

Act I

Scene 1

An untidy backstreet with a bin and litter. A teenaged girl enters and starts to make herself a bed in the corner. She has just settled down and covered herself with a blanket when a young man with a sleeping bag and various other things enters. He looks at the girl who is trying to sleep.

Darren Are you going to sleep here?

Perdita What? Who are you?

Darren I said, are you going to sleep here?

Perdita Yes I am – and what's it got to do with you.

Darren Nothing at all, but I wouldn't try to kip here.

Perdita Well I'm not you – and I am going to sleep here.

Darren Fair enough – you know best I suppose. See you around – or not as the case may be but you'll regret trying to get your head down here. Have a good night – I don't think. *(He starts to leave)*

Perdita *(Getting up)* Alright – why shouldn't I sleep here? I know you're just dying to tell me.

Darren No – you know best. *(He starts to leave again)* Sleep where you like.

Perdita I shall! I don't have to take any notice of you or anyone else any more so you can just bugger off!

Darren Oh charming! You just try to give some little tart a bit of help and guidance and all you get is abuse. I don't know why I bother. I'll come back in the morning and see what's left of you. *(He starts to go again)*

Perdita Well what's keeping you? Not me! I don't need anyone's help – so just sod off!

Darren Don't worry – I'm gone! *(He exits. The girl picks up her blanket and puts it around her shoulders and starts to cry. Darren bursts in again angrily)* And I'll tell you another thing.....*(He stops as he sees she is crying)* I'm sorry love – I didn't mean to upset you. *(He hands her a none-too-clean handkerchief. She looks at it and hands it back)*

Perdita Oh it's not you – I'm just feeling miserable – and I'm cold.

Darren Cold? It's summer! You should have been here in January when it snowed – then it was really cold.

Perdita Have you been sleeping rough since then?

Darren Yeah – nearly a year.

Perdita Why?

Darren Why what?

Perdita Why have you been sleeping rough for nearly a year?

Darren Lots of reasons. But you're a mystery – why should a lovely, young girl like you be dossing in an alley?

Perdita I'm not lovely – not any more. Look at my hair! Perhaps I was – but three days of this sort of thing can bring you down.

Darren Don't be daft – you don't look too bad at all. How old are you?

Perdita What's that got to do with it? It's always the same – how old are you? – it's so unimportant – I'm as old as I am!

Darren I'm sorry, I'm sorry – don't get so upset. I just wondered how old you were that's all – just a friendly enquiry.

Perdita Why?

Darren Well I don't know – I just wondered. If you want to know – I'm twenty-one.

Perdita Are you? I'm seventeen – well nearly eighteen if you really must know.
(Darren sits beside her).

Darren Well what are you doing here? You sound a bit posh – not the sort you usually get sleeping rough. Had a row at home?

Perdita I don't want to talk about it.

Darren Fair enough – do you want a fag?

Perdita Certainly not – it's a disgusting habit – but you smoke if you must.

Darren I don't. *(He puts the tin away)*

Perdita Well why have you got the tobacco then?

Darren Ah – very crafty. I collect fag ends outside the nightclubs – they throw away great long ends just before they go in – sometimes it's nearly the whole fag. I take the tobacco out and put it in my tin, I've got some papers and there you go – instant fags!

Perdita Why bother if you don't smoke?

Darren This is the crafty thing about it. It's a way in – you know. You meet some gits late at night and they're a bit aggressive, so you say "Hear do you want a roll-up?" Suddenly the tension disappears and they're your mates. This tin has been very useful to me I can assure you.

Perdita Perhaps I need something like that in case I meet some nasty people.

Darren Yes. Now look – don't get cross again but if you were to come across some particular types, especially around here at night, it won't be a fag they'll want from you – if you see what I mean.

Perdita I know what you mean – I'm not retarded! Is that what you're after?

Darren No – you're quite safe with me I can assure you.

Perdita Well thank you very much. I know I'm not looking at my best at the moment but.....

Darren Hang on, hang on. Bloody hell – you get angry about everything. I just mean I'm not like that. Besides I like you and I'd like to hang out with you – if you'd like to. We could look out for each other – it's a lot easier if you've got a mate.

Perdita Yes – well – as long as we're just friends.

Darren Yes – just friends. Anyhow – I'm Darren – how do you do. *(He makes a big deal out of shaking her hand)*

Perdita Very well thank you . *(She smiles for the first time)* I'm Perdita.

Darren Who?

Perdita Perdita. It's Greek. Everyone calls me Perd or Perdy.

Darren Well now Perdy what brings you to this grotty place?

Perdita I asked you first

Darren Right – so you did. Not much to tell really. My mother, who is a slut by the way.....

Perdita Oh I'm sure she isn't – what a thing to say about your mother!

Darren Do you know my mother?

Perdita No.

Darren Well take my word for it – she is a slut of the first division – the Man U of the slut world. She smokes like a chimney, drinks like a fish, she don't cook, she

don't clean. I've got two brothers and one sister that I've hardly ever seen. We've all been in and out of care and more foster homes than you can name and about a year ago her latest live-in-lover – creep! – moved in and he tried it on with me!

Perdita He tried to.....

Darren Yeah he did. He must have been ambidextrous.

Perdita What did you do?

Darren I hit him round the head with a toby jug.

Perdita *(Laughing)* A toby jug?

Darren You might laugh but it was the first thing that came to hand – and it was heavy. Gave him a bloody great bump on his forehead. That cooled his ardour I can tell you. I told the old hag what he'd done and what did she say? Don't go upsetting him – he's going to pay for me to go to Torremolinos. Well that was the final straw. I packed a bag and I upped and left and here I am. Now it's your turn.

Perdita I told you – I don't want to talk about it. I shan't tell you again.

Darren Alright, alright in that case I shan't mention it again. Are you hungry?

Perdita No I'm alright thank you.

Darren When did you last eat?

Perdita It was about.....

Darren You don't remember do you?

Perdita Yes I do – it was this morning.

Darren What did you have?

Perdita A Mars bar.

Darren So like I said, are you hungry?

Perdita Yes.

Darren Right. *(He rummages around in his bag)* Now Madam, we have a choice here. *(He reads the labels on some sandwich packs)* Cheese and onion, tuna salad, or smoked salmon with anchovy sauce plus some sausage rolls. Now what is it to be?

Perdita Can I have the smoked salmon?

Darren Your wish is my command. *(He hands her a packet)*

Perdita *(Biting into the sandwich)* Oh these are marvellous – I didn't realise how hungry I was, but how could you afford them?

Darren Haven't you got any money?

Perdita I only had fifteen pounds when I started. I left in a hurry you see and it soon went. Oh this sandwich is just lovely.

Darren Left in a hurry? *(She gives him a sideways look)* Sorry, I said I wouldn't mention it. *(He munches on a sausage roll)* We can't stay here much longer we shall have to move.

Perdita Why? You keep saying that.

Darren Well now my innocent little high class dossier. Over there are three nightclubs and two bars. When they disgorge their drunken clients at about three o'clock on a Saturday which this is, a fair proportion of them will come shouting and vomiting along this lane. Should they find a pretty little chick like you tucked up in the corner well they may wish you a goodnight I suppose, but personally they kicked me and chased me away, threw all my belongings about, smashed my radio... you haven't got a radio so you might be alright.

Perdita Why did they do that?

Darren Just for fun I think – if you can call it fun. I miss my radio.

Perdita Well it's only eleven o'clock so there's no rush.

Darren No – but we want to leave soon so that we get a good place to sleep.

Perdita I'll leave it up to you then – you know best.

Darren Starting to trust me now are you?

Perdita Not altogether.

Darren Quite right! Don't trust anybody.

Perdita I know it's rude to ask as you gave them to me for nothing, but how did you get the money to buy these sandwiches?

Darren Ah I see your thinking. Well nothing illegal if that's what you mean.

Perdita I wasn't thinking that at all.

Darren Yes you were.

Perdita Well I noticed they were from M & S and I know they're quite expensive...

Darren Bit of shoplifting – is that what you think? Are you going to spit them out if they're stolen?

Perdita *(Thinking about it – and then taking another bite)* No.

Darren That's right – morals go out of the door when hunger strikes. Well don't worry they were acquired quite legally. Look at the label.

Perdita Why?

Darren Just look at it. What's the sell-by date?

Perdita The 23rd.

Darren And what's today?

Perdita It must be about the 23rd

Darren Exactly.

Perdita I don't understand. What does that mean?

Darren It means that tomorrow M & S can't sell them – so tonight they threw them away in a skip.

Perdita Yes.

Darren And I go around the back and take them out before the rats do.

Perdita Ugh! How horrible! *(She goes to throw them away)*

Darren Just a minute, just a minute. Look the seals haven't been broken have they? Taste alright don't they? At six o'clock tonight they would have sold them – but luckily for us they didn't.

Perdita So how long were they in the skip with the rats?

Darren *(Laughing)* About ten minutes – and there were no rats – I just made that up.

Perdita Oh that's alright then. *(She carries on eating)* I hate rats!

Darren Drink? *(He gets a bottle of spring water out of the bag)*

Perdita *(Reading the label)* Swiss mountain spring water? There's no sell-by date on this.

Darren I know – and it's never been anywhere near a Swiss mountain either. It's just tap water – I filled it out of the park dog fountain.

Perdita *(Taking a swig)* It tastes very nice – a bit warm.

Darren Sorry – the ice melted. I’ll try and do better next time – that’s if there is a next time.

Perdita Why do you say that?

Darren *(Putting on a posh accent)* Well you might just rush back to Mummy and Daddy tomorrow.

Perdita Just shut up about them! *(She thrusts the bottle back at him and throws the last of her sandwich on the floor)* I told you I don’t want to talk about them – is that clear?

Darren Yes – sorry – calm down, calm down – it was just a joke.

Perdita Well I didn’t think it was very funny.

Darren I know - I said I’m very sorry. I won’t mention them or why you left again.

Perdita Alright. I’m sorry – you’ve been very kind – but I’m trying to forget about it and I want to make a new life for myself well away from them.

Darren Now that I can understand. I try not to think about my mother, but I sometimes have a nice dream about strangling her.

Perdita Darren!

Darren Very slowly. *(They both start laughing and carry on with their meal. Two people enter on the other side of the stage out of earshot of Darren and Perdita. One is an attractive, young woman in her mid-twenties and the other a man in his mid-forties)*

Nick Well – this is kind of area where you’ll find them congregating, but where they disappear to after dark I haven’t a clue. That will be up to you to research.

Sarah Did you say the Council is backing us on this project?

Nick Yes – the Mayor himself has designated it a priority for his year otherwise known as “how can I get my OBE?” Anyway him being big mates with our Editor means that we are joining in with his campaign to help the homeless of this town and to expose the plight of the unfortunates who have no roof over their heads or a peg on which to hang their hats. Stop me Sarah before I burst into tears.

Sarah You are a cynical old sod.

Nick True, but I have enough trouble keeping a roof over my own head to worry about the sick, lame and lazy who are too drugged up or stupid to even get a job at Macdonalds.

Sarah I'm sure they're not all as bad as that.

Nick Now look here Sarah. I know you are young and innocent, although not that innocent from what I've heard.

Sarah What have you heard?

Nick Don't interrupt your elders and betters when they are pontificating. Thank you. You haven't been here long whereas I have languished for years in this two-horse berg. Over the last ten years a boss eyed man with acne and halitosis could have got any number of jobs. Some years ago of course it was difficult to find a suitable job, especially if you lived in the North – silly buggers, serves 'em right – but I can see no reason why I should give my change to an idle git, or pay my Council Tax to support people that are liable to mug me, break into my house, trash my car or deface the walls of my work or home with graffiti. Here endeth the first lesson.

Sarah Is that what you want me to write?

Nick You better bloody well not! No what I, the editor and the mayor want from you is compassion and understanding for these poor, homeless prats, sorry persons, who have never had a chance in life.

Sarah I don't believe you're as hard as you make out.

Nick Oh yes I am – so don't get on the wrong side of me – or you'll find out.

Sarah Right. Well off I go – if I'm not back by nine o'clock tomorrow send out a search party.

Nick Don't joke about things like that – it's a bit rough around here.

Sarah There! You see? You do care.

Nick No I bloody well don't. If something happens to you I'll have Health and Safety camped on my doorstep for letting you go out on your own. I'll have to fill out a thousand forms. Are you sure you don't want one of the young bucks back at the office to come around with you. Most of them would jump at the chance of getting you down dark alleys all night long.

Sarah No – I think I'd be safer with the drop outs and junkies than that lot.

Nick Now I think about it – I really ought to get you to sign a disclaimer to cover my arse.

Sarah What a sweet thought – I was right – you're all heart.

Nick Now don't try to be a smart-arse.

Sarah Too late!

Nick I know they turn you out like that straight from Uni. Now in my day.....

Sarah I know, I know – you had to eat the editor’s poo at an initiation ceremony.

Nick *(Laughing)* I know you said that as a joke, but in fact I swallowed a lot of shit from my editor when I’d just started.

Sarah So what’s changed?

Nick I’ll tell what’s changed – nowadays people like you answer back. We kept it buttoned.

Sarah Oh I’m sorry about that. Well I’d better get on with it – I don’t want to be here all night.

Nick Yes off you go – head held high – and I tell you what, as a special concession, you needn’t come into the office until ten tomorrow.

Sarah You’ll be lucky – tomorrow’s Sunday. I’ll see you after lunch on Monday.

Nick *(Glancing over at the other two in the corner)* You could start with those two over there.

Sarah Do you think they’re sleeping rough?

Nick It looks like it – come on – I’ll give you a start.

Sarah No it’s alright Nick – I want to do this on my own.

Nick *(Walking towards the other two)* Come on. Hey you two – got time for a chat?

Darren Come on let’s go. *(They start to leave)*

Nick What’s your hurry? I only want to ask you a few questions.

Darren Well we don’t want to answer any questions.

Sarah I assure you we won’t keep you more than a few minutes.

Darren Get stuffed! Why do you want to ask us questions? I bet you’re from the council – bloody do-gooders!

Nick *(Pulling a tenner from his pocket)* Could be - it’s worth a tenner for us to chat to you for a few minutes. *(He winks at Sarah. Darren turns and comes back)*

Darren Now why didn’t you say that from the start? *(He tries to take the tenner)*

Nick Questions first – tenner second.

Perdita Do I get ten pounds too?

Nick No it's a tenner between you. (*He looks in his wallet*) I've got two fives if you'd prefer.

Perdita Right – in that case – fire away.

Nick You see Sarah – this is the greatest lubricant in the world. It loosens tongues and almost anything else you want loosening.

Darren A fiver won't loosen me up much

Nick Well it depends how much and how interesting your information is. Looking at you two I wouldn't think it would be worth more than 50p.

Perdita Why do you say that?

Nick Well look at you. You're a runaway who knows nothing and you're a real loser. I've seen you begging outside the shopping mall with that dog of yours. Where is it?

Perdita Have you got a dog?

Darren I did have.

Sarah What happened to it?

Darren I haven't got it any more.

Nick I should think the poor, bloody pooch died of starvation and neglect.

Perdita I hope that's not right Darren.

Darren No it isn't.

Nick Well where is it then?

Darren It's just gone that's all.

Nick Now I think that the fate of that mongrel would be worth a fiver – or perhaps you come out of this pretty badly and would rather we didn't hear about it.

Sarah Leave him alone Nick. He obviously doesn't want to talk about it.

Nick Now Sarah you have got to be a bit more persistent if you're going to succeed in this business. If you can't get information out of the likes of these two, how on earth do you expect to interview important people of intelligence? Now come on – what happened to that bloody dog?

Perdita Is it dead?

Nick Yes.

Perdita Is it like he said? Did it starve?

Darren No!

Nick I bet it did – look at him – if it was sick he’s got no money for a vet.

Darren She wasn’t sick – she was never ill all the time I had her and she got more food than I did. People were more inclined to give food to her than me – she was getting fat.

Nick Right – so what happened to her?

Perdita Did she get run over?

Darren “Girl” – that’s what I called her – she had good road sense. She even crossed the road on zebra crossings. She was really bright and full of fun.

Sarah Ah – you must have loved her.

Darren Yeah – I suppose I did – but I didn’t realise it until she was gone.

Sarah Did she just run away?

Darren No – she wouldn’t leave me – that’s how I got her. She was always at my heels – I never had to use a lead. I had to in town in case she got taken away as a stray.

Nick For God’s sake what happened to the thing? I am not standing around all night listening to this s