

Life Begins Again

a prequel to Life Begins at Seventy

by

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Characters

Betty – Early forties, attractive, confident, sarcastic.

Dorothy – Betty's friend, early forties, conservative, overcoming her natural timid nature.

Frank – Dorothy's husband, early forties, traditional, weak but not a bad man.

Helen – Frank's lover, late twenties, modern, confident, non-committal.

Bill – Becomes Betty's lover, early forties, lothario who becomes smitten.

Michael – Betty's husband, early forties, definitely has something to hide.

Synopsis of Scenes

Act 1 Scene 1 – Betty's house and Helen's flat. Early Wednesday evening.

Act 1 Scene 2 – As above a few days later. Early afternoon.

Act 2 Scene 1 – Betty's house, a week later. Early evening.

Act 2 Scene 2 – Helen's flat and Betty's house, a few days later. Evening.

Act 2 Scene 3 - Betty's house later that evening.

Time: 1981.

Setting: Betty's house should be represented on one side of the stage, Helen's flat on the other. In the scenes where action takes place in both locations simultaneously, then both areas of the stage should remain lit throughout. When the scene takes place in only one of the locations, then the other should be in darkness.

Author's note

After *Life Begins at Seventy* received its première performance at Knutsford Little Theatre in April 2010 I was asked if I would consider writing a prequel that covered the period of upheaval that was so strong the characters were still recovering from it thirty years later. At first I was hesitant – I thought I had said all that I wanted to say on the subject, but then I began to think about the story from another perspective. What if Frank wasn't such a bad man after all? Would the pent up rage held by Dorothy have been such a burden if only he had told her the truth at the time? I also felt that there was an opportunity to develop Betty's character a little. I wanted to show that she is every bit as devious as she admits to being in the later play. Most of all though, I wanted *Life Begins Again* to stand up as a play in its own right. My hope is that it will not matter whether or not audiences have seen the original, or indeed if they see it after this one, but will that they enjoy this slice of life at the beginning of the eighties.

ACT I

Scene 1

Music: Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark – Souvenir. 1981. BETTY's house. She is early forties and attractive but makes no effort with her appearance. She sits on her sofa reading Cosmopolitan Magazine. She glances at her watch, tosses the magazine aside, then crosses to a sideboard where she takes out a box of Terry's All Gold. She guiltily takes out a chocolate, pops it in her mouth, puts the box back and resumes her position on the sofa and reads her magazine for a few moments. She then repeats the business at the sideboard but after replacing the box she takes it out of the sideboard again and back to the sofa with her. She lies flat on the sofa and places a chocolate on her lips. She then puckers and draws it into her mouth. She chews and swallows, then places another chocolate on her lips. She puckers and at that point her doorbell rings. The shock makes her exhale and the chocolate is lost. She is looking for it when the doorbell goes again. She gives up her search, puts the chocolate box back into the sideboard and exits to answer the door.

DOROTHY: *(Off)* Not disturbing you am I?

BETTY: *(Off)* What do you mean? Why would you be disturbing me, I was expecting you.

BETTY enters with DOROTHY. She is about the same age as BETTY, conservatively dressed and made up.

DOROTHY: It's just that you took a while to answer.

BETTY: Oh, I'm sorry, Dorothy. How rude of me to keep you waiting!

DOROTHY: I'm not complaining Betty, I just thought I might have caught you in the middle of something that's all.

BETTY: Like what?

DOROTHY: I don't know. Perhaps you had given the servants the day off and were doing a bit of ironing.

BETTY: Oh, ha, ha. Very funny. I don't iron anyway. Waste of time.

DOROTHY: You don't even iron Michael's shirts?

BETTY: Hell no. I have better things to do.

DOROTHY: You don't iron anything?

BETTY: Nope.

DOROTHY: His trousers?

BETTY: Dry cleaners.

DOROTHY: Your skirts and dresses?

BETTY: Ditto.

DOROTHY: What about your own blouses and tops?

BETTY: Straight from tumble dryer to drawer.

DOROTHY: Oh, I don't think I could cope with that. *(She sits on the sofa, moving the magazine to another part of the sofa.)*

BETTY: We can't all be like you, Dorothy, spend all day ironing our husband's underpants and socks.

DOROTHY: I don't iron his socks!

BETTY: Ah! So you do iron his underpants then?

DOROTHY: None of your business. Anyway what do you do all day that is so important?

BETTY: I just like having a bit of time to myself occasionally.

DOROTHY: To do what?

BETTY: To improve myself.

DOROTHY: By reading Cosmopolitan magazine?

BETTY: It has some good articles.

DOROTHY: And you don't ever feel the need to whizz round with a duster or vacuum, even when your oldest and dearest friend is coming round?

BETTY: Oh no. You see my oldest and dearest friend knows that I'm a slob.

DOROTHY: That's true enough. Anyway, it seems to me that you must get a lot of time to yourself with Michael being away so much.

BETTY: Yes, well. At least I have you to come round and keep me on my toes.

DOROTHY: Glad I have my uses. Any tea on the go?

BETTY: Yes, of course Dorothy. I was going to offer you a cup straight away but I got sidetracked by your obsession with household chores. *(She exits to the kitchen.)*

DOROTHY: I'm not obsessed.

DOROTHY picks up a TV remote from the coffee table and examines this alien object. She accidentally turns on the TV that comes on at a very high volume. The shock of this makes her drop the remote and when she picks it up again she is holding it the wrong way round. She randomly presses buttons that have no effect until BETTY returns, takes the remote control and uses it correctly to turn off the TV.

BETTY: Please leave things alone Dot. You know what you are like with anything technical.

DOROTHY: I don't know what you want with one of those things anyway. Is it so much effort to get up and turn over the TV?

BETTY: Yes, but once I was up where would it stop Dorothy? Once I was up I might not be able to stop myself. I'd be dusting, tidying, hoovering. I'd have Michael's entire wardrobe ironed before I knew it.

BETTY returns to the kitchen. DOROTHY picks up the magazine again and notices something stuck to the cover. It is BETTY's lost chocolate. She winces and takes a handkerchief from her handbag to clean the sofa, her hands and the magazine. She is rubbing the magazine when BETTY returns with the tea.

BETTY: I know that I'm not a perfect home maker, Dot, but I didn't imagine that even you dusted the magazines. If it's dirty just throw it away.

That's a thought. Do you have any dirty magazines Dot?

DOROTHY: What are you talking about, Betty?

BETTY: You know. Nature magazines. Nudge, nudge.

DOROTHY: Betty, you seem to have gone off on one of your more bizarre tangents.

BETTY: Well, I'm sorry Dot, but you see I just walked in to see my best friend polishing last month's Cosmopolitan like it is an antique objet d'art. This is a woman I have known for the best part of thirty years. Now, I have to admit that you have always been a bit odd, but...

DOROTHY: What do you mean a bit odd?

BETTY: Oh come on. A woman, who by her own admission irons her husband's Y fronts can hardly be considered normal.

DOROTHY: I think you will find that lots of women iron underpants and anyway, I wasn't polishing your magazine, I was cleaning something off it.

BETTY: Like what?

DOROTHY: Chocolate, I think.

BETTY: Ah. Um, did you want biscuits?

DOROTHY: Found your guilty little secret have I?

BETTY: What little secret?

DOROTHY: You're a bit of a chocoholic are you?

BETTY: Michael brought home some duty free Terry's All Gold last time he was away. Is there anything wrong with that?

DOROTHY: Of course not, Betty. It's just that you seemed to go immediately on the defensive.

BETTY: Oh, I suppose there are worse vices. *(She goes to the sideboard and takes out the box. On the other side of the stage HELEN arrives in her flat. She is in her late twenties to early thirties and enjoys wearing the styles of the day. She turns on the light, takes off her jacket, picks up a magazine and flops down on her sofa.)* Would you like one?

DOROTHY: Biscuit or chocolate?

BETTY: Either.

DOROTHY: I'll have a *biscuit* with my tea thanks.

BETTY: Coming right up.

BETTY exits to fetch the biscuits. Whilst she is away DOROTHY pinches a chocolate from the lower layer. She sits and flicks through the magazine. Betty returns with a plate of biscuits.

DOROTHY: Betty, how can you read this filth?

BETTY: What do you mean? It's a very respectable magazine.

DOROTHY: *(Reading a headline.)* 'I've bedded a thousand women' boasts Dynasty star.

BETTY: Yes, well he could make it a thousand and one if he likes.

DOROTHY: I don't know what the world is coming to.

BETTY: Yes, of course you are one of those people who remembers the sixties, aren't you?

DOROTHY: Of course I remember the sixties.

BETTY: Well, you know what they say. 'If you can remember the sixties, you weren't really there.'

DOROTHY: I have absolutely no idea what that means.

BETTY: All that free love, drugs and sit ins.

DOROTHY: Betty, as you so correctly pointed out, we have known each other thirty years. You were no more a hippy than I am the Queen of England.

BETTY: True, but don't you sometimes think we missed an opportunity?

DOROTHY: An opportunity for what? Look at what you've got, Betty. Michael earns a very decent salary, you have a lovely, if somewhat untidy, house, a son at university, all the leisure time you need and all the duty free Terry's All Gold you can eat. What more could you want?

BETTY: I'm bored Dorothy.

There is a pause after this rare moment of candidness.

DOROTHY: Bored?

BETTY: I mean, this can't be what life is all about can it? I mean, before John went off to University I couldn't wait to get a bit of peace and quiet. The trouble is, now I've got a lot of peace and quiet.

DOROTHY: Have you thought of taking up a hobby?

BETTY: Like what? I want a bit of excitement in my life. Michael is jet setting around the world, he never offers to take me with him by the way. Embroidery or pottery classes aren't really going to do it for me Dot.

DOROTHY: Perhaps he would take you with him, if you asked.

BETTY: Fat chance. He enjoys his freedom too much.

DOROTHY: Did he tell you that?

BETTY: No, of course not.

DOROTHY: He is probably just as bored as you. It's all very well being in exotic places, but it's no fun if you have no one to share them with.

BETTY: My thoughts exactly.

DOROTHY: Where is he now?

BETTY: Madrid.

DOROTHY: Well, I expect he is sat in some miserable hotel room right now, watching dreadful Spanish television that he can't even understand, wishing he was home.

BETTY thinks about telling DOROTHY exactly what she imagines her husband is doing, but decides against it.

BETTY: Yes, you are probably right.

DOROTHY: Anyway, forget embroidery or pottery, I have an even better idea.

BETTY: Go on.

DOROTHY: Bingo.

BETTY: Bingo!

DOROTHY: Yes. In the old Palais. Wednesday nights.

BETTY: Wednesday nights?

DOROTHY: Yes

BETTY: It's Wednesday tonight.

DOROTHY: Yes.

BETTY: Is that why you have come round at this time, to drag me off to bingo? I thought it was a bit strange for you to change your routine from Tuesday mornings.

DOROTHY: I thought I would surprise you with it.

BETTY: You thought that there is more chance of me saying yes if I don't have time to think about it you mean.

DOROTHY: We don't have to go, if you don't fancy it.

BETTY: I don't know if I can cope with this sudden change to my routine, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: Well, we don't actually have to go tonight. We could start next week if you want.

BETTY: I was joking. But why this sudden desire to go out with me of an evening? Shouldn't you be at home getting Frank's dinner ready?

DOROTHY: Oh, he doesn't get home until late on Wednesdays.

BETTY: Ah! Now it is beginning to make sense.

DOROTHY: So it's lucky that the Bingo is on, on the same night.

BETTY: A miracle, Dorothy. That's what you get for being such a devout Christian, God smiles on you. Anyway, how come Frank doesn't get home until late on Wednesdays? What's he up to?

DOROTHY: He's in a pub quiz team.

BETTY: A what?

DOROTHY: It's all the rage apparently. He has formed a team with some people at work and they play in a pub quiz league.

BETTY: I see. So why don't you go along and cheer him on? Be his groupie?

DOROTHY: I don't go in public houses, Betty. You know that.

BETTY: Oh yes. Of course.

DOROTHY: And as it isn't worth him coming home only to have to go back into town, he stays late in the office, then grabs a bite to eat before meeting the others.

HELEN's doorbell rings. She gets up to admit FRANK. He is early forties

and dressed in a conservative suit. He is holding a bag from a Chinese takeaway.

FRANK: Hi gorgeous.

HELEN: Frank.

They kiss on the lips. FRANK looks to be enjoying this more than HELEN. The kiss continues until FRANK's next line.

BETTY: Frank in a quiz team. I'd never have imagined it. What's his specialist subject?

DOROTHY: Politics I expect, He's awfully excited about Mrs Thatcher.

BETTY: I think a lot of people are excited about Mrs Thatcher. Particularly Ted Heath.

DOROTHY: I do hope he is eating OK.

BETTY: Ted Heath?

DOROTHY: Frank, silly.

FRANK: Chinese OK? *(He holds up the bag.)*

HELEN: I'm not really hungry to be honest.

FRANK: Oh. Well, get a couple of plates, you can have as much as you want.

HELEN exits to her kitchen. FRANK sits at her dining table. The action is now on both sides of the stage. When not engaged in the action the actors behave as though it is a brief pause in the conversation.

BETTY: I don't think your Frank is the type to allow himself to waste away.

DOROTHY: I know, but he gets so excited about these Wednesday quiz nights. I bet he is at his desk now with an encyclopaedia, cramming his head full of facts. It wouldn't surprise me if he forgot about eating all together.

FRANK: *(Shouting to HELEN.)* Of course we could forget about eating all together.

HELEN returns with two forks.

HELEN: Easy, tiger. Here. *(She passes him a fork.)*

FRANK: Aren't we bothering with plates then?

HELEN: We can eat it out of the carton can't we?

FRANK: OK. Saves washing up I suppose. *(They proceed to eat.)*

BETTY: I never knew your Frank was such a brain box.

DOROTHY: Ah well, it isn't intelligence you see, it's knowledge. He explained it all to me. There's four on the team. He's a bit of an all rounder. George from the warehouse is good on sport; there's a Ted, who knows a lot about history; and this girl, what's-her-name, um, Helen, who does all the pop music questions.

BETTY: I see. And do Frank, George, Ted and Um Helen have a collective name?

DOROTHY: Yes. *(She laughs.)* The first time they played together they

won and some of the other teams weren't happy and accused them of cheating. Ever since then, they have called themselves The Cheaters.

BETTY: Well. This is a side to Frank I never knew existed. *(She raises her tea cup.)* Here's to The Cheaters!

DOROTHY: The Cheaters.

FRANK: This is so exciting.

HELEN: Eating Foo Yung?

FRANK: We would never eat out of the carton at home. Dorothy would be horrified if she saw me now.

HELEN: I see. The fact that you are eating from a carton is worse than the fact that you are doing so with your mistress, is it?

FRANK: Perhaps not, but she is very traditional about meals. Everything has to be done properly. Cutlery laid out correctly, napkins, the works. Even when we don't have company.

BETTY: So what time does this bingo start then?

DOROTHY: Oh, we have plenty of time. If you want to go that is.

BETTY: Might as well, Dorothy. I can't see me getting a better offer tonight. Only I haven't eaten yet. Did you want me to rustle something up for both of us?

DOROTHY: Sorry?

BETTY: Would you care to join me for dinner, Dorothy?

DOROTHY: Oh, I don't want to put you to any trouble.

BETTY: It's no trouble. It is just as easy to put four pancakes in the oven as two.

DOROTHY: Pancakes. In the oven?

BETTY: Findus Crispy Pancakes. Have you not tried them?

DOROTHY: Um, no I haven't, as it happens.

BETTY: Oh, you should get some Dot. What do you fancy, chicken curry or minced beef?

DOROTHY: Well, um...

BETTY: Or I could do you one of each. Then you could decide which you think Frank would prefer.

DOROTHY: I'm not really sure that...

BETTY: Joking again, Dot. Not the sort of thing that Frank expects to come home to I imagine.

DOROTHY: He's very traditional about meals. Listen, if you are not after a three course meal we could pop into that café on the high street. They'll still be open and they do some hot food. Shepherd's Pie, that sort of thing. It's quite reasonable.

BETTY: My home cooking not up to your standards?

DOROTHY: I just thought I'd save you the bother.

BETTY: Well, if you're offering to pay, I'll go and fetch my coat.

DOROTHY: Go on then.

BETTY exits.

HELEN: Who have we got tonight then?

FRANK: Hmm?

HELEN: In the quiz.

FRANK: Oh, the Three Horseshoes.

HELEN: Oh hell. A bunch of know-it-all teachers.

FRANK: Well, they are top of the league. It will be tough to beat them.

HELEN: We'll walk it. Come on. Have a bit of confidence, Frank.

FRANK: That's what I love about you. You inspire me. Even so, they will be tough so I thought we might do a bit of swatting up.

HELEN: You what?

FRANK: I went to the library at lunchtime and copied some questions and answers to sharpen our brains.

HELEN: Great.

FRANK: We have to give ourselves the best possible chance.

HELEN: If that's how you want to spend the few moments we have together?

FRANK: I know what I'd rather be doing, but we've only got half an hour.

HELEN: Show off!

FRANK: What?

HELEN: Never mind. I'll get rid of these and you can start to test me.

HELEN exits with the food carton and cutlery. BETTY enters on her side, smiles at DOROTHY and the two leave. BETTY turns off her light as she exits. FRANK has taken a sheet of paper from his pocket. HELEN returns. She and Frank sit on the sofa.

FRANK: Right. First Question. No peeping. The lady in which Beatles' song arrived on Friday night without her suitcase?

HELEN: Oh come on, Frank. My speciality is modern music, not prehistoric!

FRANK: The Beatles isn't prehistoric, it was only a few years ago. OK, try this. Ride a White Swan was a hit for whom?

HELEN: Ah, now I do know that. Marc Bolan.

FRANK: Wrong! It was Trex. *(He pronounces it as one syllable.)*

HELEN: T-Rex Frank, and it's the same. Marc Bolan was T-Rex.

FRANK: Well, I'm not sure they would allow you that in the league.

HELEN: What, even if I flutter my eyelashes like this? *(She does so.)*

FRANK: Well, maybe. *(They kiss.)* Norman Greenbaum...

HELEN: Who?

FRANK: Norman... *(He is lost in her eyes.)* Norm... Spirit... *(He pulls her to him and they kiss again.)* I do love you, Helen.

HELEN: No you don't.

FRANK: I do.

HELEN: I know that you think you do, but you don't really.

FRANK: It was never like this with Dorothy.

HELEN: I'm sure it was, you've just forgotten.

FRANK: Don't tease me.

HELEN: Sorry, Frank. You mean a lot to me as well.

FRANK: I'm so lucky. I can't believe you agreed to go out with me.

HELEN: I can't believe you finally got round to asking me. You must have walked past my desk twenty times a day, with your tongue hanging out. I thought you must have trouble keeping cool.

FRANK: Forget the quiz. Let's just stay in tonight.

HELEN: We can't do that, what about George and Ted?

FRANK: They'll have to find two others.

HELEN: We can't drop out of the quiz team, Frank. The only reason you formed it in the first place was to give you an excuse for being out on Wednesdays.

FRANK: It's become a millstone round my neck. Sitting in a dreary pub, answering stupid questions, when I just want to be alone with you. I want to...

HELEN: I thought you were excited about tonight. Going to the library to swat up.

FRANK: I was. Until just now.

HELEN: Oh, I see. Letting your---- *(She looks at his groin.)* rule your---- *(She looks at his head.)*

FRANK: We have so little time together.

HELEN: It's the way it has to be. Still, we've got twenty minutes before we have to leave. *(Wink)* Tiger.

FRANK: I don't want it to be like that. Rushed. One eye on the clock.

HELEN: So, in that case we will have to wait until the opportunity arises. We can't afford to take risks. You don't want Dorothy finding out about us do you?

FRANK: It would destroy her.

HELEN: Then we have to be careful. If we don't turn up for the quiz, Ted might ring your house to find out where you are, then what would happen?

FRANK: Nothing. Dorothy said she was going out tonight.

HELEN: She's not likely to go in The Three Horseshoes is she?

FRANK: In a pub? No chance.

HELEN: Well, it wouldn't matter if she did anyway. I assume that you have told her that I'm on the quiz team?

FRANK: I mentioned your name, but not how beautiful you are.

HELEN: Proper Prince Charming, aren't you?

FRANK: I so want to...

HELEN: I know, Frank. We will just have to be patient. Sooner or later the chance will arise and we will be able to spend some real time together. Without taking unnecessary risks.

FRANK: I know, I know. I don't want to hurt her.

HELEN: So, as long as you keep me as your bit on the side everyone is happy.

FRANK: That isn't what I meant.

HELEN: Don't worry about it Frank. Here, *(She picks up FRANK's sheet of questions.)* you should have asked me this one. What song is Doris Day's theme tune?

FRANK: Que Sera Sera.

HELEN: Whatever will be, will be.

FRANK: I suppose you're right. No point in rushing things.

HELEN: Frank. I'm a woman. I'm always right. *(Reading.)* What were the Nolan Sisters in the mood for in nineteen seventy-nine?

FRANK: Love?

HELEN: Dancing! Come on, Frank, you wrote this out.

FRANK: I can't think straight when I'm looking into your eyes.

HELEN: Then don't. We need you on top form if we going to win tonight. Complete this song title. 'If I said you had a beautiful body'.

FRANK: 'Would you hold it against me.'

HELEN: Is that a real song? Are you sure you haven't made that one up Frank?

FRANK: Absolutely not. It was Dr Hook.

HELEN: Dr Hook? Oh yes. I remember now. They also did 'When you're in love with a beautiful woman'.

FRANK: 'It's hard'.

HELEN: Pure smut. I'm amazed they were allowed on Top of the Pops.

FRANK: What's smutty about it?

HELEN: Oh, come on, Frank.

FRANK: I don't,---- Oh now wait. Surely they don't mean,----- it wouldn't be allowed.

HELEN: How do you mean?

FRANK: The censors wouldn't allow them to say...

HELEN: Sing.

FRANK: ...sing *that!*

HELEN: It depends. If the censors are as innocent as you, they probably never noticed.

FRANK: Maybe it's just your mind.

HELEN: Are you saying that I have a dirty mind, Frank?

FRANK: Don't you?

HELEN: 'course I do.

FRANK: Ha, ha. You're so refreshing.

HELEN: Like a polo mint?

FRANK: We get on don't we?

HELEN: Yes, it's nice.

FRANK: It's more than nice.

HELEN: I'm fond of you, Frank.

FRANK: I think about you all the time. At work, at home. In bed.

HELEN: Now who's got a dirty mind?

FRANK: I don't mean like that.

HELEN: Don't you?

FRANK: Well, not all the time anyway.

HELEN: Come on, tiger. We have ten minutes. Time for a kiss and cuddle.

Music: The Teardrop Explodes – When I Dream. They embrace.

Blackout

Scene 2

A few days later. BETTY's house. She is smartly dressed but has kicked off her shoes to put her feet up on the sofa. She is watching TV and eating chocolates. She glances at her watch then rubs her eyes before taking another chocolate. A car is heard outside. She turns off the TV and puts the chocolates into the sideboard. She rubs her eyes some more. The doorbell rings. She exits to answer it.

BILL: *(Off)* Hi Betty. Sorry to bother you but...

BETTY: *(Off)* You'd better come in.

BETTY leads BILL into the room. He is in his early forties but dressed in a style far too young for himself. Far from being conscious of this he thinks he looks the bees' knees. One for the ladies, he is confident and a little suave despite looking a bit of a prat. He is carrying a small suitcase. BETTY crosses the room and stands with her back to BILL.

BILL: It's the funniest thing. You see, we got to the airport and I said to Mike, 'You go and get a trolley and I'll get the cases out of the boot.' Only

you can't leave the car you see. Turn your back for a minute and they slap a ticket on your windscreen before you can say 'Little Hitler'. So I get all the cases on the pavement and he comes back with the trolley and as I'm loading them he says, 'Hold on Bill. That one isn't mine.' I said, 'What do you mean, it certainly isn't mine.' And he says, 'Come on Bill, you know I only ever have the two cases, a suitcase and a briefcase.' And off he goes leaving me stood there with a mystery suitcase. So then the voice of a little Hitler goes, 'Oi, you can't park there', so I sling the case back in the car and I'm on my way home wondering what to do about it when I remember that I definitely picked it up in your hallway. I remember now that it was tucked behind Mike's big case so I thought, well, if it's not his it must be yours. So here I am and here it is!

He looks pleased with himself, expecting to be thanked, but BETTY still has his back to him. She makes a little weeping sound and shudders.

BILL: Are you OK, Betty?

BETTY turns to face BILL covering her face with her hands.

BILL: What's the matter?

BETTY: It's nothing. Thank you for bringing back the case.

BILL: Betty, love. Why are you hiding your face?

BETTY: Sorry. I think you should go.

BILL: Not until you tell me what's wrong. *(He moves closer to her.)*

BETTY: It's nothing. It's just Michael, he...

BILL: Has he hit you? Betty, if he has hit you I'll swing for him I swear. I don't care if he is my boss. Hitting women is not on in my book.

BETTY: No. He hasn't hit me, he...

BILL: Put your hands down, Betty, come on.

BETTY lowers her hands to reveal her carefully prepared red eyes.

BETTY: Sorry, Bill. I didn't want you to see me like this.

BILL gives her a handkerchief.

BILL: Come and sit down, Betty.

BILL leads her to the sofa where they both sit.

BILL: Do you want to tell me about it?

BETTY: Oh no. I couldn't.

BILL: It helps to talk you know. Perhaps it would be easier to talk to me than a friend. I'm a good listener.

BETTY: But Michael is your boss.

BILL: So he has done something to you.

BETTY: I shouldn't be talking to you about it.

BILL: Forget that he is my boss. If he has been treating you badly, he'll have me to answer to.

BETTY: No. Please. Don't make trouble. Heaven knows what he'd do if he

knew I'd spoken to you.

BILL: Why don't you just tell me about it?

BETTY: Are you sure this is a good idea?

BILL: Trust me.

BETTY: Oh, Bill. He is so beastly.

As BETTY apparently breaks down BILL gently hugs her with real compassion. After a while BETTY composes herself.

BILL: Come on. Tell Bill all about it.

BETTY: I was going to leave him, that's why I packed a bag. I was all ready to go last night, but I bottled out of it. I thought, I just have to wait for him to get on that plane today and at least I'd be rid of him for a week. But then, this morning was so terrible I wish I had gone.

BILL: What happened?

BETTY: You don't want to hear this, Bill.

BILL: I do. Get it out of your system.

BETTY: It's very kind of you.

BILL: Just let it all pour out.

BETTY: Last night I cooked him a special meal. Things haven't been right between us for a while, to be honest, but I thought I'd make one last effort before he went off to New York. So I did a hotpot, his favourite, and, not knowing what time he would be home, it is something I could keep warm.

BILL: That was very thoughtful.

BETTY: He came in about half nine, stinking of beer and demanding his dinner. I was nice as pie to him. Sat him down and placed his food in front of him. As soon as I turned my back to get my own he yells, 'Where's the bloody salt?' So I said 'Can't you just taste it first Michael? If you think it needs salt I'll get it for you in a moment.' Well, he just went ballistic. He said, 'Don't tell me what to do in my own house', and tipped everything into the bin, including the plate. I was gob smacked.

BILL: What did you say to him?

BETTY: I didn't have time to say anything. He was gone; reversing the car out of the drive, even though he must have been well over the limit.

BILL: So, where did he go?

BETTY: To the chippy apparently. I just sat in the kitchen for a time, not knowing what to do. Then I thought I had better clean up, so I got the plate out of the pin, threw the rest of the food away and I was just washing up when I heard the car come back. The door slammed and when I came in here he was sitting on this sofa eating his chips. That's when I went upstairs to pack my bag. When I came down with it he was lying here, snoring his head off, and I decided to sleep in the spare room. I wish I had gone last night. I should have gone whilst I had the chance. *(She starts to weep again)*

BILL: It's OK, Betty, take your time.

BETTY: I think I could do with a drink.

BILL: Of course. I'll get you one. Where is the drinks cabinet?

BETTY: We keep it in the sideboard, but I meant a cup of tea. You can have something stronger though, if you like.

BILL: Tea will be fine. And I'll make it, don't worry, I'll find everything.

BILL stands and moves round to the back of the sofa. Before exiting to the kitchen he makes a that's-a-turn-up-for-the-books kind of face. With him out of the room, BETTY checks her appearance in the sideboard mirror, unbuttons her blouse a little and is ensuring that her bosom looks at its best when BILL appears in the doorway.

BILL: One lump or two?

BETTY: Oh, um...

BILL: How do you like it?

BETTY: Sorry?

BILL: Milk? Sugar?

BETTY: Oh, yes please, two.

BILL: Are you OK?

BETTY: Yes. I just wondered if you might want a chocolate with your tea. *(She takes out the box)*

BILL: Er. No thanks. I'll have a biscuit though. I found them whilst I was looking for the tea bags.

BILL exits back into the kitchen. BETTY pops a crafty chocolate into her mouth and resumes her position on the sofa. BILL enters with two mugs and a packet of biscuits.

BILL: Couldn't find your best china.

BETTY: Mugs will do fine Bill. I'm sorry I got upset. It must be embarrassing for you.

BILL: Not at all Betty. Like I said, it often helps to talk and I'm happy to listen. What happened this morning?

BETTY: Are you sure you want me to go on?

BILL: Of course.

BETTY: Well if things were bad last night, they were worse this morning. When I came down he was still snoring his head off so I thought I'd leave him to it. I was in the kitchen having my breakfast when I heard this almighty roar. He'd woken up, realised that he'd slept in his suit, which now had squashed chips on it, and was yelling my name like it was all my fault. He said, didn't I realise that he needed to wear this suit to New York because his other good one was already packed and now look at it. I replied that he had better sponge it down then and he just went mad at me. *(She starts to break down)* He said that I was a lazy cow and I didn't look after him properly and he was never coming back.

BILL: Sounds like that would suit you.

BETTY: That's just it. I wish he wasn't. I don't want him to come back. *(She cries)*

BILL: There, Betty. It's OK.

BETTY: Bill, what can I do?

BILL: We'll think of something.

BETTY: Oh, Bill.

BILL: Is there somewhere you can go?

BETTY: I don't think so.

BILL: Where were you going last night?

BETTY: A hotel, I suppose.

BILL: No friends you can stay with?

BETTY: Not really. There's Dorothy, but she wouldn't want me getting under her feet.

BILL: But if it was only temporary?

BETTY: We'd drive each other crazy. I'll just have to try to endure it.

BILL: Don't do that. There is no point in staying with him if he is making your life miserable.

BETTY: I don't know, Bill. I'm OK most of the time.

BILL: But he is hurting you.

BETTY: He's away for two weeks now. At least that will give me time to decide what to do.

BILL: Well, you have to do what you think is best for you. Don't worry about anyone else.

BETTY: Thanks, Bill. It's very kind of you to listen to me going on like this. You must think I'm a right case.

BILL: Not at all. I've always admired you.

BETTY: Oh, Bill.

There is an awkward moment as BETTY waits for BILL to kiss her. He finally takes the hint and does so.

BETTY: Bill! What are you doing?

BILL: I thought you wanted me to.

BETTY: I don't know what I want any more.

Again she waits, but not so long this time.

BETTY: Oh. No one has kissed me like that in years.

BILL: Well, that's a shame.

BETTY: No wonder the girls all fall for you.

BILL: Well, I wouldn't say that...

BETTY: Even Michael's talked about you. Said you have women falling at your feet. I think he is jealous.

BILL: That's a bit of an exaggeration.

BETTY: This is a small town. I've heard all about you.

BILL: All good I hope.

BETTY: Oh yes. *Very good.*

They embrace. HELEN enters her flat carrying a bag from a record store. She takes off her coat and then puts the record onto her record player. It is 'Prince Charming' by Adam and the Ants. She is jigging to it whilst tidying the flat but, when it gets to the chorus, she sings and does the dance associated with the song, fingers being drawn across her face. The doorbell goes. She answers it and pulls FRANK into the room by his tie, still jigging to the song. He tries to take it in good humour but is out of his depth. The song ends, or HELEN stops it, depending on the timing.

HELEN: Come on Frank. Don't you want to be my Prince Charming?

FRANK: Well, yes I suppose.

HELEN: *(Singing.)* Prince Charming, Prince Charming, ridicule is nothing to be scared of.

FRANK: Why do you say that? Who ridicules me?

HELEN: It's just the lyric, Frank.

FRANK: Well, it's not very nice.

HELEN: What's the matter with you Frank? Lighten up! I've taken the afternoon off work to be with you, like you asked.

FRANK: I'm very grateful.

HELEN: You've left early because you 'have a headache'. I didn't think you had planned this so carefully just so that we could have an argument.

FRANK: I don't want an argument.

HELEN: So why the long face, as the barman said to the donkey?

FRANK: Sorry, Helen. I suppose I am just nervous.

HELEN: Frank. Are you sure you want to go ahead with this? Up to now we've just had a kiss and a cuddle. Even Dorothy might forgive you that, but after this afternoon...

FRANK: I want it more than anything.

HELEN: So long as you are certain.

FRANK: I'm certain. I've never felt this way about anyone before, Helen.

HELEN: You've said that before, but surely when you first met Dorothy...?

FRANK: It was different. When I met her she seemed like a great catch. Pretty, intelligent. And devoted, she still goes to church every Sunday you know.

HELEN: So do you.

FRANK: Only to go with her. I lost my faith years ago. The thing is, marrying Dorothy seemed like the right thing to do at the time. I was fond of her and knew that she would make a very respectable wife. I didn't believe that love like this existed. I thought it was only in films and books. I didn't think that anyone could love anyone the way I love you, Helen.

HELEN: Are you sure you don't just have a crush on me?

FRANK: Don't tease me, Helen.

HELEN: But you hardly know me, really.

FRANK: I'm getting to know you all the time, and the more I know you, the more I love you.

HELEN: That's sweet, Frank. But I can't help think that lust is playing a big part in this.

FRANK: It isn't lust, Helen. I've lusted after lots of women. To be honest, I've had fantasies about half the women in the office. But I've never done anything about it. Lust I can control. Lust is just an urge that can be resisted. Emotion is different. My deception of Dorothy started the moment I admitted to myself that I had become fond of you. I might not be Robert Redford but I know that there are one or two women who find me attractive. I've never been interested though, not until you came along. You said once that every time I walked past your desk I had my tongue hanging out. I know that you were teasing but I admit that I did make more journeys past your desk than was strictly necessary, but it wasn't lust. I was trying to find a way to tell you how I felt.

HELEN: But you didn't know me. You'd hardly even spoken to me.

FRANK: I'd worked with you, I'd seen how you talk to people, how you behave with people. I was smitten. The idea of the quiz team was to get to know you better, but I was already in love with you.

HELEN: You really are Prince Charming aren't you?

FRANK: I'm not just giving you a line.

HELEN: I know you're not. Not much point. We both know what we are doing here this afternoon. And I've grown fond of you as well, Frank. I'm not the type of girl who jumps into bed with anyone.

FRANK: I know that. This is going to be special. A day we will both remember for the rest of our lives.

HELEN: That's lovely.

They kiss. BETTY and BILL release their embrace.

BETTY: Bill, I...

BILL: I'm Sorry. What must you think of me? I didn't mean to take advantage, would you like me to leave?

BETTY: No. Please stay with me.

BILL: Are you sure?

BETTY: I'm not sure, Bill, no.

BILL: I think I had better go. You're vulnerable.

BETTY: No.

BILL: I don't want us to get into anything that we might regret.

HELEN: So long as you're not going to regret this.

FRANK: It's too late for regrets.

BETTY: I just know that it feels so good being with you.

BILL: You're a beautiful woman, Betty.

BETTY: I'm not, but thank you anyway.

BILL: Mike is a fool to treat you badly.

BETTY: I think he has lost interest in me. He probably has a girl in every town.

BILL: Mike? Well, I don't know about that...

BETTY: I don't want to talk about him.

BILL: No, of course.

HELEN stands.

HELEN: Are you coming, Frank?

FRANK: Yes, yes. I'll just...

FRANK is having a last minute attack of nerves. HELEN smiles.

HELEN: Tell you what. You wait there a minute. I'll come to fetch you.

HELEN exits to her bedroom.

BETTY: What is he like at the office?

BILL: Oh, er. Good, I suppose He's a good enough boss.

BETTY: Everyone likes him?

BILL: Pretty much, yes.

BETTY: How about the women?

BILL: Well, there aren't really many women at our place.

BETTY: And the ones that are there all in love with you?

BILL: Well, I wouldn't say that.

BETTY: Come on, you can be honest with me.

BILL: I was seeing someone but it's all over now.

BETTY: Did her husband find out?

BILL: You come straight to the point don't you?

BETTY: I'm just curious about the sort of man it is that I am about to sleep with.

BILL: My God, Betty!

BETTY: We're both adults.

BILL: But this is a bit sudden isn't it?

BETTY: It just feels right. Providing you can be discreet.

BILL: No problem there.

BETTY: So, do you want to?

BILL: Silly question.

BETTY: Do really think I am beautiful?

BILL: You're radiant.

HELEN emerges in a negligee.

HELEN: Frank.

FRANK turns to see her.

FRANK: Oh my God!

HELEN: Like what you see?

FRANK: Oh, yes.

HELEN: Not having second thoughts?

FRANK: Of course not.

BETTY stands and moves to the stairs/exit to hall. BILL remains on the sofa still unsure that BETTY is serious.

BETTY: I guess it's now or never, Bill.

BILL: Now it is then, Betty.

BILL joins BETTY, FRANK joins HELEN.

FRANK: I've dreamt of this moment.

HELEN: You are sure, Frank?

BILL: You're sure about this, Betty?

FRANK:

(Together) I'm sure.

BETTY:

Music: The Human League – Love Action.

End of Act One

Act 2

Scene 1

Music: Depeche Mode – I Just Can't Get Enough. A few months later. BETTY's house. BILL standing and wearing a pair of spectacles.

BETTY: *(Off, in a put on voice.)* Doctor, the next patient is here.

BILL: Just a moment. I'm just finishing my notes.

BETTY: *(Off, in a put on voice.)* She says that it's really urgent.

BILL: I'm sorry but she will just have to wait.

BETTY enters.

BETTY: Oh Doctor, you must see me, I'm seriously ill.

BILL: Calm down, Miss, er Grimshaw.

BETTY: Grimshaw!

BILL: Don't you like Grimshaw?

BETTY: No I do not. How about De La Rosa?

BILL: Are you Spanish?

BETTY: Yes, full of hot Spanish blood.

BILL: De La Rosa it is then. Calm down, Miss De La Rosa and tell me the trouble.

BETTY: It's my heart Doctor.

BILL: Your heart?

BETTY: Yes, feel.

She places BILL's hand on her bosom.

BILL: I see. I think you had better lie down whilst I examine you.

BETTY lies on the sofa. BILL does an 'examination' by feeling her forehead, massaging her toes etc.

BETTY: Is it serious Doctor.

BILL: Very serious, I am afraid, Miss De La Rosa. The only course of treatment is a dozen kisses an hour. These must be administered by a medical practitioner, of course.

BETTY: Can we start the treatment now?

BILL: With pleasure.

He goes to kiss BETTY but she jumps up and swipes the spectacles, putting them on her own face.

BETTY: My turn. Out you go.

BILL: Ah. That was just getting interesting.

BETTY: Out!

BILL: But you haven't had your treatment.

BETTY: Miss De La Rosa is no longer here. I am Dr Feelgood.

BILL: Sounds promising.

BETTY: Out of my surgery until you are called.

BILL exits.

BETTY: Who's next?

BILL: *(Off, in a silly female voice)* It's a Mr Casanova to see you Doctor.

BETTY: Casanova eh? Show him in.

BILL enters.

BETTY: What seems to be the trouble, Mr Casanova?

BILL: I keep getting these terrible headaches, Doctor.

BETTY: Terrible headaches?

BILL: Yes.

BETTY: Headaches?

BILL: Yes.

BETTY: In your head?

BILL: Yes.

BETTY: Fine. Take off your trousers.

BILL: But it's my head.

BETTY: Don't argue with a medical professional. Take off your trousers, I need to examine you.

BILL: If you say so, Doctor.

BILL kicks off his shoes and removes his trousers.

BILL: Where do you want me?

BETTY: Well, we could start down here and move upstairs later.

BILL: Will it cure my headache?

BETTY: It will help take your mind of it.

The doorbell rings.

DOROTHY: *(Off)* Cooee, only me.

BETTY: Christ, I left the door unlocked.

BILL: What shall I do?

BETTY: In the kitchen quick.

BILL exits to the kitchen a second before DOROTHY enters from the hall.

BETTY throws BILL's trousers under a cushion on the sofa.

DOROTHY: The door was open, I hope you don't mind.

BETTY: Dorothy, how lovely to see you. I wasn't expecting you this evening.

DOROTHY: No, but Frank is away on a business trip and I knew Michael was away as well, so I thought I'd come round and cheer you up.

BETTY: What a lovely thought.

DOROTHY: Mind you, I didn't expect to catch you out.

BETTY: I'm sorry?

DOROTHY: There is something you have been keeping from me, isn't there Betty?

BETTY: Is there?

DOROTHY: How long have you been wearing them?

BETTY: What? Oh the glasses. They er, they are just for reading.

DOROTHY: I see. (*Looking around.*) What were you reading Betty?

BETTY: A magazine. I've put it in the bin.

DOROTHY: Betty! Are those Michael's shoes? Fancy just leaving them in the middle of the floor like that. You could fall over them.

BETTY: I was going to polish them.

DOROTHY: I thought you were reading?

BETTY: No. I finished reading. I forgot that I had the glasses on. What is this? Twenty Questions?

DOROTHY: Polishing Michael's shoes? Have you turned over a new leaf?

BETTY: I like polishing shoes. I find it, er, relaxing.

DOROTHY: Oh, well don't let me stop you then. I'll go and put the kettle on.

BETTY: NO! Um, I'll do it. I've just remembered that I've run out of shoe polish. You just sit down.

BETTY exits to kitchen. DOROTHY sits uncomfortably on the sofa, reaches under the cushion and finds BILL's trousers. BETTY enters.

BETTY: It's just boiling. Oh Christ!

DOROTHY: Did you know these were here, Betty? They were under a cushion.

BETTY: That's where they got to. I've been looking all over.

DOROTHY: How did they get there?

BETTY: Lord knows. Michael will be very pleased you found them.

DOROTHY: There's something in the pocket. It's his wallet!

BETTY: Yes. That is why he will be so pleased you found them.

She snatches the wallet and trousers and throws them into the kitchen.

DOROTHY: It must be a bit difficult going off on a business trip without your wallet.

BETTY: Yes. Mind you, the company pays for everything so, um, I'll just go and make the tea.

Whilst BETTY is out of the room DOROTHY goes to the sideboard where she finds the inevitable box of chocolates. She pinches a couple from the bottom layer, returns the box and resumes her position on the sofa. BETTY enters with a tray of tea and biscuits.

BETTY: No point in asking you if you want biscuits, Dot. You are developing quite a sweet tooth I have noticed.

DOROTHY: What makes you say that?

BETTY: Well, you always order cake when we are out.

DOROTHY: Oh, I see. Well one has to have some pleasures.

BETTY: Yes.

DOROTHY: It's not like I have many vices.

BETTY: Not you, Dot.

DOROTHY: The way some people carry on, you wonder why they even bother being married.

BETTY: I beg your pardon?

DOROTHY: You know Ann Sharples?

BETTY: What Ena?

DOROTHY: Well, they were saying that little girl of hers isn't her husband's.

BETTY: Who was saying?

DOROTHY: My group. At the church.

BETTY: Your bible reading group! Is that what you do, gossip about each other?

DOROTHY: Ann doesn't come any more. She hasn't been for years.

BETTY: Oh, I see. That makes her a sinner, does it?

DOROTHY: It isn't just idle gossip, Betty. She's been seen. Mary saw her.

BETTY: Seen doing what?

DOROTHY: Talking. With a man.

BETTY: What a scandal! Still, as far as I know, just talking doesn't actually get you pregnant.

DOROTHY: No, you don't understand. They were at the park and this little girl of hers was on the swings. Ann was talking to this man and they kept looking at the girl.

BETTY: Well, there you go then. That's all the proof you need. He must be the father.

DOROTHY: You might mock, but wait until I tell you who the man was.

BETTY: Go on then. The suspense is killing me.

DOROTHY: Bill Sutton.

BETTY: Bill!

BETTY turns to the kitchen. BILL puts his head through the doorway. BETTY frantically gestures him to go back into the kitchen.

DOROTHY: You know who I mean don't you.

BETTY: Yes. He works with Michael.

DOROTHY: And he is working his way through all the harlots in this town as well.

BETTY: Oh, I think that is a bit strong.

DOROTHY: Do you? Well I take my marriage vows seriously. Bill Sutton doesn't seem to be bothered whether his latest conquest is married or not.

BETTY: Well, live and let live.

DOROTHY: It's that sort of attitude that is corrupting society, Betty.

BETTY: Oh, join the twentieth century, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: There is nothing old fashioned about being faithful to the person you are married to, Betty.

BETTY: Has something upset you, Dot? Don't tell me you are getting all het up about Ena, I mean Ann, Sharples. You hardly know the woman.

DOROTHY: No. Ann can do what she likes. She has probably been taken advantage of anyway. We are supposed to be the weaker sex, aren't we?

BETTY: Well, maybe once upon a time.

DOROTHY: Some men just can't help themselves. They spot a vulnerable woman and they pounce. And it doesn't matter to them that their faithful wives are at home trying to make the most of the marriage.

BETTY: I don't think Bill Sutton is married.

DOROTHY: Who?

BETTY: Are you OK Dorothy?

DOROTHY: Yes, yes. I am fine. Some men think marriage is pick and mix. They think that they can please themselves so long as they don't get caught.

BETTY: Is everything all right at home, Dot. You said Frank is on a business trip?

DOROTHY: Well, they'll have God to answer to, that's all I'm saying.

BETTY: Yes. Dorothy, you seem to be a bit upset about something.

DOROTHY: Upset? Why should I be upset?

BETTY: Where is it Frank has gone?

DOROTHY: Swindon.

BETTY: Glamorous!

DOROTHY: Well, we can't all have husbands who go jetting off around the world, Betty.

BETTY: I didn't mean that.

DOROTHY: Doesn't really matter where it is though, does it? Swindon or Sydney. He's still not at home.

BETTY: Are you missing him?

DOROTHY: Funny isn't it? All these years we've been married. You take each other for granted after a while, but it's difficult to imagine life without him.

BETTY: He's only gone to Swindon, Dot.

DOROTHY: Yes. I expect he has.

BETTY: Are you sure you're OK, Dorothy. Is there something that you are trying to tell me?

DOROTHY: Like what?

BETTY: I don't know, you seem a bit, um, enigmatic.

DOROTHY: Do I?

BETTY: Dorothy, if you have something on your mind, please just spit it out.

DOROTHY: It's just that...

BETTY: Yes?

DOROTHY: Oh, nothing really. It is just that business trips makes a very good cover, that's all.

BETTY: Cover?

DOROTHY: I mean, if someone wanted to carry on behind their wife's back...

BETTY: Are we talking about Frank or Michael here?

DOROTHY: Michael! Oh no, I wouldn't suggest that Michael is...

BETTY: So, Frank then?

DOROTHY: No.

BETTY: In that case, would you mind telling me who the hell we are talking about because I am afraid you've lost me.

DOROTHY: No, Betty. Sorry. Don't mind me. I've been watching too much TV, that's what it is. Everyone seems to be jumping in to bed with each other, it's put ideas in my head that have no right to be there. I don't know why I watch TV any more, it's just sex, sex, sex.

BETTY: That's exactly why I watch it.

DOROTHY: Do you think life is really like that?

BETTY: What, everyone jumping into bed with everyone else? Not so I've noticed, Dot.

DOROTHY: It's just...

BETTY: Come on, Dorothy, the suspense is killing me.

DOROTHY: I don't know. It's silly really.

BETTY: What is silly, Dorothy?

DOROTHY: I was just thinking, you know...

BETTY: Dorothy, for God's sake!

DOROTHY: I mean Michael is away on business, Frank is away on business, but we don't really know what they get up to when we are not around do we?

BETTY: No we don't, I'm with you there. But you just said that you don't suspect either.

DOROTHY: I don't know, Betty.

BETTY: Hold on. Are you saying that you do suspect Frank, or are you trying to tell me something else?

DOROTHY: I don't think that Frank would cheat on me.

BETTY: So what? You've heard something about Michael?

DOROTHY: Michael?

BETTY: Yes, Dorothy. Michael. My husband.

DOROTHY: I haven't heard anything about Michael. Why would I?

BETTY: But you'd tell me if you did?

DOROTHY: Well...

BETTY: At least lie, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: It isn't really my place to spread gossip.

BETTY: I'm going to take a swipe you in a minute. Have you heard something or not?

DOROTHY: No.

BETTY: Right. But then, you're frightened of Michael aren't you?

DOROTHY: Why would I be frightened?

BETTY: I don't know but you hardly ever come round when he is home.

DOROTHY: You don't want me in the way when your husband is home.

BETTY: You're welcome any time, you know that. But come to think of it, you are a bit of a shrinking violet when Michael is around.

DOROTHY: I'm not.

BETTY: Yes you are. Hang on a minute. Are you carrying on with Michael? Is that what you are trying to tell me?

DOROTHY: Don't be ridiculous!

BETTY: All right, all right. Just joking.

BILL appears at the kitchen door and makes a slight sound to attract BETTY who turns to look at him. He makes a get-rid-of-her kind of face to which BETTY responds with a what-can-I-do face.

DOROTHY: I was just talking about the programmes on TV, that's all.

BETTY: TV?

DOROTHY: Yes.

BETTY: So, we are definitely not talking about Frank or Michael.

DOROTHY: No.

BETTY: Well, I'm glad we got that settled then.

DOROTHY: Quite. I don't know why you needed to get so het up about it all. Anyway, I'll tell you what I came round for...

BETTY: This is besides cheering me up?

DOROTHY: There's no need to be sarcastic, I came to do you a favour.

BETTY: Really? How kind.

DOROTHY: Only Frank has told me that he is likely to have to go away more often in the future. Sales conferences, that sort of thing.

BETTY: I see.

DOROTHY: But that they are mostly at weekends so that they don't disrupt the day job. You know how I like my routine, Betty. I'm used to Frank being home every night at six-o'clock. Now he's got his quiz team, but I don't begrudge him that, but if it is going to be weekends as well.

BETTY: Not every weekend, surely.

DOROTHY: No, but he's already been away a number of times and he did say there are quite a few important ones coming up.

BETTY: Ah, Dorothy, as I said, you know you can always pop round here, especially when Michael is away. If he makes you uncomfortable.

BILL appears and makes an angry face, BETTY shoos him away.

DOROTHY: He doesn't make me uncomfortable! But thanks. I appreciate that. You've always been a good friend to me and I know that I sometimes get on your nerves.

BETTY: Oh, I wouldn't say that.

DOROTHY: You have said it plenty of times. The thing is this. It is only since Frank started going away that I have realised just how bored you must get with Michael being away so often.

BETTY: Well, I did say I was bored, but then you introduced bingo into my life.

DOROTHY: So that is why I wondered whether you fancied coming along with me tonight.

BETTY: Tonight. *(With a growing sense of horror.)* Tonight. Friday. Friday nights. Ah. Bible Class.

DOROTHY: What do you think? I know you haven't been to church in ages but that doesn't matter.

BETTY: There is a reason why I don't go to church any more, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: The thing about the Bible Class is that we read the stories in the bible and relate them to modern day life. There is something for everyone. Some of the people in the group don't even believe in God.

BETTY: That's handy.

DOROTHY: Sorry?

BETTY: Nothing. Is believing in God a kind of pre-requisite?

DOROTHY: Not at all. It doesn't matter you see, because they can still get something out of it because of the way the stories themselves still have a resonance today.

BETTY: I see.

DOROTHY: So come on, Betty. It will help you take yourself out of yourself.

BETTY: You want me to come tonight.

DOROTHY: Have you got something else on?

BETTY: Well no, but...

DOROTHY: So why not give it a go?

BETTY: What time would we have to leave?

DOROTHY: If we went now we would have time for a cup of tea and a slice of cake in the café on the way.

BETTY: We've just had a cup of tea.

DOROTHY: Er, yes. it's always nicer when someone makes it for you though isn't it?

BETTY: I made it for you!

DOROTHY: Of course, if you don't want to come I'll just go on my own. As usual.

BETTY: All right, Dorothy, I'll come.

DOROTHY: Oh, don't come if you don't want to.

BETTY: I'd love to come. I'll just get my coat from the kitchen.

BETTY goes into the kitchen. Muted voices are heard.

DOROTHY: Are you all right, Betty?

BETTY: *(Off)* Yes, just turning off the radio. *(She enters with her coat.)* What time will it finish Dorothy?

DOROTHY: About seven-thirty.

BETTY: Right. *(Rather too loudly.)* So I'll be home by eight.

DOROTHY: You should be. Unless you wanted to go on somewhere.

BETTY: No, Dorothy. I think the class will be enough excitement for one evening.

They exit. BILL comes out of the kitchen. He has put his trousers back on. He takes the box of chocolates out of the sideboard, sits on the sofa and turns on the TV with the remote.

Scene 2

A few days later. Lights up on HELEN's flat. David Bowie's 'Fashion' is playing on the stereo. After a moment HELEN enters wearing either a towel wrapped around her or a towelling dressing gown if the actress prefers. She has just had a shower and also has a towel around her wet hair. She picks up a couple of dresses from the sofa and seems to be making her mind up about which to wear. The doorbell rings. She isn't sure she has heard it so turns down the music. It rings again and she turns off the music and opens the door.

HELEN: Frank!

FRANK enters. He is ecstatic.

FRANK: Hello darling. You're dressed as though you were expecting me.

HELEN: Well, I was just going out actually, Frank.

FRANK: Dressed like that?

HELEN: No. After I had dried my hair and put my clothes on.

FRANK: Oh well, I don't think you will feel much like going out after I tell you what I have to tell you.

HELEN: That sounds ominous.

FRANK: You had better sit down.

HELEN: I'd rather not.

FRANK: OK. I'll catch you if you faint.

HELEN: Just get on with it, Frank. I'm supposed to be meeting Karen in twenty minutes.

FRANK: You had better give her a ring and tell you are not coming.

HELEN: Why don't you just tell me what it is you have to say?

FRANK: Righto. Here it is. I've decided to leave Dorothy.

HELEN: What!

FRANK: I've decided to leave Dorothy.

HELEN: Yes, yes. I heard. But you love Dorothy.

FRANK: Yes.

HELEN: So why the hell would you want to leave her?

FRANK: Because I can't deceive her any more. She doesn't deserve to have a lying, deceitful husband, so I am going to do the honourable thing and leave her.

HELEN: Oh my God.

FRANK: Don't you realise? This means we can be together all the time.

HELEN: Oh my God!

FRANK: No more nights in sordid hotels when I'm supposed to be on business.

HELEN: Frank, we need to talk about this.

FRANK: Of course. That's why I came round. I know that you might not want me to move in straight away. I'll find my own place. Somewhere near here.

HELEN: Oh my God.

FRANK: There's lots for us to talk about of course. But first, I thought you might give me some advice on how I might break it to Dorothy.

HELEN: Oh my God.

FRANK: You know, if you keep saying that I can't tell whether you are pleased or not.

HELEN: Frank. Wait here. I'll go and put something on.

HELEN exits. FRANK looks around the flat for a moment then wanders over to the record player. He turns up the volume but the record has finished. He lifts up the pick-up arm and drops it in the middle of David

Bowie's 'Ashes to Ashes'. FRANK sits on the sofa and pulls a serious face as if considering the song as an art form. When the song reaches the repeated phrase 'My mother said to get things done, better not mess with Major Tom' HELEN enters wearing casual clothes. She turns off the stereo.

FRANK: *(To the tune of the song)* My mother said, that I never should, play with the gypsies in the wood.

HELEN: What?

FRANK: I think that the artist is alluding to an old nursery rhyme.

HELEN: Frank, never mind David Bowie, we have important things to discuss here.

FRANK: That's why I'm here.

HELEN: Firstly, can I assume that you haven't yet said anything to Dorothy?

FRANK: Not yet.

HELEN: Thank God for that. Frank. Listen to me. You shouldn't leave Dorothy.

FRANK: I have to, Helen. I can't go on deceiving her.

HELEN: Then you must stop deceiving her.

FRANK: Stop?

HELEN: You have to stop seeing me.

FRANK: I can't do that.

HELEN: You love Dorothy.

FRANK: But I love you as well.

HELEN: And Dorothy loves you.

FRANK: But that's it. Don't you see? I can't go on treating her like this.

HELEN: That's why we have to stop seeing each other.

FRANK: But I can't live without you.

HELEN: Can you live without Dorothy?

FRANK: Yes. I mean. All I know is I want to spend my life with you.

HELEN: Have you considered what I want?

FRANK: Well, I...

HELEN: I'm sorry, Frank.

FRANK: You said that you were fond of me.

HELEN: I am.

FRANK: So how can you say you don't want to see me?

HELEN: I do want to see you, Frank. I think a lot of you, but I don't think you should leave Dorothy.

FRANK: You don't love me.

HELEN: I never said that I did.

FRANK: But you said you might. One day.

HELEN: Que Sera Sera, Frank. That's what I said.

FRANK: Which means...

HELEN: I always believed that anything is possible. I never imagined that I would become as fond of you as I have, but I'm not ready to make a commitment. If you really think that you have to leave Dorothy then you must do so, but either way I think we should stop seeing each other.

FRANK: What's the point in leaving her if you don't want me?

HELEN: Frank, don't get upset.

FRANK: Why didn't you stop me?

HELEN: Stop you?

FRANK: You should have stopped me.

HELEN: Frank, I'm sorry. I never expected it to come to this.

FRANK: How can you say that? How many times have I told you that I love you? You must have known it would come to this.

HELEN: I thought you could handle it.

FRANK: What am I going to do?

HELEN: Go back to Dorothy, Frank. She's a good woman.

FRANK: What will you do?

HELEN: I'll be all right.

FRANK: I don't think I can live without you.

HELEN: Have courage, Frank.

FRANK: Look. I won't leave Dorothy, we'll just go back to how we were.

HELEN: I don't think that's possible.

FRANK: I'm a bloody fool.

HELEN: No, Frank.

FRANK: To imagine that you could love me. An old fool like me.

HELEN: You're not a fool, Frank. You're a lovely man. I don't think I'm capable of loving anyone. Not at the moment.

FRANK: You might one day?

HELEN: Perhaps, but...

FRANK: It's all right. You don't have to say it. It would never be me.

HELEN: Frank. This is hurting me as well, but we both have to move on. You will get over me. I promise.

FRANK: We'll laugh about this in years to come.

HELEN: Maybe.

FRANK: My mid-life crisis.

HELEN: Don't call it that, Frank.

FRANK: Do you think I can go back to Dorothy?

HELEN: Pick up the pieces with her, Frank.

FRANK: It won't be easy.

HELEN: Find a way to spend time with her. What does she like to do?

FRANK: I don't know. Well, there's the church of course, but apart from that. She goes to bingo with her friend Betty.

HELEN: Bingo!

FRANK: Surprised me as well. Apart from that, I don't know, jigsaw puzzles, crosswords.

HELEN: They all sound like solitary hobbies. Isn't there anything you could do together?

FRANK: Like what?

HELEN: I don't know, rambling?

FRANK: Rambling!

HELEN: It's just a suggestion.

FRANK: Actually, it's not a bad idea. Rambling. She might like that. And it won't do either of us any harm to get a bit of fresh air and exercise.

HELEN: There you are then. And why doesn't she take my place in the quiz team. I mean I'm a liability really, aren't I? You don't get enough questions on pop music to make it worth my while being there.

FRANK: Dorothy in a pub? You must be joking.

HELEN: Oh yes. Of course. Even so, I'm dropping out of the quiz team.

FRANK: You don't have to do that.

HELEN: I do, Frank. And I'm already looking for another job.

FRANK: You're already looking for another job? You mean, before I came round tonight you were looking for another job?

HELEN: Yes.

FRANK: So you had already decided to finish with me?

HELEN: I hadn't decided anything but now I think it is for the best.

FRANK: So I won't see you at all?

HELEN: Maybe, Frank. Give it time. Perhaps we can be friends.

FRANK: Helen. I'm lost.

HELEN: Be strong, Frank.

FRANK: I'll try.

(HELEN pulls FRANK to her and they embrace)

FRANK: Twenty minutes ago I was on top of the world.

HELEN: I'm so sorry, Frank. Really I am. Oh God. Twenty minutes! I forgot to phone Karen. She'll be furious.

FRANK: You can still meet her. You'll just be a bit late.

HELEN: That's all right. She'll get over it.

FRANK: No. I think I should go. You go and meet your friend.

HELEN: Will you be all right?

FRANK: I think so. Thank you for the last few months, Helen.

HELEN: Thank you, Frank. Do you really think I should go to meet her?

FRANK: Of course. She'll be expecting you.

HELEN: You're sweet. I'm not sure I want to go out though.

FRANK: You should. We both have to get on with our lives.

Music: John Martyn – The Hurt in Your Heart. HELEN kisses FRANK and grabs one of the dresses before exiting. After she has gone FRANK picks up the other dress and holds it against his face. Fade the song after the chorus. The phone rings. Instinctively FRANK answers it.

FRANK: Hello.

HELEN: *(Off)* Was that the phone?

FRANK: Yes, it's a payphone. Hello. No, she can't come to the phone at the moment, is that Karen? She said she was meeting you. Sorry, she has been slightly delayed but will be there shortly. Me? Just a friend, I just called by to, er, drop something. Yes. I'll tell her.

He hangs up. HELEN returns wearing the dress.

HELEN: Didn't she wait?

FRANK: No. She said she'd be in the Red Lion.

HELEN: How do I look?

FRANK: Radiant.

HELEN: Everything's going to be OK you know.

FRANK: Is it?

HELEN: I promise. Come here.

They hug. Lights up on BETTY's house. BETTY enters from the kitchen with a pile of laundry. Her doorbell rings. She dumps the basket and exits to answer it.

FRANK: You'll be late.

HELEN: What are you going to do, Frank?

FRANK: Go home to Dorothy of course. You're right. I'm lucky. I still have a wife that I love. I nearly threw it away.

HELEN: I'm glad.

FRANK: I might go for a drink first though. I don't think I can face her straight away. Not the Red Lion though.

HELEN kisses him, turns out the light and they exit. BETTY enters her room followed by BILL.

BILL: Glad I found you in.

BETTY: Bill, if you've come round for an argument you can just forget it.

I've a thousand and one things to do, Michael is home tomorrow and I at least have to wash the stuff he left on the floor before he left.

BILL: I'm sorry if I've called at an inconvenient time.

BETTY: What are you doing here? You were not due to visit today.

BILL: Well, I didn't know what the arrangements were, after you didn't come back last Friday...

BETTY: I told you on the phone. Dorothy seemed upset so I decided to walk back with her and go in for a chat. I don't know why I bothered because she hardly said a word, but she is my best friend and I have to put her first sometimes. Anyway, you were all right. You polished off that box of chocolates before you left.

BILL: Well, I needed something to keep me going, some of us hadn't had any dinner.

BETTY: Yes, well that includes me. Now, if you have said what you came round to say I'd be pleased if you left me to it.

BILL: No, I haven't said what I came round to say. Look, Betty. How long before Michael is away again?

BETTY: Oh, I don't know. I think he has a few days in Copenhagen at the end of the month. Why?

BILL: It's very difficult, not being able to see you at all for weeks on end.

BETTY: Well, what do you suggest? And I'm not into threesomes if that is what you are thinking.

BILL: I'm serious Betty. There must be some way to spend some time with you.

BETTY: No, Bill, there isn't. I'm the happy little housewife when Michael is here, remember.

BILL: But what about me?

BETTY: What about you, Bill?

BILL: You don't seem to care about my feelings. You wouldn't even let me come round when I rang on Saturday. What were you doing then, preparing for Michael coming home or comforting your miserable friend?

BETTY: Dorothy is not miserable.

BILL: She bloody sounds it.

BETTY: Don't you dare talk about my friend like that.

BILL: Oh yes, sorry, I was forgetting. Everyone comes before me, don't they?

BETTY: Bill, what is it with you?

BILL: I just want to know what I mean to you, that's all.

BETTY: What you mean to me? Oh Christ.

BETTY picks up the laundry basket and exits upstairs. BILL takes out a handkerchief and wipes his eyes. He sits and awaits BETTY's return. BETTY enters.

BETTY: Would you like some tea?

BILL: Tea! No, I'm OK thanks.

BETTY: Bill. I have something I have to tell you. *(She sits close to him.)* I think it is probably better that we stop seeing each other.

BILL: Stop?

BETTY: On the whole, I think it would be better.

BILL: Betty, please. Sorry I lost my temper. Don't do anything rash.

BETTY: No, it isn't because you lost your temper. It's just things have become a little complicated haven't they?

BILL: How do you mean complicated?

BETTY: It was fun to start with...

BILL: I wanted to be there for you.

BETTY: Yes, Bill, I'm not suggesting you took advantage. But I'm a big girl and whatever problems Michael and I might have, I should be able to face them myself.

BILL: But if he is hurting you.

BETTY: If he was hurting me, I'd leave him, Bill. I'm over it now. He doesn't hurt me any more. And I have you to thank for that.

BILL: So why do you want to end it?

BETTY: I think you know.

BILL: Do I?

BETTY: I have a comfortable life here with Michael. He earns a good salary and he is not mean. I can have pretty much whatever I want. Except affection, of course, but you can't have everything.

BILL: You have me.

BETTY: But I'm risking everything, don't you see that?

BILL: Only if he finds out.

BETTY: He is bound to, one day. We take a risk every time you come here. Look at what happened last Friday. If Dorothy had walked into the kitchen how would you have explained yourself?

BILL: But she didn't.

BETTY: No, but it's only a matter of time. I can't take the risk any more.

BILL: So this is the end.

BETTY: I'm sorry.

BILL: Are you sure about this?

BETTY: Do you remember that first time? I wasn't sure of anything. And I'm still not, but I think it is for the best.

BILL: If it's what you want.

BETTY: I think I'll make you that cup of tea anyway.

BETTY exits to the kitchen. With her out of the room BILL all but breaks

down. He is clearly devastated. BETTY returns.

BETTY: Kettle's on. Come here, Bill.

They hug. BILL is almost overcome but controls himself.

BILL: We could have done so much more together, Betty.

BETTY: I know. In another life maybe.

BILL: I'm going to miss you.

BETTY: I'll miss you too.

BILL: Perhaps, if we just cool it for a while. I mean leave it a few weeks, then see how we feel.

BETTY: Best to make a decision and stick with it.

BILL: Right. Well, if that's your decision.

BETTY: Don't be angry.

BILL: I'm not angry. I just don't understand what's changed.

BETTY: The risks are getting too great.

BILL breaks away and moves towards the exit.

BILL: Well, I suppose I had better...

BETTY: You don't have to go yet. Stay and have a cup of tea with me.

BILL: No, I think I had better go.

BETTY: I understand.

BILL: Goodbye, Betty. *(He exits.)*

Music: Ennio Morricone – Chi Mai.

Scene 3

BETTY's house, a short while later. BETTY is dusting (yes, really!) The doorbell rings. She sighs and exits to answer it.

BETTY: *(Off)* Oh! Hello.

FRANK: *(Off)* Is Dorothy here, Betty?

BETTY: *(Off)* No, Frank. Look why don't you come in.

BETTY and FRANK enter. He has been drinking.

FRANK: I've looked everywhere for her.

BETTY: Sit down, Frank. *(They sit.)* Where have you looked for her?

FRANK: She isn't at home. I even went to have a look in ASDA, but they're closed.

BETTY: Well, I think her life isn't doesn't entirely revolve around home and ASDA. It is rather late I suppose. She can't be at a church meeting or something?

FRANK: I don't think so. Not tonight. I don't know what to do.

BETTY: Let's think about this. What time do you get home from work?

FRANK: Usually about six o'clock.

BETTY: So she's been missing what, three hours.

FRANK: No. I didn't go straight home tonight.

BETTY: Right. So you told her you were going to be late?

FRANK: No. I didn't say anything.

BETTY: So, she would have been expecting you at six. Maybe she is out looking for you.

FRANK: She wouldn't know where to look.

BETTY: Well, I don't expect she's trawling round all the local boozers trying to track you down. I assume that is where you have been for most of the last three hours.

FRANK: Some of it, yes.

BETTY: Any particular reason why you didn't go straight home, Frank?

FRANK: Of course I had a reason.

BETTY: Look, Frank. I know that things are not right between you and Dorothy...

FRANK: How do you know?

BETTY: Well, she has been acting a bit strange. I tried to get her to talk but she didn't seem to want to. You turning up like this has just confirmed my suspicions that's all.

FRANK: I love Dorothy.

BETTY: I'm sure you do, Frank.

FRANK: I wish I could turn back the clock.

BETTY: Turn back the clock? What are you talking about. What have you done?

FRANK: I forgot what really matters.

BETTY: Frank, I don't know what you are talking about.

FRANK: I've had an affair!

BETTY: You've done what?

FRANK: I've had an affair, Betty.

BETTY: You!

FRANK: I've been unfaithful.

BETTY: Yes, I know what 'having an affair' means. But why are you telling me?

FRANK: I don't know. Perhaps I need to confess to someone.

BETTY: Well thanks! Why did it have to be me? Couldn't you have confessed to one of your friends?

FRANK: I haven't got any.

BETTY: Have you any idea what sort of a position this puts me in?

FRANK: I'm sorry.

BETTY: So who is it?

FRANK: A girl in the quiz team.

BETTY: The Cheaters.

FRANK: It doesn't seem funny any more.

BETTY: Wait a minute. Dot said there was a girl in the team. What was her name, um. Yes, that's it. Um Helen. Is that her?

FRANK: Yes.

BETTY: I thought it was odd, you joining a quiz team.

FRANK: Do you think she will ever forgive me?

BETTY: Does she know?

FRANK: I don't think so.

BETTY: She doesn't need to forgive you then.

FRANK: But, you...

BETTY: I won't tell her, Frank. None of my business. That is assuming we ever find her.

FRANK: Do you think we should call the police?

BETTY: It's probably a bit early for that. Let's think about where she could be.

FRANK: I've been trying. I don't know where she can be. What if she has found out? What if she has left me?

BETTY: She wouldn't just up and go, Frank. Not Dorothy.

FRANK: Perhaps she has gone round to see Helen.

BETTY: Does she know where Helen lives?

FRANK: No.

BETTY: Well, she's not likely to be there then, is she? You said you *had* an affair.

FRANK: Yes.

BETTY: Not that you are *having* an affair. You mean it's over?

FRANK: Yes. Tonight.

BETTY: That's why you've been drinking.

FRANK: I just needed a bit of Dutch courage.

BETTY: Seems to me you had quite a lot.

FRANK: Will you really not tell her?

BETTY: Why should I want to hurt my friend? Did you want me to tell her? Is that why you just confessed?

FRANK: I don't know what I want. My world has been turned upside down.

BETTY: Oh, I see. Um Helen blew you out then.

FRANK: Blew me out?

BETTY: Let me guess. You went round there, told her you were leaving Dorothy and she laughed in your face.

FRANK: No, she didn't do that. She wouldn't be so cruel.

BETTY: But she finished with you, all the same.

FRANK: Yes.

BETTY: So now you need to go crawling back to Dorothy with your tail between your legs.

FRANK: I never stopped loving Dorothy. The only reason I was going to leave her was because I couldn't go on deceiving her.

BETTY: How very magnanimous of you.

FRANK: It's true.

BETTY: And faced with a choice of Dorothy or Um Helen you chose the latter.

FRANK: I was a fool.

BETTY: Yes, Frank. You were.

FRANK puts his head in his hands. BETTY goes to comfort him but hears the door opening and closing. DOROTHY enters.

DOROTHY: Sorry to barge in Betty but... Frank!

FRANK: Dorothy.

DOROTHY: What the hell are you doing here?

FRANK: Looking for you. You were not at home.

DOROTHY: I was at home at six o'clock when you should have been home. How long have you been here?

BETTY: Now Dorothy, if you think...

DOROTHY: Shut up, Betty. I'm talking to my husband and waiting for him to tell me where he has been for the last three hours.

FRANK: I, er. I just called in at the pub for a quick drink after work. It's been a bit of a rough day to be honest, then Ted came in and we started talking about the quiz team and I just lost track of time.

DOROTHY: You lost track of three hours?

FRANK: I'm sorry, Dot.

DOROTHY: So you should be. What with your sales conferences and your quiz team you're spending a lot of the time out of the house at the moment. The least you can do is come home on time.

FRANK: Yes, Dot.

DOROTHY: And couldn't you have telephoned Betty to see if I was here?

FRANK: Couldn't you, to see if I was here?

DOROTHY: I didn't come here expecting you to be here, Frank. I came to ask Betty to help me look for you.

BETTY: Dorothy, Frank had only just arrived when you turned up. You must have just missed him in the street.

MICHAEL enters the room silently. No one notices that he is there.

DOROTHY: Betty, there is no need for you to go on the defensive. Have I accused you of anything?

BETTY: I just wanted to make it clear, that's all.

DOROTHY: Quite clear, thank you. Though I do hope that if my husband is messing about with another woman it isn't my best friend.

FRANK: Dorothy, I...

DOROTHY: Anyway, whenever you go off on your sales conferences I come round here so you are obviously not with Betty.

BETTY: What makes you think he isn't just at a sales conference? You're jumping to conclusions, Dorothy.

DOROTHY: Carry on like that and I will begin to suspect you, Betty. He can speak for himself you know.

FRANK: I, um. Er, I...

DOROTHY: Well, I thought he could anyway. So, Frank. About these business trips? Fantastic opportunity isn't it? Ideal if you are carrying on behind your wife's back. Don't you think so? Got anything to say, Frank?

FRANK: Listen, Dorothy. I think you need to know the truth.

BETTY: Frank...

MICHAEL: Frank! Dorothy! How nice to see you.

BETTY: Michael! Jesus! Where did you come from?

MICHAEL: Munich, of course.

FRANK: Mike!

MICHAEL: Bit of an interesting conversation going on isn't there?

BETTY: But you're not due back until tomorrow.

MICHAEL: Bloody cabin crew are going on strike. Had to pull loads of strings to get a flight tonight or I would have been stuck there until the weekend. The airport is chaos. No taxis to be had for love or money. Lucky Bill was free to pick me up.

BETTY: Bill's here?

MICHAEL: I invited him in but he said he needed to get home. So, Dorothy, you were saying?

DOROTHY: Um...

MICHAEL: Come on, Dot. I broke your flow. What was it?

DOROTHY: Er, Michael it was a sort of, um, hypothetical discussion.

MICHAEL: Hypothetical?

DOROTHY: Yes. I was just saying that if a man went on a lot of business trips then he could, hypothetically, use it as a way to hide having a mistress.

MICHAEL: I suppose so, yes. Hypothetically.

DOROTHY: That's all.

MICHAEL: Well, it's true I suppose. Wouldn't you say so, Frank?

FRANK: What?

MICHAEL: Hypothetically.

FRANK: Er, yes. Um, hypothetically.

MICHAEL: Good. Glad we got that cleared up.

This is all very awkward.

MICHAEL: So. Frank! What say we leave the ladies to their hypothesis and have a very real drink?

FRANK: Well, I don't know. I've already had...

MICHAEL: Come on, when was the last time we had a pint together?

FRANK: It's just that...

DOROTHY: Oh, go on Frank. You might as well make a night of it now.

FRANK: Are you sure?

DOROTHY: Just go.

MICHAEL: That's the spirit. Come on then.

The men leave.

BETTY: Hello Michael. Bye Michael.

DOROTHY: They couldn't wait to leave could they?

BETTY: And you couldn't wait for them to go. What took the wind out of your sails?

DOROTHY: What do you mean?

BETTY: Come on Dot. You were on the point of belting Frank.

DOROTHY: I didn't know Michael was there.

BETTY: Good job he was. I think I was next on your list.

DOROTHY: Sorry, Betty. I didn't mean to have a go at you like that.

BETTY: I've never seen you so angry.

DOROTHY: I was so worried. I've been all over looking for Frank.

BETTY: So it was relief? All that anger?

DOROTHY: I suppose so.

BETTY: He's not a bad man, your Frank, I mean.

DOROTHY: He's been acting very strange recently.

BETTY: Maybe it's because of his age.

DOROTHY: It's because he's a man.

BETTY: The weaker sex.

DOROTHY: That's about right.

BETTY: Where have you been looking for him?

DOROTHY: Betty. The good thing about my best friend is that she doesn't ask awkward questions.

BETTY: You seem to be confusing me with someone else.

DOROTHY: If you must know, I went to look for him in the Red Lion.

BETTY: A pub!

DOROTHY: It is the quiz team's home so I wondered if they were having a meeting that Frank had forgotten to mention to me.

BETTY: You went into a public house! I don't believe.

DOROTHY: If you ever mention it again, I swear I'll kill you.

BETTY: You actually went in?

DOROTHY: Only to see if he was there.

BETTY: You must have had a good look round then.

DOROTHY: Not really. There were only two people in the pub. Two girls. One of them sobbing her heart out over something. Boyfriend trouble, I expect.

BETTY: Men eh?

DOROTHY: My thoughts exactly.

BETTY: Can't live with them, can't murder them and bury them under the patio.

DOROTHY: Sod 'em.

BETTY: Dorothy!

DOROTHY: Come on, Betty, get your secret stash of chocolates out. I want to be reckless!

BETTY: Reckless! You? *(She moves to the sideboard.)*

DOROTHY: I think it is time I started to live a little.

BETTY: Well, I won't stand in your way. *(She has taken out the chocolates and now takes out a bottle of sherry and two glasses. She pours.)*

DOROTHY: They say life begins at forty, Betty.

BETTY: They do.

DOROTHY: Well, we've got a few years catching up to do.

BETTY: Well, you have.

DOROTHY: We only get one lifetime, Betty.

BETTY: We do indeed.

DOROTHY: Then, let's make the most of it. Thank you, I'd love a sherry. Let's go wild!

BETTY: I'll drink to that.

BETTY passes DOROTHY a glass of sherry. They touch glasses and the lights fade. Music: Talking Heads – Once in a Lifetime.

Curtain