

Angel of the Bus Shelter

by

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Dramatis Personae

Orson : A mathematician and a geek.

Jessica : Young, vain and quietly insane.

Cawthorne : A vigilante traffic warden.

Ramsey : Orson's only friend. An amateur mathematician.

Douglas : A wealthy businessman with homicidal tendencies.

Locations

ACT I : A remote bus shelter. No other scenery is required.

ACT II: A pub. Requires no more than a table and two chairs.

ACT III: An empty stage indicative of some psychological limbo.

ACT IV: A remote bus shelter.

ACT I

A remote bus shelter. Night.

ORSON sits asleep on the bench in the shelter. He snores gently. A note book rests on his lap.

Enter JESSICA. She is wearing an elegant evening gown with matching handbag.

Jessica steps into the shelter, looks at her watch and then glares at Orson.

She spots the note book and picks it up.

After a quick flick through the equations and diagrams that cram its pages, she replaces it.

Jessica reaches into her handbag and takes out a vicious-looking paper knife. She raises it above her head and prepares to strike Orson. Changing her mind, she puts the knife back in the handbag.

JESSICA (yelling): Pig!

Orson's snoring gives way to a series of staccato splutterings. He sleeps on.

JESSICA: All men are pigs. You snore, you sweat, you snivel, you fart.

Jessica sits down.

JESSICA: You're pathologically incapable of keeping your bodily functions to yourselves.

Jessica nudges Orson in the ribs.

JESSICA: Wake up, pig!

Orson wakes up.

ORSON: Did you just nudge me?

JESSICA: Depends on how you define 'nudge'.

ORSON: You nudged me!

JESSICA: Only with my elbow.

ORSON: You've been looking at my note book.

JESSICA: You were snoring.

ORSON: And that gives you the right to interfere with my belongings? This might only be a book to you – a collection of pages and paragraphs and punctuation marks – but to me it's a whole lot more.

JESSICA: Such as?

ORSON: Such as never you mind. You shouldn't touch what doesn't belong to you.

JESSICA: I was just being curious.

ORSON: Curious? No that's not curious. Curious is when you wonder about things – like how many stars there are or how long it would take a computer to calculate Pi to a billion decimal places. What you did went beyond curious. You - Oh, how can I put this? (*searches around for an appropriate phrase*) You intruded. You trespassed. You overstepped the mark.

JESSICA: I'm sorry.

ORSON: You practically raped me.

JESSICA: I think you're over-reacting.

ORSON: You probably think I'm over-reacting.

JESSICA: I do.

ORSON: It's that certain things which might appear trivial to you are a matter of prime importance to me.

JESSICA: What's your book about?

ORSON: You wouldn't understand.

JESSICA: Try me.

ORSON: It's a dissertation. Do you know what a dissertation is?

JESSICA: Do you know what a smack in the mouth is?

ORSON: Ten years. Ten long years.

JESSICA: That's not a dissertation. That's a decade.

ORSON: That's how long it's taken me to write it. It's still not finished.

JESSICA: It must be quite some dissertation.

ORSON: Now you're showing your ignorance. You can't judge a dissertation by how long it takes to write.

JESSICA: It's like make-up. My sister spends hours putting hers on and she still looks like a pig. I, on the other hand – Well, a bit of eye-liner, a touch of lip gloss and I'm away. Less is more. At least in my case. Take my cheek bones. Do they look rouged to you? Most men think I use rouge, but I don't. I just happen to have an exceptionally fine bone structure.

Orson looks at his watch.

ORSON: Bugger. Bloody thing's stopped.

Jessica checks her own watch.

JESSICA: Ten to five.

ORSON: In a pig's eye. It doesn't get dark till gone eight.

JESSICA: Ten to five in the morning.

ORSON: Can't be. The pubs have only just closed.

JESSICA: You fell asleep.

ORSON: I dozed off. There is a difference. Wish I knew what the time was.

JESSICA: Ten to five.

ORSON: Pity neither of us has a watch that works.

JESSICA: My watch work a just fine. It's got a lifetime guarantee. Won't lose a second in a thousand years. Its three quartz crystals makes it one of the most accurate time pieces in the world.

Jessica gets up and walks towards the front of the stage. She turns to face Orson.

JESSICA: Did you know that quartz vibrates thirty-two thousand, seven hundred and sixty-eight times every second?

ORSON: Yes.

JESSICA: It was in the booklet that came with the watch. I memorised that figure in the hope that I could impress somebody with it. Perhaps I will one day.

ORSON: You impressed me.

JESSICA: But then I blew it by telling you about the booklet.

ORSON: I'm still impressed. My name's Orson by the way.

JESSICA: Orson? Really?

ORSON: That amuses you?

JESSICA: It makes me think of Orson the Little Red Duck. I must have read that book a thousand times. You remember the bit where he goes to the Tower of London and gets into an argument with a raven?

ORSON: I've never heard of Orson the Little Red Duck.

JESSICA: When I was a little girl, I ran away from home to see the raven for myself. Of course, I was too young to know it was only a story. Life's full of disappointments, isn't it? I keep telling myself I'll get used to it but I never do.

ORSON: If that bus doesn't come soon, I'm getting a taxi. I was hoping to be home by midnight. I haven't had a decent night's sleep in days.

JESSICA: Don't count on getting one any time soon.

ORSON: What did you say your name was?

JESSICA: I didn't. It's Jessica.

ORSON: Are you off to a party?

JESSICA: At this time of day?

ORSON: You're wearing an evening gown.

JESSICA: So I am. I hadn't realised. I just slipped into the first thing I could find. Wish I'd put more thought into it. Still, the police won't be looking for someone in formal attire, will they?

ORSON: I've got a dinner jacket at home. Never worn it. I'm not really a dinner jacket person. I might be if I got invited to dinner parties, but I never do.

JESSICA: My husband liked dinner jackets. Always smartly turned out. That's the thing that impressed me most when I first met him.

ORSON: Please don't tell me it was love at first sight. I can't stand it when people do that.

JESSICA: To be honest, I don't think it was ever love. More of a mutual respect. You can't build a decent relationship based on love. Your feelings get in the way.

ORSON: What does your husband do?

JESSICA: He's dead.

ORSON: So not much then?

JESSICA: There's no need to be judgmental. It's hardly his fault he's a stiff.

ORSON: How long has he been dead? I know it's a personal question, but you brought up the subject.

JESSICA: To the nearest minute?

ORSON: An approximation will do.

Jessica looks at her watch.

JESSICA: About forty-five minutes now. Give or take a minute or two.

ORSON: By your watch? You don't want to go by that.

JESSICA: It used to give me a rash. My doctor reckons it's down to a combination of stress and zinc. There's zinc in the strap. You wouldn't have thought so to look at it, would you?

ORSON: How did your husband die?

JESSICA: Suddenly.

ORSON: Suddenly?

JESSICA: He wasn't expecting it.

ORSON: What I meant was – and I hope you don't mind me pressing the point – what was the cause of death?

JESSICA: Well, I'm not a doctor, but I suppose he just sort of bled to death.

ORSON: Good Lord. How awful.

JESSICA: I had considered poison, but I'd no idea how to go about acquiring some.

ORSON: Did you try a chemist?

JESSICA: I hate chemists.

ORSON: Because they remind you of hospitals?

JESSICA: Because they remind me of the perfume hall at Harrods. Too many smells. They give me migraine. I'm a one-smell woman.

ORSON: I'm like that with ice cream. So long as it's just a single flavour, I'm fine. But give me two or more and I'm as sick as a puppy.

JESSICA: I wish you hadn't mentioned ice cream. I'm cold. Aren't you cold?

ORSON: I've always been impervious to the weather. My brother was the complete opposite. 'Tommy Two Coats' we called him.

JESSICA: I've got no knickers on.

ORSON: I reckon I could walk naked to the North Pole and not feel the slightest degree of discomfort. Of course, my legs would ache but that's to be expected. Must be lovely at the North Pole this time of year.

JESSICA: I never wear knickers - unless I really have to.

ORSON: My Aunt Rebecca was the same. Hated underwear. She had a nickname too - Auntie No-

Knickers. Always wore trousers though. So, you murdered your husband then?

JESSICA: Don't you care that I'm not wearing knickers? Most men would find that exciting.

ORSON: I suppose he deserved it.

JESSICA: Who?

ORSON: Your husband.

JESSICA: Now you've lost me. What did my husband deserve?

ORSON: He deserved to die.

JESSICA: What a horrid man you are. How can you say that about somebody you've never met? Or have you? Have you met my husband?

ORSON: Not as far as I know.

JESSICA: Are you sure? People call him the Can Opener King. He's big in domestic hardware.

ORSON: I've got three can openers but I've never heard of the Can Opener King.

JESSICA: Then how can you say he deserved to die? Don't you think you're being presumptuous?

Annoyed, Orson gets to his feet and approaches Jessica.

ORSON: Presumptuous? Did you say presumptuous? You come along, purloin my note book, assault me and rob me of my sleep - and then you have the gall to call me presumptuous?

JESSICA: What is this precious book of yours anyway? What's it about? Is it interesting?

ORSON: Of course not. The last thing you want from an academic treatise is for it to be interesting. That way lies madness and death.

JESSICA: What's it about?

Orson ignores the question.

ORSON: When I was at University, a certain Professor wrote a popular book about fluid mechanics. Critics and public were unanimous in declaring it the first book on the subject that could be understood by the man in the street. He was immediately ostracised. His grant was cut. Invitations to symposia dried up. He found himself lecturing to empty halls. His wife left him. His children disowned him. His dog bit him. Someone let down the tyres on his bicycle. Things got even worse when extracts from his book were published in Reader's Digest. Two days later, he blew his brains out.

JESSICA: So you were at university? I suppose you think that makes you an intellectual.

ORSON: Actually, I'm a mathematician.

JESSICA: You poor thing. Life's too short to waste on numbers and things. Why don't you write about something useful like cookery?

ORSON: I can't cook.

JESSICA: You've got three can openers.

ORSON: Mere decoration.

JESSICA: So what is it?

ORSON: What is what?

JESSICA: Your book.

ORSON: I told you.

JESSICA: You didn't.

ORSON: It's a dissertation.

JESSICA: What's it about?

ORSON: You wouldn't understand.

JESSICA: I don't want to understand. I just want to know what it's about. Is that too much to ask?

ORSON: It's a mathematical and geometric analysis of the Kama Sutra.

JESSICA: Really?

ORSON: Really.

JESSICA: And what's it called?

ORSON: 'A Mathematical and Geometric Analysis of the Kama Sutra.'

JESSICA: Sounds interesting.

ORSON (*testily*): Well, it isn't. Even the title is as dry as ditch water – as anyone but a cretin would realise.

JESSICA: You're getting aggressive. Why do men always get aggressive? Isn't it enough that you snore, sweat, snivel and fart?

ORSON: I resent your bald statement that my work is interesting. I demand a retraction.

JESSICA: It's only a dissertation. No need to get excited.

ORSON: Thank you. That's what I wanted to hear.

JESSICA: If I'd known it was going to be this cold, I would have worn knickers. As a matter of fact, I would have worn two pairs. I'd have been risking a yeast infection, but at least I'd be warm.

ORSON: It's the bus company's fault. They don't care if we're here from now till Doomsday.

JESSICA: Tights would be better than knickers. Though best of all would be tights and knickers.

ORSON: That's something I've often wondered about. Do you wear the tights over the knickers or the knickers over the tights?

JESSICA: Don't you know?

ORSON: I wouldn't be asking if I did.

JESSICA: A mathematical and geometric analysis of the Kama Sutra? That's what you said you're writing, isn't it? Will it have pictures?

ORSON: Just diagrams.

JESSICA: Filthy ones? Can I see? Will you let me look? You won't shock me, I promise. I'm quite broad-minded – especially when it comes to geometry.

ORSON: You wouldn't understand it.

JESSICA: I don't want to understand it. I just want to look at the pictures.

ORSON: Diagrams.

JESSICA: Diagrams then.

ORSON: It's pointless anyone reading it right now. I have yet to draw my conclusions.

JESSICA: Is there anything maths and geometry can tell us about sex we don't already know?

ORSON: As I say, I've yet to draw my conclusions.

JESSICA: So the whole exercise could be a complete waste of time?

ORSON: In maths, we learn by our failures as well as our mistakes. Besides, I've developed a whole new algebra to describe every conceivable position two people can take whilst having sex.

JESSICA: Is that useful?

ORSON: It's enabled me to discover three new positions not mentioned in the Kama Sutra or any other literature I've come across. And I'm sure there's more to come.

JESSICA: Show me.

ORSON: Can't. Two are only possible in zero gravity, and for the third, one of us would need to be a midget.

JESSICA: I meant show me the equations.

ORSON: You wouldn't understand them.

JESSICA: You say that just once more, Orson, and I'll bust your fucking nose. Credit me with some brains.

ORSON: Why should I? You reckon the bus isn't due for at least another two hours and yet you stand here in the freezing cold without any knickers on. It's hardly the action of an Einstein, is it?

JESSICA: Einstein wore knickers, did he? Is that what you're saying? And I suppose Isaac Newton paraded round in fishnet stockings. Come to think of it, I believe I heard that Heisenberg dressed as a woman at weekends – but I can't be certain.

ORSON: Why are you here?

JESSICA: I've just killed my husband. What do you expect me to do? Sit around waiting for the police to arrive?

ORSON: At least you'd be warm.

JESSICA: I'm on the run. I'm a fugitive from justice. A desperado. An outlaw. Just like Robin Hood.

ORSON: Except Robin Hood had the sense to wear tights.

JESSICA: But not knickers. AC

ORSON: How did you kill your husband?

JESSICA: I've told you once.

ORSON: You said you made sure he didn't suffer. You said you didn't use poison. And that's all you said. It's hardly a detailed account.

JESSICA: What more do you need to know?

ORSON: Did you shoot him?

JESSICA: If I can't get hold of poison, I'm hardly likely to get my hands on a gun, am I?

ORSON: I'm told the best method is to inject insulin between the victim's toes. Coroners never look there and insulin breaks down into naturally occurring compounds.

JESSICA: And from where would I get insulin? Or a syringe for that matter?

ORSON: You must have used some sort of weapon. What was it? A pillow?

JESSICA: Don't be daft. You can't stab someone with a pillow.

ORSON: So you stabbed him!

JESSICA: You don't have to broadcast it.

ORSON: What did you stab him with? A knitting needle? A bread knife? A wire coat hanger?

JESSICA: Do I look the sort of girl who has wire coat hangers? Have you any idea what a wire coat hanger would do to a gown like this?

ORSON: I'm talking hypothetically.

JESSICA: Yes, well, if I want tips on how to murder someone, I certainly won't be coming to you.

ORSON: A knife! It must have been a knife. Maybe a ceremonial dagger of some sort? Am I right?

JESSICA: A paper knife.

ORSON: Oh yes. That's beautiful. A paper knife. I applaud your choice of weapon. Sharp enough to be lethal and yet at the same time delicate and feminine. I knew it had to be something like that.

JESSICA: I did think about using a chainsaw.

ORSON (*horrified*): No!

JESSICA: But I decided it would be too noisy. Besides, it's hard to conceal a chainsaw beneath a pillow.

ORSON: So you killed him in bed? Was he asleep?

JESSICA: Very much so. He was snoring. Why is it that sleep brings out the worst in a man? He was snoring. He was sweating. He was sniveling. He was farting.

ORSON: Did you stab him in the front or the back?

JESSICA: In the back. That might seem cowardly, but he was lying face down. If he'd been on his back, I would have killed him just the same.

ORSON: Did you stab him through the heart?

JESSICA: Where else?

ORSON: How?

JESSICA: With a paper knife. In the back. Through the heart.

ORSON: I know that! I've been listening. What I meant was how did you do it? For instance, how did you grip the knife?

JESSICA: I can't remember.

ORSON: Of course you can! There you are, on the verge of taking the life of a fellow human being. You have a knife in your hand. You're about to commit a dreadful crime. You can't tell me that scene isn't burnt indelibly upon your memory.

JESSICA: Maybe it'll come back to me.

ORSON: We'll skip over it for now. Describe the movement of your hand as you stabbed him.

JESSICA: I'm not sure I understand what you're asking.

ORSON: Did you thrust the knife straight into him? Or did you swing your arm through the air like a bowler delivering a googlie?

JESSICA: Does it make a difference?

ORSON: Not to your husband. But murder's a big thing. It's probably the most significant act you'll ever commit. Every little detail is important.

JESSICA: I could tell you about the planning and what I did straight afterwards, but the actual murder itself is something of a blur.

ORSON: You say he was lying on his front. (*Orson lies face down on the bench.*) Like this?

JESSICA: He didn't have his arm and leg dangling over the side.

ORSON: If I try to get my leg up, I'm going to fall off. You'll have to make allowances.

JESSICA: He was facing the other way.

ORSON: Let's say for the sake of argument he was facing this way.

JESSICA: Then he'd be sleeping with his feet on the pillow.

ORSON: Does it matter?

JESSICA: 'Every little detail is important.' Besides, I was on his right when I killed him and the bus shelter's in the way.

Orson turns round and lies in the opposite direction.

ORSON: Is that better?

JESSICA: He was in his pyjamas.

ORSON: Don't be flippant. We're talking about a man's life here. Someone who was flesh and blood the same as you and me. Show some respect.

JESSICA: Are all mathematicians self-righteous little pricks?

ORSON: Yes. Go ahead and stab me.

JESSICA: How?

ORSON: The same way you stabbed your husband.

JESSICA: I can't for the life of me remember -

ORSON: Just do it! Don't think about it. Let your instincts take over.

JESSICA: I can't.

ORSON: Oh, for crying out loud! I'm freezing my bollocks off here.

JESSICA: I thought you didn't feel the cold.

ORSON: Except in my bollocks. Can you at least remember in which hand you held the paper knife?

JESSICA: My right. I think.

ORSON: You think?

JESSICA: It must have been my right. I'm right handed.

ORSON: So you had the knife in your right hand. Good. Now we're getting somewhere. Show me how you held the knife.

JESSICA: Oh dear.

ORSON: There's only so many ways you can hold a knife.

JESSICA: It's gone. I thought I had it there for a moment, but now it's gone.

ORSON: Look, you either held it like this (*demonstrates a downward slashing movement*) – like Norman Bates in Psycho when he attacks Janet Leigh in the shower or else like this (*demonstrates a straight stabbing motion*) – like Othello slaying Desdemona.

JESSICA: It was Norman Bates.

ORSON: Are you sure?

JESSICA: Quite sure.

ORSON: Not Othello?

JESSICA: Definitely not Othello.

ORSON: Then the stroke must have been over-arm as opposed to under.

JESSICA: Yes.

ORSON: Then do it!

JESSICA: I can't. Not with you watching.

ORSON: How about if I close my eyes?

JESSICA: That would work. I could kill you if you had your eyes closed. I'd have no problem doing it then.

ORSON: Good. (*closes his eyes.*) Just don't go nudging me in the ribs again.

Jessica opens her handbag and rummages inside. She pulls out a paper knife.

ORSON: Have you done it? Am I dead yet?

JESSICA: Not yet.

ORSON: What's keeping you?

JESSICA: I'm psyching myself up. You want me to get this right, don't you?

ORSON: I want you to get on with it. The bus will be here soon.

JESSICA: OK. Here goes.

Jessica brings the paper knife up high in the air and back down again. She stops with the knife just above Orson's back.

JESSICA: Wow! That was intense.

ORSON: You've done it?

JESSICA: Even as we speak, the last remnants of your life are ebbing away like ice in the sun.

Orson opens his eyes.

ORSON: Very elegantly put.

Orson sits up. He sees the paper knife in Jessica's hand.

ORSON: Is that it? Is that what you used to commit the dirty deed? (*holds out his hand.*) May I?

Jessica hides the knife behind her back.

JESSICA: No! I don't want you touching it.

ORSON: Why not?

JESSICA: It has sentimental value. With this implement, I killed my husband. It reminds me of my wedding vows.

ORSON: To love, honour and obey?

JESSICA: Till death us do part.

ORSON: Do you always get attached to your instruments of destruction?

JESSICA: Whatever do you mean?

ORSON: Do you keep all your murder weapons as souvenirs?

JESSICA: I never killed anybody until tonight.

ORSON: You didn't tell me that. Dear God, I feel so stupid. You led me on, letting me believe you're a serial murderer - and all the time you're no more than a beginner.

JESSICA: It wasn't my intention to have you believe I was some female Jack the Ripper. What did I say to make you think that?

ORSON: I don't want to talk about it. You've deceived me. I was going to let you look at my note book but now I shan't.

JESSICA: See if I care.

ORSON: I'm giving that bus another two minutes and then I'm out of here. It's a long walk home but it's better than hanging around in the middle of nowhere with some neurotic bitch who doesn't even know what time of day it is.

Jessica brandishes the paper knife.

JESSICA: What did you call me?

ORSON: A neurotic bitch.

JESSICA: A neurotic bitch who - what?

ORSON: Who doesn't know what time of day it is.

JESSICA: You see this watch? Fifteen hundred pounds it cost. My husband bought me it for my birthday. Won't lose a second in a thousand years.

ORSON: What's his name – this husband of yours?

JESSICA: Douglas.

ORSON: And what do his friends call him? Dougie?

JESSICA: They call him the Can Opener King.

ORSON: What does his mother call him? Canny?

JESSICA: Do you talk to everyone this way? No wonder you were at this bus stop all alone. You don't have a friend in the world, do you?

ORSON: Now you're being personal.

JESSICA: You don't, do you?

ORSON: I used to have a dog.

JESSICA: A dog's not a friend. It's a commodity. You buy it from a shop like a tin of baked beans.

ORSON: It died when it was four weeks old.

JESSICA: And is that the only so-called friend you've ever had?

ORSON: I loved that little puppy. It was always there for me. Always loyal. Never questioning. Everyone I've ever known has betrayed or disappointed me. But not my puppy. He never let me down.

JESSICA: It died.

ORSON: But I got my money back.

JESSICA: And what was this puppy called? I presume it had a name.

ORSON: I don't remember. All I remember was its little puppy eyes.

JESSICA: Let me see your note book.

ORSON: Go home and put some knickers on.

JESSICA: Tights would be better.

ORSON: I never did see how you killed your husband. I had my eyes closed. Show me again.

JESSICA: You should have been watching.

ORSON: You told me not to.

JESSICA: What I did was this –

Jessica swings her arm up in the air.

ORSON: Stop there.

Jessica freezes.

ORSON: Interesting. Most people would swing their arm in an arc but you've gone more or less straight up.

JESSICA: With a slight forward motion.

ORSON: I've noted that. Continue.

Jessica brings the paper knife back down in a stabbing motion.

ORSON: A parabola! That's perfect.

JESSICA: It is?

ORSON: You must have loved your husband very much to have killed him with a parabola.

JESSICA: I'm not sure what a parabola is.

ORSON: A parabola is the locus of a point which varies in such a way that its distance from a fixed point is equal to the distance from a fixed line.

JESSICA: You don't think it's a bit over-elaborate? Perhaps I should have just thrust the knife straight into him.

ORSON: Too crude. A parabola's exactly right. It's the most poetic of all curves.

JESSICA: I didn't know it was a parabola.

ORSON: Instinct must have led you to it. You're a remarkable woman.

JESSICA: So you'll let me see your note book?

ORSON: On one condition.

JESSICA: Which is?

ORSON: That you're not wearing any knickers.

JESSICA: I'm not. Give me the note book.

ORSON: How do I know you're not lying?

JESSICA: You want to see for yourself? Is that it? You're after an eyeful of beaver! Well, well, well, Orson. There's hope for you yet.

ORSON: You don't have to make it sound so sordid. This dissertation means the world to me. How do you think I'd feel if I let you read it only to discover you've been having me on?

JESSICA: I take your point, Orson, but this evening gown is not something I can just hitch up around my waist. At the very least I'd crumple the fabric. Most likely I'd tear the damn thing and then where would I be?

ORSON: Open your legs.

JESSICA: What?

ORSON: Stand with your legs apart and I'll lie on my back and take a peep. I promise not to touch anything.

JESSICA: You're a seriously weird person, Orson.

ORSON: I'm not doing this for kicks. I need to know you're honest before I let you see my work.

JESSICA: And you can tell an honest woman by looking at her beaver?

ORSON: If you're wearing knickers, you've been lying to me and I absolutely, definitely and most positively cannot trust you with my work. You can see the logic, can't you?

JESSICA: I'm not going to do it.

ORSON: Suit yourself.

JESSICA: If you'd just come right out and asked for sex, I might have said yes. I've got no objection to straight-forward, honest-to-goodness sex – especially now that I find myself unattached. But to have you lying on the ground staring up my dress – no, that's just too much.

ORSON: Okay. Let's forget the whole thing.

JESSICA: Why couldn't you just ask for sex?

ORSON: I don't want sex.

JESSICA: Of course you do. You're a man.

ORSON: I'm a mathematician.

JESSICA: That's hardly a defense.

ORSON: I don't even like sex.

JESSICA: That's because you haven't been doing it right.

ORSON: I haven't been doing it at all.

JESSICA: You poor thing. How long have you not been doing it?

ORSON: All my life. I'm a virgin.

JESSICA (*horrified*): A virgin!

ORSON: And proud of it.

JESSICA: That's not normal, Orson.

ORSON: Celibacy isn't an affliction.

JESSICA: I'd have to take your word for that.

ORSON: I should have known you wouldn't understand. You're like all the others. You look down on me now, don't you? I can see it in your eyes – the pity, the fear, the contempt. And that hurts. It really does.

JESSICA: Nobody asked you to be a virgin!

Orson glances at his watch.

ORSON: I wish this watch hadn't stopped.

JESSICA: Mine was made in Singapore.

ORSON: Why – in Christ's name – Singapore of all places?

JESSICA: The people of Singapore have as much right to make watches as anyone.

ORSON: So how about it?

JESSICA: How about what?

ORSON: A peep for a peep. You might as well. There's nothing else to do here except read the timetable.

JESSICA: No deal.

ORSON: How about if I let you flick through my other book as well?

JESSICA: You've written another book?

ORSON: Not exactly.

Orson reaches into his pocket and pulls out a small hardback.

ORSON: This is by a chap called Euclid. He was a Greek mathematician who lived in Alexandria three hundred years before the birth of Christ.

JESSICA: What's it about?

ORSON: It's Book One of *Elements*, commonly known as *Postulates and Axioms*.

JESSICA: Book One? So there's more?

ORSON: There's thirteen in all.

JESSICA: This Euclid must have had a lot of time on his hands. What's an axiom?

Orson slips the book back in his pocket. He sits on the ground, places his note book beside himself and then lies down.

JESSICA: What are you doing?

ORSON: If you want me to tell what an axiom is, you're going to have to prove you're an honest woman.

JESSICA: I can always look it up in a dictionary.

Orson says nothing. Jessica is disconcerted.

JESSICA: Get up, for goodness' sakes. You never know who's done what on that pavement. It must be crawling with germs.

ORSON: It's quite comfortable actually.

JESSICA: Get up!

ORSON: Not until I know whether you're lying or not.

JESSICA: What if a police car comes past?

ORSON: No law against lying on the pavement.

JESSICA: I'm a fugitive. The police may already be on to me. What are they going to think if they see you lying at my feet?

ORSON: I'll wave at them to let them know I'm all right.

JESSICA: I could kill you.

ORSON: Not with me wide awake and expecting it.

JESSICA: Then I'll walk away.

ORSON: I doubt it. I don't know much about human nature but I have studied game theory. You've got nothing to gain by walking away except unsated curiosity. Whereas if you stay, you get to look at one of this century's defining mathematical works. Plus you find out what an axiom is.

JESSICA: OK – let's get this straight. You look at my beaver for no longer than it takes you to determine that it is devoid of underwear. And then I get full and unfettered access to your treatise on the Kama Sutra as well as Book One of *Elements* by Euclid.

ORSON: Those terms are acceptable to me. Shall we begin?

JESSICA: Very well. But just you behave yourself.

Jessica stands with her ankles either side of Orson's face.

JESSICA: See it?

ORSON: Too dark.

JESSICA: Would it help if I squatted?

ORSON: No. I'm claustrophobic. We'll have to wait until my eyes adjust. Won't take long. I can see past your knees already.

Enter CAWTHORNE dressed as a traffic warden.

JESSICA: Good morning.

CAWTHORNE: Do you know there's a man between your legs?

JESSICA: He's a mathematician.

CAWTHORNE: Of course.

ORSON: Who's that? Is someone there?

CAWTHORNE: The name's Cawthorne.

ORSON: Orson.

Orson proffers his hand. Cawthorne reaches down and shakes it.

CAWTHORNE: You're a mathematician then?

ORSON: How can you tell?

CAWTHORNE: Your delightful friend told me. Won't you introduce us?

ORSON: Cawthorne, this is Jessica.

Cawthorne lifts Jessica's hand and kisses it.

CAWTHORNE: Enchanted.

JESSICA: Likewise.

ORSON: I can just make out the top of your thighs now.

CAWTHORNE: Not parked around here, are you?

JESSICA: My car's safely locked up in the garage. It's an Alfa Romeo Spyder.

CAWTHORNE: If I find your car on a yellow line, I'll have to give you a ticket.

JESSICA: It's a funny time to be issuing tickets.

CAWTHORNE: I believe in hitting them when they least expect it. People think that once the sun goes down they can do any damned thing they please. Well, I'm here to show them they can't.

JESSICA: Do you get extra money for working nights?

CAWTHORNE: The job is its own reward.

JESSICA: It'd have to be. I bet you get paid peanuts.

CAWTHORNE: I give my time freely.

JESSICA: What are you? Some kind of vigilante?

CAWTHORNE: Vigilante with a capital 'V'!

JESSICA: Perhaps you should give Orson a ticket. I'm sure he shouldn't be parked where he is.

CAWTHORNE: Any idea what he's doing down there?

JESSICA: He's looking at my beaver. Where do you get your tickets from?

CAWTHORNE: I print them myself.

JESSICA: And does anyone actually take any notice?

CAWTHORNE: Not yet, but they will. The day shall come when every motorist in the country fears Cawthorne the Vigilante Traffic Warden.

JESSICA: You're mad, aren't you?

CAWTHORNE: I'm not the one standing in a public place with a man between my legs.

JESSICA: Don't knock it until you've tried it.

CAWTHORNE: Look, I know we've only just met and I wouldn't normally jump in like this, but I was wondering if...

JESSICA: I'd have dinner with you?

CAWTHORNE: Yes.

JESSICA: I'd love to Cawthorne, but it's rather awkward right now.

CAWTHORNE: Of course it is.

JESSICA: I'm sorry.

CAWTHORNE: No. Not at all. Please. It was rather presumptuous of me to ask. Let's say no more about it.

JESSICA: It's just that I've very recently killed my husband. It's far too soon for me to be seeing other men.

CAWTHORNE: Some other time then?

JESSICA: Some other time.

Cawthorne spots Orson's note book lying on the pavement.

CAWTHORNE: I say! What's this?

Cawthorne picks up the note book and flicks through it. He stops at a particular diagram.

CAWTHORNE: Good Lord. $r \cosined \text{ with } x \text{ squared over } g$? That's anatomically impossible.

Cawthorne turns to a new page and scans it.

CAWTHORNE: Oh dearie me. This is the most obscene quadratic equation I have ever encountered in my life.

ORSON: I can see it! I can see your muff!

Orson emerges triumphantly from beneath Jessica's evening gown and leaps to his feet.

ORSON: You're right. You're not wearing knickers! I'm so happy!

Orson takes in the fact that Cawthorne has his note book.

ORSON: What are you doing with my note book? Give it back at once.

CAWTHORNE: Here. Take the filthy thing! Take it!

Orson grabs the note book from Cawthorne.

CAWTHORNE: You ought to be locked up. Those differentials would make a navvy blush. And why can't you stick to natural numbers like normal people? What are you? Some kind of a pervert?

ORSON: Now look -

CAWTHORNE: There's a special pit in Hell reserved for the likes of you. It's filled with fire and snakes.

ORSON: Don't the snakes get burnt?

CAWTHORNE: God loves the poor. He loves sinners. He even loves the double-parkers. But He hates mathematicians.

JESSICA: Because they're boring?

CAWTHORNE: Because they won't leave Him alone. They can't just look at the world and

appreciate how marvelous and beautiful it is. They have to know how it works. The bastards dissect His Creation like it's some laboratory specimen. They're not happy unless they're reducing His wondrous works to mere equations. They've taken the ghost from the machine.

JESSICA (*chidingly*): Is this true, Orson? Have you taken the ghost from the machine?

ORSON: As a mathematician, it's my job to fathom the workings of nature and discern the rules that govern the Universe.

CAWTHORNE: There are no rules. It is God who guides the planets in their orbit – not Newton.

ORSON: Now steady on. There's no need to have a pop at Newton.

CAWTHORNE: Get stuffed, you atheist!

Cawthorne stalks angrily away and exits.

ORSON: What a strange fellow.

JESSICA: Invited me to dinner.

ORSON: You said no, I hope.

JESSICA: Not jealous, are you? I didn't have you down as the jealous type. But then I've noticed that people do get jealous over me – even people you wouldn't expect it from.

ORSON: I just don't feel you should be wasting yourself on someone who thinks we should be living in the Dark Ages.

JESSICA: I'm beginning to think I did the right thing by murdering my husband. It's opened up a whole new world to me. Aren't you glad you fell asleep and missed the last bus?

ORSON: I have not missed the last bus.

JESSICA: If I hadn't killed my husband, we wouldn't have met and you would have no idea that quartz vibrates at a rate of thirty-two thousand, seven hundred and sixty-eight times per second.

ORSON: I already knew that.

JESSICA: And you wouldn't have gotten to see my beaver. You don't mind if I call it that, do you? It's my favourite word for it.

ORSON: A rose by any other name...

JESSICA: All in all, Orson, I'm probably the most exciting thing that's happened to you in a very long time. I am, aren't I? Go on – be honest. Am I or am I not the most exciting thing that's happened to you in a very long time?

ORSON: A very, very long time. And not just because you allowed me to – er... (*breaks off in embarrassment*)

JESSICA: Check out my beaver? Go ahead – say it. I love my beaver and I don't mind in the least that you've seen it. Talking of which, it's time you kept your side of the bargain. Which do you think I should start with? Your dissertation or Mr. Euclid?

ORSON: I don't suppose it much matters.

JESSICA: In that case, let's have your dissertation.

Orson hands over the note book. He and Jessica sit down on the bench.

Jessica opens the note book.

JESSICA: You're going to have to talk me through this. (*reading*) 'Let i equal the phallus and u equal the yoni.' What does that mean in plain English?

ORSON: i is a penis and u is a vagina.

JESSICA: Orson!

Jessica slaps Orson. Cawthorne chooses that moment to come stalking past.

CAWTHORNE: Pervert!

Exit Cawthorne.

ORSON: What I meant was –

JESSICA: I know what you meant. I'm sorry. I reacted instinctively. Perhaps we should just stick to the diagrams.

ORSON: That seems the safest option.

JESSICA: Poor Orson. One minute you're studying my beaver in all its full, naked glory, and the next you're getting slapped around the face.

ORSON: Such is the duality of woman. She can deliver pleasure and she can deliver pain.

JESSICA: I used to deliver pizzas.

ORSON: Or she can deliver pizzas.

JESSICA: Let's get back to your dissertation, shall we?

Jessica finds a diagram.

JESSICA: What about this one?

ORSON: Good choice.

JESSICA (*reading*): 'Fig. 1. A Silkworm Spinning A Cocoon. While lying on her back, the woman

raises and spreads her thighs to expose her clitoris to powerful stimulation. Let c equal the clitoris and t equal thrust.' (*turns to Orson*) What's this symbol?

ORSON: Omega.

JESSICA: And Omega equals orgasm. Why are there three of them?

ORSON: Multiple Omega.

JESSICA: And these two arrows, one above the other, each pointing in opposite directions - does that mean what I think it means?

ORSON: Yes.

JESSICA: You've a filthy mind, Orson. Is the *Euclid* as racy as this?

ORSON: It's about as racy as an obituary in the Catholic Herald.

JESSICA: Good. I don't think I could take any more smut.

Orson takes out the Euclid. He proffers it to Jessica. She shakes her head.

JESSICA: Read it to me.

ORSON: I'm not a good reader.

JESSICA: I'll make allowances.

ORSON: The bus will be here soon. I doubt we'll get much past the axioms.

JESSICA: The axioms will do.

Orson opens the book.

ORSON: Okay. Let me see now. (*reading*) 'Axiom 1 : Things which are equal to the same thing are also equal to one another.'

JESSICA: Things which are equal...

ORSON: ... to the same thing...

JESSICA: ... are also equal...

ORSON: ... to one another.

JESSICA: Is that it? 'Things which are equal to the same thing are also equal to one another'? Talk about stating the bleeding obvious.

ORSON: That's what an axiom is - a statement of the obvious.

JESSICA: Give me another one.

ORSON: Are you sure?

JESSICA: I'm hoping they'll get better.

ORSON (*reading*): 'Axiom 2 : If equals are added to equals, the wholes are equal.'

JESSICA: What exactly does that mean?

ORSON: If you take one lot of equals and -

JESSICA: What are they equal to?

ORSON: Each other. You take these equals and add them to some other equals –

JESSICA: Are these new equals equal to the first set of equals?

ORSON: Not necessarily. They're just equal to each other. If they were equal to the other equals, it wouldn't make the slightest difference.

JESSICA: So you've got one lot of things equal to each other and another lot of things equal to each other, but the first lot of things need not be equal to the second lot of things. Is that right?

ORSON: Precisely. And you add both these lots of things together to get a new lot of things.

JESSICA: And are all the things in this new lot of things equal to each other?

ORSON: The things in the new lot of things that were in the first lot of things will be equal to each other, and the things that were in the second lot of things will be equal to each other, but whether the things that were in the first lot of things are equal to the things that were in the second lot of things all depends on whether they were equal in the first place. Is that clear?

JESSICA: Perfectly. What you're saying is that if equals are added to equals, the wholes are equal.

ORSON: Precisely.

JESSICA: But what are the wholes?

ORSON: The wholes are the sums of the two equals.

JESSICA: How many sums of two equals are there?

ORSON: The same two equals?

JESSICA: Yes.

ORSON: One.

JESSICA: So what you're saying is that if you add two numbers together, the answer you get is

equal to itself?

ORSON: Yes!

JESSICA: Are you taking the piss, Orson?

ORSON: This is Euclid!

JESSICA: This is bollocks.

ORSON: These five axioms of Euclid form the whole basis of classical geometry. They're very important.

JESSICA: You led me to believe that Euclid and his Elements would open up a whole new world to me. I was looking forward to illumination, to a life-changing experience. And what do I get? Some poncey rubbish I already knew.

ORSON: You've got to give him a chance. What he says about parallel lines will knock your socks off.

JESSICA: To think I allowed you to observe my beaver at close quarters! You have cruelly deceived me, Orson. You see before you a disappointed woman. What have you to say for yourself?

ORSON: It wasn't at close quarters.

JESSICA: Apart from that, what have you to say for yourself?

ORSON: It's not my fault Euclid doesn't tickle your fancy.

JESSICA: I'm going now, Orson.

ORSON: Please don't. I'm sorry Euclid was a disappointment, but I can make it up to you. I promise.

JESSICA: It's not the *Euclid*. Anything after your mathematical and geometric treatise on the Kama Sutra was bound to be anticlimactic. And even though things haven't ended too well, it's been lovely meeting you. But I really have to go.

ORSON: The bus will be here any second.

JESSICA: You don't really believe that, do you?

ORSON: I have to. I'm tired. It's late. I don't want to walk home.

JESSICA: Your best bet is to sleep here until morning.

ORSON: You know what it is, don't you? You know what's going on? The bloody thing's waiting for me to start walking. Have you noticed that? The bus always comes just when you've given up and started walking.

JESSICA: Is that another axiom?

ORSON: As near as damn it. I could construct a whole geometry based on the vagaries of British public transport.

JESSICA: Good luck on that one.

ORSON: Why do you have to go? Was it something I said?

JESSICA: The sun will be rising soon. In about an hour, the maid will discover the body of my husband and all hell will break lose. I have to find cover – somewhere to hide until night falls once more.

ORSON: You can stay at my place.

JESSICA: That's kind of you, but I need time alone to sort my head out. You do understand, don't you?

ORSON: Not really. I tell you what, how about we meet here tomorrow night? I've enjoyed talking to you. It's not often I get the chance to discuss maths with somebody as beauti- (*breaks off in embarrassment*) - as nice as you.

JESSICA: I really ought to get as far from here as possible.

ORSON: There's no rush, is there? Another day can't make much difference.

JESSICA: Well...

ORSON: I tell you what, I'll bring you a copy of the *Principia*. You can take it with you while you're on the run. It'll keep you company.

JESSICA: What's the *Principia*?

ORSON: *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* by Sir Isaac Newton. It explains the workings of the Universe in wonderful detail. Have you ever wondered what keeps the Solar System together or what holds the stars in the sky? It's all there in the *Principia*.

JESSICA: You don't say. Is there any sex in it?

ORSON: Just lots of heavenly bodies orbiting each other.

JESSICA: Sounds exquisite.

ORSON: So you'll come?

JESSICA: How could I not?

ORSON: Same time tomorrow?

JESSICA: Whatever time that may be.

ORSON: And do you know what I'm going to do in the meantime, once I've caught up on my sleep? I'm going to lose my virginity.

JESSICA: I'm very glad to hear it.

ORSON: I suppose I'll have to find a prostitute.

JESSICA: You're going to pay good money for a grubby fumble with some seedy little tart?

ORSON: If that's what it takes to gain your respect.

JESSICA: That's very sweet. Well, I'd better be off then.

ORSON: I'll walk you part of the way. About twenty yards should do it.

JESSICA: Twenty yards?

ORSON: Remember my axiom? The one that says a bus always comes just when you've given up and started walking? The trick is to walk far enough to conjure up a bus but not so far as to be unable to run back to the bus stop in time. According to my calculations, twenty yards is the optimum distance.

JESSICA: And you're sure that will work?

ORSON: Only one way to find out. Shall we?

Jessica takes Orson's arm.

JESSICA: Lead on, Orson. Lead on.

They head away from the bus shelter.

ORSON: You trim your beaver, don't you? I didn't realise that was possible.

JESSICA: You sure have a lot to learn about women.

Exit Orson and Jessica. After a significant pause, Orson cries out.

ORSON (offstage): That's twenty yards. Good bye, Jessica! See you tonight!

Orson comes sprinting back to the bus shelter. Panting heavily, he looks around for the expected bus. There is no sign of it.

ORSON: Oh bugger.

Cawthorne comes ambling by.

CAWTHORNE: Weirdo!

Exit Cawthorne.

ORSON: Oh bugger.

Orson walks towards the stage exit. He pauses before disappearing from view.

ORSON: Bugger.

Exit Orson.

(End of Act I)

ACT II

A pub.

RAMSEY is at a table, reading Orson's Euclid.

Orson comes over with a pint of beer and a glass of gin and tonic. He sets down the gin and tonic in front of Ramsey.

Orson sits down.

ORSON: I'm honestly inclined to believe she's a spirit of the night. From dawn to dusk she has no existence beyond the memories she sows in the minds of those who meet her. Like a star, she disappears in the full light of day.

Ramsey puts down the Euclid.

RAMSEY: Godel. Kurt bastard Godel. I hate him.

ORSON: It wasn't love at first sight. Couldn't have been. I've modeled the dynamics of attraction and can state quite categorically that love at first sight is a fallacy.

RAMSEY: That guy really knew how to pull the rug out from under a fellow's belief system.

ORSON: It was when she showed me how she killed her husband – that's when I fell in love with her. You'd have done the same if you'd seen the perfect parabola she used. How many murders do you suppose have been committed with such exquisite geometry? Not many, I'd bet.

RAMSEY: Why couldn't he have left well enough alone? Why did he have to be a smart-arse? I was a fool to believe that mathematics could describe the Universe down to its last detail, but at least I was a happy fool. Maths gave me the strength to get up in the morning. It lent meaning and purpose to my life. It was my church.

ORSON: It didn't occur to me at the time, but the more I think about it now, the more certain I am that she was falling in love with me.

RAMSEY: If Godel was here now, I'd pull out his intestines and shove them up his arse.

ORSON: Her eyes spoke to me. They were praying I would rip her evening gown from her exquisite body and penetrate her with my throbbing manhood. And I would have done – except I didn't know how. I'm a virgin, Ramsey. Did you know that? I expect that comes as something of a surprise to you. Or does it? Perhaps I've mentioned it before.

RAMSEY: Any complex logical system is incomplete. Thus spake Kurt Godel.

ORSON: The bus was late, of course. It's always late. I've no idea if it ever turned up because I decided to walk. Took me six hours to get home. Three hundred and sixty minutes of my life I'll

never see again.

RAMSEY: At any given time, a complex logical system contains more true statements than it can possibly prove according to its own defining set of rules. Therefore, we can never be sure of anything. There's no certainty. If there's an Ultimate Truth out there, we'll never get so much as a glimpse of it. And even if we did, we'd have no way of knowing it was the Ultimate Truth.

ORSON: Do you know the difference between lust and love, Ramsey? Lust can be modeled in two dimensions using integers and a few basic operands. Love on the other hand – love is much more complex. To describe it, you need to postulate at least six dimensions and resort to irrational numbers. Love is something akin to the square root of minus one.

RAMSEY (*angrily*): Why didn't you warn me? I thought you were my friend. It's your fault that my psyche is in ruins and the pain of living has become too much to bear. If I'd known about Godel, I would never have got myself mixed up with maths.

ORSON: Do you remember when we met? It was at the bus shelter – the one I spent half of last night at. Some time between Christmas and New Year. It was snowing and we were both as pissed as farts. You had a bottle of cider and I had some cheap brandy which I was going to use for cooking. The bus was late. We chatted for hours and got legless.

RAMSEY: You showed me Euclid's axioms. All five of them. It was a revelation. I looked at those axioms and thought to myself, 'Fuck me. This old Greek has it sussed. Five statements of the obvious from which we can map the entire Universe.' I especially liked that thing about parallel lines. That's what hooked me.

ORSON: I thought I understood the axioms until last night. All that stuff about equals being added to equals and the wholes being equals. What does that mean?

RAMSEY: I never understood that either.

ORSON: Is there a brothel in this town? I promised Jessica I'd lose my virginity before I saw her again. I haven't much time. How does one go about finding a knocking shop? I looked in the Yellow Pages but it doesn't list brothels.

RAMSEY: Did you try under Bordellos?

ORSON: Naturally. I also looked under Banios, Bawdyhouses, Harems and Seraglios. I even tried Social Services.

Ramsey takes out a bottle of pills.

RAMSEY: I got these from a chemist's shop yesterday morning. As I was going in, a young lady approached me. She asked if I would get her some poison. 'If you want poison,' I said, 'you can get it yourself.'

ORSON: I should look in the newsagent's window. That's where they advertise, isn't it? 'French lessons. Thirty pounds an hour.' That kind of thing.

Ramsey empties the pills into his gin and tonic.

RAMSEY: Eight of these will do the trick. I bought sixteen to make sure. The pharmacist was most helpful. He gets a lot of people wanting to kill themselves. 'Take these,' he said. 'You won't feel a thing. It'll be just like falling asleep.'

ORSON: Do you want to come with me?

RAMSEY: Where?

ORSON: To the knocking shop.

RAMSEY: I'm just about to kill myself.

ORSON: I'll pay. It'll be my treat.

Ramsey stirs his drink with his finger.

RAMSEY: These are dissolving nicely. He knows his stuff, that pharmacist. 'No more than sixteen,' he said. 'Otherwise you'll vomit and you can kiss death goodbye.'

ORSON: I'm not sure what to do once I got there. Is there some coded euphemism I should use? Or should I just march straight in and say, 'I would like to have sex with one of your tarts, please'? What's the etiquette in these situations?

RAMSEY: Do you know the worst thing about dying, Orson? It's knowing that you're never going to read your own obituary.

ORSON: I don't care what the girl looks like. So long as she's clean and doesn't swear. And I don't want a redhead. There's something about redheads that makes me uncomfortable – especially if they have green eyes.

Ramsey knocks the gin and tonic back in one go. He pulls a face.

RAMSEY: Tastes like cough medicine.

ORSON: Do you think people can tell just by looking whether you're a virgin or not?

RAMSEY: I thought so until I lost my cherry. As I emerged from that alleyway, I expected to be greeted by a chorus of congratulations. I anticipated hearty handshakes and the popping of champagne corks. Wild cheering, marching bands, bunting. A ticker tape parade! Maybe even a telegram from the Queen. And all I got was a pointed question from my mum about the state of my trousers. What's the point of losing your cherry if nobody but your mum takes the blindest bit of notice?

ORSON: What did you say you were doing tonight?

RAMSEY: Killing myself.

ORSON: And tomorrow?

Ramsey looks quizzically at Orson.

ORSON: Sorry. Stupid question. I tell you what, why not come to the knocking shop with me? Have one last shag before dying?

RAMSEY: I've already swallowed the pills. I won't live to see the dawn.

ORSON: Pity. It's your round, by the way.

RAMSEY: If I give you the money, will you go up and get them? These pills kick in awfully quick. I'd hate to keel over on my way to the bar. People will think I'm pissed.

ORSON: Actually, I'd better not drink any more – not if I'm going to have sex.

RAMSEY: Quite wise. The trick with alcohol and sex is to drink enough to get your nerve up but not so much you can't get anything else up.

ORSON: Of course, that's all academic if I can't find a brothel.

RAMSEY: Do you know Harwell Street?

ORSON: Down by the industrial estate?

RAMSEY: Go to number forty-seven and ring the doorbell twice. Say you've come to read the gas meter. Once inside, ask for Rosa. If you mention my name, she'll probably give you a discount. You can't go wrong with Rosa. She's very talented.

ORSON: Rosa.

RAMSEY: Give her my love. And say goodbye for me.

ORSON: Will do.

RAMSEY: Explain to her that I won't be requiring her services any more and that we'll never have that Caribbean cruise together and it's all down to Kurt Godel. She'll understand.

ORSON: Do you think I should take my treatise with me?

RAMSEY: Rosa is not what you'd call mathematically inclined.

ORSON: Pity. I have a certain hypothesis I'd like to test.

RAMSEY: Test it by all means. She's very accommodating.

ORSON: Perhaps I should have another beer before I go? What do you think? Dutch courage and all that.

RAMSEY: I wouldn't if I were you.

ORSON: Perhaps you're right. I'd best be going.

RAMSEY: Good luck.

ORSON: You'll be all right, will you? I'd like to stay but time's getting short.

RAMSEY: I'll be fine.

ORSON: Listen, I was wondering. My watch isn't working and seeing as you won't be needing yours...

Ramsey takes off his watch.

RAMSEY: Here – take it.

Orson takes the watch and examines it.

ORSON: This looks a bit cheap. Where did you get it?

RAMSEY: Singapore.

ORSON: Right. See you then.

Orson takes a last swig of beer and hurries off.

Ramsey contemplates his empty glass.

RAMSEY: I think I'll have one for the road.

Ramsey stands up. He staggers.

RAMSEY: Perhaps not.

Ramsey sits back down. He holds his head in his hands.

RAMSEY: Bugger Godel. *(thumps the table)* Bugger him to hell.

Enter Jessica. She looks around uncertainly.

Angrily, Ramsey picks up the Euclid and throws it to the floor.

RAMSEY: It's all your fault, Euclid. You and your triangles and arcs and lines that never intersect. You seduced me!

Jessica contemplates the Euclid. She bends down and picks it up.

JESSICA: What is it about Euclid that gets folks so worked up?

Ramsey glares at Jessica.

RAMSEY: What the sodding hell do you know about Euclid?

JESSICA: 'If equals are added to equals, the wholes are equal.'

RAMSEY: Good Lord. A woman who's read Euclid! I never thought I'd live to see the day. Almost didn't as it happens.

JESSICA: I wouldn't say I was an expert.

RAMSEY: I know you. You're the young lady who approached me outside the chemist's shop.

JESSICA: I am not in the habit of propositioning strangers.

RAMSEY: You asked me to get you some poison.

JESSICA: You must be thinking of someone else.

RAMSEY: Perhaps I am. I don't know. My mind is in a daze. The old certainties no longer apply. I feel like a man gazing at the night sky only to discover that the stars have all gone.

JESSICA: Do you mind if I join you? I hate being in a pub on my own. Makes a girl feel vulnerable.

RAMSEY: I'm not very good company right now.

Jessica sits down.

RAMSEY: I'm depressed. I'm angry. I've lost my faith in Euclid.

JESSICA: It could be worse.

RAMSEY: I'm dying.

JESSICA: You need cheering up. Lucky for you I came along. Men seem to find my company pleasant. I think it's my cheek bones.

RAMSEY: If Godel were here now...

JESSICA: Are you expecting him?

RAMSEY: He's dead. Has been for some time. I'm not upset because he's not here; I'm upset because he's turned my world upside down.

JESSICA: Sorry. You must think I'm awfully thick, but I thought you were waiting for Godel.

RAMSEY: Do you know what he says? He says that at any given time, a complex logical system contains more true statements than it can possibly prove according to its own defining set of rules.

JESSICA: No wonder you're depressed.

RAMSEY: I'd get you a drink but it's not safe for me to stand. I've popped some pills. They're beginning to kick in. I didn't think they'd act so quickly. Perhaps I shouldn't have taken them with alcohol.

JESSICA: Never take pills with alcohol. I thought everyone knew that.

RAMSEY: The pharmacist should have warned me.

JESSICA: Don't worry about the drink. I only came in to see if a friend of mine was here. From what he told me, this must be where he drinks. Funnily enough, he has the same copy of the Axioms and Postulates as you do.

RAMSEY: You're talking about Orson.

JESSICA: You know him?

RAMSEY: I'm his best friend.

JESSICA: He told me he didn't have any friends.

RAMSEY: Why would he say a thing like that? I feel hurt.

JESSICA: I'm sure he didn't mean anything by it.

RAMSEY: I let him teach me everything I know about geometry. And this is how he repays me!

JESSICA: Perhaps he was confusing you with his puppy. Grief can do that to a man. He got very emotional when he spoke of it.

RAMSEY: Grief? He was glad to see the back of the damned thing. It pooped everywhere.

JESSICA: That's not how he told it.

RAMSEY: He hated that puppy. Do you know what he called it? The European Poop Mountain – and for good reason. Mind you, it didn't deserve to die the way it did.

JESSICA: I'm afraid to ask this but – exactly how did it die?

RAMSEY: Let's just say it died of heat stroke.

JESSICA: Sounds like a euphemism. I don't like euphemisms.

RAMSEY: They have their uses.

JESSICA: How would you like it if you died of a euphemism? You owe it to that poor puppy to state its cause of death in plain English.

RAMSEY: You don't want to know.

JESSICA: I'm in love with Orson. I want to know everything there is to know about him.

RAMSEY: You're what? In love with Orson? Are you mad? How could anybody be in love with Orson? Even his mother hates him.

JESSICA: I realise he's a deeply unattractive person with few or no redeeming features, but for some perverse reason I find myself wanting his babies.

RAMSEY: You are one very sick woman.

JESSICA: That's part of my attraction.

RAMSEY: The thought of Orson having babies! Dear God! Death can't come soon enough. I'm begging you – don't let a single sperm of his anywhere near your ovaries. If Mother Nature had meant for him to replicate, she wouldn't have made him such a geek.

JESSICA: I think you're being unfair. Imagine a baby with my looks and his brains.

RAMSEY: Supposing it was the other way round?

JESSICA: I'd have to drown the little sod.

RAMSEY: Listen. I'll tell you the only thing you need to know about Orson. The bastard's driven me to suicide. He introduced me to maths and led me to believe that the Universe is an ordered and rational place. And he'll do the same to you.

JESSICA: Not easily.

RAMSEY: If only he'd warned me about Godel! I wouldn't have bothered with maths if he'd done that. I'd have joined the navy.

JESSICA: This Godel sounds dangerous. I think I'll avoid him and stick to Euclid. And possibly Isaac Newton.

RAMSEY: I have taken sixteen pills. Even as we speak, they are releasing chemicals into my bloodstream. Those chemicals are slowly shutting down my Central Nervous System. Soon, I will lapse into a coma and slowly slip this mortal coil. I shall cease to exist.

JESSICA: Sounds fascinating. How are you feeling?

RAMSEY: Whoozy. A little light-headed.

JESSICA: Any regrets?

RAMSEY: Only that I ever set eyes on Orson.

JESSICA: You still haven't told me how the puppy met its end.

RAMSEY: Orson put it in my microwave. There was a crackling sound. Sparks crawled over its body. It lit up like the aurora borealis. And then the puppy let out a pathetic yelp and exploded.

JESSICA: How terrible.

RAMSEY: I couldn't eat for a week afterwards.

JESSICA: Seeing a puppy explode would ruin anyone's appetite.

RAMSEY: There was nothing wrong with my appetite. The puppy had wrecked my microwave. It took me a week to get the money together for a new one.

JESSICA: Where's Orson now?

RAMSEY: You just missed him. Once he knew I was about to peg it, he couldn't get out of here fast enough.

JESSICA: We've got an assignation arranged for tonight. A secret lover's tryst. I bet he's gone home to have a bath and change his clothes.

RAMSEY: Not if we're talking about the same person. The Orson I know doesn't bathe unless there's a 'q' in the month. He's taken himself off to get laid.

JESSICA: He mentioned he might. He seems to have a hang-up about being a virgin.

RAMSEY: Didn't use to. He was always boasting about how he'd managed to hang on to his cherry. Said for his age that made him unique. 'Orson,' I said to him, 'the fact that you've never been laid is not a measure of your will power; it's an inevitability. You'll always be unique, regardless of whether or not you get to dip your wick.'

JESSICA: You're right about that.

RAMSEY: But then we're all unique, aren't we? There's nothing unique about being unique.

JESSICA: That sounds like something Euclid might have said.

RAMSEY: Shall I tell you the real tragedy of my life? It's this: five years ago, when I was struggling to come to terms with being divorced, I met Orson instead of someone like you.

JESSICA: I'd only have broken your heart.

RAMSEY: Are you going to break Orson's?

JESSICA: I expect so.

RAMSEY: Good.

JESSICA: It's not that I want to; it's just my nature, that's all.

RAMSEY: I'm not criticising. We all have our role in life. If yours is breaking hearts then so be it.

JESSICA: I'm as my maker made me.

RAMSEY: Amen to that.

JESSICA: Except for my thighs. My maker gave me cellulite. I didn't want it so I went to Pasadena to have it removed. You might call that blasphemy, but I see it as fulfilling God's plan. God gave us

an imperfect Universe so that we could spend our time fixing it.

RAMSEY: That's an interesting point of view.

JESSICA: People make the mistake of thinking God's under some obligation to get everything right. They think He has to because he's God, but He doesn't have to do anything. If He wants to mess things up that's his prerogative. We've no right to demand anything of Him, especially not perfection.

RAMSEY: I couldn't agree more. Being perfect in every way must make for a boring life. If I was God and perfect and could do any damned thing I liked, do you know what I would do? I'd make myself imperfect. I'd introduce uncertainty into my existence.

JESSICA: So you wouldn't know everything?

RAMSEY: Heck, no.

JESSICA: And where would this imperfection lead?

RAMSEY: To a Universe beyond comprehension.

JESSICA: So that at any given time, a complex logical system contains more true statements than it can possibly prove according to its own defining set of rules?

RAMSEY: Shit!

Ramsey puts his head in his hands and groans.

RAMSEY: What have I done?

JESSICA: You've taken sixteen pills.

RAMSEY: I thought Godel's theorem proved the absence of God. I had it back to front.

JESSICA: You saw human nature as a flaw in the fabric of Creation rather than the glue that holds it together.

RAMSEY: I'm afraid you've lost me.

JESSICA: You ignored the anthropic principle which says that the Universe only exists because we are here to observe it. Without us, there is no reality.

RAMSEY: I don't follow.

JESSICA: Our humanity, our flaws, our imperfections – these are the things that make existence bearable for God and for us.

RAMSEY: Who are you? Where do you get these profound notions?

JESSICA: It's a mystery even to me. I seem to know a lot of things without knowing how I know

them. Usually, I don't even know that I know them. I'll be having a conversation and all of a sudden I'll say something quite brilliant, right out of the blue. It just pops into my head.

RAMSEY: It's called inspiration.

JESSICA: I think it's down to reincarnation. I must be carrying knowledge over from my previous lives. For instance, how many fundamental forces are there in the Universe?

RASMEY: Four – the strong force, the weak force, electromagnetism and gravity.

JESSICA: And what unites them all? What makes them work together? Where is the unified force?

RAMSEY: I don't know. Nobody does.

JESSICA: I do.

Jessica taps her forehead.

JESSICA: It's here. This is what makes the Universe work. This is what unifies the four fundamental forces – human consciousness. That occurred to me the other night. I've no idea where the notion sprang from. It just came to me. To be honest, I'm not sure what it means. Aren't you glad you met me?

RAMSEY: I have taken sixteen pills. They are stripping my soul apart piece by piece. It didn't matter a few minutes ago when I didn't believe I had a soul, but now...

JESSICA: In mathematics you learn by your mistakes as much as your successes. Orson taught me that.

RAMSEY: Suicide is a mortal sin. God gave me the gift of life and I've thrown it right back in His face. I've damned my soul to eternal torment.

JESSICA: It's a shame you never met my husband. He could have given you one hundred and one reasons why the soul can't possibly exist. There is no God, he always said. No afterlife. And you couldn't argue with him. He knew his stuff. Made millions out of selling can openers.

RAMSEY: And that makes him an expert on metaphysics?

JESSICA: That and the fact he died and rose from the dead.

RAMSEY: Don't talk nonsense.

JESSICA: It's true. There was an article in the local paper.

RAMSEY: The trouble with God is that he never calls. He's like some distant uncle out in India you've never met. You have the feeling you'd be great friends but you're always waiting for him to make the first move.

JESSICA: I had an uncle in India. I don't think he was God though.

RAMSEY: I can feel the pills working. Molecules breaking apart. Synapses shutting down. Neurons dying.

JESSICA: Did you know Orson's got three can openers?

RAMSEY: Do you remember in '2001' where the computer has its memory modules removed one by one? (*singing*) Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do.

JESSICA: Who's Daisy? Your girlfriend?

RAMSEY: My soul is being disassembled. The fragile remnants of my identity are drifting away like dandelion seeds on a summer's breeze. A few hours from now, I'll be lying on a slab. They'll dissect me and put my various bits into jars filled with formaldehyde. Like a piece of meat, I will be catalogued and processed.

JESSICA: I knew a girl called Daisy once. Didn't like her.

RAMSEY: Look, I know we've only just met and I wouldn't normally jump in like this, but I was wondering if...

JESSICA: I'd go to your funeral?

RAMSEY: Yes.

JESSICA: I'd love to, but it's rather awkward right now.

RAMSEY: Of course it is.

JESSICA: I'm sorry.

RAMSEY: No. Not at all. Please. It was rather presumptuous of me to ask. Let's say no more about it.

JESSICA: Don't take it personally. It's just that I've recently killed my husband and it's far too soon for me to start burying other men.

RAMSEY: I understand.

JESSICA: Some other time, perhaps.

RAMSEY: Orson was right. You are a spirit of the night.

JESSICA: That doesn't sound like a compliment.

RAMSEY: He called you his Angel of the Bus Shelter.

JESSICA: Tell me something about him.

RAMSEY: He's a git.

JESSICA: I meant something I don't know. Where does he work?

RAMSEY: He works at the UK Institute of Pataphysics.

JESSICA: So he's a pataphysicist? Is that useful?

RAMSEY: No.

JESSICA: And you? What do you do?

RAMSEY: I'm an amateur.

JESSICA: An amateur what?

RAMSEY: If I knew that, I'd turn professional.

JESSICA: I think I'd better go now.

RAMSEY: Something I said?

JESSICA: I have to freshen up. I want to look my best for Orson.

RAMSEY: He's at the local knocking shop shagging Rosa.

JESSICA: Did he take his treatise with him?

RAMSEY: Probably. I told him not to but he's quite vain about it. Leaves it lying around where people can sneak a look. When he catches them, he pretends to be cross but he's secretly pleased.

JESSICA: I thought as much.

RAMSEY: Did he show you any of it?

JESSICA: 'A Silkworm Spinning A Cocoon.'

RAMSEY: 'While lying on her back, the woman raises and spreads her thighs to expose her clitoris to powerful stimulation.'

JESSICA: That's the one.

RAMSEY: That's not even the Kama Sutra. It's from The Perfumed Garden.

JESSICA: I hope he's not showing it to some common tart.

Ramsey clutches at his chest. When he speaks, it is with great effort.

RAMSEY: You've got no worries there. Rosa's not the least bit interested in maths. She can't even read a newspaper without moving her lips.

JESSICA: Are you all right?

RAMSEY: Everything's going dark... starting to fade away. This is it then. This is the end.

JESSICA: Like I say, I've got to be going. Is there anything you'd like me to say to Orson for you?

RAMSEY: Yes. Bugger Godel.

Ramsey slumps forward - dead. Jessica gets to her feet.

JESSICA: Bugger Godel.

Jessica picks up the Euclid and opens it.

JESSICA (reading): 'Axiom 3. If equals are subtracted from equals, then the wholes are equal.'
(nods knowingly) Makes sense.

Jessica drops the Euclid on the table and exits.

(End of Act II)

ACT III

An empty stage – representative of some psychological limbo.

Ramsey, Jessica and Cawthorne stand in a triangle, each unaware of the other.

The stage is dimly lit. The characters are barely visible.

RAMSEY: Where am I? Am I dead or still in a coma? I seem to have entered some sort of mathematical n-space.

CAWTHORNE: What's happened to the street lights? Things are getting weird.

JESSICA: Such a strange sky. All those stars staring down. What do they want from me?

RAMSEY: It's as if Space has become Time.

JESSICA: I've never felt comfortable with the stars. They remind me of the infinite reaches of space – that unending darkness that goes on forever. And when I look at them, I have an uncomfortable feeling that there's something I should remember. It's as if the heavens have a message for me, only I can't read it. I used to be able to, but I've forgotten how.

RAMSEY: Face it, Ramsey – you've really fucked up this time. There's no going back for you. Not ever. Who says suicide is painless?

CAWTHORNE: All in all, it's been quite a night. It started in Church Street. There must have been at least twenty cars parked where they shouldn't be. When I went to ticket them, they disappeared. 'Strange,' I thought. 'That's never happened before.'

RAMSEY: Based on what little data I have, I am drawn to the tentative conclusion that the afterlife sucks.

CAWTHORNE: I spent the next two hours walking through the town and didn't come across a single car. It made me feel lonely. I hadn't realised how much I depend on private transport to give my life meaning. And now the street lights have gone out.

JESSICA: The Milky Way looks like a traffic jam. Why have I never noticed that before?

RAMSEY: This must be Limbo. Suicides don't go to Heaven. I'm doomed to wander this vast emptiness for all eternity. Ramsey, thy name is loneliness. I wonder if I'll ever meet another soul? Perhaps I'll bump into Kurt Godel.

Noises off: A dog howling.

RAMSEY: What was that?

CAWTHORNE: Sounded like a dog.

JESSICA: Must be Orson's puppy.

RAMSEY: What's wrong with emptiness anyway? Everything in the Universe consists mostly of nothing.

A spotlight illuminates Jessica.

JESSICA: That star. So bright. Light penetrating me, saturating my soul. It hurts and yet I welcome it. I feel a connection. Something reaching out to me across the dark light years. And in my head, voices. No – not voices. Information. It's pouring into me. It suffuses my being.

The spotlight switches to Ramsey.

RAMSEY: A light! 'Follow the white light!' That's what it says in the Tibetan Book of the Dead. I have to keep going towards the light. It will lead me to a womb and on to rebirth. The Cycle of Life and Death is never broken except that one finds Enlightenment.

The spotlight switches to Cawthorne.

CAWTHORNE: Oi! Put that light out! Don't you know there's a war on?

The spotlight switches to Ramsey.

RAMSEY: I'm being given a second chance. This time I won't blow it. I'll be a good, kind, caring person. I shall follow the example of the Lord Buddha. Of course, I probably won't be reborn as a human being. There's a karmic debt to be repaid. But even if I come back as a cockroach, I'll be the best behaved, least sinful cockroach ever. I shall love my fellow cockroach as myself.

The spotlight switches to Jessica.

JESSICA: Something's happening to mind. Some forgotten part of me is awakening. Circuits that have lain dormant through my many incarnations are opening again.

The spotlight switches to Ramsey.

RAMSEY: I'm not looking forward to being a cockroach, but if that's all that's open to me, then so be it.

The spotlight switches to Jessica.

JESSICA: It's all starting to make sense. I remember! I remember!

The spotlight switches to Cawthorne.

CAWTHORNE: Perhaps it's a car? Dear Lord, let it be a car.

The spotlight switches to Jessica.

JESSICA: I've been asleep so long.

The spotlight goes out.

RAMSEY: What happened to the light? Come back! I want to be reborn! I want to live again. Don't leave me here. (*weakly*) Don't leave me.

CAWTHORNE: I don't understand this at all.

JESSICA: *I understand now. Truly I do.*

(End of Act III)

ACT IV

A remote bus shelter. Night.

Orson is asleep in the shelter, gently snoring. A copy of Newton's Principia rests on his lap.

Enter DOUGLAS. He is wearing a dinner jacket and carrying a briefcase.

Douglas steps into the shelter, looks at his watch.

Douglas sits next to Orson. He sees the book in his lap and picks it up.

After a quick flick through the Principia, he decides the book is not for him and replaces it.

DOUGLAS: A fine night. A fine bloody night. Probably the finest night there's been in a long time. But then, what do I know about nights?

Douglas looks at Orson.

DOUGLAS: So what have we here? A vagrant? A fugitive from the law? Or just another pisshead?

Douglas nudges Orson in the ribs.

DOUGLAS: Oi. Wake up.

Orson wakes up.

DOUGLAS: I was just saying what a fine night it is.

ORSON: You nudged me.

DOUGLAS: It's restful here, isn't it? You can stare at the stars and the stars will stare right back at you and neither of you need give a damn about the other. The Universe goes about its business; you go about yours.

ORSON: You've been looking at my book.

DOUGLAS: Never understood why God created so many stars. Seems unnecessary. One or two, I wouldn't mind. I'd be fine with that. But billions? That's just showing off.

ORSON: You looked at my note book and then you nudged me. There's a name for people like you.

DOUGLAS: And what name would that be?

ORSON: I don't know.

DOUGLAS: Just think of the effort God put into making all those stars. Must have taken him ages. If he'd spent a little less time making the sky pretty and concentrated on what he was going to put

beneath it, the world wouldn't be in the mess it is today. That's the trouble with God – no sense of priorities.

ORSON: Are you a religious man?

DOUGLAS: God, no.

ORSON: Then why do you keep going on about God?

DOUGLAS: I don't.

ORSON: Since you rudely awoke me, you've mentioned God three times.

DOUGLAS: Have I? I hadn't noticed. Strange that. I've always been a committed atheist.

ORSON: God and the bloody stars.

DOUGLAS: What have the stars to do with it?

ORSON: You asked why God created so many of them.

DOUGLAS: Why would I do that? I've no interest in the stars. Can't see the point of the bloody things.

ORSON: Would you prefer an empty sky?

DOUGLAS: Now there's a thought. Unending darkness going on for ever and ever. I'd be comfortable with that.

ORSON: You've something against the stars?

DOUGLAS: The thing I hate about stars is that they encourage people to dream and I don't think that's a healthy thing.

ORSON: The world needs dreamers.

DOUGLAS: And what use are dreamers? What we need are more thinkers – people who deal with life as it is. Dreamers are trouble. Look at that Hitler chap for instance. Dreamt of a thousand year Reich. Made a right mess of things.

With a yawn, Orson looks at his watch.

ORSON: Have you got the time? I'm not sure this watch is working. It was made in Singapore.

Douglas checks his watch.

DOUGLAS: Damned thing's stopped.

ORSON: The last bus...

DOUGLAS: Went hours ago. You've missed it.

ORSON: Good.

DOUGLAS: I hate buses. You may have noticed there's quite a few things I hate – stars, watches, buses.

ORSON: And God.

DOUGLAS: I don't hate God. When did I say I hate God? I probably would if I thought he existed, but I don't. Do you know what my biggest hate is? The thing I hate above all others?

ORSON: Cellophane wrapping. I've yet to meet anyone who doesn't hate cellophane wrapping.

DOUGLAS: The descant recorder. Torture in a tube. Must have been invented by a madman. Why parents give them to their children, I'll never know. So far as I can tell, the descant recorder has only two purposes. One is to annoy the crap out of people. The other is to serve as a repository for spit.

ORSON: They make good pea shooters.

DOUGLAS: Never mind landmines and chemical weapons. If the United Nations wants to make the world a better place by banning things, they should start with the descant fucking recorder.

ORSON: They always play *Frère Jacques*. Have you noticed that?

DOUGLAS: And the only time anyone plays *Frère Jacques* is on the descant recorder.

ORSON: *London's Burning*. That's another one.

DOUGLAS (*testily*): Yes, yes! No need to labour the point. All I'm saying is that there's nothing I hate more than the descant recorder. Now let's leave it at that. I don't wish to discuss the matter further.

ORSON: Are you going to be here long?

DOUGLAS: What the hell business is it of yours? You think you own this shelter?

ORSON: Don't get me wrong. I didn't mean to imply that I want you to go away. I've no objection to your presence here. Quite the opposite. I'm glad of the company.

DOUGLAS: So you should be. I'm very good company.

ORSON: You can stay as long as you like as far as I'm concerned.

DOUGLAS: That's good of you.

ORSON: It's just that I'm waiting for a young lady. I have an assignation.

DOUGLAS: At this time of night? You'll forgive me for saying so, but I rather think you've been

stood up. What time is this young lady of yours meant to be here?

ORSON: Tonight.

DOUGLAS: When exactly?

ORSON: We didn't settle on a precise time. She'll be here before the first bus comes.

DOUGLAS: I wouldn't count on it. Women are invariably late. They have a pathological fear of being on time.

ORSON: Is that so? I hadn't realised.

DOUGLAS: You astound me. A certain inbuilt tardiness is a prime characteristic of the female of the species. I thought everyone knew that.

ORSON: Not me. When it comes to women, I know precious little.

DOUGLAS: What are you? A eunuch?

ORSON: A mathematician.

DOUGLAS: Now there's a funny thing. As soon as I set eyes on you, I thought to myself, 'Hello. What do we have here then? Looks like a mathematician.' And I was right. Of course, I did first consider that you might be a vagrant, a fugitive or a pisshead but there was something about you that just screamed 'mathematician'.

ORSON: The book's a dead giveaway.

DOUGLAS: I'd hate to be a mathematician. I've known a few in my time and they've all been virgins. Nothing against virgins but what's the point of them?

ORSON: I can state quite categorically that I am not a virgin.

DOUGLAS: Good for you! Virginity's not a healthy thing. It causes mental disorders – and spots. Hitler was a virgin. Did you know that? I bet he was as spotty as hell underneath all that make-up. Thankfully, I lost my cherry to my French teacher when I was thirteen. That's why I'm so sane and grounded.

ORSON: If your French teacher was anything like mine, it must have been a wonderful experience.

DOUGLAS: Would have been better if he'd been a woman, but you can't have everything.

An awkward silence ensues.

DOUGLAS: So when did you lose your cherry? At school was it? A furtive fumbling behind the bike sheds which led to something more?

ORSON: In all the time I was at school, I never once went behind the bike sheds.

DOUGLAS: Not even for a smoke?

ORSON: I've never smoked. I did consider having a cigarette straight after I lost my virginity, but none were available.

DOUGLAS: You seem to be avoiding the question. I've no interest in what you did or didn't do after your first taste of the forbidden fruit. I just want to know when it happened.

Orson looks at his watch.

ORSON: If this watch is right, it was just under six hours ago.

DOUGLAS: Six hours? Do you mean to tell me you've spent your whole adult life without ever once getting your end away?

ORSON: Up until about six hours ago.

DOUGLAS: Well, that explains your complexion.

ORSON: Of course, this watch could be wrong.

DOUGLAS: So what was it like? Was it all you'd ever dreamt it would be? Or was it a let down as tends to be the case?

ORSON: I'd rather not say. It's a private matter.

DOUGLAS: Was she a screamer? Did she cry out with every thrust? Or was she more restrained than that? Perhaps she just groaned?

ORSON: It would be ungentlemanly of me to go into details.

DOUGLAS: Ungentlemanly, my arse. You're a bloke. Half the fun of parking the pink Rolls Royce in the hairy garage is bragging about it afterwards.

ORSON: I don't like to brag.

DOUGLAS: Bragging is an essential part of the mating ritual. What was she like? A raver? Was she drunk? I bet she was a bit of a dog. No offence, but I can't see you pulling anything that wouldn't look better with a bag over its head.

ORSON: She charged me fifty pounds. I only had thirty on me. So I paid the balance with my credit card.

DOUGLAS: Fifty pounds? You did say fifty pounds? That's a bit steep.

ORSON: That's what I thought, but as I'd no previous experience in these matters, I was hardly in a position to argue. And I didn't begrudge her the money. Making love to strangers can't be easy.

DOUGLAS: Nothing to it. Close your eyes. Open your legs. Think of England.

ORSON: All the same, it's not a nice way to make a living.

DOUGLAS: Fifty quid! I tell you what, my son, you were done good and proper. Next time you fancy getting your leg over, take yourself down to Harwell Street. Number forty-seven. Ring the bell twice. Say you've come to read the gas meter.

ORSON: And ask for Rosa.

DOUGLAS: Bloody Hell! Rosa! I might have known. She's got a nerve charging you fifty quid.

ORSON: I suspect Rosa's not her real name.

DOUGLAS: The cheating, lying, two-faced little slut. I've told her before about ripping off the punters. That kind of thing gives prostitution a bad name.

ORSON: You know Rosa?

DOUGLAS: Know her? I own her! Got the whole of Harwell Street sewn up, I have. When I took over, that place had a terrible reputation. People were getting fleeced left, right and centre. I thought I'd put a stop to all that.

ORSON: Perhaps she made an honest mistake.

DOUGLAS: If it wasn't for me, those girls would still be freezing their arses off behind the gasworks. And I've always been a good employer. You ask any of my bitches. They'll tell you I'm the best pimp any tart could ask for. Never took more than a minimal commission – barely enough to cover my expenses. Fifty quid! It makes my blood boil.

ORSON: I'll know better next time.

DOUGLAS: I feel bad about this. Really I do.

ORSON: It's not your fault.

DOUGLAS: But it is my fault! I'm responsible for the behaviour of my girls. As their employer, I have a duty to see that they act in a fair, ethical and professional manner. The Johns must get a fair deal. I'm going to make this up to you, really I am.

ORSON: There's no need.

DOUGLAS: There's every need. You've been cheated and I have a moral obligation to put things right. Supposing... (*considers his options*) supposing I kill her?

ORSON: I'd settle for a refund.

DOUGLAS: Bless you, sir. You're a kind man. A kind, forgiving man. If everyone was as sweet as you, this world would be a better place. But they're not, are they? You're a lamb floundering in a sea of sharks. And that's why I can't let Rosa off lightly. You can see that, can't you? I have to make an example of her.

ORSON: If you killed her, you'd be losing an asset.

DOUGLAS: I'd be cutting off my nose to spite my face, but what else can I do?

ORSON: Couldn't you just beat her up?

DOUGLAS: Good thinking. I like that idea. But I have a better one. How about if you did it? That would be more fitting.

ORSON: I'm not sure I could.

DOUGLAS: I'd hold her down for you. You'll soon get the hang of it. Please say you'll do it, sir. I'd feel so much better.

ORSON: This means a lot to you, doesn't it?

DOUGLAS: It does, sir. It does.

ORSON: I can see you're in pain.

DOUGLAS: I am. I am.

ORSON: Very well. If you hold her down, I'll give her a bloody good kicking.

DOUGLAS: Oh, that's so kind of you. You're a real gent, you are. I'm glad we've got that settled. We'll sort her out tomorrow. Shall we say 2pm?

ORSON: Three would be better.

DOUGLAS: Three o'clock it is then. Let's shake on it.

They shake hands.

DOUGLAS: My name's Douglas by the way.

ORSON: Orson.

DOUGLAS: So what's it like being a mathematician, Orson?

ORSON: Dull, Douglas. Very dull.

DOUGLAS: I can imagine. It must be a bit like being an accountant.

ORSON: I expect so.

DOUGLAS: My brother was an accountant. Possibly the most boring man in the world. And I don't mean that unkindly. I loved that guy like – well, like a brother. It broke my heart to have to kill him. I wept for days afterwards.

ORSON: I can see why you'd be upset. But – if it's not a personal question – why exactly did you

kill him?

DOUGLAS: Caught him fiddling my books. Ironic really – considering that’s what I paid him for. Only he was meant to fiddle them in my favour, not his. I bet you’ve never met a murderer before, have you?

ORSON: Well, actually...

DOUGLAS: People like murderers. Have you noticed that? They find us fascinating. I expect it’s because we represent something in themselves – something innate and primal – which they daren’t unleash. I’ve lost count of the number of people who’ve told me that knowing I’m a killer has changed their lives. We’re a form of therapy for all the dull grey people out there who are too scared to take life by the balls. There’ll come a day when the newspapers declare murder the new rock'n'roll.

ORSON: There’s something magic about this bus shelter. I meet the most interesting people here.

DOUGLAS: Ever thought about doing a bit of killing yourself? It would do wonders for your self-esteem. Instead of apologising for being a mathematician, you’d be able to look people in the eye and say, ‘I am a killer’. You’d never be stuck for something to talk about at dinner parties.

ORSON: I don’t go to dinner parties.

DOUGLAS: I expect a man of your intellect finds them a bit dull.

ORSON: I’m never invited.

DOUGLAS: Well that’s my whole point, isn’t it? One quick murder and - bang! - you’re a celebrity. People will be begging you to grace their table.

ORSON: To be honest with you, Douglas, I don’t see myself as the murdering type.

DOUGLAS: We’re all the murdering type. That’s what makes us human.

ORSON: Besides, who would I kill?

DOUGLAS: Does it matter? The world’s full of potential victims, Orson. Go out and pick one.

ORSON: It would have to be someone I knew – at least to start with.

DOUGLAS: If you need a few pointers, I’d be delighted to oblige.

Orson stands up and looks to left and right.

DOUGLAS: Still no sign of her? Tough luck, old chum.

ORSON: She’ll come. If you’d been there last night you wouldn’t doubt it for a second. There was this real chemistry between us. A spark.

DOUGLAS: Love at first sight?

ORSON: To begin with I barely noticed her. We chatted about this and that but it was only to pass the time. I actually felt like telling her to piss off. But then she showed me how she killed her husband!

DOUGLAS: How she what?

ORSON: Killed her husband.

DOUGLAS: She's a murderess? Oh my dear Orson, what a dark horse you are! And there was me rabbiting on about being the first killer you've ever met. It never occurred to me that you might actually be dating one. There's more to you than meets the eye.

ORSON: I wasn't trying to deceive you.

DOUGLAS: Of course not! I didn't think that for a moment. You'd have told me straight away if I'd let you get a word in edgeways. It's my own fault for being so full of myself. I'm going to have to learn some humility one of these days.

ORSON: If truth be told, I don't think of her as a killer.

DOUGLAS: And that's as it should be. Never forget she's a woman first and a killer second. Do that and you won't go wrong.

ORSON: Her husband's her only victim so far.

DOUGLAS: It's not a number's game, Orson. All you need to qualify as a murderer is one murder. Simple as that.

ORSON: I wouldn't like it if she went on killing. It's good that she murdered her husband – otherwise we'd never have met – but I don't think she should do any more.

DOUGLAS: Then be firm with her. You put your foot down and tell her her killing days are over. From now on, she's to stick to doing the housework and making babies.

ORSON: I don't like babies. And it's going to be hard to settle into a life of domesticity with the police on our tail.

DOUGLAS: She could assume a new identity.

ORSON: But I love her the way she is. I want us to go on the run together. Maybe rob a few banks here and there.

DOUGLAS: Like Bonnie and Clyde!

ORSON: Or Butch and Sundance.

DOUGLAS: You know, I like you, Orson. I really do. And it's not often I say that to anyone. You've got ambition. You've got spunk. Hard to believe you're a mathematician.

ORSON: Of course, it will mean an early death for us. One morning, we'll wake up to find

ourselves surrounded by armed police. We'll have no choice but to shoot our way out.

DOUGLAS: You'll be ripped apart in a hail of bullets.

ORSON: We'll be famous.

DOUGLAS: You'll go out roaring like lions.

ORSON: Years from now they'll be making films and writing songs about us.

DOUGLAS: Splendid stuff. I wish I had your courage. Unfortunately, I'm cursed with a streak of cowardice a mile wide – not to mention a pathological drive towards self-preservation. If I so much as suspect that the police are on to me, that's it – I'm gone. South America here I come.

ORSON: I'd prefer the North Pole.

DOUGLAS: To each his own. I like a bit of sun myself. Can't stand the cold. Beginning to wish I'd worn a coat. Hadn't realised it was so chilly.

ORSON: You shouldn't be out dressed like that. I'm all right - I'm amazingly warm blooded. But you look frozen.

DOUGLAS: I'll survive. Another twenty minutes and I can go home. I only live down the road.

ORSON: In the big house on the hill? Sunny Oaks?

DOUGLAS: That's the one.

ORSON: I've often wondered who lived there. Beats me why you'd want to come out on a night like this.

DOUGLAS: Just killed the wife. No one wants to stay at home with a corpse, do they?

ORSON: So you're on the run as well?

DOUGLAS: Not a bit of it. As soon as I'd done for the old girl I called in certain business acquaintances. They're what are known in the parlance of the underworld as removal experts. By the time they've finished, there won't be the slightest hint of anything untoward. And then I can go back and get my head down.

ORSON: And your wife?

DOUGLAS: It'll be as if she'd never existed. These guys are the best in the business. They did such a good job with my brother my parents think I'm an only child.

ORSON: Amazing.

DOUGLAS: Pity your lady friend didn't avail herself of their services. But then I don't suppose she could afford it. These guys don't come cheap.

ORSON: I can imagine.

DOUGLAS: A fine night, isn't it? Not a cloud to be seen anywhere. Pity there's no moon though. I do enjoy a good moon.

ORSON (*pointing skywards*): Isn't that the moon over there?

DOUGLAS: Where? (*squints at the sky*) Oh yes. I think I see what you're pointing at. You reckon that's the moon then?

ORSON: It's pretty unmistakable.

DOUGLAS: To you maybe. But I don't often go out at night. It's been years since I last saw the moon. So that's what it's like these days. It's changed a bit, hasn't it?

ORSON: Not so far as I can tell.

Douglas gets up and walks around. He rubs his hands to warm them.

DOUGLAS: Did I mention you've missed the last bus?

ORSON: Yes.

DOUGLAS: Did I also mention I think your lady friend's stood you up?

ORSON: She'll be here before sunrise.

DOUGLAS: I hope so, Orson. I really do. You're a nice guy and you deserve all the happiness a loving relationship can bring.

Douglas glances down the road.

DOUGLAS: Hello. Who's this? It looks like your lady friend hasn't let you down after all.

Overjoyed, Orson leaps to his feet.

ORSON: I knew she wouldn't.

DOUGLAS: What is she wearing? It looks like some kind of uniform.

Enter Cawthorne.

DOUGLAS: Oh, it's you, Cawthorne. I might have known. How the devil are you doing?

CAWTHORNE: Hello, Douglas. You're up early.

DOUGLAS: Just killed the wife.

CAWTHORNE: You finally got around to it then?

DOUGLAS: I kept putting it off, hoping she'd get better, but in the end I had no choice.

CAWTHORNE: I'm sorry to hear that. I would have liked to have met her some time.

DOUGLAS: Issued many tickets today?

CAWTHORNE: No. I seem to have gone car blind.

DOUGLAS: Car blind?

CAWTHORNE: I think I've seen so many cars that my mind has started to filter them out. It's like the ticking of a clock. After a while, you just don't hear it any more.

DOUGLAS: Sounds like you need a holiday. I suppose I should introduce you to my new friend.

CAWTHORNE: We met last night. You watch out for him. He's a pervert. A regular little sex fiend.

DOUGLAS: Is he really? He kept that one to himself. I tell you, Cawthorne, this guy's full of surprises.

CAWTHORNE: He's a mathematician. I can't abide mathematicians.

DOUGLAS: Orson's not like other mathematicians.

CAWTHORNE: Oh. And in what way is he different?

DOUGLAS: For a start, he's not a virgin.

CAWTHORNE: Get away! You're pulling my leg.

DOUGLAS: Take a look for yourself. You can see he's not a virgin.

CAWTHORNE: He was last night.

DOUGLAS: Not any more. He's been to Harwell Street.

CAWTHORNE: Must be a pataphysicist then.

DOUGLAS: Possibly. I hadn't thought of that.

CAWTHORNE: Perhaps he can explain what's happened to all the cars.

DOUGLAS: It's worth a try.

CAWTHORNE: Hey, you! Mathematician! Where have all the cars gone?

ORSON: I'm sure they're out there somewhere.

CAWTHORNE: Take a look around, you smart-arse. Do you see a single car anywhere?

ORSON: Absence of evidence is not the same as evidence of absence.

CAWTHORNE (*to Douglas*): He doesn't half talk a load of bollocks, doesn't he?

DOUGLAS: It's one of his many talents.

CAWTHORNE: Anyway, can't stand here chatting. Things to do and all that. See you around some time.

DOUGLAS: Take care now.

Exit Cawthorne.

DOUGLAS: So how long have you been a pervert?

ORSON: I'm not sure that I am.

DOUGLAS: Oh come now. No need to be modest. If you can't be a murderer, be a pervert – that's what I always say.

ORSON: You don't want to pay any attention to Cawthorne. He thinks I'm a pervert because I'm writing a mathematical and geometric analysis of the Kama Sutra.

DOUGLAS: Sounds fascinating.

ORSON: Would you like to see it some time?

DOUGLAS: No.

ORSON: It's taken me ten years so far and I'm not even halfway through.

DOUGLAS: Does it have pictures?

ORSON: Only diagrams.

DOUGLAS: Oh.

ORSON: My next book's going to be a monologue on the vector paths of knives used in murders.

DOUGLAS: What does that mean?

ORSON: Well, there are many different ways to stab someone.

DOUGLAS: You astound me.

ORSON: For instance, you can stab someone in a straight line which is the shortest distance between two points. Or else you can describe an arc through the air.

DOUGLAS: A sort of up and under?

ORSON: In layman's terms.

DOUGLAS: Sounds very inefficient. Me, I'm a straight in and out man. No messing about.

ORSON: Is that how you killed your wife?

DOUGLAS: As it happens.

ORSON: Perpendicular or horizontal?

DOUGLAS: I don't follow.

ORSON: Did you bring the knife down or did you thrust it forward?

DOUGLAS: Oh, I see what you mean. Now let me think about this. She was lying face down on the bed in her favourite night gown. It's made of Chinese silk covered in dragons. She looked exquisite.

ORSON: So basically your thrust would have been downwards?

DOUGLAS: More or less. I can't be sure of the exact angle though.

ORSON: Did you twist the knife once it had entered her?

DOUGLAS: No need. She died immediately. Got her right in the heart. She wouldn't have felt a thing. Like I say – straight in and straight out again.

ORSON: I propose that all knife attacks can be placed into one of three categories – thrust, hack and slash. Of course, there's bound to be some overlap.

DOUGLAS: Thrust I can see. But what's the difference between hack and slash?

ORSON: A hack is an up and down motion.

DOUGLAS: Like Norman Bates?

ORSON: Exactly. And a slash is from left to right or right to left.

DOUGLAS: What if it's a frenzied attack? Cut after cut after cut?

ORSON: That's where the maths gets complicated.

DOUGLAS: I had no idea there was so much to the apparently simple act of snuffing someone. You've opened my eyes for me, Orson, and I thank you for that from the bottom of my heart. You should write a manual. You could call it *Fifty Ways to Kill Your Lover*. Bound to be a best seller.

ORSON: I can't afford a best seller. I have my reputation to think of.

DOUGLAS: I'm going to ask you a personal question here, Orson, and I hope you don't mind. It's just that I'm curious to know what stroke you would use.

ORSON: Hard to say really. It would depend on the situation, but I think I would instinctively go for the hack.

DOUGLAS: Interesting.

ORSON: But not a straight-forward hack.

DOUGLAS: No?

ORSON: What I'd do is this. (*demonstrates*) I'd bring my arm up – thus. You notice I didn't go straight up. I veered slightly off the perpendicular.

DOUGLAS: I saw that.

ORSON: And then forward (*demonstrating still*) and down – like so!

DOUGLAS: Oh bravo. Not only a mathematician, but an artist too!

ORSON: I need to work on it a bit.

DOUGLAS: No. That was perfect. Poetry in motion. I wish I had a video camera to record it.

ORSON: You're too kind, Douglas.

DOUGLAS: You'll have to teach me how to do that some time. Tell you what, why don't you come up to the house tomorrow after we've dealt with Rosa? We'll knock back a few drinks, shoot some pool and have a man-to-man about the mechanics of murder.

ORSON: Thank you. I'd like that. Perhaps I'll wear my dinner jacket.

DOUGLAS: I'm afraid I won't be able to feed you though – what with the wife being dead and all that.

ORSON: We could always get a takeaway.

DOUGLAS: Now there's an idea. I haven't had a takeaway for ages. Pity the wife won't be around. She was fond of takeaway food. And I think you and her would have got on just fine.

ORSON: It sounds like you're beginning to regret doing her in.

DOUGLAS: I'm going to miss her, that's for sure. But when you've got to move on, you've got to move on. If there was any other way...

Douglas breaks off and shakes his head sadly.

DOUGLAS: Life's unfair, Orson. She was a bloody lovely woman. She didn't deserve to die so young. But what choice did I have? She was going around telling people I was dead and I couldn't have that. It was making my life complicated.

ORSON: I can imagine.

DOUGLAS: Take last Sunday for instance. I was on my way to meet a supplier when I decided on a whim to drop in on my parents. They're always delighted to see me. I'm their favourite son. Actually - as far as they're concerned - I'm their only son. So I pull up in their driveway and knock on the door. My mum opens it and there I am expecting cries of joy and hugs and kisses and what happens? She screams and faints. That's odd, I thought to myself. The silly bitch has never done that before. So then my Dad comes to see what the noise is all about and the old bastard bursts into tears. 'Dad!' I say to him. 'What the merry hell's going on? Have you and Mum gone senile?' 'No, Son,' he says. 'We thought you were dead.'

ORSON: How awful.

DOUGLAS: Once he stopped blubbing, he told me how my missus had rung to say I'd been stabbed to death by person or persons unknown. Gave me a right queer feeling, that did.

ORSON: It would.

DOUGLAS: I walked into the living room and there's this old geezer in a black suit waving a tape measure around. Turns out he's from the funeral parlour. 'Are you the late, lamented deceased?' he asks me. 'No I bleeding ain't,' I says to him but he's not having any of it. Next thing I know, he's all over me with his tape measure. 'On what side does sir dress,' he says. And then he's showing me this catalogue full of coffins, asking me which one I'd like to be buried in. You should have seen the price of them. Some of them cost more than a second hand car. And for what? A wooden box. I told him I wouldn't be seen dead in one.

ORSON: They get away with murder, these undertakers.

DOUGLAS: I was just about to strangle the little toad with his tape measure when my mum walks in and starts screaming all over again. That was too much for me. I couldn't get out of there quick enough. All that trouble just because the missus decided to tell one little lie. I had to kill her, didn't I? I'm not at fault here. Any man in my shoes would have done the same. You can see that, can't you?

ORSON: You had no choice. She'd put you in an intolerable position.

DOUGLAS: You don't know the half of it. When I got home, I couldn't get my car up the drive for all the wreaths laid on it. So I popped down to the office, only to find it empty. My workers had taken the day off as a mark of respect. And then to top it all, I sit down to breakfast next morning, have a glance through the local paper and find myself reading my own obituary.

ORSON: I was in the local paper once. A short piece about my house being vandalised. They printed it in the entertainment section.

DOUGLAS: Quite put me off my toast that did.

ORSON: They got the caption underneath my photo wrong. Spent the next week having to convince total strangers that I wasn't Immelda Marcos.

DOUGLAS: Two column inches – that's what they gave me. Not much to show for a life, is it? The local lollipop lady got three. And you know what made it worse? The headline - 'Hardware

Magnate Kicks the Bucket'. What kind of crack is that meant to be? Some people have no respect for the dead.

ORSON: Shoe companies kept sending me free samples.

DOUGLAS: So I went straight down to that newspaper office to give the editor a piece of my mind. You should have seen his face when I stormed in and he found himself face to face with a dead man. He screamed and fainted – just like my mum. Next day's headline read, 'Can Opener King Rises From the Dead'. Should have read, 'Newspaper Editor Shits His Pants'.

ORSON: One hundred and fifty pairs of shoes I had. And all several sizes too small.

DOUGLAS (*chuckling*): 'Newspaper Editor Shits His Pants!' Now that would have been some headline.

ORSON: What did you just say?

DOUGLAS: 'Newspaper Editor Shits His Pants.'

ORSON: Before that.

DOUGLAS: How much before that?

ORSON: You were saying about the headline. What was it?

DOUGLAS: 'Can Opener King Rises From the Dead.' That's me, that is. You must have seen my slogan : 'You can buy cheaper elsewhere, but never forget the Can Opener King died for your sins'. I thought that one up myself. What's up, old chap? You look like that editor did just before he fainted.

ORSON: I've suddenly realised I'm wasting my time here. It's a racing certainty I've been stood up.

DOUGLAS: That's the spirit! Don't hide from reality. Take your punches like a man. That's what I've always done. If I get knocked down, I get right back up again. Fuck me, I've even risen from the dead. That makes me like Jesus Christ, doesn't it?

ORSON: Or Count Dracula.

DOUGLAS: I hadn't thought of that. Mind you, I'd rather be Jesus than Dracula. I mean, who wants to sleep in a coffin? Did I mention I'm not a night person? It's those bloody stars. They get on my tits. I never come out after sunset if I can help it. Looks like your young lady has much the same attitude.

ORSON: Her name's Jessica.

DOUGLAS: Jessica? Funny that. My wife's name is Jessica. Small world, hey?

ORSON: All my life, I've been a boring, miserable apology of a person wrapped up in loneliness and self-pity. I thought things were finally going to change. It seems I was deluded.

DOUGLAS: Hey, now. You don't want to get yourself worked up over some dozy bint.

ORSON: What was I thinking? I should have known it wasn't going to work out. Nothing ever does for me.

DOUGLAS: Oh listen to yourself! Snap out of it. Do you think you're the only person who's ever been stood up? It happens to the best of us.

Douglas puts a comforting arm around Orson.

DOUGLAS: Do you mind if I give you a bit of advice, Orson? One man of the world to another? You go out there. You find this woman of yours. You take her in your arms and tell her how much she means to you. Tell her you love her. And then kill the bitch.

ORSON: I can't do that.

DOUGLAS: Do it quickly. Do it cleanly. She doesn't have to feel a thing. Make love to her and wait until she falls asleep.

ORSON: Is that what you did? Did you make love to your wife before driving a knife through her heart?

DOUGLAS: Damn right I did. Believe me, Orson, she died a happy woman.

ORSON: It's good to know that.

DOUGLAS: Wherever she is now, she'll understand why I did it. And more importantly, she'll know I never stopped loving her. In a way, I did her a favour, because she's with God now.

ORSON: You don't believe in God.

DOUGLAS: But she did. That's what matters.

ORSON: I once had a puppy. It was the loveliest, sweetest puppy you could ever imagine – playful, affectionate, full of life. After he died, I went for a long walk and ended up at this bus shelter. It was night by the time I got here. There was no moon, just a glistening cascade of stars. I looked up and – I don't know why – but one star in particular caught my eye. It shone brighter than all the rest and I thought to myself, 'that's him. That's my beloved little puppy'.

DOUGLAS: What was his name?

ORSON: I don't remember.

DOUGLAS: Show me this star then. The one you think might be your dead dog.

ORSON: I can't. All stars look the same to me.

DOUGLAS: A pity.

Douglas walks to the front of the stage and gazes upwards.

DOUGLAS: It's kind of comforting to think that all those billions of stars might be the souls of the departed. They're waiting for us up there, aren't they, Orson? The Milky Way is proof of God's love.

ORSON: You don't believe in God.

DOUGLAS: And I hate stars. Wish I didn't. My wife loved the night sky, but then she loved so many things. She was just the way you described your puppy – playful, affectionate, full of life.

ORSON: She didn't deserve to die, did she?

DOUGLAS: Of course she didn't. I've already said as much. God always takes the best ones.

ORSON: You don't believe in God.

DOUGLAS: Why do you keep saying that? Just because I don't believe in the Almighty, that's no reason I can't talk about him. Jesus, Orson! Why do you have to be so prosaic?

ORSON: You think you're better than everyone else, don't you? You think being a killer makes you superior.

DOUGLAS: Well, it's true. Try it yourself. You'll see I'm right.

ORSON: Maybe I will.

DOUGLAS: I'd be so happy if you did. I know we've only just met, but already I look upon you as the son I never had. Or rather the son I had until I killed him.

ORSON: How to go about it though? That's the question.

DOUGLAS: May I recommend poison?

ORSON: Poison's good. But how would I get hold of it?

DOUGLAS: I know where you can get a gun.

ORSON: I won't use a gun. It's against my principles.

DOUGLAS: How about a knife then?

ORSON: A knife would be appropriate.

DOUGLAS: I have just the thing.

Douglas excitedly opens his briefcase. He takes out Jessica's paper knife.

DOUGLAS: What do you think of this? Isn't it a beauty?

ORSON: May I see it?

DOUGLAS: You can have it. My gift to you.

Douglas hands the knife to Orson.

DOUGLAS: I bought that in Singapore. Amazing what you can get over there.

ORSON: There's blood on it.

DOUGLAS: Really? I thought I'd cleaned it thoroughly.

ORSON: You killed your wife with this.

DOUGLAS: I should have left it at the house for the removal men, but I couldn't. It has sentimental value. Thought maybe I'd bury it in the woods until I was in the clear.

ORSON: And you're giving it to me, even though it means so much to you?

DOUGLAS: I know you'll put it to good use.

ORSON: Thank you, Douglas. I'm touched.

DOUGLAS: Have you decided yet who you're going to kill?

ORSON: One candidate stands out above all the others.

DOUGLAS: Your young lady?

ORSON: No.

DOUGLAS: Who?

ORSON: It's best you don't know.

DOUGLAS: Very sensible, Orson. What I don't know, I can't tell. That's good thinking. You're going to be a natural at this murder lark - I can see that.

ORSON: Murder is easy if you have the right motivation.

DOUGLAS: There are two types of people in this world – those who kill and those who would like to.

ORSON: So now I have a weapon and I've decided upon my victim. Which just leaves the question of which stroke to use.

Orson walks up to Douglas.

ORSON: A thrust?

Orson thrusts the knife, stopping just short of Douglas' belly. Douglas looks down at the knife without apparent concern.

ORSON: A hack?

Orson brings the knife up and back down again, narrowly missing Douglas who is now a little apprehensive.

ORSON: Or a slash?

Orson swings the knife in a horizontal arc. Douglas jumps back.

DOUGLAS: Steady there. You could do me some damage.

ORSON: What's your opinion, Douglas? What suits me best? Thrust, hack or slash?

DOUGLAS: Which do you feel most comfortable with?

ORSON: The hack. It appeals to the mathematician in me. If I get it right, I can describe a parabola in the air before landing the fatal blow.

DOUGLAS: I hope you don't think me ignorant, but what's a parabola?

ORSON: A parabola is the locus of a point which varies in such a way that its distance from a fixed point is equal to the distance from a fixed line.

DOUGLAS: Well, I never knew that. You live and you learn.

ORSON: The thing is, Douglas, I've suddenly realised I've been rather limited in my outlook. I had assumed that all knife attacks could be placed into one of three categories – thrust, hack and slash. But I've just thought of one more.

DOUGLAS: That's brilliant! May I see it?

ORSON: Certainly.

Orson swings the knife up and into Douglas' gut. Douglas gasps. He grabs hold of Orson's knife hand.

DOUGLAS: That wasn't nice.

Orson removes the knife. Douglas clutches at his bloody wound.

ORSON: How are you feeling, Dougie?

DOUGLAS: Strange, and a little shocked. Funny – you'd have thought there'd be more blood.

ORSON: If I remember my anatomy right, I've ripped open your duodenum.

DOUGLAS: I'm not dead.

ORSON: Not yet. But you soon will be.

DOUGLAS: I think you're right. I'm definitely dying. Mind you, it's not as bad as you might think. In fact, it's quite pleasant in an odd sort of way.

ORSON: You're not mad at me, are you?

DOUGLAS: Mad? No, I'm flattered you should choose me as your first victim. It's quite an honour.

ORSON: You'd better sit down.

DOUGLAS: Bless you, sir. That's very considerate.

Orson helps Douglas to the bench. They sit down together.

DOUGLAS: Fiendishly clever of you to choose me as your victim. I'd be the last person expecting it.

ORSON: It had to be you, Douglas. You understand that, don't you?

DOUGLAS: Not entirely.

ORSON: Jessica deserved better than straight in and straight out.

DOUGLAS: Who's Jessica?

ORSON: Your wife.

DOUGLAS: Oh, yes. She was called Jessica, wasn't she? A beautiful, tender person – so full of life.

ORSON: You should have killed her with a parabola.

DOUGLAS: I can see that now. A parabola. The locus of a point which varies in such a way that its distance from a fixed point is equal to the distance from a fixed line. I wish I'd known.

ORSON: It's not your fault. You're not a mathematician. Don't blame yourself.

Still clutching his stomach, Douglas points to the sky.

DOUGLAS: Look! There. Do you see it?

ORSON: What?

DOUGLAS: That star. The bright one. It wasn't there before, was it?

ORSON: I don't know. I couldn't say.

DOUGLAS: It's her. It's my Jessie.

ORSON: It's just a star.

DOUGLAS: She's speaking to me, Orson. You can't hear her, can you? Her words are only for me.

ORSON: What's she saying?

DOUGLAS: She's saying, 'Put on the wings and arouse the coiled splendour within you; come unto me!'

Douglas coughs feebly. He is close to death.

DOUGLAS: The Can Opener King is once more knocking on Death's door and this time he ain't coming back. When I'm gone, Orson, look for two bright stars circling each other for all eternity. That'll be me and Jessica.

Douglas falls to the ground and dies.

ORSON: Goodbye, Douglas. I think we both understand now why God created so many stars.

Orson stands and contemplates the heavens.

ORSON: Still too many of them though.

Orson shivers.

ORSON: I wonder which of those stars is my puppy?

Enter Cawthorne - running.

CAWTHORNE: Murderer! Pervert! Mathematician!

Exit Cawthorne.

Orson remains staring at the sky.

Cawthorne returns and confronts Orson.

CAWTHORNE: What have you done?

ORSON: I killed him. It was necessary.

CAWTHORNE: Not him, you fool! I'm talking about the sky.

ORSON: The sky?

CAWTHORNE: Look, damn you! Look!

ORSON: I don't see anything unusual.

CAWTHORNE: The stars!

ORSON: What about them?

CAWTHORNE: They're disappearing. They're going out one by one.

ORSON: My God. You're right. The sky is dying.

CAWTHORNE: First it was the cars and now this! Ever since you lost your virginity, the world's gone crazy.

ORSON: I'm not sure there's a connection there.

CAWTHORNE: Stop doing it!

ORSON: It's not me. I have no control over this.

CAWTHORNE: Damn you! Why can't you leave Nature alone? Why must you forever poke and probe at her and demand she gives up her innermost secrets? Why?

Orson is too numb to answer. He can only shake his head.

CAWTHORNE: Put the stars back! They're not yours. They don't belong to you.

ORSON: I don't have them.

CAWTHORNE: Thief! Coward! Pataphysicist!

Cawthorne runs off-stage crying –

CAWTHORNE: He's stolen the stars! He's taken the heavens.

Orson watches Cawthorne depart.

ORSON: Mad. Quite mad. What the hell's a pataphysicist?

JESSICA (offstage): Orson? Are you there, my love? Did you wait for me?

Enter Jessica.

ORSON: Jessica! It's you. It's really you!

JESSICA: Did you think I wouldn't come?

ORSON: Oh Jessie!

JESSICA: I want to be with you, Orson. Nobody else but you. From now till the end of time.

ORSON: You will be.

JESSICA: Talking of time, have you got a watch that's working? I think mine's a bit slow.

Orson shows Ramsey's watch to Jessica.

JESSICA: No – it's right. Unless we're both slow.

Jessica spies Douglas' corpse.

JESSICA: Hello. What's this? There's a dead body in the bus shelter, Orson. He looks familiar.

ORSON: It doesn't matter, Jessie. Nothing matters now except that you and I are together.

Orson takes Jessica's hand.

ORSON: Look at the sky, Jessica.

JESSICA: So many stars. I used to wonder what they meant. Now I think I know.

ORSON: They're disappearing. The Universe is dying. It's the end of the world – the end of everything.

JESSICA: Every end is a beginning. Without winter, there can be no spring. I began to realise that when I saw the headline, 'Can Opener King Returns from the Dead'.

ORSON: What are you talking about?

JESSICA: The Can Opener King died for your sins.

ORSON: That means nothing to me. Say something comforting.

Jessica points to the sky.

JESSICA: Do you see that star there? The bright one?

ORSON: Sirius?

JESSICA: Is that what it's called? I didn't know. It spoke to me, Orson. I was walking from the pub when something made me look up. All of a sudden I was filled with all the feelings of childhood. Do you remember what it's like to be a child?

ORSON: I suppose so. Vaguely.

JESSICA: To come in from the cold and snuggle up on a settee in front of an open fire? Nothing could touch you then. You knew you were safe, that the world was a wonderful place and everything was as it should be.

ORSON: I don't ever remember feeling that way.

JESSICA: But you did, Orson - only over the years you forgot. I forgot too. I forgot a whole lot of things until tonight. I looked up at Sirius and all of a sudden everything became so real, so solid. I was back in the world of my childhood.

ORSON: I don't understand.

JESSICA: You've been programmed not to. I was programmed the same way. But then a star spoke to me. I was hit by an intense beam of light filled with information. It penetrated my mind

and overwrote my erroneous programming. I suddenly knew that my existence has meaning. I could see the purpose of Creation.

ORSON: You had an exegesis.

JESSICA: My mind is still sorting through the data, trying to make sense of it all. I'm beginning to remember who I really am and what I was put on this Earth to do.

ORSON: You hallucinated, Jessie. It was probably caused by temporal lobe epilepsy. My Uncle Julian suffered from that. Swore blind he could see angels. You can't be programmed by a beam from outer space. It's not possible.

JESSICA: And the stars going out? Is that possible?

ORSON: I don't know.

JESSICA: Whoever sent me that beam has a message for you - two messages. The first is that you have nothing left to fear.

ORSON: And what's the second?

JESSICA: Bugger Godel.

ORSON: Soon there won't be any stars left. Just an empty sky. Unending darkness going on forever.

JESSICA: And there's something else the beam told me. It's do to with light. Did you know that for a light beam there is no time? All the things a particle of light does from the moments it's born, it does in an instant. Time is an illusion brought on by our material desires.

ORSON: We're going to die, Jessie.

JESSICA: No one has ever died; no one ever will. Death is an illusion.

ORSON: I'm scared.

JESSICA: That's because you haven't been listening. We're about to become pure light. When that happens time will cease to have meaning. Without time, we cannot die.

ORSON: This shouldn't be happening. The Universe can't suddenly wind down like this. It doesn't make sense. The maths doesn't add up.

JESSICA: It has nothing to do with maths.

ORSON: Perhaps it's the bus shelter. I always said it was a magical place.

JESSICA: This is where Space becomes Time.

ORSON: I'm so glad you're with me. I couldn't face this on my own.

JESSICA: Shall we sit down while we wait for the end?

ORSON: We might as well.

Jessica and Orson sit down in the bus shelter.

ORSON: Only four stars left now. Three... Two... One. Just one star remaining out of all the billions that once graced the heavens.

JESSICA: Perhaps it's your puppy.

ORSON: It's Sirius - the Dog Star.

JESSICA: That's where the beam came from. Our Space Brothers and Sisters are watching over us. They're waiting for us to come home.

ORSON: And now that's gone. Thank God we still have the moon.

BLACK OUT. A dog howls.

ORSON: Don't panic, Jessie. It'll soon be sunrise. The light will return.

JESSICA: We are the light, Orson.

From out of the darkness comes a deep, rumbling sound.

ORSON (terrified): Sweet Jesus! It's the Gates of Hell. They're opening!

JESSICA: It's the bus, Orson. The first bus of the day.

ORSON: Good God. It's on time!

THE END