

JOE. I bet you'd get tickets if you turned up.

PEARL. It was sold out months ago.

JOE. I bet you'd get some off the touts.

PEARL. Touts . . . ?

JOE. They'll be there on the gate, I guarantee. Take enough cash and you'll be in.

PEARL. We can't. We'd leave you high and dry.

JOE. I'll get on to the agency, sort summat out.

PEARL. What's come over you all of a sudden?

JOE. Well, Pearl, you're not the only one who's leaving, are yer?

PEARL. What d'you mean?

JOE. Me visa. I got home last night and there's the letter on the mat. Twenty years of saving and dreaming and I've got it. I've bloody gorrit!

PEARL. You're going?!

JOE. Dead right I am.

LINDA. Where?

JOE. Australia, sport. Melbourne, Sydney, Bondi Beach, Ayres Rock.

JAN. When?

JOE. Just as soon as I've got out of this place.

JAN. For how long?

JOE. A whole bloody year.

LINDA. Wow.

SHELLEY. So we've finally got shot of you at last?

PEARL. Come here, you.

PEARL *hugs* JOE.

Well done.

JAN. Yeh. Well done.

JOE. I gave my notice in this morning. I'm packing up my flat.

JAN. That's a bit hasty. I mean, what'll you come back to?

JOE. Who says I am?

SHELLEY. I thought only students went travelling. You'll look more like their dad.

JOE. So? I'd go on a zimmer if I had to.

PEARL. I can't believe you're really going.

JAN. Nor me.

LINDA. It's a long way, in't it?

JOE. It's a world away from this place and I won't be looking back. See you in the canteen.

Exit JOE.

PEARL. Well?

JAN. I can't believe it.

PEARL. Not him. Us. Tomorrow. How about it?

JAN. I can't afford it.

PEARL. Don't you worry about that.

LINDA. Will it be owt like the Tony Christie show?

PEARL. It'll be just like that with horses.

SHELLEY. And rich blokes and champagne.

PEARL. If he can go to Australia, we can go to York.

SHELLEY. Dead right.

PEARL. Royal Ascot, here we come!

PEARL. 'Til the punch-up.

SHELLEY. What happened?

PEARL. The best man hit the groom.

JAN. How long ago was that?

PEARL. Seven years in September.

JAN. Seven years since I last wore a hat.

PEARL. Time flies.

JAN. Don't it just?

Enter FRED, a ticket tout.

FRED. Grandstand tickets.

SHELLEY. Girls?

FRED. Anyone for grandstand tickets.

SHELLEY. Over here, mate.

JAN. Keep your voice down.

PEARL. Leave it to me.

FRED. How many, luv?

PEARL. Four.

FRED. Four for the Grandstand. No problem.

FRED counts out four tickets.

PEARL. How much?

FRED. You've got a great view of the course from here.

Restaurants, bars, betting, the lot. You can get to the Paddock, see the Royal Enclosure.

PEARL. That's enough of the sales pitch. How much?

FRED. Two grand.

PEARL. How much?

FRED. Two thousand pounds.

PEARL. You're joking?

JAN. Five hundred pounds each?

FRED. Six. I'm doing you a deal.

PEARL. I can't afford it.

FRED. No problem. Have a nice day.

FRED goes to walk away.

PEARL. I'll give you seven hundred for the lot.

FRED. Now you're having a laugh.

JAN. Pearl, that's way too much.

PEARL. Seven hundred pounds, cash in hand.

FRED. No can do.

SHELLEY. Do you take plastic?

JAN. How much are they worth? Face value, I mean.

PEARL. Fifty.

JAN. Fifty pounds? You should be ashamed of yourself.

FRED. It's supply and demand. If you don't want 'em, there's plenty more who do.

JAN. Have you got no principles?

SHELLEY (*seductively*). Have you got somewhere we can go?

FRED. I've got a pregnant wife at home and we're skint.
Twelve hundred.

PEARL. I've only got a grand.

JAN. And you're not giving it to him, no way.

SHELLEY. I'd rather go over the wall.

FRED. In that skirt? Good luck.

He moves away.

Grandstand tickets, grandstand tickets.

Exit FRED.

SHELLEY. Tosser.

Scene Five

Racecourse. Two hours later. Enter JIM McCORMACK, talking to camera.

JIM. To update you on the Jackpot, today's win pool is £543,223. There's over six thousand tickets sold with four legs to go. And they're lining up now for one of the biggest races of the day. Founded in 1807, the Gold Cup is the oldest and one of the most prestigious races at Royal Ascot. Staged over the marathon trip of two-and-a-half miles, the race is a stiff test of stamina and attracts the very best staying horses.

From offstage, we hear the women singing 'Avenues and Alleyways' by Tony Christie.

Many have distinguished themselves with multiple Gold Cup wins, enhancing the race's reputation as a specialist's event. Blind Alley'll be looking for his third consecutive win and if he can rattle and roll early on, he should do well. Tory Boy battled to win the last two times, he likes to run close to the pace and he's well drawn to do so. Bearded Lady looked well in the paddock, he's been getting a little bit sweaty later on in the proceedings but he won at Haydock which is promising.

Enter PEARL, LINDA, SHELLEY and JAN. All but LINDA carry a champagne bottle. They are singing drunkenly.

Ladies, please.

SHELLEY. Sorry.

The women giggle and 'shhh' each other as JIM continues his broadcast.

JIM. Last Supper looks well, won once this season but very consistent and a far weaker race would suit him. Chimney's At Dusk is nicely drawn in stall four but Last Chance Saloon, let's be clear, he's been done no favours at all.

SHELLEY. What's he on about?

PEARL. Who cares? We've won.

JAN. Twice.

SHELLEY raises her bottle.

SHELLEY. To . . . ? What was its name again?

PEARL. Tony's Lad.

PEARL/JAN/LINDA/SHELLEY. Tony's Lad.

SHELLEY. And who was the next one?

PEARL. Solitaire.

PEARL/JAN/LINDA/SHELLEY. Solitaire.

JIM. So you're celebrating, ladies?

SHELLEY. We're on a winning streak.

JIM. Beginner's luck, ey?

LINDA. How come they've all got stupid names?

JIM. They're not stupid at all, my dear. In fact, there's strict rules that govern naming.

JAN. Here we go, lesson two.

JIM. The Jockey Club states that names must consist of no more than eighteen letters, must not use initials or numerals, trade names, names of notorious people, titles of copyright books, films or plays, or names that are suggestive, vulgar or obscene.

LINDA. Oh.

SHELLEY. So you couldn't call it Big –

JIM. Some names are chosen because they imply a horse is powerful, others have a touch of humour and many get their names from their mother. Dinner Time's foal was Eight Thirty, for example.

LINDA. Why?

JIM. Well, dinner time's eight thirty, is it not?

LINDA. I have mine at twelve.

ACT TWO

Scene One

Paddock. One hour later. PATRICK, an Irish jockey, dressed in full racing silks, is having a cigarette.

PATRICK (*gestures to his cigarette*). Yes, I know I'm an athlete. And I know it's probably gonna kill me in the end but I'm hungry. I'm so feekin' hungry I could eat that feekin' horse. You can't live on coffee and a dry piece of toast, and I don't mean just for breakfast, for the whole feekin' day. No, for the last feekin' twenty-five years. You think I'm joking? Most fellas shut their eyes and dream of Paris Hilton. My fantasies are fry-ups and freshly-baked bread but they won't let me earn a living if I'm over eight stone four. Eight stone four, what kind of weight is that for a grown man? What kind of feekin' life? But we don't say that, do we? At least not to the press or the public. We don't talk about that one meal a day and all those hours in the sauna, the gym, the toilet. We don't talk about the laxatives and locker-room vomiting and –

Enter LINDA, singing the Amarillo 'sha-la-la's'.

You can't come in here, Miss. Not without a badge.

LINDA. I've got a badge.

LINDA *shows* PATRICK *the badge she's wearing*.

PATRICK. Let's have a look, now. The Tony Christie Fan Club.

LINDA. He's come here today, Shelley says.

PATRICK. Shelley?

LINDA. Me workmate. Have you seen him?

PATRICK. Not unless he's riding in the four fifteen.

LINDA. Sorry. I just want to talk to him, that's all.

PATRICK. What about?

Beat.

LINDA. Nothing much. I'd best . . .

PATRICK. So what do you do, you and Shelley?

LINDA. We pack fish in 'Ezzle.

PATRICK. 'Ezzle?

LINDA. Hull.

PATRICK. And do you like it?

LINDA. No one likes it.

PATRICK. Clocking in and clocking out. Sounds like a good craic to me.

LINDA. Are you a rider?

PATRICK. Well, how d'you guess?

LINDA. Your blouse. I like it. I like the stars.

PATRICK. They should give us one with arrows on next.

LINDA. Why?

PATRICK. Ah, take no notice. I'm just feeling sorry for myself.

LINDA. Me an' all.

PATRICK. A pretty girl like you? What have you got to worry you?

LINDA. Not much. Just stuff. I'd better go.

PATRICK. You know, my mammy liked a bit of Tony Christie.

LINDA. Yeh? My nan had all his records. She brought me up 'cos me mam weren't no good. She'd play 'em every Sunday when she made us dinner. She'd be singing with the windows all steamed up.

PATRICK. I bet she's dancing round the kitchen now he's back.

LINDA. Not really.

PATRICK. Winners and losers, that's what this game's about.
And if you're not a winner, you're nobody.

LINDA. Have you never been a winner?

PATRICK. I was once upon a time. Oh, yeah.

LINDA. What was it like?

PATRICK. I'm twenty-one years old. Reins in one hand, mane in another and a great big ugly knot in my stomach. It's taken everything I've got to come this far but I know this is just the beginning. Balanced in the stirrups, I'm ready to spring. The bell rings, the gate flies open and we're off. Shout to the horse to get him on his way, pump down on his neck to drive him on. Look around to see we're third in the pack. Raise up off the stirrups, push the mount but not too hard, there's still a long way to go. Hear the hoof beats of the horses, see their shadows on the ground and go, go, go, go, pushing through the pack. Into the Far Turn and it's high-speed chess. Crouch down in the stirrups, shorten your hold on the reins, knuckle up and down the neck to push him on. Nerves are forgotten and everything I've learned is coming good. Take the two ahead and you're top of the pack. Into the Stretch Run and break out the whip. 'Come on, come on, give us all you've got.' Body moving with the motion of the horse, and I'm pushing, pushing, pushing! Hooves on the inside, he's got to give you more. Wave the whip by his head, press down on his neck, ride him hard, hard, hard, you're fast, you're free, you're first past the post!

LINDA. Wow.

PATRICK. You take all the spills and you get back in the saddle. But then one day, you come off and you can't get back up. You've got to ride again 'cos what else can you do but you've changed. You've lost your nerve. You're scared.

LINDA. I'm scared an' all sometimes. I'm scared of my mum.

PATRICK. Why?

LINDA. Don't tell the others.

PATRICK. I don't know the others.

LINDA. They think I should stand up to her. I've tried to but she says things.

PATRICK. What kind of things?

LINDA. Nasty things.

PATRICK. Well, you shouldn't let her.

LINDA. I know but every time she comes back, I think, 'She's changed. She'll be nice this time.'

PATRICK. She's back now, is she?

LINDA. Yeh.

PATRICK. And is she being nice to you?

LINDA. No.

PATRICK. So why d'you let her in?

LINDA. 'Cos she's my mam. And I get lonely.

PATRICK. You're not the only one.

LINDA. You an' all?

PATRICK. Oh yeh – and I'm so feckin' hungry I could die.

LINDA *offers* PATRICK *a sugar lump*.

LINDA. Here. I bought 'em for the horses but they're not allowed.

PATRICK. Nor am I.

LINDA. Ah, go on.

PATRICK. I can't, I've got to race.

LINDA. When?

PATRICK. Five thirty. Broken Dreams.

LINDA. That's our horse. After 'Street of Broken Dreams', that's ours. I picked 'em all from the songs of Tony Christie.

PATRICK. Then I'll ride it for you, Linda.

LINDA *offers* PATRICK *the bag once again*.

LINDA. Please?

KEVIN. Oh. Okay. I'll leave you in peace. Look, I'm going.
I'm gone.

SHELLEY. Good.

KEVIN. Miss?

SHELLEY. Now what?

KEVIN. Have you got a light?

SHELLEY *lights her lighter.*

SHELLEY. There.

KEVIN *stares at the flame.*

KEVIN. Have you got a cigarette?

SHELLEY. Piss off.

LINDA. It's just a cigarette, Shell.

PEARL. Go on, he might leave us alone.

SHELLEY *gives him a Sobranie Cocktail cigarette.*

SHELLEY. See yer.

KEVIN. Pink?

SHELLEY. Beggars can't be choosers.

KEVIN. No, no. *(Looks at the cigarette.)* Pink.

SHELLEY. Right first time.

SHELLEY *lights his cigarette.*

Now do one.

JAN. Are they running or what?

SHELLEY. I can't watch.

JAN. I can't focus.

LINDA. Patrick's got stars on his top.

JAN. I've got 'em in my eyes.

SHELLEY. 'And tonight, Matthew, I'm going to be loaded!'

KEVIN. Ladies?

SHELLEY. Friggin hell!

KEVIN. Can you spare a bit of change?

SHELLEY. No, and we don't want the *Big Issue* neither.

KEVIN. You see, I've lost the lads I came with . . . lost my train ticket home . . . lost my shirt.

LINDA. You've got it on.

PEARL. He means he's broke.

KEVIN. I won on Monday, Tuesday . . .

PEARL. What? You've been here all this time?

KEVIN. I put the lot on Bearded Lady in the Gold Cup today.
Dead cert. But the jockey came off.

SHELLEY. Well, you win some, you lose some.

KEVIN. But the thing is, I've lost everything. *(Laughs.)*
Everything.

LINDA. What do you mean?

KEVIN. My wife . . . Suzanne . . . she thinks I'm on a business trip . . . she doesn't know I lost my job . . . or why . . . or what shit I'm in . . .

PEARL. With the horses?

KEVIN. The horses, the dogs, the fruit machines, the lot. I'd bet on an egg and spoon race if I could. At night, I'm up on the computer. She thinks I'm working.

JAN. And what are you doing?

KEVIN. Playing internet poker on her credit card. I'm into it for thousands, I can't get myself out.

PEARL. Well, you've just got to get a grip, you've got to stop.

KEVIN. I've tried . . . loads of times . . . I can't.

PEARL. Yes, you can. You've got to sober up, take a big deep breath and tell your wife.

KEVIN. But I've not even got the cash to get home . . .

PEARL. I remember you said no.

BARRY. Why? What did I tell you?

PEARL. Oh, the kids, the house, the money. All the reasons I couldn't do it either in the cold light of day.

BARRY. I was lying. I was covering up. I couldn't leave 'cos I was frightened.

PEARL. Of what?

BARRY. Of you. Of us. Of what I was feeling. So long as I could keep it locked in that room, I was all right. The thought of opening the door on it all . . .

PEARL. What?

BARRY. When you're a kid, you're afraid of the dark but you grow up and grow out of it, don't you? In time, you think you're strong, you think that nothing can touch you. Then one day you find it's not the darkness that scares you, it's the light.

PEARL. What do you mean?

BARRY. I was hiding in that hotel room. Not from my wife or the world. From myself.

PEARL. Barry -

BARRY. I should have opened up and let you in, I know that now. I should have told you exactly how I felt.

PEARL. You did.

BARRY. I mean, what was I thinking of? What was I on? I should have had the guts to say I loved you.

PEARL. But that weren't in the rules.

BARRY. Nor was coming here today but you did.

PEARL. I wanted to see you.

BARRY. Why?

PEARL. To find out what went wrong.

BARRY. Why?

PEARL. 'Cos I needed to know.

BARRY. Yes, I know but tell me why?

PEARL. Why d'you think? 'Cos I love you too.

Beat.

BARRY. We should never have played by the rules, Pearl.

PEARL. Well, we did.

BARRY. Thanks to them, no one knew to let you know.

PEARL. Know what?

BARRY. I was at home that Thursday night. Packing my stuff to come to see you. I was reaching up to the top of the wardrobe for my suitcase. Felt a pain all down my left arm, then it spread to my chest.

PEARL. No.

BARRY. I don't remember nothing more after that.

PEARL. Barry . . .

BARRY. It's all right.

PEARL. But if I'd known, I'd have never . . . I'd have found some way to see you. If you'd left word at the hotel, I'd have come.

BARRY. I know you would.

PEARL. I mean, stuff the rules, you could have . . .

PEARL is touching his face.

BARRY. What?

PEARL. You're cold.

BARRY. I know.

PEARL. It's summer.

BARRY. And you know what? You look lovely in the sunlight.

PEARL. Am I dreaming this?

BARRY. No.