

to loosen his collar.) Your best flannelette nightie? . . . Well, I'm sure you must look very erratic my love but I'm afraid something's just popped up (*Hurriedly.*) cropped up . . . (*Recoiling from the phone.*) . . . Well, there's no need for that aptitude . . . (*Wincing.*) . . . Yes, my love, I will be lucky I know but . . . hello? . . . hello? . . . (*Glancing at POTTER, trying to impress.*) And just you make sure you get those Brussel sprouts on overnight, woman . . . (*Wincing.*) Sorry, my love, I thought you'd gone! . . . Hello? . . . Hello? . . . Ah. (*Putting the phone back and smiling ruefully at POTTER.*)

POTTER Sounds like you'll be on the settee tonight, Sarge.

PRATT Oh, no, Mrs Pratt's a very understanding woman . . . it's just that she's giving the little Pratts an early night and she had plans for me to stuff her turkey.

(*ARCHIE GATES enters through the French windows. He is aged around 50 and is a no-nonsense, garrulous Australian with a strong Australian accent. He wears green trousers which have a large hole in the seat. This becomes obvious to the audience as he turns to close the French windows behind him.*)

ARCHIE (*as he enters*) G'day. How're you going?

PRATT (*mystified by the accent*) I beg your pardon?

ARCHIE I said, G'day.

PRATT Ah . . . and goody to you too, sir.

ARCHIE *(looking at PRATT's hat)* I didn't expect to find Santa here so soon. Chrissie won't be here for a few hours yet, mate.

PRATT Chrissie? I wasn't even aware she lived here, sir.

POTTER Think he means Christmas, Sarge.

(ARCHIE moves towards POTTER and PRATT notices the hole in his trousers.)

ARCHIE *(leering)* And you must be Santa's little helper, eh? Well you can help me out any time you like, if you get my meaning?

POTTER *(with obvious distaste)* Yes, I think I do.

ARCHIE You can drop by and give me my prezzie later tonight if you like . . . I've been good as gold all year . . . more or less.

PRATT Excuse me.

ARCHIE Why, what've you done, mate?

PRATT *(pointing at his trousers, embarrassed)* It's . . . your trousers.

ARCHIE *(posing)* What about 'em, eh?

PRATT No . . . no, round the back.

ARCHIE *(feeling behind)* Oh, crikey . . . my best pair of daks! Ah, well, no worries. *(Laughing.)* Hey, back in Oz we call that the big 'outback' eh?

(ARCHIE starts displaying the hole ostentatiously to them both. PRATT stares at him blankly and POTTER looks on distastefully.)

Get that, mate? Big 'outback', yeah? Get it?

(PRATT *continues to stare blankly.*)

Ah well, please yourself, mate. Anyway, forgive me for being blunt but who the hell are you anyway? Walt didn't mention he had a shed load of people coming over. (*Taking his hand straight from his rear and offering it to PRATT.*) Archie Gates.

PRATT (*looking at the offered hand dubiously before reluctantly shaking it*) Pratt.

ARCHIE Well there's no need to be like that, mate, I was just trying to be civil.

PRATT No, that's me . . . Sergeant Pratt. This is Constable Putter.

POTTER Potter. (*Coldly, clearly disliking ARCHIE.*) And we're already being attended to by a very nice lady, thank you, sir.

ARCHIE Ah, I reckon that'd be Lady Gates. Bit of a stunner . . . can't understand why she'd marry a senile old duffer like my brother.

(WALTON *enters from the hall, closely followed by MORAG.*)

Ah, speak of the devil.

WALTON (*moving to PRATT*) Ah Archie, there you are. And you must be this Puzzled Pratt fellow?

ARCHIE Yeah, well, he's certainly a puzzle to me, Walt, that's for sure . . . fair dinkum, no worries!

Get that, mate? Big 'outback', yeah? Get it?

(PRATT *continues to stare blankly.*)

Ah well, please yourself, mate. Anyway, forgive me for being blunt but who the hell are you anyway? Walt didn't mention he had a shed load of people coming over. (*Taking his hand straight from his rear and offering it to PRATT.*) Archie Gates.

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ARCHIE Yeah, well, he's certainly a puzzle to me, Walt, that's for sure . . . fair dinkum, no worries!

PRATT *(to himself in a Scottish accent)* Aye.

(PRATT produces his handkerchief from his pocket and is about to blow his nose when he realises that there are bits of the shattered bauble still in it. He looks around for somewhere to dispose of it, finally tossing it behind the Christmas tree before turning and exiting through the French windows.)

(Lights fade.)

Scene Two

An hour later. The curtains are drawn across the French windows. On the small table, centre left, are three headscarves, one red, one green and one white. Hidden beneath the green scarf are two decks of cards, one red backed and the other green backed. Hidden beneath the red scarf is a gun. ARCHIE is sitting reading a book as EMMA enters from the hall. She is wearing a sheet over her head, which completely conceals her except for eye holes.

EMMA *(as she enters, speaking in a ghostly voice)*
Whoooo . . . whooooo . . . *(In an imitation of MORAG's Scottish accent.)* Och, I am the ghost of Christmas Future . . . whoooo . . . whoooo.

ARCHIE *(looking up from his book)* In that case, Emma, I shouldn't be here because I won't be coming over at this time of year again! I prefer to eat my Chrissie dinner in the sunshine!

EMMA *(disappointed at being recognised)* Oh, gosh! How did you know it was me? You were supposed to think it was Mrs McKay!

- ARCHIE Sorry but it hardly takes a genius. At her age, Mrs McKay is probably more of a Christmas Past kinda Sheila. She's certainly well past her best, that's for sure . . . got a face like a half sucked lemon.
- EMMA (*removing the sheet*) It's dreadfully hot under there! Perhaps you could wear it and I'll come as a Christmas pudding or something . . . (*Giggling.*) then I could steep myself in lots of stupendous brandy.
- ARCHIE Sorry but I've never been a dressing up kinda bloke. Afraid you'll just have to put up with me in my civvies.
- EMMA Oh, no that won't do at all. But it's just so brilliant that you're here in the first place . . . after all these years.
- ARCHIE Oh, I've had a mind to get myself over here to Blighty for a long time but when I heard you and your father were set on visiting Oz, I'd put all my pommie plans on the back burner.
- EMMA I was absolutely devastated when we couldn't travel. It was rotten luck when Daddy got beaten up like that.
- ARCHIE Sounds like it was a nasty incident.
- EMMA Well, the police think it must have been some horrid burglar who got disturbed as he snuck into Daddy's room to grab some loot. Poor Daddy must have muttered something in his sleep . . . all he remembers is waking up when they whacked his leg with the bat!
- ARCHIE Strewth! And they never caught the mongrel who did it?

- EMMA Daddy just glimpsed a shadow moving out of the door.
- ARCHIE But what about Grace . . . didn't she catch sight of anything?
- EMMA Grace? She's hopeless! Anyway, they weren't actually married then . . . they were in separate rooms.
- ARCHIE (*leering*) That's what they told you anyway!
- EMMA Uncle Archie! Anyway she and Daddy still have separate rooms even now.
- ARCHIE Strewth! The old duffer's even slower than I thought! But you obviously don't think too much of the new love of your father's life then?
- EMMA Love? Love's got absolutely nothing to do with it? I know it's a horrid thing to say but Daddy's quite weak really. He couldn't cope when Mummy died and she saw her opportunity to pounce. I don't know what Daddy sees in her . . . he says she's from 'good stock'.
- ARCHIE Makes her sound a bit like a horse!
- EMMA She may have all the airs and graces, but she certainly hasn't got any money. That's the only reason the beastly woman married Daddy! And now he says he may have to reduce my allowance because of all her spending! I'd jolly well like to smash her with a bat . . . I used to be pretty handy with a hockey stick.
- ARCHIE Well as it happens I'm not exactly a big fan of Grace either. She's trying to get your father to cut off my money completely . . . can you believe that?

- EMMA I'd believe anything of her. But she can't do it can she . . . I thought it was a trust fund or something?
- ARCHIE Nothing a half decent lawyer couldn't drive a horse and dunny cart through. If she gets her way, I end up with nothing . . . what do you make of that?
- EMMA But couldn't you survive without it? I thought you had a huge farm?
- ARCHIE Poor grazing land though. Last year we produced about enough wool to knit a pair of gloves for a one armed man. I'd be ruined.
- EMMA Gosh! (*Thoughtfully.*) Uncle Archie . . . may I ask you something?
- ARCHIE Fire away.
- EMMA It's just that . . . nobody would ever tell me. Why did grandpapa send you off to Australia all those years ago? It wasn't for anything really horrid was it . . . you know, like violence or something?
- ARCHIE I think that's best left in the past, don't you . . . that was between me and your grandfather.
- EMMA (*conspiratorially*) It's just that when I think of how Grace is spending all my inheritance, I feel so angry and I get these really horrid thoughts about how I might get rid of her! Thought you might have some ideas.
- ARCHIE Now, girl, you want to be careful who you go around saying things like that to . . . you might get yourself into a heap of bother!