

# Act One

## SCENE ONE

*As the audience take their seats the skiffle band plays. Lights down. 1963, April, mid-morning. A room in CHARLIE's house in Brighton. A framed photo of Queen Elizabeth II at coronation upstage. CHARLIE, HARRY DANGLE, ALAN DANGLE, PAULINE, LLOYD, DOLLY and other friends and family. Hardly anything remains from a buffet of typically English party food. Maybe one lone cheese and pineapple on a stick, and some peanuts. A party can of beer. All very lively and jolly, with the skiffle band playing, laughter, drinks, dancing. The song finishes. PAULINE and ALAN kiss. They toast 'Pauline & Alan' CHARLIE taps a glass for quiet.*

DOLLY: Come on Charlie! Give us a speech!

LLOYD: Speech!

CHARLIE: I don't like public speaking. I'd rather jump out of an aeroplane.

LLOYD: Go on then!

CHARLIE: I've only ever spoken three times, formally, in public, in my life, and each time I've been banged up by the judge straight afterwards! I done me best bringing up Pauline, on me own, after her muvver... *(Chokes.)* ... sorry...

LLOYD: – doin' well Charlie.

CHARLIE: – I've had to be her dad and her mum after her muvver... *(Chokes.)*

PAULINE: – It's alright dad.

CHARLIE: – ...after her muvver left me and went to live in Spain. It's a disappointment that Jean can't be here in Brighton at her daughter's engagement party, and a shame she can't even afford a stamp for a card neither. But I'm not gonna go on about it. I'd like to thank Alan's father, my solicitor, where is he?!

DANGLE: *(Coming forward.) Ecce homo!*

CHARLIE: No Latin! Please! I have enough difficulty understanding you when you're speaking English. But, seriously, wivout Harry, I wouldn't be here today, I'd be behind bars, where, let's face it, by rights, I oughta be. Over to you Alan.

*CHARLIE steps back. Applause for CHARLIE. ALAN kneels, with a flourish, before PAULINE.*

DOLLY: Ooh!

*(Aside.)* He wants to be an actor.

ALAN: Pauline, I give you my hand. *(ALAN holds out an upturned, closed, cupped hand towards PAULINE.)* Captive within my hand, is a bird. This bird is my heart.

PAULINE: *(To DOLLY.)* Is it a real bird?

DOLLY: No. It's a metaphor.

PAULINE: *(Excited.)* Oh! Lovely!

ALAN: I offer you the whole of my life, as your husband.

DOLLY: *(Aside.)* Ooh! I could do with a bit of this myself. Knowwhatimean.

*PAULINE opens his hand and takes out the imaginary bird, and presses it to her heart.*

PAULINE: I accept your bird heart thing, and I promise to look after it properly *(PAULINE kneels, and offers her hand to ALAN.)* I got a bird in my hand an'all.

CHARLIE: – That's two birds now, I'm gonna have to get in a box of Trill!

PAULINE: – This bird is *my* heart, the only one I've ever had.

*ALAN mimes taking the bird and presses it through his rib cage into his heart. They kiss passionately. Silence. A bit embarrassing. It is broken by the pop of a champagne cork.*

DANGLE: May I propose a toast. To love! In Latin –

CHARLIE: – Oh no!

DANGLE: *Ars amandi!*

PAULINE: No! Pauline.

ALAN: *(To PAULINE.)* '*Ars amandi*', is the art of love.

PAULINE: I don't understand.

ALAN: *(Aside.)* This is why I love her. She is pure, innocent, unspoiled by education, like a new bucket.

LLOYD: To love!

ALL: To love!

*They toast. The door bell rings.*

CHARLIE: Dolly, get the door.

DOLLY: Bookkeeper? Or butler? Make your mind up.

CHARLIE: And if it's carol singers tell them to piss off. It's only April.

*DOLLY exits.*

LLOYD: You're Charlie's solicitor then?

*They shake hands.*

DANGLE: Harry Dangle. Dangle, Berry and Bush. My card.

LLOYD: *(Reading.)* No win, same fee?

DANGLE: That's us.

LLOYD: Charlie tells me you're brilliant!

DANGLE: Put it this way, I got the Mau Mau off. Are you family Lloyd?

LLOYD: No, no! An old friend. Me and Charlie go way back.

*(Aside.)* Parkhurst.

PAULINE: Dad! Me and Alan, we're gonna go up to my room, to play some records.