

SHIRLEY'S SONG

The third play in a Trilogy

by

AMANDA WHITTINGTON

SchoolPlay Productions Ltd

15 Inglis Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3HU

www.schoolplayproductions.co.uk

SHIRLEY'S SONG

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in order of appearance

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BETH JAMES (21) *a waitress*

SHIRLEY SUTTON (37) *a nightclub owner*

Shirley's Song is set in London, 1984.

The action takes place in the Pink Flamingo, a downmarket nightclub in Soho. The cellar doubles as a dressing room, complete with lighted mirror and changing screen. The nightclub is decorated in a lounge style.

A production should make use of pop music from the early 80's.

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SCENE 1. DRESSING ROOM. Midnight.

(Female impersonator NICKI PICCADILLY sits at his dressing table, looking at his reflection in the mirror. He wears a dressing gown, wig, false nails and full make-up).

Nick: I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth.

(NICK pulls off his wig and starts to remove his make-up. There is a knock on the door).

Nick: Come in, if you're handsome.

(Enter BETH, wearing her Pink Flamingo cocktail waitress uniform. She looks in awe at NICK, who continues to take off his make-up).

Nick: If you want peanuts, they're in a box behind the bar.

Beth: I filled 'em up at midnight.

Nick: I can't change a barrel yet, not with these nails.

Beth: Oh, Nick. You were fantastic.

Nick: Get away.

Beth: I mean it. You were brilliant.

Nick: Even when the mic wire got caught in my heel? I'm nearly arse over tit for "*I Am What I Am*".

Beth: No-one noticed.

Nick: They all heard the backing track slow down.

Beth: When?

Nick: On "*Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend*". I started off as Minnie Mouse, finished up as Barry White.

Beth: I thought that was part of the act.

Nick: I did my best to cover it.

Beth: It was hilarious. You should keep it in.

Nick: Do you think so?

Beth: I loved it. I loved everything about it. The costumes, the wigs, everything.

Nick: And shouldn't you be out there with it all on show? You won't make your

tips stood here gawping at me.

Beth: I just can't believe the transformation.

Nick: Well, transform yourself back into my best waitress.

Beth: Ok. I just wanted to tell you how good you are.

(NICK turns to look at BETH).

Nick: Well, seeing as you're here, you can pour me a drink.

Beth: You should be doing this professionally.

Nick: I am. Large gin.

Beth: I know, I didn't mean-

Nick: And Lucozade.

Beth: Mixed together?

Nick: For energy. Takes it right out of you, performing.

(BETH pours NICK a drink and hands it to him).

Beth: Do you do it every night?

Nick: That's for me to know and you to mind your business.

Beth: Nicki Piccadilly, I mean.

Nick: First rule of showbiz is to leave 'em wanting more. So I miss out Mondays.

Beth: I don't know who was my favourite - Liza or Cher?

Nick: I'm going to have to drop "**Downtown**". There's no one under fifty knows who Pet Clarke is. Then again, there's no one under fifty comes in. The rate we're going, I'll be closing the act with Gracie Fields.

Beth: There was a row of girls sat at the bar.

Nick: They don't come to see me.

Beth: They looked like they were loving it.

Nick: That's what they're paid for.

Beth: How do you mean?

(NICK takes a look at the drink BETH has poured).

Nick: I said a large one.

Beth: It is large.

Nick: Not club measures. Back here, it's a dash of Lucozade filled up with mother's ruin.

Beth: You said gin?

Nick: That is gin. Where've you been all your life?

Beth: Southport.

Nick: Say no more.

Beth: I've got a lot to learn, haven't I?

Nick: You're doing all right for a beginner.

(BETH tops up NICK's glass).

Beth: I hope Miss. Sutton thinks so.

Nick: Miss? You make her sound like a school ma'am.

Beth: Is she married?

Nick: Yeah. To this place.

Beth: So should it be Mrs?

Nick: Unless you're young and good-looking.

Beth: What do you call her?

Nick: The Wicked Witch of the West End.

Beth: She's not wicked, is she?

Nick: Only when she hits the tequila.

Beth: How long have you known her?

Nick: Too long.

Beth: It's gone midnight. She'll be back any time.

Nick: Unless she's copped off. She made out she wasn't bothered but why else do you go abroad on your own? Hey, she went to book one of them 18-30's, you know. They sent her home with a Saga brochure. Take no notice when she says she's 29. She's 45 if she's a day.

Beth: Is she?

Nick: Between you and me, she's 38 next but when you get past 21, what's the difference?

Beth: How old are you?

Nick: You tell me.

Beth: I don't know.

Nick: Go on - have a guess.

Beth: Twenty-six?

(NICK looks in the mirror).

Nick: That's it - I'm having tucks.

Beth: It's the make-up that does it.

Nick: It's working for her Ladyship.

Beth: Are you sure she'll be all right about you taking me on?

Nick: I do the hiring and firing in her absence. I needed a waitress, you needed a job.

Beth: But don't you think she'll want someone with experience?

Nick: She's got enough of her own, luv.

Beth: But what if I don't look the part? What if she sacks me on the spot?

Nick: She's had a fortnight in the sun. She'll be sweetness and light for at least an hour.

Beth: I just want her to like me.

Nick: If she shouts at you, shout back - she'll like that. Now will you stop mithering and get me another?

Beth: Same again?

Nick: Make it a Taboo and Tizer.

Beth: Tizer?

Nick: The surpriser. Hey, did I tell you? I'm doing a Shirley Bassey special for Madam's birthday?

Beth: No?

Nick: (*sings to the tune of "Goldfinger"*) Every night, I hang around the docks - in sequinned frocks.

(*Enter SHIRLEY [37], wearing sunglasses and carrying a suitcase.*)

Shirley: Nick?

Nick: Well, well - the happy wanderer.

Shirley: Oh, Nick

Nick: What's up?

Shirley: You won't believe what's happened.

Nick: What?

Shirley: I don't know where to begin.

Nick: Just tell me, will you?

Shirley: It was it was

Nick: Shirley?

Shirley: It was fantastic!

Nick: You silly cow.

Shirley: It was the best holiday ever. I feel like a new woman.

Nick: Shame you don't look like one.

Shirley: I hope you've been busy 'cos I've spent a bloody fortune.

Nick: It does that to you, Butlins.

Shirley: It started at Heathrow. They took one look at my luggage and upgraded me to first. It's all mother's ruin and millionaires, Nick, you'd scream if you saw it. By the time we touched down, I was high as a kite. Took a taxi to the hotel, arrived at midnight and didn't leave the bar 'til sunrise. When I woke at midday, I thought "Where the hell am I?" Then I opened the curtains and saw

heaven. White sand, blue sky and every waiter a God.

Nick: Them red coats do look lovely.

Shirley: No beer boys, no backpackers and best of all, no bloody families. I'm telling you, Nick, that place had class on tap. Marble floors, poolside waiters and the toilets were pristine. Not that it were snobby, mind. I went topless and no one turned a head.

Nick: What's new?

Shirley: I was out on the lounge by eleven every morning with my Barbara Taylor Bradford and Ricardo for company.

Nick: Ricardo?

Shirley: The barman, darling. Face like an angel. Arse like a peach.

Nick: You didn't?

Shirley: I was old enough to be his mam.

Nick: Since when has that stopped you?

Shirley: I was a model of decorum. A woman of mystery. An English rose. No one thought I'd gone for that but you.

Nick: They don't know you like I do.

Shirley: Cheeky bitch.

Nick: Silly cow.

Shirley: Have you missed me?

Nick: I've missed my night off.

Shirley: I can tell. You look terrible.

Nick: Not that you lift a finger when you're here. It's made no difference, if the truth be told.

Shirley: Really?

Nick: Really. I've barely noticed you've been gone.

(SHIRLEY opens her duty free bag and takes out a bottle).

Shirley: Oh? So you won't want your present then?

Nick: Tequila!

(SHIRLEY takes out a box of cigarettes).

Shirley: And these are mine, right? Keep your thieving hands off.

(As NICK opens the bottle, he turns to BETH).

Nick: Babe? Fetch us the necessary.

Beth: Ok.

Nick: And bring a club sandwich for Judith Chalmers here.

Shirley: No, ta. I've been eating fit to burst.

Nick: I hope you'll fit back into your drag frocks.

Shirley: Well, if I don't, I'll have to borrow yours. They're cut for comfort, so I'm told.

Nick: I'm a 40, double-D.

Shirley: That's your back.

Beth: Excuse me? What is the necessary?

Shirley: Little glasses. Salt and lime.

Beth: Of course.

(Exit BETH).

Nick: We'll drink to absent friends. If only you were.

Shirley: Who's she?

Nick: Beth. New waitress.

Shirley: What happened to Sue?

Nick: Sue? She left me right in the lurch. Tuesday night, she came in here to fetch the peanuts. Two hours on, I find her slumped behind that screen with a bottle of Barcardi and a boy from **Les Mis**.

Shirley: So you sacked her?

Nick: She walked out.

Shirley: No?

Nick: Says he's got her a job in the chorus.

Shirley: Dizzy cow.

Nick: I was at my wits end 'til Anne of Green Gables wandered in. "Got any job?", she says. I put her in feathers and she's not looked back.

Shirley: Bit quiet, in't she?

Nick: Hard-working, though. Never stops. Stick a broom up her arse, she'll sweep the floor.

(NICK sweeps SHIRLEY into a waltz around the dressing room).

Shirley: You are vulgar.

Nick: Welcome home.

SCENE 2. DRESSING ROOM. The following night.

(Enter BETH. She sits at the table, takes out a notebook from her pocket and starts sketching. She is startled to hear SHIRLEY from behind the screen).

Shirley: Pass us a fag, Nick.

Beth: It's Beth.

Shirley: If it's cashews you're after, we keep 'em in the cloakroom.

(SHIRLEY puts her head around the screen. BETH closes the notebook. SHIRLEY notices the book as BETH puts it in her pocket).

Beth: Why the cloakroom?

Shirley: So Nick can't get 'em. He eat six bags at a time, greedy pig.

(SHIRLEY goes back behind the screen).

Beth: Would you like one of my cigarettes?

Shirley: Who gave you the green light for a fag break?

Beth: Nick said I could have five minutes. Do you mind?

Shirley: Not if we're quiet.

Beth: There's been a bit of trouble on the door.

Shirley: Oh, aye?

Beth: With a stag party. Nick turned them away. They didn't seem to like it.

Shirley: Did they take a pop?

Beth: Pop?

Shirley: Did they hit him?

Beth: No. He sent them off smiling in the end.

Shirley: A born diplomat, is Nick. His Dad's a Minister.

Beth: Church Minister?

Shirley: Cabinet - but keep that to yourself.

Beth: You wouldn't think he'd got any secrets.

Shirley: Everyone has secrets. Have you cleaned them mirrors?

Beth: Top to bottom.

Shirley: Buffed up the brass along the bar?

Beth: I've polished the piano, put out the ashtrays, lit the candles. Oh and I've done the ladies room like you said.

Shirley: Fresh soap?

Beth: And lavender water.

Shirley: It's them little touches make 'em come back for more.

Beth: I thought it was the men we're looking after?

Shirley: Men go where the girls are, don't they?

Beth: There's one that keeps pinching my bum.

Shirley: Comb-over hairdo? Hitler 'tache?

Beth: That's him. What should I do?

Shirley: Let him. He's good for ten quid at the end of the night.

Beth: The last of the big spenders.

Shirley: Take care of the little blokes and they'll take care of you.

Beth: Is that what you do? Is that why they all like you?

Shirley: Who says they do?

Beth: They were all asking for you last week.

Shirley: Absence makes the heart grow fonder, so they say. Pass my boa.

Beth: Which one?

Shirley: White. Shows off me tan.

(BETH picks up SHIRLEY's feather boa, puts it round her neck and breathes its perfume. SHIRLEY comes out from behind the screen).

Beth: I'm sorry.

(SHIRLEY takes the boa from BETH and puts it on).

Shirley: There's nowt wrong with wanting the good things in life.

Beth: If you know how to get them.

Shirley: Work hard. Aim high. Don't look down.

Beth: Even when there's things you've left behind?

Shirley: What you leave behind, you can't have wanted in the first place. How do I look?

(BETH looks at SHIRLEY but can't seem to reply).

Shirley: That good, eh?

(Enter NICK).

Nick: There's been a right palaver out there. You'll never guess who's staggered in?

Shirley: Not Barbara Windsor again?

Nick: That bloody Sue! Bold as bednobs, shouting the odds, telling all and sundry she's on the guest list.

Shirley: I hope you told her where to go.

Nick: I would have but you'll never guess who's arm she's hanging off? Only Ollie, if you please.

Shirley: Oliver? I've not seen him since Tommy went down.

Nick: Well, he's in the V.I.P. booth with a party of ten who'll be ripping up the seats if they don't get served. Now, far be it from me to spoil the party, but where's my waitress?

Shirley: On her way.

(Exit BETH).

Nick: That Sue's gonna run her ragged.

Shirley: It won't do her no harm.

Nick: You'd better get out there, keep an eye. Love the tan.

(Exit NICK. SHIRLEY prepares to make her entrance).

Shirley: Don't look down.

(Exit SHIRLEY).

SCENE 3. NIGHTCLUB. Continuous action.

(NICK and BETH work the bar as SHIRLEY makes her grand entrance. Waving and smiling at the crowd, she takes her place on a barstool and lights a cigarette).

Beth: *(looking across the bar)* He's not like he is on the telly.

Nick: Just make sure you get a tip before he passes out.

Beth: How?

(NICK whispers in her ear).

Beth: You're joking?

Nick: That's worth fifty quid of anybody's money. Now take this to Maggie Thatcher before she dies of thirst.

(NICK gives BETH a cocktail, which she takes over to SHIRLEY).

Beth: Flamingo Flip.

Shirley: Just what the doctor ordered.

Beth: Can I get you any peanuts?

Shirley: No, ta.

Beth: Cashews?

Shirley: Bless you.

Beth: Those things in the shell?

Shirley: Pistachios.

Beth: I'd never seen them 'til I came here.

Shirley: Ollie all right, is he?

Beth: I think so.

Shirley: Keeping him happy, are you?

Beth: I'm doing my best.

Nick: Oi, Beth?

Shirley: Chop, chop.

(BETH returns to NICK, who hands her a bottle of wine).

Nick: See him in the tight white T-shirt? Give him this Merlot. Compliments of the house.

Beth: Is he famous?

Nick: Legendary.

(BETH takes the bottle of wine to the table).

Shirley: Nicky, darling?

(SHIRLEY beckons NICK over to her barstool).

Shirley: I do hope he'll be paying for that.

Nick: You bet your life he is.

(NICK walks back to the bar but SHIRLEY calls him back).

Shirley: Oi? Lili Marlene?

Nick: Can't you see I'm busy?

Shirley: What's Beth been asking?

Nick: Where do you keep the polish? What's a Flamingo Flip? Does your chewing

gum lose its flavour on the bedpost overnight?

Shirley: Keen, in't she?

Nick: Just don't stand still, she'll shine your shoes.

Shirley: Too keen, in my book. Too fond of questions.

Nick: She wants to get on. What's wrong with that?

(BETH comes over to join them).

Beth: Excuse me? What do I do when there's nothing to do?

Shirley: Find summat.

Nick: Come on, luv. Me stilettos want sharpening.

(NICK guides BETH back behind the bar).

Beth: She's going to sack me, isn't she?

Nick: 'Course not.

Beth: She thinks I'm useless.

Nick: No-one can do it like Shirley, that's all. She started as a Flamingo Girl and clawed her way up. Just remember that and you'll get along fine.

Beth: I can't do right for doing wrong.

Nick: What did I tell you when you came, eh? You do your job and leave Godzilla to me.

(BETH starts to take her apron off).

Nick: What are you doing?

Beth: I've made a mistake.

Nick: You can't walk out. Not in front of bloody Sue.

Beth: I should never have come here.

Nick: But you did, didn't you? All the way from the frozen North. Now you're here, at least give us a chance.

Beth: It's not you, it's me.

Nick: You're the second-best waitress that's ever walked this floor. We need you, Beth.

Beth: Really?

Nick: Would Nicki Piccadilly tell a lie?

Beth: Are you on tonight?

Nick: I'll sing 'Stay Awhile' just for you, how's that?

Beth: *(looking at SHIRLEY)* Is she like this with everyone?

Nick: I've been here three years and I'm still on trial. Stick around. Keep me

company.

(BETH puts her apron back on).

Beth: Will you tell her what I said?

Nick: My lips are sealed. Now, pucker up and go fetch that fifty quid.

(Exit BETH. NICK goes across to SHIRLEY).

Shirley: Trouble in paradise?

Nick: Go easy on her, will you? I nearly had a mutiny on me hands.

Shirley: I don't like how she looks at me.

Nick: Well, you'll have to grin and bear it if you like having bar staff.

Shirley: I caught her writing.

Nick: Hallelujah! We've got one who can.

Shirley: In a notebook. She hid it when she saw me.

Nick: Perhaps she's planning for your 50th?

Shirley: Perhaps she's making notes?

Nick: What kind of notes?

Shirley: Well, you can bet they're not love letters.

Nick: You don't think she's a reporter? You don't think she's here 'cos of my Dad?

Shirley: When you took her on, did you get proof of her age?

Nick: She's 21, she told me.

Shirley: But you checked her out?

Nick: Sue was out for the count, I was thinking on me feet.

Shirley: You silly queen.

Nick: Since when have we bothered with paperwork?

Shirley: Since we've been spied on by Licensing.

Nick: Or Customs?

Shirley: Or the bloody taxman.

Nick: Oh 'eck. I've just sent her out for fifty quid.

Shirley: I'll give her a tip if she comes over here. Don't play games with Shirley Sutton 'cos she's seen it all before.

Nick: Dodging tax? In't that what your Tommy was done for?

Shirley: Among other things - and he weren't my Tommy.

Nick: I'm not cut out for life in the pokey. I couldn't stand them scratchy pants.

Shirley: Stay calm. Keep smiling. We've got nothing to hide.

Nick: Except the cash-only door and the back-pocket wage bill.

Shirley: It's members only and their guests. Any tips go straight in the jar.

Nick: What jar?

(Enter BETH, waving a fifty pound note. SHIRLEY and NICK smile through gritted teeth).

Shirley: The one you're going to put by the till. Now!

(NICK goes over to BETH and takes the note).

Nick: Aren't you a clever girl? That's one for the pot.

Beth: But I thought

Nick: Didn't I tell you? We pool 'em, declare 'em and divi 'em up. All above board and through the books. Hey-ho; I think our Leader wants a word?

Beth: What have I done?

Nick: Won Employee of the Month, now run along.

(BETH goes over to SHIRLEY).

Shirley: Settling in, are you?

Beth: I think so.

Shirley: Lot to remember, in't there?

Beth: More than I expected.

Shirley: When you're rushed off your feet, certain things slip your mind. Like forgetting to say ta for all your efforts.

Beth: That's ok.

Shirley: And taking down your credentials.

Beth: What credentials?

Shirley: Full name, date of birth.

Beth: Elizabeth James. I'm 21.

Shirley: But we need it in writing. Bring your birth certificate in with you tomorrow, there's a luv?

Beth: I'm not sure where it is.

Shirley: Well, you'd better start looking. No proof of age, no job.

Beth: Don't you believe me?

Shirley: It's the law. My hands are tied. Same again.

(SHIRLEY hands BETH her glass).

Beth: That man in the corner? He says he'll play if you sing.

Shirley: Tell him I've not drunk enough.

Beth: I didn't know you could.

Shirley: Why should you?

Nick: I have of late - but wherefore I know not - lost all my mirth; forgone all custom of exercises, and indeed it goes so very heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look, you, this brave o'er hanging firmament, this magestical roof fretted with golden fire - why it appeareth no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man

Beth: How noble in reason. How infinite in faculty. In form and moving, how express and admirable.

(NICK is surprised and embarrassed to see BETH and SHIRLEY listening).

Beth: We read it at school. But not like that.

Nick: I've got an audition. I'll go if I've got the time.

Beth: You'd better. That was beautiful.

(SHIRLEY comes behind NICK and looks in the mirror).

Shirley: See this face? It's going to be famous one day.

Nick: And so says every other unknown actor.

Shirley: But none of them have got what you've got.

Nick: Bugger off.

Shirley: It's you should bugger off. Throwing away your talent in a dive like this.

Nick: The place'd fall apart without me and you know it. Are you getting the drinks in or what?

Shirley: Pardon me - what did your last slave die of?

Nick: Alcoholic poisoning. Chop-chop.

(Exit SHIRLEY).

Beth: Did you go to drama school?

Nick: I left after a year. Couldn't find the fees.

Beth: Didn't your family -

Nick: I take care of myself.

Beth: Mine put me through art college. Textile design. Look, I hope you don't mind but I've come up with some ideas. It's not that I don't like what you've got, it's just -

(BETH takes out her notebook and opens it for NICK).

Nick: Costumes?

Beth: Here's how you could change from Marlene to Cher. If you Velcro round the bust you won't need Scotchguard. And this one would be great for Norma Desmond.

Nick: Love the turban.

Beth: There's a loop sewn in the dress that you slip around your finger. When you lift up your arms, up it comes.

Nick: What a finale!

Beth: I've seen that fabric on the market for six pounds a metre. I could run you something up if you like?

Nick: Hang on? You've been sketching out costumes in this book?

Beth: Tell me to mind my own business if you like.

Nick: Is that all you've been doing?

Beth: I want to be a designer. I practice all the time.

Nick: *(calling)* Shirley?

Beth: She won't be angry, will she?

Nick: Shirley, luv? Have you got a minute?

Shirley: *(off)* No.

Nick: It's important.

Shirley: I'm busy.

Nick: It's about Beth's book.

(Enter SHIRLEY, with tequila glasses, sliced lemon and salt).

Shirley: What book?

Nick: She's been making observations.

Shirley: Has she?

Nick: I think you'd better have a look.

(SHIRLEY takes the book and reluctantly opens it).

Nick: Fan-bloody-tastic, in't it? That's Marlene, Cher, Norma Desmond from Sunset. Beth's going to run 'em all up.

Shirley: Drag frocks?

(BETH turns the page for SHIRLEY).

Beth: And then I thought I'd have a look at the uniform. The trouble with stilettos is that I can't get round the tables fast enough. And the feathers in my hair catch the chandeliers.

Shirley: I like the feathers.

Beth: Don't get me wrong, I love what you've done. I just think it needs updating, that's all. Perhaps we could embroider a flamingo on the tops?

Shirley: Perhaps we could?

Beth: I could make you up a sample, free of charge?

Shirley: I'll think about it.

Beth: Will you? Will you, really?

Shirley: Haven't you got a bus to catch?

Beth: Gosh, is that the time?

Nick: Come in early tomorrow, take me vital statistics.

Beth: I can run up Norma Desmond on my night off.

Shirley: Good, now run along.

Beth: Night, then?

Shirley: Night, night.

Nick: Sleep tight.

Shirley: Don't let the bed bugs bite.

(Exit BETH).

Nick: Would you like a Valium?

Shirley: Would you like fifty?

Nick: I couldn't resist it.

Shirley: You're giving me a migraine.

Nick: Best take your medicine, then.

(NICK pours two glasses of tequila).

Shirley: It still don't explain why she's been looking at me funny.

Nick: She can't get over what you're wearing.

Shirley: Excuse me? I paid an arm and a leg for this.

Nick: Just shows that money can't buy style.

Shirley: So what are we drinking to?

Nick: My gorgeous new wardrobe.

Shirley: Your new wardrobe.

(NICK and SHIRLEY begin their ritual of tequila, lemon and salt).

Nick: Hits the spot, don't it? What now?

(NICK pours another and raises his glass).

Shirley: To the Inland Revenue.

Nick: The Inland Revenue.

(They drink again and gasp).

Shirley: That's gone right to the back of me eyes.

Nick: It's made me teeth go soft.

(NICK pours another and raises his glass).

Shirley: To drag frocks.

Nick: Drag frocks.

(They drink again. Enter BETH).

Beth: I missed my bus. It's raining. Can I wait here for the next one?

Nick: Take a pew, I'll get a glass.

Beth: I don't drink tequila.

Shirley: Fetch her a coke.

Beth: I'd love a brandy.

Nick: Brandy and coke, then?

Beth: No - just brandy.

Nick: Coming up.

(Exit NICK).

Shirley: How often do they run?

Beth: Every hour.

Shirley: It's a long time since I caught a bus.

Beth: They seem to stop on every street. Sometimes, I don't get home 'til daybreak.

Shirley: Buses through the night? When I first came to London, I couldn't get over it.

Beth: When was that?

Shirley: Before your time.

Beth: Where did you come from?

Shirley: The middle of nowhere.

Beth: What do you mean?

(Enter NICK, with a bottle of brandy).

Nick: What's this? Truth or dare?

Shirley: She wants a glass not a bottle.

Nick: I've got nothing to hide, have you, Beth?

Beth: Everybody's got secrets.

Shirley: But you don't know my dares. Last time we played this, he got arrested.

Nick: We'll drink and Beth can ask the questions. Me first.

Shirley: Why are you so annoying?

Nick: Beth, I said. You know why.

Beth: Is your Dad really a Minister?

Nick: *(to SHIRLEY)* Well, thank you, Mouth Almighty.

Shirley: You'd have told her yourself after a few of them.

Nick: We're a fascinating family. Father's in the cabinet, son's in the closet.

Beth: Doesn't he know what you do?

Nick: You've had your question. Next.

(NICK pours a tequila for SHIRLEY, which she drinks).

Shirley: Come on then, Beth. Do your worst.

Nick: Ask her about her sordid past. Ask her about the gangster boyfriend and the racketeering and the beehive.

Shirley: He was a businessman, he weren't my boyfriend, I did not have a beehive and you said this was Beth's call?

Beth: What were you doing in 1963?

Nick: In for the kill. Watch her squirm out of this one.

Shirley: In 1963, I met a man called Tommy King who now lives at Her Majesty's Pleasure and who gave me this club to keep me in the style to which I was accustomed. Two and a bit decades on, I'm youngish, free and single and I don't regret a moment. I thank you.

Beth: Is that all you remember?

Shirley: I'd like to change the rules of this game. I'd like to ask our new friend a question.

Nick: Chin-chin.

(NICK tops up BETH's glass and she drinks the brandy).

Shirley: I'd like to ask Beth why she's come here?

Beth: I came to London to -

Shirley: No, luv. Why did you come here?

Beth: To meet people like you.

Nick: You want to get out more.

Shirley: You don't know anything about me.

Beth: You're a Cancer.

Nick: Good guess.

Beth: Hard shell, soft centre. Easily hurt - but can treat others harshly, especially when threatened.

Nick: What am I, what am I?

Beth: Creative, generous, likes centre stage? Leo.

Shirley: Gemini.

Nick: I might have Leo rising? Well, with any luck.

Shirley: She's making it up.

Beth: Got you right though, didn't I?

Shirley: You were lucky.

Beth: First of July, 1947.

(Beat).

Shirley: I think you'd better go.

Beth: My bus isn't due.

Shirley: Get a cab.

Beth: I don't want to.

Shirley: And have tomorrow night off.

Beth: But -

Shirley: I said go -

Beth: It's not what you think -

Shirley: Before I say summat I'll regret.

(Exit BETH).

Nick: She must have read your mind.

Shirley: More like my passport.

Nick: What now?

(SHIRLEY pours another drink and raises her glass).

Shirley: To knowing who you can trust.

Nick: Trust.

(SHIRLEY and NICK clink glasses).

SCENE 5. DRESSING ROOM. Two days later.

(NICK sits at the dressing table, plucking his eyebrows. Enter BETH, in her waitress uniform).

Nick: About time, too. I've given you up for dead.

Beth: She's had me polishing the fishtank for the last half an hour. She'll have my guts for garters if she notices I've gone.

Nick: Quick sticks, then. Let's have a gander.

Beth: First things first.

(BETH hands NICK her driving licence).

Nick: What's this?

Beth: My driving licence. Proof of age.

Nick: *(reading)* You've just had a birthday.

Beth: My 21st.

Nick: I didn't doubt you. It's Shirl you need to show.

Beth: Can't you tell her?

Nick: She'll want it from the horse's mouth.

Beth: Please, Nick. You know she'll take your word.

Nick: Oh, anything for a quiet life. Now, will you please let the catsuit out the bag?

Beth: Before we start -

Nick: I thought you were in a hurry?

Beth: I am - but has she said anything about the other night?

Nick: What other night?

Beth: The three of us in here. Starsigns and tequila.

Nick: Not a word, why?

Beth: I spoke out of turn.

Nick: Oh, that was the drink talking.

Beth: And she's not brought it up?

Nick: I'll say one thing for the Fuhrer, she doesn't hold a grudge. She'll flare up then it's forgotten, so come on - don't keep me in suspenders.

Beth: All right, all right

(BETH opens her bag and takes out a turban-style hat).

Beth: Da-na!

Nick: That won't cover my essentials.

Beth: It's the turban.

Nick: I can see that. Where's the frock?

Beth: Still on my overlocker.

Nick: But you promised.

Beth: Do you want it now or do you want it perfect?

Nick: I'm excited, that's all. I've never had my own designer.

Beth: It'll be worth the wait. Now shut up and try it for size.

(NICK puts on the turban and looks in the mirror).

Nick: *(as Norma Desmond)* "I'm still big. It's the nightclub that got small".

Beth: How does it feel?

Nick: A bit snug.

Beth: That's your big head.

Nick: Cheeky mare.

Beth: I've made the robe in gold with a mandarin collar, cut on the bias like you said.

Nick: *(looking in the mirror)* Elaine Paige, eat your heart out.

Beth: I bought a pair of long gloves from a jumble sale and found a fantastic pair of slingbacks in a skip.

Nick: What size?

Beth: Six.

Nick: I'm a nine, you mullet.

Beth: Well, you'll just have to suffer for your art. Now, make sure you tuck your hair right under.

(BETH adjusts the turban. Enter SHIRLEY, unseen by BETH and NICK).

Nick: *(as NORMA)* "I'm ready for my close-up, Miss Sutton".

Beth: And draw on your eyebrows like you've just had a shock.

Shirley: I'll give you a shock if you don't get a shift on.

(BETH turns to face SHIRLEY).

Nick: She'll be there in a minute.

Shirley: *(to BETH)* You - upstairs, now.

Nick: She's doing me Norma Desmond.

Shirley: I don't care if she's doing the can-can, I want her working.

Beth: This is work.

Shirley: You're a cocktail waitress.

Nick: And a designer.

Shirley: And you can take that dishcloth off your head.

Beth: I'm only trying to help. To improve things.

Shirley: Who says they need improving?

Beth: I just thought -

Shirley: Well, I don't pay you to think, love. I pay you to get upstairs and do as you're told. God, it's like Workers Playtime down here.

Beth: Will you let me finish?

Shirley: I beg your pardon?

Beth: I said -

Shirley: I heard you the first time. You can finish, all right. You can finish right now.

Nick: Steady on, Shirl.

Shirley: Stay out of it, you.

Beth: You're sacking me?

Shirley: Right first time. So pack up your stuff and skiddaddle.

Beth: You're not being fair.

Shirley: Yeah, well, life's not fair. You've got five minutes to get out of your costume.

Beth: You've got a club full of customers.

Shirley: You weren't bothered about that when you were down here dressing up.

Nick: Shirl, we need a waitress.

Shirley: Not if you pull your weight.

Nick: I work harder than anyone in this place.

Shirley: You did. You've been running round like a chorus girl since she came along.

Nick: Ha!

Beth: You can't do this.

Shirley: Are you still here?

Beth: You can't just send me away like I'm nothing.

Shirley: You are nothing. Girls like you are ten-a-penny round here and the sooner you wise up to that, the better.

Beth: I'm more than you'll ever be.

Nick: Take it easy, Beth.

Beth: No. She's not the only one who can shout.

Shirley: Four minutes and counting.

(BETH goes behind the screen to change out of her waitress uniform).

Beth: You want to know what you are?

Shirley: Save your breath, love. I've heard it all before.

Beth: A sad, lonely, pathetic old lush.

Shirley: Who are you calling old?

Beth: Take a look in the mirror. You're more of a drag queen than he is.

Nick: I'm a female impersonator.

Beth: So's she.

Shirley: Three minutes.

Beth: All you've got in the world is a tatty backstreet dive. There's no-one to go home to, no-one to take care of ...

Shirley: I'll take care of you in a minute.

Beth: Not even a friend to go with you on holiday.

Shirley: That's how I like it.

Beth: Must be a lonely life, Shirley Sutton.

Shirley: And you'd know all about life at sweet sixteen?

Beth: I'm not sixteen. Still, what do you care?

Shirley: She's full of it.

Beth: Maybe I am. But it's better than being hollow and empty and still wearing mini-skirts at forty.

Shirley: I'm 37, right? Thirty-seven.

(NICK picks up BETH's driving licence and gives it to SHIRLEY).

Nick: And she's 21, look.

(SHIRLEY reads the licence).

Shirley: Is this her date of birth?

Nick: 'Course it is.

Shirley: How do you know?

Nick: I take people on trust, Shirl. You should try it.

(SHIRLEY hands the licence back).

Shirley: Tell her to come tomorrow night for her wages.

Nick: Don't you think she deserves a second chance?

Shirley: Eight o'clock sharp.

Nick: Shirley?

Shirley: I've got a club to run.

(Exit SHIRLEY. NICK takes off his turban and throws it in the bin).

SCENE 6. NIGHTCLUB. *The following night.*

*(Enter SHIRLEY, carrying a shoebox. She pours herself a drink. She turns on the sound system and plays **What's Love Got To Do With It** by Tina Turner. SHIRLEY sits on a barstool with the box on her knee. Enter BETH. She turns the music off).*

Beth: The sign says closed. Have you not got the staff? Where's Nick?

Shirley: Auditioning.

Beth: What's wrong?

(SHIRLEY hands the shoebox to BETH).

Shirley: This should answer your questions.

(BETH opens the box. Inside, she finds yellowing official papers, photographs and baby clothes. She takes each one out in turn).

Beth: How did you know?

Shirley: I put two and two together.

Beth: I wanted to tell you.

Shirley: Clever girl, aren't you? There's not many people put one over on me.

Beth: I didn't mean to. I only came to see where you lived. Nick saw me looking, thought I'd come for a job. He dragged me in and dressed me up before he even asked my name.

Shirley: Have you told him?

Beth: No. Haven't you?

Shirley: It's ancient history.

Beth: Then why have you kept all my things?

Shirley: I knew you'd be coming. One day, I knew you'd come.

(BETH takes out a photograph).

Beth: Is this you and me?

(SHIRLEY lights a cigarette).

Beth: Where was it taken?

Shirley: I don't recall.

Beth: Have a look.

Shirley: No, ta.

Beth: Have you got another?

Shirley: That's your lot, I'm afraid.

Beth: Don't you want to keep one?

Shirley: No.

Beth: Don't you want anything?

Shirley: Just take it, will yer?

Beth: You're giving me everything?

Shirley: That's right.

Beth: Everything but a reason.

(Beat).

Shirley: Have they kicked you out, your Mum and Dad?

Beth: Of course not.

Shirley: Do they know where you are?

Beth: They know I'm in London. I don't want to hurt them.

Shirley: Good to you, are they?

Beth: The best.

Shirley: Then go back home and be glad of what you've got.

Beth: I am. But it never stopped me thinking about you. Wondering where you were, who you were-

Shirley: Well, now you know.

Beth: I didn't mean what I said last night.

Shirley: 'Course you did.

Beth: I was scared 'cos you were sending me away.

Shirley: There's nothing for you here.

Beth: There's you.

Shirley: You don't know me. You don't wanna know me.

Beth: Do you think I'd have taken all your crap unless I did?

(Beat).

Shirley: How did you find me?

Beth: Got my file. Saw your name and address. Lucky for me you never went very far.

Shirley: I did, as it happens. I left home at sixteen. Came all the way to London on my own.

Beth: Because of me?

Shirley: I thought you were the reason. You were just the excuse.

Beth: What did your mother say?
Shirley: She left home before I did.
Beth: And your father?
Shirley: I've not spoken to him since.

(BETH takes another photo out of the box).

Beth: Who's the lad with the guitar?
Shirley: Turn it over.
Beth: *(reading from the back)* Tony Cooke, 18.
Shirley: You've got his eyes.

(BETH looks up at SHIRLEY).

Beth: It said "father unknown" in the documents.
Shirley: I knew. I didn't want no-one else to.
Beth: *(reading)* On the yard at Cambridge Street. Where's Cambridge Street?
Shirley: Mansfield.
Beth: He wanted me, didn't he?
Shirley: I don't recall.
Beth: Yes, you do. You've told me where he is.
Shirley: He was in a group. He dreamed of being discovered. Go up there and make it happen.
Beth: But I've only just found you.

(Beat).

Shirley: There's a cheque in the box. Enough to start afresh.
Beth: I didn't come here for money.
Shirley: Call it severance pay.
Beth: So that's it? A four figure cheque and a shoebox?
Shirley: It's all I've got to give.

(BETH hands the cheque back to SHIRLEY).

Beth: Take it.
Shirley: I don't want it.
Beth: Me neither.

(BETH rips up the cheque. It scatters on the floor. BETH picks up the box and

starts to leave).

Beth: You know what? I'm glad you gave me up. You didn't want me but you gave me to people who did. I'll always be grateful for that.

(BETH walks behind SHIRLEY to the door).

Shirley: It suits you.

Beth: What does?

Shirley: Beth. I called you Jessica.

Beth: Why?

(Beat).

Shirley: Look, you're all right, aren't you?

Beth: Yeah.

Shirley: You're not in trouble?

Beth: No.

Shirley: Good.

Beth: Are you?

Shirley: No.

Beth: Are you sure about that?

Shirley: Go on, now. Clear off.

Beth: Do you want my number?

Shirley: And lock the door behind you.

(Exit BETH. SHIRLEY picks up the ripped cheque. Enter NICK).

Nick: Shirl? Shirl! Open up you lazy mare and put the champagne on ice. Turns out the male lead's dropped out so they got me in to read for the psycho son. It's right up my street, he ends up strangling his mother. I took a deep breath, thought of you and knocked 'em dead. We've got a month up north and a national tour so we might as well say goodbye now, love. I'll not want to know you when I'm famous.

Shirley: Well done.

Nick: What's up?

Shirley: Nothing.

Nick: Shirl, what's happened?

Shirley: I'm all right.

Nick: Tell me?

Shirley: Honestly, I'm fine.

Nick: I'd better open up then.

Shirley: No. Have a night off.

Nick: I can't leave you to manage on your own.

Shirley: You won't be. We're shut.

Nick: Why?

Shirley: 'Cos I say so. Go and celebrate.

Nick: Are you sure?

Shirley: 'Course I am.

Nick: So where are we going?

Shirley: Not me. Not tonight.

(NICK gives SHIRLEY a kiss).

Nick: You've got five minutes, Shirley Sutton. My treat.

(Exit NICK. SHIRLEY goes to the bar and pours herself a drink and puts the music on loud. She is determined not to cry).

SCENE 6. DRESSING ROOM. One week later.

(SHIRLEY sits at the dressing table, reading a book as NICK paces the floor).

Nick: *(irate)* You've done it again, haven't you? Pulled the blinds, shut the door, locked yourself away from all that's good in your life. Don't deny it. I've seen you do it time and time and time again. People get close so you push 'em away and they topple like dominoes, one after another. Well, I'm not gonna be the last domino. I'm not gonna play your little game. You can't push me away. Not when I've already gone. That's right, gone. And don't try to stop me. We both know it's what you wanted from the start.

(NICK walks to the door. SHIRLEY applauds).

Shirley: Bravo!

Nick: I've not got it yet.

Shirley: You have from where I'm standing.

Nick: Did you get the sense that he doesn't want to leave?

Shirley: He does want to leave.

Nick: I think he's calling her bluff.

Shirley: He wants to break away but the ties are too strong. That's why he has to kill her.

Nick: Tragic, in't it?

Shirley: 'Tis the way you do it.

Nick: Am I really bad?

Shirley: Well ?

Nick: Come on, give it to me straight - and I don't say that very often.

Shirley: Are you sure you can take it?

Nick: Yeah, come on.

Shirley: You're fantastic.

Nick: Do you think so?

(SHIRLEY gives NICK a kiss).

Shirley: You'll steal the show. Now, I've got work to do.

(SHIRLEY walks away).

Nick: Can we have a look at the next scene?

Shirley: You're not in it.

Nick: I know. You are.

Shirley: Don't be daft.

(NICK hands SHIRLEY a train ticket).

Nick: Two characters on a train to Mansfield. A mother and a daughter. If it were a play, you'd call it "Return Ticket".

(SHIRLEY gives the ticket back).

Shirley: You shouldn't waste your money on me.

Nick: I didn't. It's from Beth.

Shirley: Have you seen her?

Nick: I went round to fetch me frock.

Shirley: I bet she was calling me blind.

Nick: No. She understands.

(SHIRLEY makes a move to go).

Shirley: You've got a train to catch.

Nick: Haven't you?

Shirley: I've got to open up.

Nick: You can say that again.

Shirley: I'm not going, Nick. I'm needed here.

Nick: You're right.

(NICK begins to unpack his suitcase).

Shirley: What are you doing? Your train leaves in an hour.

Nick: It'll find it's way without me.

Shirley: Nick?

Nick: We both go or we both stay.

Shirley: But it's your big break.

Nick: They'll be other auditions, other parts. It's your chance that comes once in a lifetime.

(SHIRLEY starts to repack NICK's case).

Shirley: You're taking that job.

Nick: I've got a job.

Shirley: You did have. You're sacked.

Nick: Yeah, right.

Shirley: I mean it. I don't want you back.

Nick: I don't care, you've got me.

Shirley: I've took on a replacement.

Nick: Already?

Shirley: Full time. Permanent. Sorry.

Nick: You've got a new me?

Shirley: That's right.

Nick: Who?

Shirley: Never you mind.

Nick: Why didn't you tell me?

Shirley: It must have slipped me mind.

Nick: When do they start?

Shirley: Tonight. So that's that. Job done.

Nick: You said you'd keep it open.

Shirley: You're going to be a star, Nick. You won't be coming back.

(NICK closes his suitcase and walks to the door).

Nick: So how did you find 'em? This replacement?

Shirley: Put a card in the window.

Nick: Best Mate Wanted?

Shirley: What's the matter with you?

Nick: Well, if you don't know now, you never will.

Shirley: Oh? We're playing games now, are we?

Nick: You had a baby, Shirl. And you never told me.

(Beat).

Shirley: No.

Nick: Slip your mind, did it? Or perhaps you didn't trust me enough -

Shirley: I wanted to -

Nick: But I trusted you. I told you things I'd never told anyone. I thought you felt the same. I was wrong.

(NICK goes to walk out of the dressing room).

Shirley: Nick?

Nick: Forget it, Shirl. You're good at that.

Shirley: Pink flowers, that's all I can remember. Pink flowered wallpaper gone yellow from the sun. And it were streaming through the window that Sunday afternoon. It came in with the midwife and his mother. Tommy said he heard me screaming right down the Old Kent Road. He sat on the stairs 'til it were done. And do you know what's funny? The minute you hold 'em, you forget all that pain.

Nick: I know someone else who wants to hear that.

Shirley: I can't.

Nick: Why?

Shirley: I gave up the right to know her when I gave her away.

Nick: You were sixteen years old.

Shirley: Seventeen, I was. I kept her for a year.

Nick: A year?

Shirley: Yeah.

Nick: But were you married?

Shirley: No.

Nick: Working?

Shirley: No.

Nick: Then what choice did you have in the end?

Shirley: Tommy looked after us. He bought us, if you like. For when he felt like

playing family man. We had a room just round the corner and I gave him what he wanted in return. Now, that's fine for the likes of me but she deserved better. All I could give her was a chance. A chance to do better than I had. So I did.

Nick: Did Tommy try to stop you?

Shirley: He didn't know 'til she were gone.

Nick: What did he say?

Shirley: He just looked at me. Then knocked me clean across the kitchen. Walked out and never spoke of it again.

(NICK offers the ticket to SHIRLEY once again).

Shirley: No.

Nick: Why not?

Shirley: I feel ashamed, all right?

Nick: You an' all? You let down your father, you broke your mother's heart.

Shirley: My mother left. I never had the chance to ask her why.

Nick: And do you want Beth to feel the same? This is your chance an' all, Shirl. It could be your last chance.

Shirley: I don't deserve it.

Nick: Says who?

Shirley: I just don't.

Nick: All right, you don't but you've got it. So what are you going to do? What your own mother did - or what you wish she'd done? Shirley?

(Beat).

Shirley: Do you ever look around and wonder "why me?"

Nick: Doesn't everyone?

(Beat).

Shirley: Don't. Don't make me feel like I can do this.

Nick: What's stopping you?

Shirley: I lost her once and I can't I can't not again.

Nick: You will if you don't get on that train.

Shirley: She might not want me?

Nick: But do you want her?

(SHIRLEY looks in the mirror).

Shirley: You know what's funny? The last thing I said to my dad was that I'd never end up like my mother. And what was I doing? Running away, just like she did. Just like Jessie.

Nick: Do you want her, Shirley Sutton?

(Long pause).

Shirley: Yes.

Nick: Right. Good. OK. Kop hold of this, then.

(NICK gives SHIRLEY another suitcase).

Shirley: That's my case.

Nick: I packed your posh nightie, your best knickers and that special cream in the bedside drawer.

Shirley: How do you know about that?

Nick: *(as Joan Crawford in **Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?**)* "We're sisters, Elvira."

Shirley: I've not refilled the optics. Or put the float on the door.

Nick: We'll ring from the station. Will you please get a move on?

Shirley: How will I get in touch with you?

Nick: Come to the stage door and ask for an autograph.

Shirley: I'll need to speak to you tonight. Every night.

Nick: Leave a number at the theatre, I'll call you back.

Shirley: Where's that bottle of tequila?

Nick: In your bag.

Shirley: Did you pack me curling tongs?

Nick: No. This is the 80s.

Shirley: Not in Mansfield, you mullet.

Nick: Taxi's waiting.

Shirley: Twenty-one years. Last time I was there, The Beatles were playing.

Nick: Did you go?

Shirley: Oh, aye.

Nick: Did you meet 'em?

Shirley: You don't wanna know.

(The taxi pips outside. NICK picks up his case).

Nick: Save it for when we get home. A bottle of tequila and your Beatles story.

Shirley: If we've still got a club to come back to.

Nick: And why the hell won't we?

Shirley: The new you. Bloody Sue.

Nick: Bloody Sue? I'm saying nothing. Nothing!

(Exit NICK. SHIRLEY takes a long look around the dressing room, smiles, and exits).

THE END

