A Bench In The Park

by

Robin Wilson

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Characters:

Bill

Joe

Jimmy

Park Keeper

Gladys Bainbridge

Ruth Penoleneski

Penny Walters

Young Lady

Guy Saunders

Policeman

Young Lad

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A Bench in the Park

Scene 1:

(Half lights up on a set in a park in any town. The play is set in the present at 7.00am on a summer’s morning. Lights will gradually brighten throughout Scene 1. The only furniture is a park bench Centrestage facing the Audience. Backdrop could be simple or complex dependant on resources. Smokey Joe is lying on a bench, he is covered with sheets of newspaper. SFX: A faint sound of a church clock striking seven. Policeman enters Stage Left and walks to the bench.)

**Policeman: (Prodding Joe**.**)** Come on wakey wakey, rise and shine. Can’t sleep all day you know.

(Joe is startled but still lying, stretches his arms, a few sheets of newspaper fall on the floor.)

**Joe:** What’s a matter with you? Couldn’t you sleep?

**Policeman:** I’ll have you know I’ve been on duty since six o’clock.

**Joe: (Sitting up**.**)** That’s hardly my fault is it? No doubt you’re the one who chose to be a policeman.

(Through sleepy eyes Joe gets a closer look at the Policeman.)

**Joe:** Where’s Bert?

**Policeman:** Bert sir, should I know this gentleman?

**Joe:** He’s one of your lot. A policeman.

**Policeman:** Oh you mean Constable Wakefield. He retired yesterday sir.

**Joe:** So you’re going to tell me in a minute that you are his replacement, right?

**Policeman: (Gleefully**.**)** This is my first day on the beat.

**Joe:** Well there are a lot of things to learn lad. The first one… Try not to come so soon in the morning and… **(Louder)** don’t prod me so hard to wake me up, do it gently. You frightened the living daylights out of me.

**Joe: (Gathering up his sheets of newspaper**.**)** Where have you left your Panda car then?

**Policeman:** Panda car, what’s one of them?

**Joe:** The police used to have those grey shopping trolleys with an engine.

**Policeman:** You’re having me on sir.

**Joe:** Well at least you have a sense of humour, I’ll grant you that. **(Pause.)** You seem very young to be a policeman. **(Mournfully**.**)** Still when you’re my age everybody looks young.

**Policeman:** I haven’t been long out of training school, still learning the ropes so to speak.

**Joe: (Looking around**.**)** What have you done with the flask lad?

**Policeman:** Flask sir, what sort of flask are you talking about sir?

**Joe:** The flask with the tea in. Don’t tell me the desk sergeant forgot again?

**Policeman:** Nobody said anything about tea to me sir.

**Joe:** Don’t they teach you anything at this er… training college lad?

**Policeman:** They tell us lots of things at training college…

**Joe:** But obviously not about making tea for war veterans.

**Policeman: (Enthusiastic**.**)** You’re not a war veteran are you sir? Would that be the first world war that you fought in?

**Joe:** Steady on, I might look old but I’m not that blinking old!… No, the second world war. **(Reminiscing**.**)** I was part of a small, but highly trained unit that went ahead of the main fighting force to spy on German pill boxes. We had to live rough and disguise ourselves for fear of being seen. Very important job it was lad.

**Policeman: (Sitting down**.**)** That’s very interesting sir. When I was at the secondary school, we talked a lot about the Second World War. **(Thinking**.**)** I’ve always wanted to meet a war veteran. Did you fight in many campaigns?

**Joe: (Sullen**.**)** I would have showed you my medals but they went missing when I moved out of London.

**Policeman:** So you lived in London then… Was that when you were demobbed?

**Joe:** I wouldn’t call walking the streets living in a house, lad. After the war, no job, only had me demob suit. Didn’t stay in London long, soon moved out to be up here where the air is a bit fresher. All smoke and fog it was down there.

**Policeman:** Ah, that’s why they call you Smokey Joe then?

(Joe gathers up the sheets of newspaper and hands an already full sack-type bag to the Policeman.)

**Joe:** Here, hold this a minute will yer?

(Policeman holds open the bag while Joe stuffs the paper in.)

**Policeman:** I must say I find our conversation quite fascinating, I wish I could spend a lot more time talking to you.

**Joe:** Well I’ve got all day, but I don’t suppose you have. I expect you have to run a lot of errands for the sergeant.

**Policeman:** He actually asked me to give you a wakeup call this morning.

**Joe: (Surprised**.**)** Oh that was nice of him.

**Policeman:** Yes, he said, ‘Don’t forget old Smokey Joe on the park bench’.

**Joe:** But he forgot to mention the tea.

**Policeman:** I’m sorry about that sir, I’ll make sure it doesn’t happen again.

**Joe:** So what does the rest of the day hold in store for you lad?

**Policeman:** The sergeant said I must keep my eyes peeled for the would-be criminal.

**Joe:** I hope he told you what these would-be criminals look like. I mean I could be one.

**Policeman:** Oh no sir, not you. I’m sure you wouldn’t hurt a fly. **(Pause.)** Is this your permanent resting place Joe?

**Joe:** You make it sound like a cemetery lad.

**Policeman:** I’m sorry Joe, I meant, was this where you sleep every night, it must be awfully lonely.

**Joe:** Not a bit of it constable. There’s quite a few people like me, sleeping rough as they call it, on park benches and in shop doorways. We do have some meeting places, as I’m sure you will be aware of, where we can have a chat and maybe share a ciggy.

**Policeman:** I was thinking more about relationships, settling down and having a family.

**Joe:** Not for me lad, not for me. All my life I’ve been a loner. Even when I was fighting in the war I never mixed with other soldiers. I always yearned for the great outdoors, to be at peace with myself and not to worry about how other folk are coping.

**Policeman:** I admire your determination to get what you want out of life sir, but it wouldn’t be for me. It’s a bit like living thousands of years ago, in caves and things, fighting for a meagre livelihood, existing on what nature can provide.

**Joe:** I’m glad you mentioned nature lad, for that’s one of the other bonuses. You see I’ve made friends with some badgers. There was a vixen the other night with a couple of cubs. Then of course there are always owls and bats flying about. People don’t realise what they’re missing stuck in their central heated homes in front of the telly every night watching soaps, when they could be outdoors watching the wildlife.

**Policeman:** But you can’t live on fresh air Joe. What about food and clothes?

**Joe:** I have my old age pension and another from the army, I go to the Sally Army once a week for a bath and a brush up. If it really gets cold they give me a bed for the night. What more could I wish for.

**Policeman:** But what about the luxuries? Going to the cinema, having a drink with your mates in the pub, playing bingo… you must yearn for some of those. Besides, I’d be lost without me mates.

**Joe:** Of course you would lad, but what you haven’t had you don’t miss. I get by. There’s quite a few like me and more joining this way of life. We get pleasure from the simple things.

**Policeman:** Did you by any chance study philosophy at school?

**Joe:** I don’t even know what the word means let alone study it.

**Policeman:** You seem to know a lot about life though.

**Joe:** Look lad, you are just starting out in life, you have years ahead of you. As for me… well I really don’t know. As long as this old bench stays, I shall be happy.

(Joe and the Policeman stand.)

**Policeman: (Holding out his hand**.**)** It’s so nice to have met you Joe.

(They shake hands.)

**Policeman:** Enjoy the rest of the day.

(Joe picks up his baggage and begins to exit Stage Left. He stops and turns to face the Policeman.)

**Joe:** And don’t forget the tea in the morning lad.

(Joe exits Stage Right. A Young Lady enters Stage Left, she is carrying a handbag and a sat nav in her hand. She looks around as if lost. Policeman moves Downstage Centre, Young Lady joins him.)

**Young Lady:** Ah constable, just the person I’ve been looking for.

**Policeman:** Morning miss, always a pleasure to help, if I can. Nice morning, isn’t it?

**Young Lady:** Yes it is if you’re not in a hurry to get somewhere. Looks as though it’s going to be a nice day for sitting around and doing nothing instead of going to work.

**Policeman:** I couldn’t agree more miss… now, how can I help you?

**Young Lady:** The truth is constable, I’m lost. **(Showing sat nav**.**)** I’ve even tried to find my way using this blessed thing, it simply keeps taking me round and round this park! I don’t suppose you know how to work these things do you?

**Policeman:** No madam, I’ve never had the need for one. So where is it you’re wanting to go?

**Young Lady:** I’m looking for the town hall constable, I’ve got an interview for a job there.

**Policeman:** Oh that’s easy, it’s next door to the police station.

**Young Lady:** Forgive me for saying so, but I don’t even know where that is.

**Policeman:** Sorry miss… but rather than me explaining how to get there, ‘cause it’s a bit complicated, I’ll take you.

**Young Lady:** That’s very kind of you.

**Policeman:** My pleasure miss, it’s part of the job… Right follow me as they say.

(Policeman and Young Lady exit Stage Right, stage whispering. Lights down.)

Scene 2:

(Full lights up on the set as before. It is the same day at 10.00am. Bill is seated on the bench Stage Right side fanning himself with a newspaper. He has a briefcase on the bench. Seated on the same bench Stage Left side, but as far away from Bill as possible, is Gladys Bainbridge, eating a sandwich.)

**Bill: (To himself**.**)** I don’t know what I was thinking about, wearing a suit in this weather.

**Gladys:** I beg your pardon sir, were you talking to me?

**Bill:** No, I’m sorry, I was talking to myself. Bad habit you know.

**Gladys:** What did you say?… I’m a bit hard of hearing, see. Getting on a bit.

**Bill: (Louder**.**)** I said I was talking to myself.

**Gladys:** Bad habit that. My late husband used to talk to himself a lot, look where it got him.

**Bill: (Loudly**.**)** And where did it get him?

**Gladys:** Just a minute sir. **(Gathering up her shopping bag, handbag and half-eaten sandwich, shuffles closer to Bill**.**)** I shall have to come a bit nearer. **(Looking at Bill**.**)** That’s better. Now sir, what did you say?

**Bill: (Moving as far away from Gladys**.**)** I was merely enquiring after your late husband.

**Gladys:** Why, did you know him?

**Bill:** I haven’t the foggiest.

**Gladys:** Yes it was first thing this morning.

**Bill:** What was?

**Gladys:** Foggy.

(A period of silence. Gladys finishes her sandwich. She takes a handkerchief from her handbag and wipes her fingers. Bill stops fanning himself.)

**Gladys:** You can carry on the fanning sir if you like, it was quite pleasant. I hope you don’t mind me saying, but you look a bit overdressed… for the weather I mean.

**Bill:** Yes you’re quite right, but I have to attend **(Pauses as if uncertain)** an interview this morning, I like to be smartly dressed.

**Gladys:** Would that be for a job? **(Pauses.)** I’m sorry sir, I shouldn’t pry, it’s none of my business. But you see I’ve been on my own for the past fifteen years, gets a bit lonely you know. There’s only Thomas and me left now.

**Bill:** Thomas, is that your son?

**Gladys:** Oh no, he’s the cat.

(Bill opens up his newspaper and starts to read. Gladys puts her handkerchief away.)

**Gladys:** Did you say what time your interview was?

**Bill: (Looking up**.**)** No I didn’t. But it’s er… eleven o’clock.

(Bill reads.)

**Gladys:** I was just wondering if you’d had anything to eat… you don’t want to go to an interview feeling hungry, your tummy might start rumbling.

**Bill:** I got up late this morning, didn’t have time to prepare anything.

**Gladys:** Couldn’t your wife get you something then?

**Bill: (Without looking up**.**)** I don’t have a wife.

**Gladys:** Seems strange you not having a wife.

(Bill looks up.)

**Gladys:** You’re not a bad looking chap.

**Bill:** Haven’t had much time what with one thing and another.

**Gladys:** With one thing and another sir? I don’t quite understand. I suppose like most men, work gets in the way. Was that so in your case… er… I didn’t quite catch your name?

**Bill:** William Penrose… but most of my friends call me Bill.

**Gladys:** William Penrose **(Pauses.)** William Penrose… that’s a lovely name. I shall call you William, if you don’t mind… Bill sounds a bit… common.

(Bill reads his paper.)

**Gladys:** Me, I’m Gladys, Gladys Bainbridge. I used to be a Smith until I married my husband Fred.

(Bill suddenly puts his paper down and looks closely at Gladys.)

**Bill:** Fred Bainbridge… Fred Bainbridge, I remember… sad affair that.

**Gladys: (Looking surprised**.**)** So, you knew my husband then.

**Bill:** Well I didn’t exactly know him, but our paths did cross, so to speak.

**Gladys:** I’m most intrigued William, but I’m a bit reluctant to ask under what circumstances you met my husband.

**Bill:** You can ask Gladys, but I’m not allowed to discuss past cases.

**Gladys:** Past cases, what are you driving at?… What past cases?

**Bill:** As I just said, I’m not in a position to discuss criminal cases.

**Gladys: (Loudly**.**)** C*riminal cases*. What on earth did my Fred get up to then?

**Bill:** Well I did discuss it with you at the time. Don’t you remember Gladys?

**Gladys:** Memory’s playing havoc at the moment, old age you know.

**Bill:** I would have thought that you, being his wife, would have known exactly what he was up to.

**Gladys: (Agitated**.**)** I’m sorry William, I’m not understanding any of this. Are you sure you’ve got the right Fred Bainbridge?

**Bill:** I don’t suppose there could be that many Fred Bainbridges in this small town.

(Gladys fiddles in her handbag and finds a photograph.)

**Gladys:** There, that’s my Fred, does that look like the Fred Bainbridge you knew?

**Bill: (Looking at the photo**.**)** Yes that’s the one, but as I said before, I didn’t actually meet him… he was dead by the time I saw him.

**Gladys: (Surprised**.**)** D*ead*! What do you mean dead?

**Bill: (Abruptly**.**)** I don’t want to appear facetious, but it’s called… not living.

**Gladys: (Abruptly**.**)** I might appear a bit vague at times, but I certainly know what being dead is if you don’t mind.

**Bill:** Yes of course. **(Standing up**.**)** Now if you’ll excuse me, I have to attend an interview.

**Gladys: (Agitated**.**)** Just a minute, I want to know a bit more about my Fred.

**Bill:** Some other time perhaps… but I must rush.

(Bill picks up his newspaper and brief case and exits Stage Right.)

**Gladys: (To herself**.**)** Funny fellow. There’s something strange about him.

(Gladys takes a flask from her shopping bag and pours a cup of tea and drinks. Jimmy enters Stage Left. He stops and stares at the park bench and then proceeds to Gladys.)

**Jimmy: (To Gladys**.**)** I’m sorry to bother you madam, but I was expecting to find a gentleman sitting here.

**Gladys: (Indignant**.**)** Do I look like a gentleman then?

**Jimmy:** No certainly not madam… I don’t suppose by any chance you might have seen him.

**Gladys:** Would his name be… William Penrose?

**Jimmy:** Why er, yes! But I know him as Bill.

**Gladys: (Nonchalantly**.**)** Well you’ve only just missed him. **(Still sipping tea**.**)** You must be a friend of his then, cause he said his friends call him Bill.

**Jimmy:** We were sort of work colleagues really, he was my boss.

**Gladys:** And what sort of work would that be er…? Sorry I didn’t catch your name, a bit hard of hearing you know.

**Jimmy:** I didn’t say, but it’s Jimmy, Jimmy Cockcroft. Well, James to be more precise.

**Gladys:** I gathered from William that he is now retired. So, what did he get up to when he was working?

**Jimmy:** Do you mind if I sit down? I’ve been hurrying a bit this morning.

**Gladys:** Not at all Jimmy, glad of your company.

(Jimmy sits.)

**Jimmy:** Didn’t Bill tell you what he does then?

**Gladys:** He didn’t say much at all really. **(Pauses while thinking**.**)** Did you say, what he *does*? I got the impression that he had retired.

**Jimmy:** What old Bill. He’ll never retire. The force wouldn’t let him.

**Gladys: (Surprised**.**)** That wouldn’t be the police force would it?

**Jimmy:** I thought you might have gathered that by the way he dresses, neat and tidy like. He’s an inspector in the local constabulary.

(Gladys finishes the tea replaces the top and puts the flask back in her bag.)

**Gladys:** Strange that, ‘cause he said he had an interview at eleven o’clock.

**Jimmy:** An interview…? Probably meant to say that he was going to question a witness.

**Gladys:** Well it did cross my mind when he started talking about cases and things.

**Jimmy:** So you’ve known Bill a long time then.

**Gladys:** Oh no, we only met a short while ago. It was rather spooky talking to him though because apparently he knew my husband.

**Jimmy:** The police do get to know a lot of people in the course of their work, part of the job.

**Gladys:** Well he said he didn’t really know my husband, but he said their paths had crossed.

**Jimmy:** How long ago are we talking about er…?

**Gladys:** Gladys… I would say round about the time that my husband died. All of fifteen years ago.

**Jimmy:** Sorry to hear that Gladys. **(Counting in his head**.**)** That would be when I stopped being his sidekick.

**Gladys:** His sidekick Jimmy?

**Jimmy:** That’s what he used to call me. I left the force and joined the army.

**Gladys:** Did William kick you out then?

**Jimmy:** Not really. I sort of left by mutual consent. **(Pauses.)** We were working on a case that involved an armed robbery…

**Gladys:** An armed robbery you say.

**Jimmy:** I shouldn’t really be discussing this with you Gladys.

**Gladys:** That’s what William said, but carry on.

**Jimmy:** Oh so he remembers it too.

**Gladys:** Only when I told him who my late husband was.

**Jimmy:** Well I’m not in the force now so I don’t suppose it matters and it was a long time ago… stop me if you get bored.

**Gladys:** I don’t expect I will Jimmy, there’s not much on the telly this afternoon.

**Jimmy:** Good… We’d had some very useful information from one of our more reliable snouts…

**Gladys:** Snouts?

**Jimmy:** Yeh, snouts Gladys, informers… we were tipped off by the security guard who worked at the warehouse.

**Gladys: (Thinking**.**)** Security guard Jimmy.

**Jimmy:** Yeh, security guard. According to Charlie **(Thinking**.**)** Charlie Smith, he was one of the three robbers that we caught Gladys. When we interviewed him he said that the security guard, whom the robbers thought they could trust, had informed his bosses that a robbery was about to be committed.

**Gladys:** You can’t get more two-faced than that Jimmy.

**Jimmy:** It gets worse Gladys. During the scuffle, quite a few shots were fired and the security guard took the full blast of one of the bullets and was killed instantly.

**Gladys:** Well you could say that he got his comeuppance. They say you can’t serve two masters Jimmy.

(Pause.)

**Jimmy:** I suppose not… but according to Charlie Smith, and we’ve only got his word for it, that there wasn’t much cash in the safe, he reckoned about twenty-five-thousands pounds.

**Gladys:** How much?

**Jimmy:** Twenty-five-thousand pounds. I know it sounds a lot to you Gladys, but in armed robbery terms, not very much. But what’s more bizarre is, that a few weeks after the robbery the owners put in an insurance claim for *two-hundred-and-twenty-five-thousand-pounds*.

**Gladys: (Shocked**.**)** Two hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds!

**Jimmy:** And they, the owners got away with it.

**Gladys:** *What*! You mean…

**Jimmy:** Yes Gladys, they knew that the robbery was about to take place, so they absconded with most of the cash, leaving a small amount for the robbers to take, telling the insurance company that two-hundred-and-twenty-five-thousand had been stolen.

**Gladys:** The cheek of it. **(Pause.)** Did you say there were three robbers?

**Jimmy:** Yeh.

**Gladys:** What happened to the other two then?

**Jimmy:** They ran off, one in one direction and one in the other, he was the one I followed… I wasn’t expecting to kill somebody that day.

**Gladys:** *You, kill*.

**Jimmy:** Yes Gladys, kill.

(Gladys is a little faint.)

**Jimmy:** Are you alright Gladys?

**Gladys:** Yes I think so, but I wasn’t expecting you to tell me about a murder.

**Jimmy: (Pointing to the auditorium**.**)** I was standing about fifty yards over there. He had run all the way from the warehouse and paused for breath right in front of this bench. **(Demonstrating**.**)** I took careful aim Gladys and pulled the trigger…

(Gladys is mesmerised as she stares at Jimmy.)

**Jimmy:** He fell on this bench. I rushed over but he was dead Gladys.

**Gladys:** And who was this robber Jimmy?

(Pause.)

**Jimmy:** Fred Bainbridge.

(Lights down.)

Scene 3:

(Full lights up on a set as in previous scene. It is midday. Penny Walters is seated on the Stage Right side of the bench. She is talking on her smart phone. On the bench is a large handbag.)

**Penny:** What do you mean you can’t come to the cinema? **(Pause.)** Parents, I don’t know why we have them, they’re always getting in the way. **(Pause.)** Can’t somebody else look after your little brother? **(Pause.)** What do you mean your Dad’s gone off with his girlfriend? Are you telling me that your mum and dad have split up? **(Pause.)** I’m sorry Babs, perhaps we can make it some other time. **(Pause.)** Ok, cheers.

(Penny switches off her phone and puts it in her handbag. She takes out a lunch box.)

**Penny: (To herself**.**)** She’s always got problems has Babs, she’ll never pass her exams at this rate.

(Penny takes a sandwich from her lunch box and starts to eat it. She is oblivious to Guy Saunders who enters Stage Right. He approaches the bench. Penny is startled.)

**Penny:** Oh what are you up to…? Do you always creep up on people like that?

**Guy:** I’m awfully sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you.

**Penny: (Angrily**.**)** Well you certainly did that all right. You could have been one of those perverts I’ve read about.

**Guy:** Well I can assure you I’m not one of those.

**Penny:** I didn’t know that did I… I hope you’re not in the habit of going around frightening people.

**Guy:** I can only apologize profusely for my awful behaviour… we seem to have got off to a bad start.

**Penny:** Just a minute buster, what’s this *we* thing? I don’t know you, do I?

**Guy:** Well I have seen you around at Tech a few times. **(Looking her up and down**.**)** Couldn’t really miss you.

**Penny:** Oh, so this is the latest in chat up lines is it?

**Guy:** No, no, nothing like that. But all the other benches in the park seem to be full.

**Penny:** So you thought, I know I’ll go and pester Penny.

**Guy:** I’m clearly barking up the wrong tree. I’ll leave you in peace.

(Guy turns and starts walking towards the exit Stage Right.)

**Penny: (Calling after Guy**.**)** Just a minute.

(Guy turns to face Penny.)

**Penny:** I’m the one who should apologize… You can share my bench if you like.

(Guy returns and sits as far left on the bench as he can.)

**Penny:** I’m sorry, you caught me at an awful moment.

**Guy:** Not bad news I hope?

**Penny:** No not really, it’s just that my best friend Babs can’t go to the cinema tonight. I was really looking forward to a night out.

**Guy:** Oh, that’s a shame.

**Penny:** Never mind some other time perhaps. **(Pause.)** Being a nice day I decided to have my lunch out, have you brought your lunch with you?

**Guy:** I thought I’d go to the canteen later.

**Penny:** You do realise that they close at one o’clock today, don’t you. **(Looking at her watch**.**)** It’s already half-past twelve, you’d never make it back in time.

**Guy:** Oh damn, I didn‘t realise it was Friday.

**Penny:** Yeh, I think the staff like to get away early on Fridays. **(Pause.)** Look, because I’ve been so pig-headed, why don’t you have one of my sandwiches… to sort of make up for things.

**Guy:** That would be fantastic. You’re sure you don’t mind?

**Penny: (Abrasive**.**)** Would I be asking you if I did.

**Guy:** I suppose not.

(Penny takes the lid off her lunch box and offers Guy a sandwich.)

**Guy: (Taking a sandwich**.**)** Wow these look cool, did you make them?

**Penny:** Me… no, I can’t even boil an egg. I’m very fortunate that my mother just happens to spoil me rotten. On second thoughts, I don’t suppose it does me any harm to be waited on hand and foot.

(Penny puts her lunch box back into her handbag.)

**Guy:** Do you live locally then Penny?

**Penny:** It’s only a ten minute bus ride from my home to the Tech. Very handy.

**Guy:** I hope you don’t mind me calling you Penny, I’d hate you to think I’m being a little pushy or even another chat up line.

**Penny:** That’s fine by me.

**Guy:** My name’s Guy by the way, Guy Saunders.

**Penny:** Penny Walters.

**Guy: (Holding out his hand**.**)** How do you do Penny?

(Guy and Penny shake hands. They both eat their sandwiches. Joe enters Stage Right. He walks towards the bench but stops when he sees Penny and Guy.)

**Penny: (Looking up at Joe**.**)** Oh hello… would you like to sit down?

**Joe:** Yes… if you don’t mind.

**Guy:** No, of course we don’t mind.

(Guy and Penny move to far left of bench, Joe sits far right, he opens his sack and takes out an apple and begins to eat. He listens intently to Guy and Penny’s following conversation.)

**Guy:** Do you always bring sandwiches with you then?

**Penny:** Oh yes, I can’t afford to eat in the canteen every day. Everything seems to be so much dearer these days.

**Guy:** Things *are* much dearer… take tuition fees for example, they‘re astronomical.

**Penny:** Join the clan. I don’t know whether it’s because I haven’t much, or things are suddenly much dearer.

**Guy:** But I’m hoping to go to university and start an extensive four-year course next year, it’s going to cost me a fortune.

**Penny:** Same applies to me I was hoping to go to uni’, but I was politely told by my father that he couldn’t possibly afford that sort of money.

**Guy:** I don’t want to sound morbid, but I don’t see much of a future for us at the moment.

(Pause while they finish their sandwiches.)

**Penny:** Are you from these parts then?

**Guy:** I don’t have a home, not a proper home.

**Penny: (Surprised**.**)** Don’t have a home?

**Guy:** No, I’m living in digs, close to the Tech. My parents split up six months ago, utter chaos it was. They’re still in the process of selling the family home. I’m best out of the way.

**Penny:** I’m sorry to hear that. Like my friend Babs then, her parents have just separated.

**Guy:** That was the friend who you were going to the cinema with, was it?

**Penny:** Yes, it’s a film I particularly wanted to see, about space travel.

**Guy: (Surprised**.**)** S*pace travel*!

**Penny: (Aggressive**.**)** What’s wrong with that? I suppose you think space travel is just for boys.

**Guy:** Not at all, it’s just a coincidence…

**Penny:** Why a coincidence?

**Guy:** At the end of this year I hope to be going on to university to study astrophysics, that’s all.

**Penny:** *Astrophysics*. That’s hardly space travel, learning about how planets are formed from a cloud of dust.

(Penny occupies a trance-like state.)

**Guy:** Forgive me Penny, but I think that’s where you’re wrong. Before many more decades have passed, man will want to get out there and get a closer look at the stars and their planets… space travel, right?

(Penny looks a bit non-plus.)

**Guy:** You don’t look too convinced.

**Penny:** I’m sorry Guy, I wasn’t paying attention. I was thinking about your parents and Babs’ parents. It must be awful to lose someone you’ve known for ages.

**Guy:** I try to forget about it, I won’t pass my finals if I have too many other things to think about.

**Penny:** That was going through my mind earlier. Babs has lost so much schooling… she has to stay in a lot with her younger brother, while her parents are out gallivanting.

**Guy:** I’m sorry to say it Penny, but it’s sheer selfishness on the part of the parents. They should act more responsibly.

**Penny: (Smiling**.**)** Like you and me, yes?

**Guy:** Like you and me, yes. **(Pause.)** By the way, that’s the first time I’ve seen you smile since I’ve been sitting here.

**Penny:** Sorry Guy, I’m not usually a misery, I hope to snap out of it when I hear some better news about Babs.

**Guy:** But that could be ages and in the meantime…

**Penny:** And in the meantime I have a nice bloke to chat to.

**Guy:** Shouldn’t that have been, *chat up*?

(Penny laughs out loud. Guy smiles sweetly at her.)

**Guy:** That’s better Penny, that’s my girl. **(Pause.)** Sorry Penny, that came out completely wrong.

**Penny:** Why apologize, that was lovely. I haven’t had anything as nice as that said to me since I was a two year old sitting on grandpa’s knee.

**Guy:** You mean there’s no fellow whispering sweet nothings in your ear night after night?

**Penny:** No Guy, nobody. I don’t think men find me attractive enough to take me out on a date.

(Guy is surprised and stands and looks Penny up and down. Joe looks at Guy. Penny also looks up at Guy.)

**Guy:** I think they’re all mad. I think you’re *more* than attractive, you are beautiful.

**Penny:** Stop it Guy, you’ll make me blush.

**Guy:** But it’s true Penny, it’s true. **(To Joe**.**)** Don’t you think so?

(Joe just smiles and carries on eating his apple.)

**Penny:** Not one of your chat up lines then?

**Guy:** Definitely not. **(Pause whilst thinking**.**)** Listen Penny, I just had a thought. My last lecture finishes at seven o’clock tonight, just in time to catch the last showing of that space film. How about it?

**Penny:** You try and stop me Guy, you just try and stop me.

(Penny and Guy stand, they give a cursory glance at Joe and exit Stage Right. Lights down.)

Scene 4:

(Full lights up, set as in previous scene. It is 4.00pm. Young Lad enters Stage Left bouncing a football. He stops at the bench and jumps on it, still bouncing the ball he runs up and down the bench. Ruth Penoleneski enters Stage Right pushing a modern large wheeled pushchair which is loaded down with bags of every description including a handbag. She stops and stares at the Young Lad.)

**Ruth: (Shouting**.**)** Hey you! Get off that bench. People have to sit on it.

(Young Lad ignores Ruth and carries on jumping up and down. She goes nearer the bench.)

**Ruth:** Are you deaf or something? I said get off the bench. If you were mine you’d get a clip round the ear. **(To herself**.**)** I don’t know what the world’s coming to. **(To Young Lad**.**)** Aren’t you supposed to be going home?

(The Young Lad jumps off the bench knocking into the pushchair. SFX: Baby crying. The Young Lad exits quickly Stage Right.)

**Ruth:** Now look what you’ve done. You’ve woken the baby.

(Ruth tries to rock the pushchair but finds it difficult.)

**Ruth: (To baby**.**)** Just a minute, I’m trying to find your blessed dummy. **(To herself**.**)** I wonder what your mother did with it.

(Ruth searches the holdall taking out in the process several baby clothes, nappies etc., all of which she spreads on the bench including a baby’s milk bottle. She eventually finds the dummy and puts it in the baby’s mouth. Crying stops.)

**Ruth: (To herself**.**)** Thank goodness for that. I don’t know how mothers cope these days.

(Ruth pushes all the contents from the holdall along the bench, brushes the bench with a nappy and sits.)

**Ruth: (Exhausted**.**)** I think I’d rather do a day’s work than this, never had all this bother when I was bringing up my kids. **(Pauses while getting her breath**.**)** Getting too old for this malarkey… I wonder what time he wants his feed. **(Ruth searches in her handbag. She finds a mobile phone**.**)** I’ll give Sharon a buzz at work. **(Slowly dials a number, puts the phone to her ear**.**)** Oh good, it’s ringing. **(Pause.)** Oh hello, I’d like to speak to Sharon please. **(Pause.)** What do you mean is it a personal call…? I suppose so in a way. **(Pause.)** It’s about Elvis. **(Pause.)** No young man I am not insane, I know he’s dead, at least that one is. It’s to do with my grandson, he happens to be an Elvis as well. **(Pause.)** Why should you want to know if he plays the guitar… All I want to do is speak to my daughter and ask her what time Elvis wants his feed. **(Pause.)** No I can’t ask him, he’s not able to speak yet. **(Pause.)** Cause he’s only six months old, that’s why. **(Pause.)** Oh sorry, it’s Sharon, Sharon Sedgefield. **(Pause.)** No I haven’t got a clue which department. You can’t have that many Sharon Sedgefields now can you. **(Pause.)** My name, what do you want my name for? **(Pause.)** Oh you have to log it in a book… have you got your pen ready…? It’s Ruby Penoleneski. **(Pause.)** What do you mean can’t I be a Smith or Jones. I’ll spell it. P, E, N, O, L, E, N, E, S, K, I. **(Pause.)** No, I married a Pole didn’t I, and no wise quacks. **(Pause.)** Yes, of course I can hang on, but don’t take all day there’s a good chap.

(Ruth still holding the mobile phone peers into the pushchair. She taps her fingers frustratingly on the bench.)

**Ruth:** Oh hello, is that you Sharon… Oh I do beg your pardon I thought you were my Sharon. **(Pause.)** I *am* aware that you are a man and that my daughter is female, thank you very much. **(Pause.)** What do you mean you can’t find her? She definitely went to work this morning, ‘cause she dropped little Elvis off at my place. **(Pause.)** Yes of course I understand that you work in a large building. **(Pause.)** No, I’d rather you ring me back if you don’t mind; I don’t want to keep hanging on in case my battery goes flat. **(Pause.)** Oh yes, just a minute. **(Ruth presses a button to retrieve her number**.**)** It’s, zero-seven-three, six-five-double-seven, one-zero-five-four. **(Pause.)** No, zero-*five*-four! Not three-four. **(Pause.)** Ok thank you very much, I’ll wait.

(Ruth switches the phone to standby and puts it on the bench. She peers again in the pushchair.)

**Ruth: (To herself**.**)** Thank goodness he’s dropped off… I don’t know why we have these mobile phones it would have been quicker to walk to Sharon’s place.

(Park Keeper enters Stage Left carrying a rake on his shoulder. He goes to the bench and peers in the pushchair.)

**Park Keeper:** A bonny looking baby madam if you don’t mind me saying so. Not yours I trust?

**Ruth:** No it’s my daughter’s.

**Park Keeper:** Doing a spot of baby-sitting are you?

**Ruth:** Well you could call it that. Just thought I’d have a sit down on this bench. It’s very tiring doing the weekly shop.

**Park Keeper: (Looking at the paraphernalia**.**)** Looks as though you’ve been here all day madam, with all that stuff.

**Ruth:** I don’t understand why there has to be so much stuff, they seem to be making pushchairs bigger and bigger. There’ll soon be enough room for the kitchen sink.

(Park Keeper laughs. Joe enters Stage Right but hides behind a piece of scenery but is seen by the Audience. He listens to the conversation.)

**Park Keeper:** By your accent you don’t sound as if you’re from these parts.

**Ruth:** You’re quite right. My husband has just got landed a job at the local hospital, we bought a house up on Green Rise, three months ago.

**Park Keeper:** That’s where the old warehouse used to be.

**Ruth:** My neighbour reckons that a murder took place in the warehouse, that’s why the council pulled it down.

**Park Keeper:** She isn’t quite right, is your neighbour.

**Ruth:** You seem to know quite a bit about it.

**Park Keeper:** Well I sort of got involved, with the clearing up bit, I mean.

**Ruth:** The clearing up bit. You mean you helped to pull the place down?

**Park Keeper:** Oh no the clearing up, *here*.

**Ruth:** I’m not with you I’m afraid.

**Park Keeper:** As I said, your neighbour got it slightly wrong. According to the newspaper at the time, a robbery took place at the warehouse. During a scuffle, the security guard was shot and died at the scene.

**Ruth: (Solemn**.**)** Oh how awful… So my neighbour had got it right about someone being killed up there then.

**Park Keeper:** But I’m talking about the bloke who got shot *here*. I had to clear the mess up.

**Ruth: (Fanning herself**.**)** I think it must be the heat, I’m getting a little confused.

**Park Keeper:** The newspaper said that there were three robbers, one they captured at the warehouse and the other two escaped. One of them, a bloke called Fred, was chased by a detective into this park. The detective apparently took a shot at him and he fell down dead on this bench.

(Ruth jumps up very quickly.)

**Ruth:** Aaagh!

**Park Keeper: (Standing**.**)** Are you alright madam?

**Ruth: (Wiping her brow**.**)** Yes I think so.

(Joe comes out of hiding and slowly walks across the stage and exits Stage Left. Ruth and Park Keeper observe Joe’s action.)

**Park Keeper:** I wouldn’t let it upset you madam, it did happen a long time ago. The old bench is alright, I gave it a good scrub.

(Ruth looks at the bench, removes the baby’s bottle and clothes and puts them in a bag.)

**Park Keeper:** There are no germs on it madam, lots of people sit on this old bench, that old tramp we’ve just seen sleeps on it.

**Ruth: (Aggressively**.**)** He’s welcome to it. But I’ll not be here much longer I can tell you that. I’m waiting for a telephone call… then I shall know when to feed Elvis.

**Park Keeper: (Looking surprised**.**)** E*lvis* madam?

**Ruth:** Yes, that’s the name of my grandson, him in the pushchair.

**Park Keeper:** For a moment I thought…

**Ruth:** Yes yes, you thought I was round the bend.

**Park Keeper:** Not at all madam, not at all.

(SFX: Mobile phone rings and baby cries.)

**Park Keeper:** I’ll leave you to it then madam.

**Ruth:** No, hang on a minute, there’s a dummy in his pushchair, can you find it for me while I answer this?

(Park keeper searches in the pushchair. Ruth picks up the phone, presses button and puts the phone to her ear.)

**Ruth:** Hello, is that you Sharon…? Thank goodness, at long last.

**Park Keeper: (Holding the dummy**.**)** Here you are madam.

**Ruth: (To Park Keeper**.**)** Stuff it in his mouth will yer.

(Park Keeper puts dummy into baby’s mouth. Baby stops crying. Pause.)

**Ruth:** No I was talking to the park keeper, I’m in the park, see. The phone woke him up. **(Pause.)** No not the park keeper… Elvis. **(Pause.)** I know Sharon I’ll be quick… I just want to know what time he should have his feed. **(Pause.)** Right. Hang on a minute. **(To Park Keeper**.**)** See that bottle there, can you start feeding him? Sharon says it’s way past his feeding time.

(Park Keeper reluctantly picks up the baby’s bottle and puts it in the mouth of the baby.)

**Ruth: (On the phone**.**)** I didn’t catch that; I was talking to the park keeper. What did you say Sharon? **(Pause.)** Right, hang on a minute. **(To Park Keeper**.**)** Sharon says don’t let him suck on air, else he’ll get wind. Keep the bottle up.

**Park Keeper: (Slightly annoyed**.**)** Yes madam, I have had kids of my own.

**Ruth: (On the phone**.**)** What’s that, changing him Sharon?

(Park keeper looks very surprised at Ruth.)

**Ruth:** No I can’t smell anything. **(To Park Keeper**.**)** Can you smell anything?

(Park keeper shakes his head.)

**Ruth: (To Ruth on the phone**.**)** No, neither of us can smell anything. **(Pause.)** OK I’ll let you go now, Sharon. **(Pause.)** No nothing to worry about, Elvis is fine. **(Pause.)** No he’s a nice man. **(To Park Keeper**.**)** You are a nice man aren’t you?

(Park Keeper nods and hands empty bottle back to Ruth.)

**Ruth: (On the phone**.**)** Elvis has drunk it all already. **(Pause.)** Yes, yes, I will. Bye for now, see you this evening. Bye.

(Ruth switches off the phone and puts it in one of the bags.)

**Ruth: (To Park Keeper**.**)** I’m sorry about that. But this is my first day baby-sitting for Elvis, and it seems an awfully long time since I had my babies.

**Park Keeper:** Not to worry madam, I can assure you that it has been my pleasure to feed little Elvis. **(Sarcastically**.**)** I don’t often have the privilege.

**Ruth:** I’m sure you’re only saying that, but thanks very much all the same.

**Park Keeper:** I must get on madam, much to do… Might see you again one day.

**Ruth:** Could be, but not on this bench.

(Park Keeper as he exits Stage Right has a smile on his face. Ruth stands and gathers up all her belongings.)

**Ruth: (To baby**.**)** Come on Elvis, let’s see if we can find a helpful man on the bus.

(Ruth exits Stage Left with Elvis. Lights down.)

Scene 5:

(Full lights up on set as before. It is now 6.00pm. Policeman is sitting on the bench. He is hot and tired, has removed his helmet and is wiping his brow with a handkerchief. Young Lad enters Stage Right bouncing a football. After a couple of bounces he stops when he sees the Policeman. Facing the Policeman the Young Lad hides the ball behind his back.)

**Policeman:** What are you up to lad? Hey, you haven’t got a football have you?

(Young Lad shakes his head vigorously.)

**Policeman:** You know it’s against the rules to play ball games in the park, don’t you.

(Young Lad nods as he tries to creep slowly to Stage Left exit keeping the ball firmly out of sight of the Policeman.)

**Policeman:** Where do you think you are going I haven’t finished with you yet?

(Young Lad tries to make a dash for it, drops the ball, Policeman jumps up attempting to catch Young Lad who retrieves the ball. They both run around the bench a few times and Young Lad quickly exits Stage Left.

**Policeman: (Stopping in his tracks**.**)** Well I never. First day on the beat, and I’ve been outpaced by that young scamp.

(Panting, he struggles back to the bench and sits.)

**Policeman: (To himself**.**)** Too hot anyway to be chasing after kids.

(Taking a handkerchief from his pocket he again wipes his brow. Gladys Bainbridge enters Stage Left walking very slowly carrying her handbag. Policeman stands as she approaches the bench.)

**Gladys:** I wouldn’t sit there if I was you constable.

**Policeman:** I beg your pardon madam.

**Gladys:** I said, I wouldn’t sit there if I was you.

**Policeman:** Yes madam I heard you the first time, but it’s *why* I shouldn’t be sitting here is what I was really enquiring about.

**Gladys:** Well you should phrase your sentences more carefully then.

**Policeman:** I’ll start again if I may… Why shouldn’t I be sitting here?

**Gladys:** Shouldn’t you be patrolling the streets or something?

**Policeman:** Ah that‘s it. You’re complaining about my being here, relaxing after a hard day plodding the streets.

**Gladys:** It’s not for the likes of me to tell you what you should be doing, as long as you’re not going around shooting people.

**Policeman: (A puzzled look on his face**.**)** I’m sorry madam, but I’m getting awfully confused. You wouldn’t like to sit down and explain yourself a bit clearer would you?

**Gladys: (Indicating the bench**.**)** I’m not sitting there.

**Policeman: (Thumping the bench**.**)** It’s perfectly sound madam, it’s got years left in it yet.

**Gladys:** I’m not querying the state of the bench constable.

**Policeman: (Exasperated**.**)** You not suggesting that I might molest you are you madam?

**Gladys: (Indignant**.**)** No, no no, of course not. I was told something about this bench earlier this morning and it has left me feeling rather frail and distraught.

**Policeman: (Standing**.**)** Should I get a doctor, or the ambulance maybe?

**Gladys:** No I’m not ill. I think all I need is a sympathetic ear.

**Policeman:** I’ll do my best madam. **(Pause.)** Are you sure you wouldn’t like to sit down? I don’t think you should stand any longer if you’re feeling unwell.

**Gladys: (Indignant**.**)** I’m not feeling ill constable. I will only sit on *that* bench if you give it a good inspection and can assure me that there are no *blood stains* on it.

**Policeman:** *Blood stains madam*? Are you sure that you are… not… er…?

**Gladys:** I have all my faculties constable if that’s what you’re hinting at.

(Policeman gives the bench a thorough inspection.)

**Policeman:** I see nothing out of the ordinary madam, I would consider it safe to sit down.

**Gladys: (Thoughtfully**.**)** I suppose after fifteen years someone would have scrubbed it… the bench I mean.

**Policeman: (Nonchalantly**.**)** Yes madam I’m sure you’re right.

(Gladys peers on the bench then gingerly sits down. Policeman also sits.)

**Gladys:** I needed to sit somewhere, I was getting very tired, what with the heat and everything.

**Policeman:** But if you didn’t want to sit on *this* bench you could have sat on a different one, there are several in the park.

**Gladys:** I was sort of er… drawn to this one constable as if he was still here.

**Policeman:** Still here. Who was still here?

**Gladys:** My husband of course.

**Policeman:** Oh I get it now, you left your husband here while you went shopping, and when you came back… he’d gone.

**Gladys:** No not today, fifteen years ago. He was on this bench fifteen years ago. Don’t you get it constable?

**Policeman:** Madam I hate to disappoint you, but this is my first day as a constable. I cannot possibly know where your husband might have disappeared to fifteen years ago.

**Gladys: (Agitated**.**)** He didn’t disappear anywhere, he was still here.

**Policeman:** It’s been a hot day for both of us, may I be bold and suggest that there is a possibility that you might be suffering from heat stroke.

**Gladys:** Are you suggesting that I might be delirious and haven’t got a clue as to what I’m talking about?

**Policeman:** I wouldn’t put it as bluntly as that madam. But you must think it strange that I encounter a woman who suggests that there could be bloodstains on a park bench, possibly put there by her husband who then disappears for fifteen years.

**Gladys: (Annoyed**.**)** All I wanted constable was a sympathetic ear, which *you* have been unable to provide. Unfortunately the same can be said about so many folk these days.

(Policeman stands as if to exit.)

**Gladys:** No wait, sit down again, please, just hear me out first.

**Policeman: (Sitting**.**)** I’m terribly sorry madam, I’m afraid I was a little ham-fisted.

**Gladys:** Don’t worry about that, just listen… I would like you to do some research for me… You see I was told by a man this morning, who called himself William Penrose, an inspector from the local police station, who seemed to think that my husband was a criminal.

**Policeman:** What’s all this leading up to madam?

**Gladys:** Just be patient will you… his second in command, his sidekick as he referred to him as, was Jimmy Cockcroft whom I spoke to soon after William Penrose had left. This Mr Cockcroft had apparently chased one of the robbers, whom they said was my husband, shot him, he collapsed and died on this very bench constable.

**Policeman:** And all this happened fifteen years ago you say.

**Gladys:** Yes constable… It’s been puzzling me all day about this William Penrose and Jimmy Cockcroft. Why after all this time should they want to meet up again?

**Policeman:** Just pals wanting a chat about old times I presume.

**Gladys: (Thinking**.**)** You could be right I suppose, but I think there’s more to it than that.

**Policeman:** You asked me if I could do some research, what would that entail madam?

**Gladys:** No forget it constable, I’m probably barking up the wrong tree.

**Policeman:** If you’re sure madam.

**Gladys:** Yes I am. Thank you anyway.

**Policeman:** My pleasure… I’ll bid you goodnight then. Hope you soon feel better.

**Gladys:** Much better now thank you.

(Policeman stands, puts on his helmet and exits Stage Left.)

**Gladys: (To herself**.**)** He’s so young, he wouldn’t have a clue as to where to start.

(Jimmy Cockcroft enters Stage Right, he rushes to the bench. Gladys is startled.)

**Jimmy:** Thank goodness you’re still in the park Gladys.

**Gladys:** Why what’s wrong?

**Jimmy: (Sitting down beside Gladys**.**)** I’m so sorry about this morning Gladys, I wasn’t aware that you didn’t know about your husband and the circumstances leading up to his death.

**Gladys:** It was quite a shock to be told that my Fred had died on this very bench that I have been sitting on for many years… it made me feel quite queer Jimmy.

**Jimmy:** I honestly thought that Bill would have given you all the facts, at the time of the shooting I mean.

**Gladys:** No Jimmy he hadn’t.

**Jimmy:** It’s just fate I suppose that I had arranged to meet Bill here on this bench this morning. I admit I was a bit late arriving at the time he suggested, due to a poor train connection, for I was going to ask him if I could have my old job back, that‘s all.

**Gladys:** But it’s fifteen years ago Jimmy. I thought for a moment that you wanted to open up the case about my poor Fred.

**Jimmy:** I should think that case was closed ages ago. You see there was a substantial amount of money in the warehouse safe. The guy we caught didn’t have any money on him, neither did we find anything on your husband Gladys. We can only presume that he stashed it away somewhere on his way to the park, or the third robber had it. We did a very thorough search of this whole area and found nothing.

**Gladys:** Well don’t look at me Jimmy, I didn’t even know anything about the robbery… did your snouts hear anything?

**Jimmy:** Not a dickybird.

**Gladys:** Reading between the lines then Jimmy, if the money did turn up it would be a case of finders, keepers.

**Jimmy:** Well yes, if the owners didn’t claim it, which is most unlikely… you’re going to tell me in a minute that you’ve got it stashed away somewhere Gladys.

**Gladys: (Amused**.**)** You must be joking I wouldn’t be sitting here talking to you, I’d be living it up in the Mediterranean.

**Jimmy:** Point taken Gladys, point taken.

(Pause.)

**Jimmy:** I’m afraid you’ll have to excuse me Gladys, I’ve got a train to catch and I need to get home if you don’t mind.

**Gladys:** No problem Jimmy, you be on your way now, there’s a good chap.

(Jimmy stands and exits Stage Left. Joe enters Stage Right carrying his sack bag.)

**Gladys:** Hello Joe, that was a close shave.

**Joe:** Don’t worry Gladys, I’d got my eye on him.

(Joe sits on the bench.)

**Gladys:** So you remember him from way back?

**Joe:** Not really, I only got a glance at him when me and Fred hot-footed it from the warehouse… I often think of Fred when I’m lying on this bench.

**Gladys:** Did you realise Joe that my Fred actually died on this bench?

**Joe:** Yes Gladys I did.

**Gladys: (Angrily**.**)** Well why on earth didn’t you tell me? I had to find out from that copper this morning. It was quite a shock to think that I had been sitting on this bench talking to you week after week and then to actually hear it from a total stranger that my Fred had been shot here.

**Joe:** Hold on Gladys, not so fast. I wouldn’t keep anything from you as important as that… we’re friends remember.

**Gladys:** So why didn’t you tell me then?

**Joe:** Listen… I only heard today, myself. That loud-mouthed park keeper was babbling on about it to a woman with a pushchair.

**Gladys:** But you sleep on this bench, Joe… Doesn’t that worry you…? I mean…

**Joe:** On the contrary, I shall sleep more at ease knowing that my old mate spent his last moments on this very bench that you and I sit on every week.

**Gladys:** I’m sorry Joe, I should have known better. But I have had a very traumatic day.

(Joe feels in his raincoat pocket and brings out a wad of £20 notes.)

**Joe: (Handing the wad to Gladys**.**)** Here take this Gladys.

**Gladys:** Thanks. **(Looking at the raincoat**.**)** How much longer are you going to hang on to that raincoat? Why don’t I buy you a new one?

**Joe:** No thanks Gladys. **(Tugging at his raincoat**.**)** Got a lot of memories has this old raincoat. This is where I stuffed the takings on that fateful night… seems a long time ago now… still I mustn’t get morbid.

**Gladys:** You’ve been a good friend these past fifteen years…

**Joe:** Just a minute, what do you mean by *been*? I don’t intend popping off just yet.

**Gladys:** I don’t want you popping off before me anyway. **(Putting her money in her handbag**.**)** I shall miss my weekly treat.

(Gladys stands.)

**Gladys:** I must go now Joe, just in case that inspector is hanging around. Can’t be seen talking to you, we don’t want him getting any ideas. **(Tapping Joe on the shoulder**.**)** Take good care of yourself Joe.

(Gladys slowly exits Stage Left. Lights down.)

Scene 6:

(Half lights up on set as before. It is now 9.30pm. Penny and Guy enter arm in arm Stage Right. Penny and Guy are dressed more suitably for evening. Penny is carrying a small handbag. They pause.)

**Penny:** That was absolutely wonderful Guy, thank you so much for taking me.

**Guy:** Don’t mention it, it was my pleasure… What time did you say your bus left?

**Penny:** Ten minutes past ten.

**Guy: (Looking at his watch**.**)** We have half-an-hour before the bus leaves… Now this is not a chat up line Penny… but do you think we could pause awhile on this bench? **(Pointing to the bench**.**)** This is the one we shared a sandwich on this morning.

**Penny:** Why not. I’ve already learnt that you don’t do chat up lines.

(Penny and Guy go to the bench and sit. Guy slips his arm around Penny’s shoulder, she leans closer.)

**Penny: (Looking up**.**)** Look, there’s a new moon up there, aren’t you supposed to do something with your money?

**Guy:** I think you’re supposed to turn it over or something, doesn’t apply to me… I don’t want to sound depressing, but I don’t see much of a future for us at the moment.

**Penny:** Us Guy? You’re not suggesting that…

**Guy:** Suggesting what Penny?

**Penny:** Nothing Guy, nothing. Head in the clouds after such a wonderful evening I guess.

(Smokey Joe enters Stage Right carrying his sack bag and approaches the bench.)

**Guy:** Oh hello. Was there something?

**Joe:** No, it can wait.

**Penny:** Wait for what?

**Joe:** Bit embarrassing to say really.

**Guy:** You mean we’re embarrassing you by sitting here canoodling.

**Penny: (To Guy**.**)** We weren’t canoodling, were we?

**Joe:** No *you’re* not embarrassing me, it’s nice to see a young couple holding hands, starting out on that long road to… I’m sorry I’m getting on my hobby horse again.

**Penny:** You came and sat here at lunch time, didn’t you?

**Joe:** That’s right.

**Penny: (Thinking**.**)** I think I’ve just worked it out Guy. Our friend, didn’t expect us to be here and finds it embarrassing to ask us to move.

**Guy:** Move, what for?

**Penny:** ‘Cause I reckon he sleeps here. **(To Joe**.**)** I’m right aren’t I?

**Joe:** Yes miss, I’m afraid you are. I’ve been sleeping on this bench for the past goodness knows how long, at least fifteen years.

**Guy:** You don’t have to be afraid, we’ll move. Won’t we Penny?

(Guy and Penny start to get up.)

**Joe:** No hang on a minute. **(Pauses.)** Do you mind if I sit with you for a while?

**Penny: (Making room for Joe**.**)** Of course not.

(Joe puts his bag on the floor and sits on the bench.)

**Joe:** I shall be brief. My name is Joe by the way.

**Guy:** I’m Guy and this is Penny.

**Joe:** Yes I know, I heard you talking.

**Penny:** You’re not a spy in disguise, are you?

**Joe:** No Penny, I’m as you find me… a man of the road. Not a care in the world. **(Pauses.)** But as strange as it may seem I do care about other people… especially you two.

**Guy: }** **(Together)**

**Penny: }** Us two?

**Joe:** Yes, you two… I heard you bemoaning the fact that you hadn’t any money, you both want to go to university, and perhaps one day you could be looking to get married and have a family. All the things that at the moment seem far, far away, practically out of reach.

**Guy:** You’ve hit the nail on the head, you’re so right Joe.

**Joe:** Well I’m going to help you achieve some of those dreams.

**Penny:** I don’t wish to be rude Joe, but how can you possibly help us?

**Guy:** You don’t look as though you’ve got two pennies to rub together, let alone thousands of them.

(There is a long pause.)

**Joe:** When I sat here earlier listening to you wanting to further your education, I thought that I had to do something about it.

**Guy:** Joe I’m sorry, I can’t possibly see how you can do much about mine, or Penny’s further education

**Joe:** I want to pay for it.

**Penny:** You what? But Joe it costs thousands, you haven’t got that sort of money… have you?

**Joe:** I can’t possibly go into details, but I have sufficient money to see you both through university.

(Penny and Guy look at each other in disbelief.)

**Guy:** I don’t want to pry Joe, but we would need an awful amount, it seems a lot of money for a…

(Pause.)

**Joe:** For a tramp to be carrying around?

**Penny:** But won’t *you* need that money Joe?

**Joe:** Me! What do I want with money? You are young, starting out in life, seeking new ventures. I am more than content with what I’ve got, besides I’m not as young as I used to be. **(Pause.)** I insist that you take it, I shall be very upset if you don’t.

(Penny and Guy look at each other in amazement.)

**Joe:** Now if you don’t mind I’d like to get some shut-eye.

**Guy:** Just a minute Joe, how do we know that you haven’t nicked it?

**Joe: (Slightly angry**.**)** Are you saying that us men of the road go around pinching things?

**Penny:** I don’t think Guy is implying that you obtained it under false pretences, but it does seem an awful lot of money for one person to accumulate.

**Guy:** I didn’t mean to offend Joe. But if we take the money, somebody is likely to ask questions as to where we obtained that amount of cash.

**Joe: (Stridently**.**)** I don’t intend giving you it all… not all at once.

**Penny: (To Guy**.**)** I still don’t think we can take it Guy, it seems wrong somehow.

**Joe:** I can see that I’m going to find it hard to give this money away, and you are the first people I’ve met that could use it wisely.

**Guy:** Perhaps if you tell us how you acquired the money, it might be easier for us to accept it.

**Joe:** I can’t do that, I don’t want to involve you in any way, you’ll have to trust me that the money I have is mine and no one else’s.

**Guy: (To Penny**.**)** If we did accept Joe’s offer, all our worries regarding university fees would be solved. **(To Joe**.**)** I don’t know what to say Joe. We would be foolish to turn down your offer, but…

**Penny: (To Joe**.**)** You said that you wouldn’t give us all the money at once. I don’t understand Joe.

**Joe:** Look, I like you two, I like you a lot. I have had a wonderful life, and I would like to see you two enjoying your future together, perhaps not as a pair, because you both might meet other partners, but the one thing that I don’t want, is for you to be tied down with financial problems getting a good education.

**Guy:** What are you getting at Joe?

**Joe:** There would be conditions to me giving you the money.

**Penny:** Conditions Joe?

**Joe:** Yes conditions… As I said I like you pair a lot, and would like to see you more often, you see I have no kids of my own and you can become my family, my inheritance. **(Pause.)** So the conditions are… one, that I will give you money each week on a Friday, cause that’s when the canteen closes early… right Guy?

(Guy nods.)

**Joe:** And two… that you both have a separate bank account specifically for your tuition fees which you will show me each week.

**Penny:** I don’t know what to say Joe. **(To Guy**.**)** What do you say Guy?

(Guy leaps up and shakes Joe by the hand.)

**Guy:** Joe, you’re a genius. I see in you a person who thinks more of his fellow man than of himself, someone whom Penny and I can look up to. It will be a huge, huge pleasure to visit this bench each week if only to shake hands with a true gentleman.

**Penny:** And not just to accept the money but to have lunch as well. I shall get my mother to make an extra sandwich.

**Joe:** You get the accounts set up.

(Reaching in his raincoat pocket takes out two wads of £20 notes.)

**Joe:** And here are your first instalments.

**Guy:** What can I say?

**Joe:** Not a word Guy, not a word.

**Guy: (To Penny**.**)** Come on Penny or we’ll miss your bus.

(Penny stands and kisses Joe on the forehead.)

**Penny:** Take care Joe… I shall remember you forever.

**Joe:** Go on you two. **(Pause.)** You’ve made an old man very happy.

(Joe lies down on the bench. Penny and Guy take some of the sheets of newspaper and cover him up. Hand in hand they begin to exit Stage Left, as they approach the exit they both turn and wave to Joe. Joe waves back. Penny and Guy exit. Lights down.)

Production Notes:

Character Descriptions:

**Joe** - Known as Smokey Joe, a 65 year old tramp, although his appearance would suggest he is much older. He fought in the Second World War, when demobbed he decided to become a ‘man of the road’. Unfortunately he got involved in a warehouse robbery.

**Bill** - William Penrose. A Detective Inspector from the local constabulary. He has a slightly pompous air about him, he appears every bit the perfect gentleman.

**Jimmy** - James Cockcroft. Quite the opposite in character and appearance to Bill. He was a detective constable working alongside Bill until 15 years ago when he left the police force and joined the army. He recently retired from the army and has been asked to meet his former colleague.

**Gladys Bainbridge** - A 60 year old who has been widowed for 15 years. Her husband was shot during a warehouse robbery. She is slightly hard of hearing and longs to make friends which makes her appear nosey.

**Penny Walters** - An attractive 20 year old student from the local technical college. Her attitude on her first encounter with Guy would suggest nonchalance.

**Guy Saunders** - Also a 20 year old student at the tech. His parents are in the process of getting divorced, he resides in digs. He is obviously very keen on Penny.

**Ruth Penoleneski** - A 60 year old grandmother who bemoans the fact that because her daughter works she has to look after her grandson Elvis. She has a straightforward, pleasant personality.

**Policeman** - The first day on the beat for this straight-out-of-college 20 year old. Tries very hard to get things right but is still very green. He gets on very well with people, especially Joe.

**Park Keeper** - A 50 year old who goes about his work with enthusiasm and efficiency. He is very keen on stressing the morbid side of life.

**Young Lady** - A 20-ish attending her first interview at the town hall.

**Young Lad** - Non-speaking, approximately 10 years old. Cheeky in nature and able to bounce a football.

Setting:

A simple set consisting of a park bench/garden seat, capable of seating three persons, placed Downstage Centre facing the audience allowing sufficient space between it and front of stage for actors to walk. The backdrop could be either simple or complex with painted trees etc. dependant on resources. Shrubs in tubs, with the tubs disguised and beds of flowers would enhance the overall appearance of the set. A piece of scenery i.e. fence or trellis is required for Joe to screen himself from the bench but for him to be seen by the audience.

Props List:

Scene 1:

Large sack-type bag (Onstage)

Several sheets of newspaper (Onstage)

Handbag (Young lady)

Sat nav device (Young lady)

Scene 2:

Folded up newspaper (Bill)

Briefcase (Onstage)

Sandwich (Gladys)

Handbag containing handkerchief, photograph and a flask of tea (Gladys)

Shopping bag with some items (Gladys)

Scene 3:

Large handbag containing a smart phone and lunchbox which in turn contains two sandwiches (Penny)

Wrist watch (Penny)

Scene 4:

Football (Young Lad)

Large wheeled pushchair loaded with shopping bags (Ruth)

Small holdall containing baby bottle with milk, several nappies, a few baby clothes and baby’s dummy (Ruth)

Handbag containing a mobile phone (Ruth)

Scene 5:

Gents handkerchief (Policeman)

Football (Young Lad)

Handbag (Gladys)

Large wad of money (Joe)

Scene 6:

Large sack-type bag containing wads of money and sheets of newspaper (Joe)

Gents wrist watch (Guy)

Small handbag (Penny)

Note: The wads of money can be represented by several sheets of paper the same size as a £20 note, rolled together with a real note on the outside.