

ACT ONE Scene One

Darkness. 'Go Greased Lightning' from Grease plays for a few seconds, then fades as a spotlight reveals CHARLES standing front stage holding a poetry book and declaiming to the audience.

CHARLES Oh my love is like a red, red rose that's newly spring in June
My love is like the melody that's sweetly played in tune
As fair ort though, my bonnie lass, so deep in love am I;
And I will love thee still my dear, till all the seas gang dry!

A pause

Nah. That's no good.

He walks out of the spotlight and sit in his chair upstage. The lights come on to reveal three men in the prime of life. They wear comfy cardies, corduroys and shabby shoes, and sit around a table in a pub. COLIN works at a crossword, CHARLES leafs through his book of poetry, whilst GEORGIE is engrossed in a game of Patience. All three are lost in their own little world. The men express frustration and/or boredom with tuts, sighs, grimaces and shakes of the head.

GEORGIE Right. Red seven onto black eight, then black eight onto red nine.
Thank you very much indeed.

COLIN Ah! Ever-green. Excellent. Now then, just one more to go.

A pause, then more frustration.

The Italian way to an undergraduate joke gives flagging men a new lift...

GEORGIE Red six. Come on, I need a red six..

CHARLES (*reads*) Had I the Heaven's embroidered cloths
Enwrought with the gold and silver light; the blue and the dim and dark
cloths of night and the light and the half light..
Nah – nothing doing.

COLIN ...gives flagging men a new lift.

GEORGIE That'll do. Now – a red jack. Come on, I need a red jack.

COLIN The Italian road...does either of you know any Italian?

GEORGIE I used to know a little Italian. She worked in a chip shop

CHARLES Parlore a poco Italiano.

COLIN And what does that mean, exactly?

CHARLES It means 'I speak a little Italian'

COLIN Ah! Then I may need to call on you in a moment

CHARLES Come to me in my dreams, and I shall be well again.
For then the night will more than pay the endless longing of the day...
oh it's no good. I'm blocked. Completely blocked.

COLIN You're still struggling with your story, I take it?

CHARLES Yes – I thought I might pick up an idea or two for a storyline if I read through some well known love poetry. Some cue, some small inspiration. No luck yet, though.

GEORGIE Have you thought of a title, yet? If you could come up with a title, that might give you more of an idea for your storyline.

CHARLES I quite like 'Champagne and Roses' as a working title. It hints at what the play is all about. That's what Jess says, anyway.

COLIN Just remind me – who is Jess?

CHARLES My tutor on the writing course. She's given me loads of advice. (*CHARLES becomes animated and enthusiastic here*) It's all about structure, you see. First you have the point of attack – that's where the audience picks up the story. It's all about showing the audience the world of the characters.

Throughout this speech, GEORGIE and COLIN look at each other, trying not to laugh. COLIN pretends to fall asleep then wakes up suddenly.

Then you have the inciting incident. That's where the story actually starts.

COLIN So what's your inciting incident going to be?

CHARLES Well, I haven't quite got that far yet.

COLIN laughs.

GEORGIE Have you actually got any characters?

CHARLES Well, I've got my leading man. I'm calling him Charles

COLIN loves this.

COLIN Oh brilliant! What an imagination you have, Charles!

GEORGIE How about your point of attack?

CHARLES Er no. Not yet

COLIN Any sign of a plot?

CHARLES Therein lies the problem. I'm blocked, you see? Completely blocked.

GEORGIE So how long have you been doing this course, then?

CHARLES Er – six weeks.

GEORGIE and COLIN laugh

COLIN Have you actually learnt anything at all?

CHARLES (*defensive*) Most of the work has been focused on creating believable characters. Jess says I should be giving them strong, distinctive voices.

GEORGIE Well how the hell you gonna do that, then?

CHARLES Oh – laugh all you like, but great oaks from little acorns grow. I can afford to devote some time to it, now that I've got some time on my hands.

Contemptuous snort from COLIN

GEORGIE Oh aye – that'll be right.

CHARLES I'm determined to get a play performed on stage. I just need to find an idea or two. Once I've done that, I'll be away.

All three go back to their activities – more frustration.

GEORGIE Red jack, where are you? Ah – the hell with this? What time's the match on?

COLIN You've got half an hour yet.

GEORGIE It's bloody criminal. I can't afford to go to the match now, you know.

CHARLES We know, Georgie. You told us.

COLIN Several times.

CHARLES Fine thing when you spend your life working to afford the things you enjoy then end up unable to pay for them.

COLIN You'll have to find some part time work.

GEORGIE I'm buggered if I'm going back to work, not after the way I've been treated. Do you know how long I worked for them?

CHARLES (*without looking up*) Thirty – seven years.

GEORGIE Up and down them bloody motorways an' never so much as a scratch on the paintwork in all that time. 'Thank you very much, but you cannot drive no more, you're too old'. Sixty five!. Yesterday you can drive a hundred grand's worth of stock from one of the country to the other. Today, oh sorry, son your tachometer's up to the limit, so bugger off.

COLIN Calm down, Georgie, will you?

GEORGIE Oh it's alright for you – you've still got summat to get up for. You're still worth summat

COLIN Not for much longer. We knock off at sixty in the Civil Service. I've only got another eighteen months to go.

GEORGIE Well you'll see what I mean then, soon enough. You'll find out how it feels to be invisible.

Pause – the men resume their activities.

There you go – onto your red queen. Right – where are you black eight?

COLIN The Italian way to an undergraduate joke gives flagging men a new lift. Oh bugger this. I don't know why I bother with the wretched thing. Marjorie would have knocked this off in five minutes flat. She used to time her morning egg by it. I'd be lucky to get away without burning the Sunday roast the rate I do the damned thing. You'd think that once, just once, I'd be able to finish the bloody crossword.

CHARLES Can I give you a bit of help, Colin?

COLIN No – I'm determined to do the thing on my own. I'm so close. Just one more clue and I'll be there.

GEORGIE turns again to his evident satisfaction

GEORGIE Red nine onto a black ten. Right – what do I need now?

CHARLES Have you tried 'Viagra'?

COLIN What?

CHARLES Viagra. Via – the Italian for way, rag – an undergraduate joke – rearranged gives you Viagra. It's an anagram, see?

COLIN Gives flagging men a new lift. Brilliant!

COLIN writes in the correct answer.

CHARLES So – you’ve done it. Finished.

COLIN So I have, but it wasn’t all my own work. I needed some help to get the thing done, didn’t I, damn it? One day, I swear I’ll finish the bloody thing on my own. *Huffily, he opens up the paper and starts to read. After a moment, he laughs contemptuously.* Well, well, well. What have we here? A certain theatre company making a desperate pitch for new members, thinly disguising it as a preview of the coming year.

CHARLES Written by?

COLIN Would you believe it? Our beloved Chairman.

GEORGIE Tosser!

A pause – COLIN reads on.

COLIN Would you like me to read a bit of it out?

GEORGIE I’m not interested.

CHARLES I can live without it, thank you very much.

COLIN Suit yourselves.

Another pause. COLIN laughs. The others look at him. COLIN laughs again.

GEORGIE Oh – go on then!

CHARLES If you must.

CHARLES Recent personnel changes...

Derisive laughs from the other two

...have created a wonderful opportunity for ambitious young men.

Stony silence.

GEORGIE Well that says it all doesn’t it? Absolutely no idea of what he’s thrown away.

CHARLES Ambitious young men

CHARLES laughs quietly to himself then resumes his reading. After a moment, another laugh from COLIN

COLIN Hah! A chap in here's on trial for bigamy!
Blank looks from the other two.

COLIN A bigamist. You know - a man with more than one wife.

GEORGIE He must be barking mad

COLIN Apparently, he told one wife he worked the day shift, whilst all the time the other thought he was on nights. Apparently, he didn't actually do any work at all – he just went straight from one to the other, then back again

Another laugh from COLIN

COLIN It says that the jury is not expected to reach a verdict because neither wife will testify against him. They were both perfectly happy with the arrangement until he suggested a threesome.

All three laugh

A threesome! I dream about a twosome! The judge asked him what he thought a man in the prime of life though he was doing, keeping two women on the go at once. You know what he said? 'I just wanted to spice things up a bit – I wanted some adventure. I wanted to feel like I was twenty - one again'. Isn't that great?

GEORGIE and CHARLES stare at him uncomprehendingly

Well I think it's marvellous. A bloke of his age, refusing to let go. Clinging on to the glories of his youth, steadfastly resisting the march of time. What was it my daughter said to me the other day? 'Forty is the new thirty'. It's rather good, don't you think? Forty is the new thirty

CHARLES Except that it's been a long while since Georgie and I were sixty, let alone forty.

COLIN But what a great way of thinking, though. Refusing to accept the arrival of Stannah and slippers.

CHARLES So what are you suggesting? That we should follow this gentleman's example and end up in front of the magistrate?

COLIN If you ask me, this chap has set an example that we could do well to follow. You know, I reckon we should seriously think about taking up a new activity.

CHARLES Hmm. How about painting? I used to enjoy art when I was at school

COLIN What? Bowls of fruit, landscapes, all that stuff?

CHARLES Yes. Constable, Turner, the classic English landscape.

COLIN Hardly what I'd call exciting. We need to find something more...unexpected. Something to bring us out of ourselves. As I said – an adventure, a risk, a little bit of danger.

GEORGIE You know, I think I agree with Colin. Maybe we need to prove to the world that people of our age still have something to offer. The world's not just a playground for the young, you know.

COLIN Hear, hear.

CHARLES So what do you propose we do?

COLIN Look – I've been doing some thinking. Have you ever noticed the Personals bit in the local paper?

CHARLES What exactly is the Personals bit?

GEORGIE He means the Lonely Hearts column. Every paper has one these days.

CHARLES Then of course I've noticed them, but I can't say I've ever studied them. I assumed they were all full of horoscopes, astrology and all that stuff.

GEORGIE No, no, no. It's where you go looking, you know, for a lass or whatever. It's all the rage now.

CHARLES (*horrified*) Where's the romance in that? Putting an advert in the paper the way you would for a beaten up old banger. Ask yourself, what kind of a person would want to do that? It'll be full of anoraks and trainspotters; sad cases who can't find romance the old – fashioned way.

COLIN Who said anything about romance? Lots of the adverts are from people looking for others with the same interests – bridge, walking, that kind of thing. Here – take a look for yourself.

COLIN hands CHARLES the newspaper. CHARLES reads.

CHARLES Fifty years young, but growing old disgracefully. Smoking, drinking, funloving lady seeks likeminded gentleman to stop out late with. Must be solvent and GSOH essential. What does she mean 'GSOH' essential

GEORGIE It means she's after Great Sex On Holiday

CHARLES stares in disbelief

Nah – I'm kidding ye.

COLIN It actually means Good Sense Of Humour

CHARLES laughs incredulously

CHARLES GSOH. Good Sense Of Humour. Well I'm damned. They've got their own language. It's like a code or ...shorthand

GEORGIE Oh aye – it's cheaper to print that way. You get more words for your money

CHARLES So what does this mean – 'must be solvent'?

COLIN Means she doesn't want to buy the drinks.

COLIN takes the paper back from CHARLES

Here's another one – listen. Pretty young thing seeks sugar daddy to help sweeten life's bitter pill. MHOT.

CHARLES (*working it out*) Must.. Have.. Own..something

COLIN Trombone?

The men laugh, starting to enjoy themselves

CHARLES Tractor?

GEORGIE Toaster?

CHARLES Treadmill?

COLIN Tachometer?

GEORGIE Testicles!

Pause as CHARLES considers this

CHARLES Must have own *testicles*?

GEORGIE It's teeth, man. Must Have Own Teeth. It's a joke – she wants an older man, but not too old, see?

Another laugh from the men, then COLIN reads

Damsel in distress seeks Knight in shining armour to rescue her from life' dragons. Must like jousting. Does that mean what I think it means?

GEORGIE Depends what you think it means.

COLIN Well I can think of something...

GEORGIE Well that's what it means.

CHARLES looks at GEORGIE in disbelief

CHARLES Here, let me see.

CHARLES takes the paper from COLIN and reads aloud

Self confessed BOBFOC seeks kindhearted man who knows that beauty is more than skin deep. What on Earth is a BOBFOC?

GEORGIE Means she's got a Body Off Baywatch, Face Off Crimewatch

CHARLES So is this how you start courting these days? Through an advert in a newspaper!

GEORGIE: It's how some people start.

CHARLES: It just seems so.. impersonal

GEORGIE: Not really. Makes good sense if you think of it. You'd find a builder in the paper, no problem, or a place to go out to eat.

CHARLES So you read through the adverts and decide which one you like the sound of, then what?

GEORGIE There's a phone number to ring. You just leave your details and wait for them to contact you

CHARLES Well in that case, it's more than impersonal. It's completely bloody brutal. You're setting yourself up for rejection by someone you haven't even met!

GEORGIE That's the fun of it, man. It's like being a kid on Christmas morning. You never know what you might find inside the stocking.

COLIN And if you were really concerned about rejection, you could always turn the tables and do the rejecting.

GEORGIE Aye - if you put the advert in, you get to choose who you go out with.

CHARLES But what if no - one replies to your advert?

GEORGIE Then you've lost nowt, have you?

COLIN All's fair in love and war.

CHARLES So tell me. How come you two know so much about this Personals lark? It all seems very suspicious to me.

GEORGIE It's how I met me third wife.

CHARLES I'm astonished. I've known you all these years, and you never told me that.

GEORGIE You never asked, man. It's no secret.

CHARLES And what about you, Colin? You told me you were at school with Marjorie. Surely you haven't had first hand experience?

COLIN No, I haven't. But I've made it my business to find out about it. That's my plan, you see - for my adventure. Why don't we take it a stage further? Just look at the last but one column on the right hand side.

COLIN hands the paper back to CHARLES, who reads it

CHARLES Escort Agency requires presentable men – all ages and races needed by cultured women. (*CHARLES works out what COLIN means; he's horrified*) Oh no! No way! Not a chance!

COLIN Oh come on, Charles! Don't be such a wet blanket. We could advertise ourselves as a going concern. You know, 'Gentlemen available for an evening of high class company for the discerning woman', that kind of thing. It's perfect for three mature gentlemen with time on their hands. GEORGIE gets to afford his ticket, and you have a perfect story for your play.

GEORGIE And what do you get out of it?

COLIN The same as you of course. An adventure!

CHARLES Do you know, I think you might be onto something. It could easily be the starting point of a rather good story. Dashing old fashioned gentleman sets off on a romantic quest. Who knows where fate will take him..? Hmm – I rather like that.

COLIN And the beauty of it is – we work as a three. That way we avoid the fear factor. If a woman fancies an evening of company but feels too scared to go out with one total stranger it makes sense to go out two of her friends for company. That way she's gets moral support, and guaranteed safety.