cap'.

GEORGE: No, I made some ratatouille this morning which I'm going to heat up. We're going to eat that and talk.

SIMON: George, you're making a big mistake.

GEORGE: There's the door, use it.

SIMON: But I was going to stay home and watch the match.

GEORGE: Match?

SIMON: The big match! The football. It's the European Cup –

GEORGE: Go and watch it in a bar somewhere.

SIMON: But –

GEORGE: You're not watching it here!

SIMON: I'll watch it in my room then. I'll take the TV into my –

GEORGE: I want you out!

SIMON: I'll keep the sound turned down, you'll hardly notice –

GEORGE: Simon! I don't want you... She'll be here any... I want you... I

want you... She'll be...

GEORGE starts to hyperventilate.

SIMON: Okay, George, okay, calm down, calm down. I'll go and watch it in a bar somewhere. Use your thingy. Where's your thingy?

GEORGE uses his asthma inhaler.

Breathe... Breathe... Deep breath. Better?

GEORGE: Yes... Now sod off!

SIMON: Since you put it so nicely. Can't I just say a quick 'hello' at least?

GEORGE: No.

SIMON: All right. Remember, George, just be yourself... or the closest you can be to it. Women like a man to be relaxed, easy, charming, witty, sexy. Think... Simon Fisher.

GEORGE: Thank you.

SIMON: And remember, George, the way between a woman's eyes is through her legs... or is that the other way round?

GEORGE: Look –

SIMON: I'm gone.

SIMON exits through the SR door. GEORGE makes slight adjustments in the room.

GEORGE: He's right, need to relax.

He takes a toke on his inhaler.

(To mirror.) Penny, I'm George, hi. No, you've done that bit. Good to see you again, George – I mean Penny. Hi. Hi there. Hello.

GEORGE attempts to smile, but it is more like a grimace.

Okay. *(Pretending.)* Doorbell. That'll be her.

GEORGE crosses to the SR door. He mimes opening the door.

Penny. Come in, let me take your clothes off – your *coat* off for you.

Repeating the exercise.

Doorbell.

GEORGE mimes opening the door.

Penny. Come in. Sit down.

GEORGE sits.

Coat! You haven't taken her coat!

Repeating the exercise.

Doorbell.

Doorbell rings. GEORGE mimes opening the door.

Penny. Come in. Let me take your coat off for you. Sit down.

GEORGE sits.

So... Penny...

PENNY: *(Off. Calling.)* Hello?

GEORGE: *(Calling.)* Hello?

PENNY: *(Off. Calling.)* George?

GEORGE: *(Calling.)* Yes?

PENNY: *(Off.)* It's me, Penny.

GEORGE opens the SR door. PENNY stands on the other side. She holds her bag and a bottle of wine.

GEORGE: You're here.

PENNY: Here I am. Am I... too early?

GEORGE: *(Checking watch.)* No. Come in?

PENNY: Thanks.

PENNY enters.

GEORGE: Let me take your coat off for you.

GEORGE starts taking PENNY's coat off. The bottle of wine gets stuck in her sleeve.

PENNY: Just a... George!

PENNY extricates the wine from her sleeve. GEORGE takes her coat.

How are you?

GEORGE: Good, good, good.

PENNY: Good.

GEORGE: You?

PENNY: Good.

GEORGE: Good.

PENNY: *(Wine.)* I brought this.

GEORGE: Oh... Good.

GEORGE tries to negotiate taking the wine while holding PENNY's coat. He hands coat back to PENNY and takes the wine.

PENNY: I just need to use your... facilities.

GEORGE: Yes.

PENNY: Where... is it?

GEORGE: Oh, through there, second door on your... if you're not counting this one. The seat's a bit... if you're sitting down and the flush needs a bit of a... Otherwise things don't quite go...

PENNY: Right.

GEORGE: And the lock doesn't – unless you lean against the...

PENNY: Okay. Won't be a moment... I hope. I'll put this... shall I?

GEORGE: Yes.

PENNY puts her coat on a chair. She exits through the SL door with her bag. GEORGE checks himself in the

mirror.

So far so good, George. (*Checking rash.*) Rash, rash...
(*Remembering.*) Ratatouille, ratatouille!

GEORGE exits through the SL door. The SR door opens. SIMON puts his head round. He enters the room. He sees PENNY's coat and sniffs the perfume.

SIMON: Hints of spice. Denotes elegance, mystery, exotic beauty.

SIMON furtively switches on the TV. The football plays quietly. PENNY's mobile is heard ringing off. SIMON turns off the TV. PENNY enters through the SL door speaking on her mobile. She is keeping an eye out for GEORGE and so doesn't notice SIMON.

PENNY: (*To mobile.*) No, I'm quite all right. I said I'll call you if I need to... Yes, that's why I've got the phone... Yes, I've said I'm at Gina's... Yes, I will...

She turns and sees SIMON.

Oh!... (*To mobile.*) No, nothing. Need to go. Bye.

PENNY hangs up.

SIMON: Sorry, didn't mean to... I'm Simon, Si, George's housemate – *flatmate*, let's not pretend.

PENNY: He didn't mention he had a...

SIMON: No? Out of sight out of mind, eh. I'm not staying, I just came back for my... wallet. Left it behind somewhere. He wants me out of the way, for obvious reasons. Doesn't want his old flatmate cramping his style. I certainly wouldn't, certainly not if I were entertaining a beautiful girl like you. No, I'd want me well out the way... well out the way. Penny, right?

PENNY: Yes.

SIMON: Lovely name.

PENNY: Thanks.

SIMON: Like the phone.

PENNY: It's new.

SIMON: (*Showing his phone.*) This is mine.

PENNY: Nice.

SIMON: Thanks. Has he offered you a drink yet? Don't hold your breath. Only kidding. Good man, George, won't hear anyone say anything bad about him. That's my job. He said you met him at a party.

PENNY: Yes.

SIMON: You a party animal, Penny?

PENNY: Not really.

SIMON: No, me neither. Like to throw a few shapes now and again though: triangle, rhombus, dodecahedron.

GEORGE enters through the SL door with two glasses of wine.

GEORGE: Simon!

SIMON: Hi, George.

GEORGE: I thought you'd gone out.

SIMON: I had. I'm back in again – briefly. Left my wallet behind.

GEORGE: Did you?

SIMON: Yes, I did. One of those for me, is it?

GEORGE: No.

SIMON: What are you drinking there?

GEORGE: A drink.

SIMON: You don't say.

PENNY: It's pinot Grigio.

SIMON: Oh, one of my favourites.

GEORGE: Too bad. Your wallet.

PENNY: Let Simon have a drink, George.

SIMON: Why, thank you, Penny. How very gracious of you.

*SIMON tries to take both the drinks from GEORGE.
GEORGE is not releasing.*

George, I think that's your cue to let go.

GEORGE releases the drinks.

Thank you.

SIMON gives a glass to PENNY and keeps the other for himself.

GEORGE: I'll go and get another glass for me then.

GEORGE exits through the SL door.

SIMON: Yes, Pinot Grigio's lovely. Fruity and... refreshing with a really beautifully rounded... delicate yet playful... extremely moreish... Very... Look, Penny, we've only got a very small window here – (*pointing to a fourth wall window*) and I'm not talking about that one – so I'm just gonna come right out and say it. Call me a cad, a bounder, a rotter, but I just know I'd kick myself – very hard indeed – if I walked out that door without asking you for your phone number. What do you say? Penny?

PENNY: Yes.

SIMON: Yes?

PENNY: You are most definitely a rotter, a bounder and a cad.

SIMON: Please. Penny, please –

GEORGE enters through the SL door with a glass of wine.

– tell me what you think of these... shoes. Honestly. They're old but they still look all right, don't they?

PENNY: Yes.

SIMON: Phew! Well... cheers everyone! Here's to the big match.

PENNY: What?

SIMON: European Cup, final tonight. Chelsea against Barcelona. Come on you blues! Do you like football, Penny?

GEORGE: No, she doesn't.

PENNY: Actually, I don't mind it... sometimes.

SIMON: Got a favourite team? Say Chelsea, say Chelsea, say Chelsea?

PENNY: Arsenal.

SIMON: Oh, that's fighting talk. Shall we say pistols at dawn?

GEORGE: Shall we say drink up, you'll be missing it.

SIMON: In a jiffy. Mustn't rush a quality wine.

PENNY: What do you do, Simon, work-wise?

GEORGE: He's unemployed.

SIMON: Resting. I'm an actor. We don't call it unemployed. I'm taking my well earned pause, recharging for my next emotional tour de force.

GEORGE: Dressed up as a chicken handing out leaflets at a shopping centre.

SIMON: Just that once. He'll never let me forget that.

PENNY: Would I have seen you in anything, apart from a chicken suit, possibly?

GEORGE: The pub.

SIMON: The kid's on fire tonight. No, I've got a possible big film coming up.

GEORGE: Have you?

SIMON: I have.

GEORGE: First I've heard about it.

SIMON: I don't tell you everything, George, we're not married... *yet*. He's a big director.

GEORGE: Who?

SIMON: The big director is.

GEORGE: Who is it?

SIMON: You don't know him.

GEORGE: Do you?

SIMON: I'm meeting him next week.

GEORGE: What's his name?

SIMON: Sandro... Mattatoni. He's Italian.

GEORGE: Never heard of him.

SIMON: See. Fingers crossed.

PENNY: Sounds exciting.

SIMON: It is. I'm excited. Could be my big breakthrough.

GEORGE: Well...

SIMON: Yes, well... better... leave you two to enjoy your ratatouille.

PENNY: Ratatouille?

SIMON: I'm sorry, George, was that meant to be a surprise? George's speciality.

PENNY: Ah.

SIMON: Penny, what can I say?

GEORGE: Goodbye?

SIMON: I'm getting to that. Penny, it's been a pleasure to have met you.

PENNY: Yes.

GEORGE opens the SR door.

SIMON: Have a... lovely evening... together.

SIMON hands his empty glass to GEORGE.

Thanks for this.

SIMON starts to exit through the door.

PENNY: You know... I've only seen a few games in my life – football games – but I remember the scores, very clearly.

GEORGE pushes the closing door against SIMON.

SIMON resists.

SIMON: George, Penny's talking to me.

PENNY: The *numbers* of goals scored in each match.

SIMON: Ah. You do?

PENNY: I've got a good memory like that.

SIMON: Can I put it to the test?

GEORGE: Look –

SIMON: I'm just giving Penny a little memory test, that's all. Soon be gone.

PENNY: Let's see... The first game I saw was nil for the home side and seven for the away side.

SIMON: Okay. Big score.

PENNY: The second game was seven nil.

SIMON: High scoring games. Exciting.

PENNY: Yes. Then another high scoring game: nil nine.

SIMON: Oh an absolute trouncing, nil nine. Go on.

PENNY: Nil nil was the next one. And the last one was four seven.

SIMON: Not one more... possibly?

PENNY: No, *zero* games after that.

SIMON: Zero after that.

PENNY: Yes.

SIMON: That's... wow, what a memory! I'm impressed.

PENNY's mobile rings. PENNY checks it.

PENNY: It's my mother. She thinks I'm with someone else, so if you could...

PENNY answers.

(To mobile.) What is it?... No, I'm still with Gina...

From this point the dialogue overlaps. SIMON and GEORGE speak in an animated whisper at first. Their voices rise in volume as they continue until they are silenced by PENNY. They resume the animated whisper again but once more their voices rise in volume.

GEORGE:
What do you think you're doing?

SIMON:
Doing? I came back for something, what was it? My wallet. *(Checking pocket.)* Oh, it's here in my pocket after all. Duh!

GEORGE:
I know why you came back.

SIMON:
I came back for –

GEORGE:
You're a rat! A rat!

SIMON:
George –

GEORGE:
You're just here to try to... to... to try to... to –

SIMON:
Now, George, don't work yourself up.

GEORGE:
You're a... you're a... you're a...!

SIMON:
George –

GEORGE:
A sod!

SIMON:
Now that's a bit harsh, George.

GEORGE:
You're just here to... You're just here to –

SIMON:
That's not true, George, whatever you're going to say,

PENNY:
Yes, everything's fine, I'd call you if it wasn't, that's why I have the phone... I wish you'd stop being so concerned about me... I'm old enough now to take care of myself. No, of course I'll get a taxi... Yes I will... Yes, of course... *(She puts her hand over phone. To GEORGE and SIMON.)* Shhh! *(To mobile.)* No, nothing... I'm in a bar... No, I'm not... Look, I'm being very rude, Gina's in the middle of telling me something very important... No, she isn't pregnant... No, it's secret, it's something she's telling me in confidence. Listen, I'll call you when I'm –

it's not true.

GEORGE:
You...! You...!

SIMON:
Use your thingy. Where's you're thingy, George?

GEORGE:
You're trying to get her interested in football again to try to get her to watch it in some pub with you so you can just... you can just... you can just –

SIMON:
George, George –

*After PENNY's line 'Listen, I'll call you when I'm –'
PENNY puts her hand over the phone.*

PENNY: (To GEORGE and SIMON.) Quiet!

*Simultaneously after SIMON's line 'George, George –'
GEORGE throws the remainder of the contents of his glass of wine at SIMON. SIMON ducks. PENNY is hit by the contents.*

Ah! (To mobile.) I have to go.

PENNY hangs up.

GEORGE: I'll... I'll fetch a –

PENNY: No, it's... okay, I... I need to... My mother... She wants me to... Thanks for a ... Bye.

*PENNY takes her coat and exits through the SR door.
GEORGE looks menacingly at SIMON.*

SIMON: To be absolutely honest with you, George, I don't think she was your type.

GEORGE: Thanks for *not* giving me the chance to find out. You...!
I ought to...! I... I...

SIMON: Breathe, George, breathe. Take a deep... I smell burning ratatouille, George!

GEORGE: Bugger! Bugger!

GEORGE exits hurriedly through the SL door. SIMON

turns on the TV. There is the sound of crowd cheering on TV.

SIMON: *(To himself.)* Yes!

He turns TV off and takes out his mobile.

(Putting in numbers.) Nil seven, seven nil, nil nine, nil nil, four seven, zero.

SIMON exits through the SR door.

TRANSITION SCENE 2

SIMON is divested of props and costume from previous scene and is given a waiter's waistcoat and a bowtie. PENNY enters. As SIMON and PENNY converse, PENNY makes up in (a fourth wall) mirror. She applies imaginary lipstick etc. She is given an article of costume to suit the following scene. Props from previous scene are cleared away. The doors remain where they are. A Ladies and Gentlemen toilet sign is stuck on the SR door. The SL door leads to the outside. One table is adjusted to make a square table. It is placed centre stage with the two chairs either side. The other remains as a rectangular table and is placed somewhere upstage to form a serving station. The central table is set with a table cloth and two napkins. Two menus are placed on the side table.

SIMON: And that was the start of it: three months of more or less uninterrupted bliss before your mother's poisoned tipped arrows eventually hit their target.

PENNY: It wasn't all her doing.

SIMON: No?

PENNY: No. I did have a mind of my own, you know... even back then. But perhaps I *should* have listened to her a little bit more than I did, however. She was right about actors: enjoy them on the stage by all means, but never on any account marry one... especially an unsuccessful one.

SIMON: She'd have been much happier, I'm sure, if you'd selected someone from her list of chinless misfits. Money no obstacle for them perhaps, but had difficulty working out which way round their trousers went. Like... Giles Thingummy-Whosit.

PENNY: Thingummy-Whosit?

SIMON: That was his name, wasn't it?

PENNY: No.

SIMON: Giles though, right?

PENNY: Yes, it was Giles.

GILES enters through the SL door. He surveys the room and checks his watch.

SIMON: *(Humphrey Bogart voice.)* And of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world you had to walk into mine... *(Own voice.)* or the faded glory of Bradshaw's in Primrose Hill, to be more precise.

PENNY exits.

SCENE 3 – DINNER DOUBTS

Fifteen years ago. 7.15 p.m. Bradshaw's restaurant in North London.

SIMON makes a couple of adjustments to the table setting.

SIMON: *(Sings to himself.)* Luck be a lady tonight
Luck be a lady tonight
Luck if you've ever been a lady to begin with
Luck be a lady tonight
Luck let a gentleman –

GILES clears his throat impatiently to announce his presence.

I'm sorry, sir, I didn't see you there. Table for one, sir?

GILES: No, two.

SIMON: Two, sir?

GILES: Yes, two.

SIMON: This table all right for you, sir?

GILES: It'll do, I suppose.

SIMON seats GILES at the table.

New here are you?

SIMON: Barely two weeks old, sir.

GILES: Menu.

SIMON: Menu, sir. *(Turning away. To himself.)* 'Please' would be nice.

GILES: Make that two.

SIMON: Sir. *(Turning away. To himself.)* Still no 'please'.

SIMON brings over a couple of menus. He hands one to GILES and places the other on the table.

Your menus, sir. *(Turning away. To himself.)* No 'Thank you's' either.

GILES: Waiter?

SIMON: Yes, sir?

GILES: It is customary, I believe, on arrival, to offer one's patrons a drink.

SIMON: Of course, sir. Perhaps sir would like a drink?

GILES: Gin and tonic, no ice.

SIMON: Gin and tonic, no ice, sir. *(Turning away. To himself.)* Frosty enough already.

GILES: What's that?

SIMON: I said 'soon be ready', sir.

SIMON makes a rude gesture behind GILES's back before exiting into kitchen (not through a door).

GILES: *(Checking watch. To himself.)* She's late. Not a good start, Penelope, not a good start.

GILES studies the menu. PENNY enters through the SL door.

PENNY: *(Seeing GILES. To herself.)* That must be him. Oh! No, can't do this. Can't.

PENNY is about to go. GILES looks up.

GILES: Penelope?

PENNY: Ah... yes. Giles?

GILES stands.

GILES: You're here.

PENNY: Yes... here I am.

GILES: I thought you may've changed your mind.

PENNY: No, no... no, no.

GILES: Right, here we are.

GILES seats PENNY and then seats himself.

I've ordered a gin and tonic, no ice.

PENNY: Yes, I'll have the same, thanks.

GILES: Can't guarantee when it will arrive. The waiter we have seems to be a bit of a clot. New here apparently. Your mother was right.

PENNY: Was she?

GILES: You are how she described you.

PENNY: Well, she does know me quite well.

GILES: And *me*?

PENNY: Sorry?

GILES: Am I as your mother described me?

PENNY: No.

GILES: No?

PENNY: No, I mean yes.

GILES: Is that good?

PENNY: No.

GILES: No?

PENNY: I mean yes, yes and no, no and... *(Standing.)* I'm sorry I... I need to... go.

GILES: Go?

PENNY: Yes... to... freshen up. Won't be a... This way I presume.

PENNY exits through the SR door. SIMON enters with a gin and tonic. He approaches the table.

SIMON: Your gin and tonic, please sir. No ice, thank you.

GILES: And I'll have another.

SIMON: Another gin and tonic, sir?

GILES: Yes, another gin and tonic.

SIMON: So soon, sir?

GILES: It's not for me, it's for her.

GILES points to the empty chair.

SIMON: Oh I see, sir, for her. I understand. She's looking very well this evening, sir.

GILES: What?

SIMON: Your wife is it, or... your mother?

GILES: She's in the bathroom, you fool!

SIMON: Oh, I see. Ice, sir?

GILES: No ice.

SIMON: Very good, sir. *(Turning away. To himself.)* She's no doubt as frosty as you are, I'm sure.

GILES: What's that?

SIMON: I said I'm 'on my way out to get some more', sir.

GILES: Do you always talk to yourself like this?

SIMON: Only when I'm working, sir. It helps me remember things.

SIMON moves away from the table.

GILES: Waiter?
SIMON: Yes, sir?
GILES: *(Pointing at menu.)* What's this?
SIMON: The menu, sir.
GILES: No, this dish. *(To himself.)* Good grief!
SIMON: It's a pork dish, sir. Pig.
GILES: I know what pork is. That's all.

SIMON moves away from the table. He makes a subdued pig grunt.

Did you say something?

SIMON: Just clearing my throat, sir.

SIMON clears his throat to demonstrate. GILES resumes studying the menu. PENNY enters through the SR door.

Penny?

PENNY: Simon?
SIMON: Hello... stranger. You're looking very... lovely.
PENNY: You're looking... like you're a waiter here. Oh.
SIMON: Are you... having dinner here or just using the...?
PENNY: No, I'm... I'm having dinner.
SIMON: With... him?
PENNY: With Giles, yes.
SIMON: Giles.
PENNY: Giles, yes.
SIMON: Is he your mother's idea?
PENNY: No, Giles is my idea actually.
SIMON: Is he.

PENNY: Yes he is.

SIMON: Oh dear.

PENNY: I see nothing to 'oh dear' about. Giles is a very interesting man.

SIMON: Curious, yes.

PENNY: He's also very wealthy and comes from a highly successful family.

SIMON: Well, that should please your mother.

PENNY: It pleases me too. Anyway, how about you, Simon, not yet Hollywood is it?

SIMON: Give it time, give it time.

PENNY: Plenty of time, plenty of time.

SIMON: Hadn't you be getting back to the very rude – sorry, *wealthy* – Giles from the highly condescending – sorry, *successful* – family?

PENNY: I'm sure duty calls for you too.

SIMON: Madam requires a gin and tonic, I believe.

PENNY: Oh God, don't tell me you're our waiter too.

SIMON: No ice.

SIMON exits.

PENNY: *(To herself. Despairingly.)* Oh, why?

*She looks thoughtfully in the direction SIMON exited.
GILES turns and sees PENNY.*

GILES: Penelope?

PENNY: Yes... Coming.

PENNY crosses to the table and sits.

GILES: I've ordered your drink. Let's hope that waiter remembers. He talks to himself like a half-wit. Yes, pretty eyes.

PENNY: The waiter?

GILES: Not him, you.

PENNY: Oh.

GILES: Your mother's eyes.

PENNY: I should probably give them back then, shouldn't I.

GILES: What?

PENNY: Nothing.

GILES: And your lips, definitely her lips. She has lovely lips.

PENNY: She has. She's got a good nose too. Have you noticed that?

GILES: Oh yes, a charming nose.

PENNY: Mine's not quite so charming as hers. Got a bit of my father going on here.

GILES: Never met him, of course. Seen his portrait though. Now you come to mention it you do have his nose.

SIMON enters with a gin and tonic.

PENNY: *(Seeing SIMON.)* Oh no.

GILES: It's not that bad.

PENNY: No, I mean 'oh no, the waiter's coming and I don't know what to order yet'.

SIMON approaches the table. PENNY hides behind her menu.

SIMON: Another gin and tonic for madam. No ice. Would sir and madam like to hear the specials for this evening?

PENNY: No, thanks.

GILES: I think we would.

PENNY: Yes... we would.

SIMON: Perhaps I may have something I could tempt madam with.

GILES: And the specials are?

SIMON: Yes, sir, tonight we have a... I'm sorry, madam, but don't I know you from somewhere?

GILES: What!

PENNY: I very much doubt it.

SIMON: Your face does look familiar.

PENNY: It's not.

GILES: Look, man, she clearly doesn't know you. Now let us hear the specials before I request a new waiter.

SIMON: Very good, sir. Tonight we have a poached salmon with black truffles to begin and a navarin d'agneau as a... as a –

GILES: Yes?

SIMON: Penny?

PENNY: Yes.

SIMON: Yes, I thought I knew you from somewhere. Where was it? A party... a wedding perhaps. Where?

GILES: Look, you're a server, even if you have seen her somewhere you're not here to make conversation. If we wanted your company we'd ask you to dine with us. Know your place, man! Away with you!

SIMON: Sir, madam.

SIMON moves away from the table.

GILES: The presumptuous fellow!

PENNY: Well, he was only saying he possibly –

GILES: He's a server, he's here to serve! If he tries anything like that again he'll get a proper dressing down. The man doesn't know his job! Look, he hasn't even presented our napkins to us.

PENNY: Well, surely we can –

GILES: Don't touch it, that's *his* job. (*Calling.*) Waiter?

SIMON approaches the table.

SIMON: Sir?

GILES: You've forgotten to present us with our napkins.

SIMON: I apologise, sir.

SIMON takes PENNY's napkin and lays it on her lap.

Madam.

He picks up GILES's napkin.

Sir. Let me present your napkin –

In the process he knocks the remainder of GILES's gin and tonic into GILES's lap.

GILES: What! You...!

SIMON: I'm terribly sorry, sir.

GILES: You... you... clown! You oaf! You... bloody...!

SIMON: An accident, sir.

GILES: Oh!

GILES crosses towards the bathroom.

The blundering clot!

GILES exits through the SR door.

PENNY: An accident?

SIMON: Well...

PENNY: You're ruining my evening.

SIMON: I can't believe you're really enjoying yourself.

PENNY: I'm not, but it would be a lot less un-enjoyable if you weren't here.

SIMON sits.

What are you doing?

SIMON: I'm sitting down.

PENNY: I can see that. Why?

SIMON: I want to talk.

PENNY: About what?

SIMON: About you.

PENNY: What about me?

SIMON: And your mother.

PENNY: What about my mother?

SIMON: You have to stop letting her run your life – *ruin* your life.

PENNY: She's not.

SIMON indicates GILES.

I've told you he's my idea.

SIMON: I don't believe you.

PENNY: Believe what you wish, I don't care.

SIMON: Okay, I'll believe what I wish. Like wishing to believe in that caravan in Hastings in the rain that you meant it when you said you didn't want the rain or us to end. Like wishing to believe when we sat up front on that river boat trip on the Thames you were being genuine when you told me you loved me and how you could see *us* being forever.

PENNY: Look –

SIMON: Like wishing to believe when we had our fortunes read in Brighton by that seaside mystic –

PENNY: Stop it, Simon!

SIMON: Maybe you were just wishing me to believe it... wishing yourself to believe it. Wishful thinking. Well... I won't ruin your evening any longer. I just want to say – as a well-wisher – it's your life, Penny, I just *wish* you to be happy.

SIMON stands.

No more accidents, I promise.

GILES enters through the SR door.

GILES: We won't be requiring your services anymore, I'm requesting a new waiter. Goodbye.

SIMON moves away from the table, but remains in PENNY's view. GILES sits.

Let's hope they replace him with someone with a modicum of intelligence, an ounce of aptitude for serving. I find it incredible that in an establishment like this – not a cheap one by any means – that their process for selecting staff can be so shoddy. A waiter is the first and chief impression a customer receives of an establishment long before one gets to the food. He should not only be suitably attired, but he should be courteous, deferential, attentive and unobtrusive, which means not engaging in idle chit chat with one's patrons. And as for clumsiness... The standards have unquestionably slipped here at Bradshaw's. The manager will get a very stiff letter from me, a very stiff one indeed. In my opinion what we've witnessed with that clot is indicative of the decline in standards in the service industry as a whole. If I were in charge of the training institutions responsible for –

PENNY throws the remainder of the contents of her gin and tonic into GILES's face.

PENNY: Shut up! Shut up you tedious... stuck up...

GILES: What!

PENNY: Pretentious...

GILES: What, what!

PENNY: Arse!

GILES: Oh! I think, Penelope, our dinner here is concluded.

PENNY: I think it most certainly is.

GILES: Your mother will hear about this.

PENNY: Well, that will be a nice excuse for you to see her again... and her charming nose.

GILES: Goodnight.

PENNY: Goodbye.

GILES: *(To SIMON.)* You? Your name?

SIMON: Rudolf, sir.

GILES: Please charge the drinks to my account. Millington-Hewitt.

SIMON: Very good, sir.

GILES: I will be complaining to your manager and your name will be mentioned personally, Rudolf.

SIMON: Very good, sir.

GILES exits through the SL door. SIMON crosses to the table.

Is madam ready to order now?

PENNY: No. But madam would like another drink.

SIMON: Gin and tonic, no ice?

PENNY: Yes.

SIMON: Very good, madam.

PENNY: Perhaps, my waiter would care to join me for a drink?

SIMON: I'm afraid your waiter is not allowed to drink while on duty, madam.

PENNY: Ah.

SIMON: But I do know an unemployed waiter who'll be happy to share a drink with you.

SIMON starts to take off his bowtie and waistcoat.

And he also knows of a little pizza place that's nearby, that's cosy and friendly where he'll be happy to take madam, if madam is agreeable to that.

PENNY: Madam is agreeable to that, if the waiter is agreeable to being unemployed.

SIMON: He most assuredly is.

PENNY gets up and crosses to the SL door. SIMON throws his bowtie on the table and hangs his waistcoat on the back of the chair. PENNY and SIMON exit through the SL door.

TRANSITION SCENE 3

As PENNY and SIMON converse SIMON is given an apron, a pair of rubber gloves and a mobile phone of the period and an engagement ring in a small box. He puts the phone and box in his pockets and rolls up his sleeves. He puts on apron and rubber gloves. PENNY is divested of props and costume from previous scene. She is given a mobile phone of the period and an article of costume to suit the following scene. Props from previous scene are cleared away. The doors remain where they are. The SR door leads to the outside. The SL door leads to the remainder of the flat. The rectangular table is placed DSL and faces out to the audience. This forms a sink area. A washing up bowl is placed there. The square table forms a kitchen table. The two chairs are placed close by.

SIMON: And after that there was no stopping us, not even your mother could derail the Simon and Penny express. We were full steam ahead... to our engagement.

PENNY: After three years of shunting around the track.

SIMON: Nothing wrong with a bit of shunting. The station came into view eventually.

PENNY: Yes, although the arrival at that particular station was anything but smooth I seem to recall.

SIMON: Well we know who's fault that was: my dear, charming and not at all psychotic inmate of a flatmate, Gary.

PENNY: I still don't know why the hell you got embroiled with him.

SIMON: Drama school has strange bedfellows.

PENNY: Not that either of you were at drama school when you were living together.

SIMON: For the first six months we were.

PENNY: So how do you justify the other two and a half years?

SIMON: We kept very different hours, we barely saw each other. (*Staring into the washing up bowl.*) Although his presence was undeniable.

PENNY dials her mobile.

Scene 4 – ENGAGEMENT TACKLE

Twelve years ago. 7.30 p.m. The kitchen in SIMON and GARY's flat in North London.

SIMON stands at sink facing out to audience. His mobile rings. He takes his mobile from his pocket and tries to negotiate removing his gloves to answer it. The mobile drops in the bowl.

SIMON: Damn! Damn it!

He fishes out the mobile.

PENNY: *(To mobile.)* Hi, Simon – wherever you are, I'm going to be a bit late, I'm afraid. I've been given some extra things to sort out at work. Should be there by eight. Bye.

PENNY hangs up and exits. SIMON has checked his mobile but it's dead.

SIMON: Balls! This is your fault, Gary! Sod off to Manchester leaving me four weeks of washing up to trawl through. Okay, some of it may've been mine but we're talking ten percent, fifteen tops. If I get ill from toxic poisoning I'll sue you for all you've got, my friend... which, let's face it, is basically zilch. It's the principle that counts. *(Mobile.)* Damn!

SIMON puts mobile in his pocket and stares into the bowl.

I'm sure the department for the environment might have objections to me tipping this radioactive waste down the drain. Half-life of ten thousand years.

SIMON tips the bowl water down the sink.

Ugh! Okay, Gary, it's definitely your turn next month... and that includes the bathroom. Don't think about it, Simon, you'll start retching again, you know you will.

SIMON takes off his gloves and throws them in the bowl.

Okay.

SIMON looks in a (fourth wall) mirror.

No signs of cellular deterioration... unusual discolouration or... neurological anomalies. Simon, now I've got your

attention. Yes? You definitely know what your doing, do you? Simon, don't turn away. You're asking her because you love her and want to spend the rest of your life with her, right? Right? Simon? Right. It sounds pretty final. Well, it's meant to be isn't it, Simon, old fruit. I, Simon Nicholas Fisher, take you, Penny Alexandra Coleman, to be my wife to have and to hold from this day forward until some other piece of skirt catches my fancy. No, marriage is an institution not to be entered into lightly, Simon old sausage... and don't you forget it. I won't. And on no account take any notice whatsoever of Gary. (*GARY voice.*) 'Spend too much time with one person you become a boring bastard'. What does he know? He hasn't spent more than one night with a single person... if that. We all know where he's going to end up: trawling the streets of Manchester when he's fifty searching for hookers and highs... and that's on a good day. Gary's certainly not someone you want to model your life on, Simon old chum. It's time to grow up, take on responsibility, earn some money... some decent money, not just temping money. Just one acting job, Lord, just one tiny memorable speaking part as a named character in a massive great Hollywood blockbuster. That's all I ask, Lord, if you can hear me. Oh and a sequel with my character developed and perhaps pivotal to the main story line. And perhaps a love interest. It's not asking for much. I'm not asking to be Marlon Brando. (*In Brando voice.*) Although if anyone needs Marlon you come to me first, capiche. (*In Lauren Bacall voice.*) 'Is that an engagement ring in your pocket or are you just pleased to see me?'. Well, I am pleased to see you but now you come to mention it...

SIMON takes out the box, opens it and takes out the ring.

Penny, will you marry me?

SIMON's mobile gurgles a ring.

Hold that thought.

He answers.

(*To mobile.*) Hello?... Hello?... Whoever it is I can't hear you very well... Hello?

SIMON exits through the SR door.

(*Off.*) Hello?... Hello?

GARY enters through the SR door with a six pack of beers. He is drinking one.

GARY: Si? You here?

DEBBIE enters through the SR door. She has a large ribbon wrapped around her neck.

DEBBIE: I still get paid, right, if he's not here?

GARY: He's here. He's cremating something – sorry, cooking.
(*Calling.*) Mr Fisher? Is there a Mr Fisher in da house? (*To DEBBIE.*) Hide.

DEBBIE: What?

GARY: Hide.

DEBBIE: What for?

GARY: You're a surprise, aren't you. Keep with the programme, Debbs darling.

DEBBIE: I said don't call me that.

GARY: Darling?

DEBBIE: Debbs. It's Debbie.

GARY: Hide! Under here.

DEBBIE hides under the table. GARY sits on it and drinks nonchalantly. SIMON enters through the SR door.

All right, mate.

SIMON: I thought you'd gone home to Manchester.

GARY: I am. What you're seeing is a holographic projection, mate. I thought I'd just beam myself in to say hello. No, I had a couple of men to see about a couple of dogs... if you get my drift. What you cooking?

SIMON: Chicken casserole.

GARY: Oh wait for me to bugger off and then go all cordon bleu on me, why don't you. Are you alone?

SIMON: Yes.

GARY: Good.

SIMON: Listen, Gary –

GARY: I'm not staying, I'm just here to give you your birthday present.

GARY gives SIMON a beer.

Happy birthday, mate... belated. But better belated than never.

SIMON: Thanks, you really shouldn't have gone to so much trouble. I'm really touched.

GARY: Sarcasm, my great rancid nob, does not become you.

SIMON: Thank you, Gary.

GARY: You're welcome.

SIMON: Now...

GARY: That wasn't it, you donkey.

SIMON: What?

GARY: Not your big one anyway. And I do mean big one – pun intended. So without further ado I summon for you, for your delight a nymph so bright, an Essex treasure to serve your pleasure. Arise bright nymph!

SIMON: What?

GARY: Nymph? Debbs, that's you, love.

DEBBIE: It's Debbie.

SIMON: What's going on?

DEBBIE surfaces from beneath the table.

DEBBIE: *(Sings.)* Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday dear – what's his name?

GARY: Lucky Boy.

DEBBIE: *(Sings.)* Dear Lucky Boy –

DEB & GAR: *(Singing.)* Happy birthday to you.

GARY: Happy birthday, mate. Debbie, Simon, Simon, Debbie.

DEBBIE: All right.

SIMON: What's...?

GARY: Debbs is the Dagenham queen of oral pleasures.

DEBBIE: It's Debbie.

GARY: No job too small – so she says, so not to worry. She is the present you always dreamed of, but never dared ask your parents for.

SIMON: Look, Gary, Penny will be coming here –

GARY: Don't worry mate I'll keep an eye out at the window. If I see her coming down the street I'll make this noise. (*Making an animal noise.*) Debbs get to work, you heard the man, he doesn't have much time... although from what I've heard he doesn't need long.

DEBBIE: (*Apron.*) You better take that off first.

SIMON: Listen, Gary –

GARY: What you're not turning her down, are you mate? She's a gift horse, quite literally, don't look her in the mouth.

DEBBIE: Oi, I'm not a horse!

GARY: I meant figuratively.

SIMON: Listen, Debbie, what my dear flat mate Gary has omitted to tell you is that I have a girlfriend who's just about to –

GARY: We've all got girlfriends, mate, this doesn't count.

SIMON: Maybe not to you, Gary.

DEBBIE: I still get paid, right, if he's not gonna do it?

GARY: He's gonna do it.

SIMON: He's not.

GARY: Listen, Debbs, take five.

DEBBIE: Debbie! Good, I'm dying for a piss anyway. Where is it?

GARY: Through there on the left.

DEBBIE exits through the SL door.

SIMON: You're unbelievable.

GARY: No, you're unbelievable, mate. I'm so disappointed in you.

SIMON: Good. I've come to the conclusion you're disappointment means I'm doing something right.

GARY: You're a ghost, man, a ghost of what you were!

SIMON: Gary –

GARY: Who said that?

SIMON: Look –

GARY: I can hear a voice, but there's no-one there. A ghost is speaking to me.

SIMON: Gary –

GARY: What happened to you, Simon?

SIMON: Oh, you can see me now.

GARY: I can see you and I see someone who's given up.

SIMON: Well –

GARY: Given up! You used to be somebody. At that waste of time drama school we went to together I used to look at you and think: that kid's got talent, he's going places. Now look at you: given up a lucrative career –

SIMON: Hardly lucrative.

GARY: Potentially, potentially. To join the rat race and crawl in every morning with the rest of those dead bastards to your pen pushing –

SIMON: It's a temporary job.

GARY: It's been two years, mate, two years! And in that time you haven't as much set foot on a stage, have you?

SIMON: Well to be fair, Gary, neither have you.

GARY: Don't try and turn this back on me. And you were fun: the life and soul, any party, Mr Personality, that's what you were,

always up for it, whatever it was, you were up for it. I could count on you. You're a ghost, Si, a ghost. And we know who's done it. She's got you by the balls, by the balls. Don't say I didn't try to help you get repossession of 'em tonight.

SIMON: I appreciate your concern for me, Gary –

GARY: Don't condescend to me. Just don't do anything stupid.

SIMON: Stupid?

GARY: Rash... with *her*.

SIMON: I presume we're talking about Penny.

GARY: Yes.

SIMON: Well, as a matter of fact, I do have plans, yes.

GARY: Plans? You're not thinking of... Are you?

SIMON: This evening isn't just about showing off my culinary skills.

GARY: What, you're gonna... Tonight! No... No...

SIMON: Gary –

GARY: No, I'm serious, you can't!

SIMON: I can, I've got the ring.

GARY: The ring! You've got the ring! Oh Jesus!

SIMON: Gary, you're overreacting –

GARY: No, Si, you've got to think about this, seriously think about this.

SIMON: I've thought about it.

GARY: (*More to himself.*) He knew, the bastard knew!

SIMON: What?

GARY: Cookie, Eddie Cook!

SIMON: Eddie Cook? What about him?

GARY: Did you plan this with Eddie Cook?

SIMON: What? What are you talking about? Gary? Gary?

GARY: I took a bet.

SIMON: A bet?

GARY: Yes, a wager, with Eddie Cook. We were talking about you... and her.

SIMON: Penny?

GARY: Yes. We made a bet. He said you would, I said you wouldn't. We made the deadline New Year's day. I thought that's eleven weeks away, you wouldn't not in that time.

SIMON: Let me get this straight, Gary: you had a bet with Eddie Cook that I wouldn't get engaged to Penny?

GARY: Yes, not this year anyway. I thought it was an un-losable bet.

SIMON: No bet is un-losable, Gary. How much?

GARY: Five.

SIMON: I'm guessing that's not five quid.

GARY: No.

SIMON: Hundred? Thousand!

GARY: How could he possibly...?

SIMON: Perhaps because he was in the shop when I was buying the ring.

GARY: Oh Jesus! Listen, mate, you're gonna have to postpone it.

SIMON: No.

GARY: Just till the New Year.

SIMON: Gary –

GARY: What better way to kick it off, eh? Pop the cork, happy New Year, auld lang syne, will you marry me? And into the sack for the best New Year's shag ever.

SIMON: No, Gary, I'm not postponing it just because you've taken on some stupid –

GARY: Where am I supposed to get five thousand from!

SIMON: You shouldn't bet more than you can afford to lose.

GARY: I'm gonna have to sell my kidneys on the black market. Either that or Eddie's gonna remove them with his teeth. You know Cookie, he's insane. He's a scaffolder, a scaffolder!

SIMON: I know.

GARY: He held Eric Taggart's head inches from the live rail at Epping station for spilling a cappuccino on his pit-bull.

SIMON: Gary –

GARY: I'll split it with you: two and a half, two and a half.

SIMON: Gary –

GARY: Three then to you, two for me. You can trade that rock in and get yourself a real sparkler, compliments of Eddie Cook.

SIMON: No.

GARY: Four. That's my final offer. I'm not backing down.

SIMON: And neither am I. I'm not getting mixed up in your desperate schemes. I've made that clear before, Gary.

DEBBIE enters through the SL door wearing PENNY's light dressing gown.

DEBBIE: Look at me, I'm a fairy!

SIMON: Hey, that's not yours!

DEBBIE: Finders keepers. Is he gonna do it, or what?

SIMON: No, he isn't.

GARY: My blood will be on your hands and your conscience my ex-friend and ex-flatmate.

SIMON: You've brought this on yourself, Gary.

GARY: Bastard! Come on, Debbs, we're going.

GARY grabs the beers including the gift for SIMON.

DEBBIE: It's Debbie! Debbie, Debbie, Debbie!

GARY: Leave Judas to his chicken casserole. I hope she says ‘no’.

DEBBIE: I still get paid, right?

GARY exits through the SR door.

SIMON: The dressing gown...

DEBBIE gives SIMON the finger and exits through the SR door.

Okay Simon, don't think of this as losing a flatmate but rather gaining thirty years on your life. Okay, deep breath and... hold it and... blow it all out.

SIMON checks the oven.

All shaping up nicely.

SIMON looks into the mirror.

No, it's good to see everyone gathered here to see me off the premises of bachelorhood and into the undiscovered country of matrimony... from whose bourn no traveller returns. Pause for ripple of laughter. Mrs Coleman there, Penny's mum, with that heart-warming look in her face... like a badger who's just swallowed a bottle of bleach. Pause for guffaws. Talking of cooking, I'm sure she won't be offended by me saying, hers isn't exactly cordon bleu it's more like cordoned off. And I will get you that chair for Christmas... don't forget to plug it in, dear. Big belly laughs all round. No, it's a good job she's got a great sense of humour folks... living with her she needs one. More laughter, death stare from Penny's mum. No sorry that's just her normal look. Seriously, folks, just remembering that wonderful evening when I put the question to her – Penny that is, not her mother – we'd just laid our knife and forks down on a near perfect chicken casserole. She was midway through taking a mouthful of her chilled Chablis, when I slipped down onto one knee and delivered the time honoured utterance –

There is a brief knock and the SR door opens.

Gary!

PENNY puts her head around the door.

Penny?

PENNY: The front door was wide open.

SIMON: Oh... Gary just left... for Manchester.

PENNY: Have I come at the wrong moment? You look...

SIMON: No, no, it's good... all's good.

PENNY: Sure?

SIMON: Sure. No, it's Gary, he was just being... Well, you know Gary.

PENNY: Yes. I called, a couple of times. Did you get my message?

SIMON: I... dropped my phone in the washing up.

PENNY: Oh. Is it okay to come in?

SIMON: Of course. Come in.

They kiss.

PENNY: Smells nice.

SIMON: Me or the dinner?

PENNY: Both.

SIMON: Thanks. It's my new chicken casserole aftershave. Come this way for aperitifs.

SIMON and PENNY exit through the SL door. The SR door opens and GARY puts his head round. He enters and crosses to where SIMON and PENNY exited and looks off. He beckons towards the SR door. DEBBIE enters through the SR door still wearing the dressing gown.

DEBBIE: A hundred, right? Plus the other fifty you owe me?

GARY: Yes.

DEBBIE: What's his name again?

GARY: Simon... Big boy... Whatever you call him. Use your imagination.

DEBBIE: That's extra.

GARY: A hundred, that's it.

GARY exits through the SR door.

DEBBIE: *(Calling.)* Oh, Simon, sweetheart, are you there? Big boy, I'm back.

SIMON and PENNY enter through the SL door.

SIMON: What!

DEBBIE: Who's this?

PENNY: Who's this?

DEBBIE: Wait your turn, bitch, I asked first.

PENNY: Simon?

SIMON: Debbie –

PENNY: Debbie? And she's wearing my dressing gown!

DEBBIE: Two timing me are you when my back's turned!

SIMON: It's a set-up!

PENNY: A set-up?

SIMON: Gary! Where is he?

SIMON crosses to the SR door.

(Calling off.) Gary! Gary!

PENNY: Who the hell are you?

DEBBIE: He's is mine, clear off!

PENNY: Simon?

SIMON: Debbie –

DEBBIE: Love hunks?

PENNY: Love hunks!

SIMON: *(Calling.)* Gary!

DEBBIE starts to remove the dressing gown.

DEBBIE: All right, that's it! If she's gonna be here I'm going. In fact it's

over between us, I've had enough of you messing me about.
Give this to your new tart.

DEBBIE throws the dressing gown at PENNY. GARY nonchalantly appears at the SR doorway.

GARY: All right, Simon mate, how's it going?

SIMON: Gary!

GARY: All right, Penny. Who's this?

DEBBIE: Debbie.

GARY: Debbie. How do you do, Debbie?

DEBBIE: *(To PENNY.)* You can have him. He's crap in the sack anyway.

DEBBIE exits through the SR door.

SIMON: Gary, tell Penny what you're doing.

GARY: Doing? No idea what you mean, mate.

SIMON: Penny, this is Gary's pathetic and desperate attempt to stop me from...

PENNY: What?

SIMON: I can't tell you, it's meant to be a surprise.

PENNY crosses to the SR door.

PENNY: Well, when you feel like telling me you can call me.

GARY: See you, Penny. I'll try and straighten him out, don't worry.

SIMON: Gary has taken a stupid bet with someone that I wouldn't propose before the New Year.

GARY: Si, you're just making it worse, mate.

SIMON: I've got the ring here in my pocket.

GARY: *(To PENNY.)* It was for *her*. *(DEBBIE.)*

SIMON: Don't listen to him, it was for you.

SIMON takes out the ring. He holds it out as GARY tries to pull it away. They struggle together.

Gary!

GARY: You're just digging yourself in deeper, mate, leave it! I'd go if I were you, Penny, this could get messy.

SIMON: I was going to do it this evening.

GARY: Stop it, mate!

SIMON: Penny, Penny will you marry me?

GARY: Stop it, mate! *(To PENNY.)* Run! Run!

SIMON: Penny, Penny, please, say yes – even if you don't mean it, please say... ugh!

GARY has his arm around SIMON's neck and throat.

GARY: Simon, don't live to regret this, mate, don't live... don't live...

PENNY: *(Seeing SIMON's distress.)* Yes! Yes, yes, yes! I will!

SIMON: *(To GARY.)* Game over, Gary. Game over.

GARY: *(Releasing his grip.)* Seriously, mate, congratulations. I'm happy for you, both of you. Here's a little advance wedding gift... for you both.

GARY snaps his knee up into SIMON's crotch. SIMON doubles over in pain.

Penny. Enjoy your evening with Judas.

GARY exits through the SR door.

PENNY: Simon?

SIMON: I'm fine, I'm...

PENNY: He took a bet with someone that –

SIMON: Yes. Let's forget about him.

PENNY: Gladly.

SIMON: Did you mean it, when you said 'yes'?

PENNY: Well...

SIMON: Can we... Can I do it again? Penny? Penny?

PENNY: Can you take that off first, I'm not being proposed to by a man in an apron.

SIMON removes his apron. He gingerly goes down on one knee as he presents the ring.

SIMON: Penny? (*Feeling the pain.*) Ah! Penny, will you marry me? Please, Penny, say yes, I don't think I can hold this position for much longer.

PENNY: Yes... yes I will.

SIMON collapses to the floor.

TRANSITION SCENE 4

Another modern Christmas song plays. SIMON exits. PENNY is divested of props and costume from previous scene. She is given her coat, hat and mobile phone for the following scene. Props from previous scene are cleared away. The stage is reset to the lounge bar in The Beachy Head Hotel. Only PENNY's glass remains on the table.

Scene 5 – LAST ORDERS 2

Present day. The lounge bar in The Beachy Head Hotel. 10.30 P.M. Christmas Eve.

PENNY sits at the table. She finishes her drink. She crosses to the SL doorway and looks through. She considers. She looks towards the SR door. She crosses to it and exits, closing it behind her. After a couple of moments. SIMON enters through the SL door holding two drinks.

SIMON: Penny? Penny!

Christmas song rises in volume.

Blackout.