

ACT I

A BLACK stage. A SPOTLIGHT near the front highlights JONATHAN, smart jeans and a smart shirt, a glass of wine in hand. He addresses the audience.

JONATHAN Shagging. Man's greatest primal impulse. But have you ever noticed the hierarchy? Men are the shaggers, women are the shagged. Men are active, women are passive. Men lay, screw, bone and bang, well, that's the way it used to be. Nowadays, men are women and women are men. The lines are blurred, and the experience is shared. Should we have sex? Shall we make love? (*scoffs*) The advent of 'girl power' pushed the boundaries even further. Ladies boast to their compatriots about shagging men. Women lay, screw, bone and bang –

BANG. Jonathan, interrupted, turns to look. SPOTLIGHT: SARAH has nailed one side of a banner to the back wall. She wears smart trousers and a shirt.

SARAH Alright...do you want to take it...?

She hands the hammer to KEVIN, clashing vest, shirt and jeans. He walks along, unravelling the sign. 'Jocasta Matchmaking'.

SARAH (cont'd) Make sure it's taut, I don't want it drooping in the middle. (*Kevin nails in the banner*) Okay good, now stick the music on. And let whatshisface know we're ready to go, okay?

Kevin obediently heads for the backroom, hands in his pocket – his favoured pose. JAZZ music starts to play. SPOTLIGHT OFF. As Jonathan addresses the audience again, Sarah opens the front door. Customers enter the darkened bar and begin to populate the three tables.

JONATHAN Nowadays we live in a climate of love, and monogamy. Forget that animals fuck whoever they want, whenever they want – it's been decided that humans are better, that a man

must take a woman out before they can do the nasty. Date one; dinner, gentle music, a pinot and a chinwag and goodnight. Date two; a movie – Hugh Grant – popcorn, benign chatter, maybe a kiss. Date three, date four; perhaps a fumble under the blouse, dates five to ten; getting to know each other, discussing likes, dislikes, future ambitions, cash, expense...hours and hours of preamble for five minutes in a toilet stall.

He catches his breath.

No wonder people spout the benefits of monogamy; they don't have the energy or the funds for more than one sexual partner.

He SIGHS, calming down, and heads over to a table where FRANÇOISE, expensive black dress, garish jewellery, sits.

Myself, I don't have the patience for this charade, so I need a game plan. Minimum input for maximum output; sex without the preamble. A swift, direct route that bypasses the bullshit. And the most direct way to get a woman into your bed is to let her talk. Face it, women love the sound of their own voices. You don't need to talk a woman into your bed, just listen, and they'll do it for you. Just listen.

He sits down. Françoise talks as if he's always been there.

FRANÇOISE

It is a disgrace, no? I feel betrayed. I think I am marrying a rich man but he says nothing on his business failing, nothing.

JONATHAN

(to audience) Of course, there's no accounting for the emotional types. Unless they're really worth the effort, just cut your losses, sit back and count down the seconds until –

KLAXON! Loud, intrusive. HOUSE LIGHTS UP. The jazz SCRATCHES to a stop – it's on vinyl. Kevin rushes around the bar, ushering women along.

ORGANISER

Next table ladies!

SARAH

(louder, competitive) Next table!

Couples on other tables begin farewells. Françoise continues:

FRANÇOISE ...and I am used to riches, yes? Diamonds, gold, silver – he cannot now keep me in his way.

JONATHAN (*‘go away’*) Well, it was lovely to meet you...

Kevin arrives behind Françoise, but says nothing.

FRANÇOISE I don't want to go back to Moulon, to him. I want to stay here.

JONATHAN Well I'm very sorry but...
He gestures to Kevin. Kevin does nothing.

FRANÇOISE It is my home now, you see.

JONATHAN Yes, I –

FRANÇOISE I am only just here. It is not fair for me to go home.

TERRI Excuse me!

Terri, business suit, has arrived. She gestures for Françoise to stand, which she does. Terri then takes her seat, and thrusts out a formal hand towards Jonathan.

TERRI Hello, I'm Terri.

JONATHAN (*takes hand, charming*) Jonathan. Lovely to meet you.

Kevin starts to walk Françoise to the next table, wordless. HOUSE LIGHTS DOWN to SPOTLIGHT. CRACKLING; the music commences from the same point.

JONATHAN So, Terri...what do you do for a living?

CHANGE FOCUS. SPOTLIGHT: Françoise SITS down opposite CHRIS; ripped jeans, white school shirt, scuffed school shoes.

FRANÇOISE 'Ello.
She tentatively sits, rearranges herself.
I am Françoise.

CHRIS Hi, I'm Chris.
Silence. After a moment, Chris holds up a bottle of wine.
Would you like some wi-?

FRANÇOISE Ah, yes!
She holds up her glass and he begins pouring.

CHRIS Say when...
It fills and fills. Chris is still pouring as we:

CHANGE FOCUS. *SPOTLIGHT: MARIA, low-cut top, short skirt, heavy makeup, is opposite ERIC, expensive suit, sweat patches.*

ERIC ...so I've had more time to concentrate on work – the business has never been more lucrative. The day she ran off with the gardener was the best day of my life...financially, you know. *(sips wine)* What about you, what d'you do for a living?

MARIA *(gestures to bottle of wine)* I'm sorry, do you mind?

ERIC No, course, go for it.

She leans over, showing cleavage. Eric is distracted.

MARIA So what got you into the property game?

ERIC *(still staring)* I just like...assets.

MARIA Real estate?

ERIC Looks like it.
(she leans back, breaking the spell)
I mean, yeah, real...ty.