

VANESSA (*singing*). Oh, the toe bone's connected to the foot bone, the foot bone's connected to the –

SAUL. Vanessa!

VANESSA. – *ankle* bone, the ankle bone's connected to the leg bone, the leg bone's connected to the –

SAUL. Shut up!

VANESSA. – *knee* bone, the *knee* bone's connected to the –

SAUL. Open this door now!

VANESSA (*shouting now*). – THIGH BONE, THE THIGH BONE'S CONNECTED TO THE HIP BONE, NOW HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD –

SAUL. You've left off the torso, you silly cow! If your toes freeze together again, I'm not taking you to the hospital to have them chipped apart this time. I'll do it myself and put the bits in a punch bowl and have cocktails on the bloody veranda!

*He waits.*

Vanessa?

*No response. SAUL goes to the shop door, locks it, and exits. Beat. PERCHIK jumps out of the sack. VANESSA comes out of the icebox. They stare at each other. The power fails.*

(*Off.*) I have turned the electricity off, Vanessa!

PERCHIK and VANESSA *panic*. PERCHIK *runs and throws himself down behind the counter. VANESSA runs to the door, finds it locked, looks around.*

VANESSA (*calling*). Don't be so stupid, Saul. The stock will spoil.

SAUL (*off*). Then you will have that on your conscience, wife.

VANESSA (*calling*). I didn't turn the power off, did I?

SAUL *approaches*. VANESSA *jumps in the sack. SAUL enters. Goes to the icebox.*

SAUL. You are behaving in such a naughty way that my hand was forced. Do you understand, wife? You left me no other option. No other option!

*Pause. He opens the icebox door and peers in. Closes it silently.*

No, no, Vanessa. You're quite right.

SAUL *turns to see the sack wriggling across the floor, towards the door. He sighs, goes to the sack and sits on it. It stops moving.*

The best thing for us to do is to sit quietly and Think About What You Have Done.

SAUL *hacks up some phlegm and spits it into a Union Jack handkerchief.*

I am a man of infinite patience. (*He suddenly turns to the counter.*) Whoever you are, I'd come out of there if I was you. The sound of your rattling pipes is getting distinctly on my breasts.

*Pause.*

I'm talking to you. Behind the counter. It's bloody sardines in here tonight. Come out.

*Pause.*

Tell you what. Make it sporting. I'll give you till ten. One... two... three... four...

PERCHIK *makes a dash for it. SAUL trips him, picks him up and sits him on a chair.*

Aha! Can I see your passport please, baggage?

PERCHIK. What? I've no' got a – What? Get off!

SAUL. Ah. You're a *foreign*! Splendid!

PERCHIK. No – I'm Scottish.

SAUL. Like I said. Foreign! Can I see your passport?

PERCHIK. This is an invasion of my civil liberties – What do you want to see my –

SAUL. An Englishman's home is his castle, but an Englishman's shop is his Empire. We are short on staff at the moment so I am both monarch and border control.

PERCHIK. I don't –

SAUL (*shouting into the sack*). The First Lady has gone AWOL at present.

PERCHIK. I've no' got my passport wimme. I mean – I've no' got a passport.

SAUL. 'No' got a passport! Dear me. What an untravelled young larrikin you must be. The marvellous crevices of this great turning world are of no interest / to you?

PERCHIK. What are you / on about?

SAUL. Never smelt the swamps of Venice or seen their silt of sunken city? Or watched the ice fields of Siberia melt into daisy-dotted washing-powder meadows?

PERCHIK. No, I've not!

SAUL. What! Never danced through the dusty kasbahs of In Salah picking mint leaves from your teeth, or observed the powdery course of the Milky Way as the bombs come down like windfalls on to Norwegian fjords? The blaze of a watery nation going up in flames. Tell me, have you *never* seen the Kalahari Desert lights, baggage?

PERCHIK. No. I told you, I've no' got a passport.

SAUL. Neither have I, I have an aversion to sand, but I am assured they are quite spectacular. I have never been to Scotland either, but I am assured that it is not. How did you get across Hadrian's Channel without a passport? Ferries wouldn't take you without papers, and you can't walk it at low tide any more.

PERCHIK. I swam.

SAUL. You swam?

PERCHIK. From Berwick to Newcastle.

SAUL. You swam from Berwick to Newcastle?

PERCHIK. Aye.

SAUL. You swam. He swam! Thirty-eight miles! That shows some gristle that does, shows some / bloody gristle.

PERCHIK. I should probably be / going.

*He stands. SAUL immediately forces him down again.*

SAUL. I underestimated you, er – what did you say your name was?

PERCHIK. I didn't. S'Perchik. Peter Perchik.

PERCHIK *holds out a hand in introduction. SAUL examines it.*

SAUL. Perchik? Not very Scottish, but that can only be a good thing. It will aid your integration into our native culture and

value system. My name is Saul Everard but you may call me Mr Saul. More friendly, don't you think you're bleeding on my floor.

PERCHIK. What's that? (*He looks down.*) Oh. Yeah. Sorry 'bout that.

*His knuckles are dripping blood. SAUL silently passes an already bloody tea towel to him, and PERCHIK bandages himself. SAUL watches with detached interest.*

SAUL. It's a bit fighty out there tonight?

PERCHIK. Ay. A bit. Got lost in the Asian Quarter.

SAUL. The Asian Quarter? The whole city is the Asian Quarter, you dolt. Except for this shop. Do you want a job?

PERCHIK. What?

SAUL. A job. Do you want one? My last boy has just left me in the lurch and your low horizons and negligible intellect suggest you would be quite perfect for the role.

PERCHIK. But no one's hiring. There's nae jobs anywhere.

SAUL. On the contrary, there is one job in the whole of Bradford and you have had the serendipity to trespass right into it. So. What do you say?

PERCHIK. I dunno – what's the work like?

SAUL. Oh, awful.

PERCHIK. But the pay?

SAUL. Very bad. All round it's an excellent situation.

PERCHIK. Right. Well thanks, but no –

SAUL. Is it about the money?

PERCHIK. No, it's not about the / money.

SAUL. Because it's really quite distasteful / to haggle –

PERCHIK. I don't care about the money!

SAUL. Then don't look a gift horse in the mouth, little Perchik! Or it might eventually come to believe you are a sugar cube and *eat you*.

*Pause. SAUL crosses to the shop door and pulls the blind aside.*

Awful lot of coppers about tonight. Awful lot. You can say what you like about them, but they still have a tremendous sense of *pageantry*, don't you think? Tremendous *flair*. For example (I don't know if you read the papers but) it must take a certain amount of brute strength to physically *peel* an Irishman's kneecap off with just your bare hands – and just because he didn't have a passport! I mean, obviously unpleasant for the Irishman. But a real *spectacle*, nonetheless.

PERCHIK *crosses the shop and looks through the blind himself. He looks back at SAUL.*

PERCHIK. Mr Saul? I've bin thinking 'bout your offer.

SAUL. And?

PERCHIK. And I've decided to reconsider.

SAUL. Tremendous! (*He shakes PERCHIK's hand.*) You know I was hoping you would!

PERCHIK. Sounds grand. Thank you. You, er, you get a lot of people coming and going?

SAUL *stops pumping PERCHIK's hand.*

SAUL. People?

PERCHIK. Customers, ken.

SAUL. Customers, Perchik?

PERCHIK. Buying things?

SAUL. Oh! You mean 'The Wallets'! Not many, no. You couldn't call it many. The market has become awful hostile of late, what with times being not so much lean as anorexic. And of course it's very hard to get hold of good stock now, you know?

PERCHIK. Imagine it is, aye.

SAUL (*deadly serious*). You imagine? But I didn't ask you to imagine.

PERCHIK. Sorry?

SAUL. I didn't ask you to imagine. How hard it is to get hold of good stock, I mean. It wasn't open for debate. It is very *hard* for me to get hold of good stock. Understood?

*Pause.*

PERCHIK. Ye-ah. Right, Mr Saul. Very hard.

SAUL. Good. Good! And now, Perchik, you must tell me: what exactly are you doing in my shop? Naturally, you're on the hoof from someone. The question is, why?

PERCHIK. I'm a painter.

SAUL. Never mind.

PERCHIK. I was painting. On the palace. In London.

SAUL. A-ha. And what, Peter Perchik the Painter, were you painting?

PERCHIK. It was a... portrait. Of sorts.

SAUL. Of sorts?

PERCHIK. You'd mebbe call it an... erotic impression.

SAUL. Of who? The King?

PERCHIK. Nah. Of the PM.

SAUL. Aha. And what was the Prime Minister doing in this erotic impression?

PERCHIK. He wasnay really doing anything. Not that you could see.

SAUL. Not very erotic.

PERCHIK. But you know the Statue of Liberty?

SAUL. Intimately.

PERCHIK. Well, she was sitting on his face.

SAUL. Ha! Excellent. You're going to fit in nicely round here, Perchik, though I don't much care for your methods. Altogether too cerebral. Utopia will be born from the body and not from the mind. When the body is ordered, society follows. Do you see?

PERCHIK. No.

SAUL. Good! Now, my scrofulous whelp, just *one more thing*: do you know what a tinderbox is?

PERCHIK. Yeah – s'for fire-lighting and that.

SAUL. And that. Yes. Well, this shop is a veritable tinderbox. The walls are little more than parchment, and what you must remember is: who holds the matches, little Susan?

PERCHIK. My name's Perchik.