



A GHOST OF A CHANCE
BY
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Extract

A SMITH SCRIPT

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by

J Swain

CHARACTERS

- BERYL A middle aged woman who still attempts to dress glamorously. Landlady of the Cock and Badger she has reached a stage in life where she is slowly becoming aware that she will never achieve her dreams.
- MELVIN A middle aged man and landlord of the Cock and Badger. He and Beryl married later in life after he had spent many years as a single man living with his mother. He has far simpler expectations of life than his wife.
- MARY A middle aged or older lady who is a guest at the hotel. She purports to be an animal clairvoyant but this is clearly a new skill for her. She is a little naïve on times.
- RODNEY A middle aged or older man who is a guest at the hotel. He is a retired comedian in the style of the sexist British standup comedians and struggles to use his verbal filter.
- BETH A woman in her twenties. A university student and guest at the hotel. She is studious and a bit of a know-it-all with no sense of humour.
- BRIAN A man in his thirties to forties employed by the brewery as a dray driver. He has spent the weekend trapped in the hotel cellar.

SCENE ONE

THE PUB LOUNGE

THE INTERIOR OF A PUB LOUNGE. THERE ARE HORSE BRASSES ON THE WALLS AND A HEAVILY PATTERNED RUG ON THE FLOOR. AT THE BACK OF THE STAGE IS THE BAR. ON EITHER SIDE OF THE STAGE ARE DARK WOOD PUB TABLES AND CHAIRS. THERE IS A FIRE PLACE AT THE SIDE OF THE STAGE.

ENTER BERYL CARRYING A CLIP BOARD. SHE LOOKS FOR SOMETHING BEHIND THE BAR.

BERYL: Melvin. Where have you put the menus? I need the menus. They'll be arriving any minute.

ENTER MELVIN CARRYING THE MENUS

MELVIN: I've got the menus here, dear. I've just printed them. I think the ink's still wet.

BERYL: I asked you to print them hours ago. Really, Melvin. I can't do everything myself.

MELVIN: Of course not, dear. Sorry dear.

BERYL: And who still has a printer that churns out wet ink?

MELVIN: There's nothing wrong with that old girl. Built to last she was.

BERYL: Well, at least there's one old girl in your life you don't want to replace with a newer model.

MELVIN: Oh, will you let it drop.

BERYL: No, I will not let it drop. (HOLDS OUT A TREMULOUS HAND) Look what you've done now. I've got a turn coming on.

MELVIN: Well, you'll need to stop it coming on. The guests have just pulled up in the car park. I saw them through the office window.

BERYL: Oh my word. Right. This is it. (LOOKS AT A MENU) What's this?

MELVIN: What, my little foxglove?

BERYL: We talked about this, Melvin. No chicken in a basket.

MELVIN: But people like chicken in a basket. They expect chicken in a basket when they come to a traditional British pub. Just like they expect sticky carpets and nuts hanging off a busty woman's chest. This is a traditional British pub, so we need to give them traditional English food.

BERYL: No we don't. There is a fine line between traditional and tacky and, quite frankly Melvin, serving poultry in a plastic receptacle pole vaults the line. If we're going to save this pub we need to move with the times.

MELVIN: Yes dear. (LOOKS AT THE MENUS) Can we keep the prawn cocktail and Black Forest gateaux though?

BERYL: (GRABS THE SIDE OF THE BAR) I can definitely feel a turn coming on.

MELVIN: (RUSHES BEHIND THE BAR AND POURS A GLASS OF GIN) Hang on dear. Here's your medicine.

BERYL: (DRINKS) Have you sorted out the draft ales?

MELVIN: The man from the brewery is in the cellar now, Beryl.

BERYL: What? With the guests already arriving? Will he be finished soon?

MELVIN: I'm not sure dear. I don't think he was included in the memo where you outlined your very tight schedule. Oh wait. No. That's because there wasn't one.

BERYL: Don't be sarcastic, Melvin, it doesn't suit you and please don't try my patience today. This is very important to me and if you really loved me you'd realise that.

MELVIN: Of course I love you, my little wolfsbane. You are my entire reason for being. You take your medicine and I'll go and change the menus.

BERYL: (SNATCHES THEM FROM HIM) No you won't. I clearly can't trust you to do this properly so I'm going to have to do it myself. (EXITS)

MELVIN STARTS TO BUSY HIMSELF BEHIND
THE BAR. ENTER MARY WHEELING HER
SUITCASE BEHIND HER.

MARY: Excuse me. Is this where the Ghostly Goings On
Weekend guests check in?

MELVIN: It is indeed. Welcome to the Cock and Badger. I'm
Melvin Reynolds the landlord. Can I take your name
please?

MARY: Mary Hughes.

MELVIN: (LOOKS AT THE CLIPBOARD) Mary Hughes. Ah, here you
are. We're just waiting for the other guests to
arrive and my wife will be along in a moment to
welcome everybody formally. Can I pour you a
complementary cocktail while you wait? I am known
locally as the king of the cocktail.

MARY: Thank you very much. I'll have a Porn Star Martini
please.

MELVIN: Sorry. I don't know that one.

MARY: Oh. Okay. What about a Hanky Panky?

MELVIN: No, sorry. Not familiar with that one either. Is it
gin based? We do have rather a lot of gin.

MARY: Can you do a Missionary's Downfall?

MELVIN: Stumped again sorry. (ENTER BERYL) I could do you a
Slow Comfortable Screw Up Against the Wall.

BERYL: Melvin!

MELVIN: Cocktail, dear. It's a cocktail.

BERYL: It better be because, if this is another chamber
maid scenario, then.....

MELVIN: That was four years ago. How many times can I say
I'm sorry.

BERYL: Never enough. (TO MARY) Hello. Beryl Reynolds.
Landlady of the Cock and Badger. Welcome to our
Ghostly Goings On weekend.

MARY: Hello. Mary Hughes. Alternative clairvoyant.

MELVIN: Really? Like an alternative comedian?

MARY: Well, not exactly although I did contact Billy Connolly once by accident when I was trying to get through to my neighbour's pussy.

MELVIN: Fascinating.

BERYL: (TAKES MELVIN TO ONE SIDE) We have a problem, Melvin.

MELVIN: What's that, dear?

MARY: It's an easy mistake to make, I didn't realise it was her Foo Foo until I noticed the smell?

MELVIN: The smell?

MARY: Oh yes, it's amazing how the spirits choose to break through. I once experienced the most invigorating sensation whilst on my hands and knees in the kitchen! I don't know what came over me but I distinctly heard the theme from 'Free Willy', which makes sense because I had just had an accident with my top loader and there was water everywhere!

MELVIN: Sorry, I don't follow...

MARY: Well, his name was Moby...

BERYL: Moby?

MARY: As in Dick.

BERYL: Dick?

MARY: As in the whale.

MELVIN: You had a whale in your kitchen?!

MARY: No! Moby lived in my garden.

MELVIN: I really don't follow.

MARY: Moby was my pet goldfish who lived in the pond in my garden.

MELVIN: So the invigorating sensation?

MARY: Was the spirit of Moby the goldfish. He passed the week before in a sudden downpour. I think he drowned.

BERYL: And Foo Foo was a -

MARY: Cat.

BERYL: Of course. (PAUSE) Melvin. We really do have a problem if one of the guests is a clairvoyant. She's going to work out that this is all made up and we haven't actually got ghosts. (TAKES A GLUG OF GIN)

MELVIN: Not unless the story you're telling them is the tragic tale of Butch and Rover and how they met a sticky end fighting for the love of a good bitch. You heard her. She's the clairvoyant version of Dr Doolittle.

BERYL: I will not let this weekend fail, Melvin Reynolds. Neither you nor some jumped up Mystic Meg is going to ruin this for me, do you hear?

MELVIN: Yes dear.

ENTER RODNEY AND BETH. RODNEY IS TRYING TO CARRY BETH'S BACKPACK AS WELL AS HIS OWN SUITCASE. BETH TRIES TO WRESTLE THE BACKPACK FROM HIM.

BETH: It's okay. I can carry it.

RODNEY: No, it's fine love. It's all part of my therapy.

BETH: Well, go and find some other unfortunate woman to practice your male chauvinism on.

RODNEY: (TO MELVIN) D'you know what, you can't win with women these days. You can't help them and you can't tell jokes about them without being called sexist.

BERYL: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Cock and Badger.

RODNEY: Pardon? Oh, Cock and Badger. Continue.

BERYL: Thank you. Are you here for the Ghostly Goings on weekend?

BETH: Yes.

BERYL: If you'd like to check in with my husband Melvin, I'm just going to make sure your rooms are ready and I'll be back shortly. (GRABS THE GIN BOTTLE AND GLASS THEN EXITS)

MELVIN: Welcome, welcome. If you could you give me your names please and I'll just get you checked in then serve you a complementary drink from the bar.

RODNEY: Now you're talking. My mouth's drier than a menopausal nun's - oh, no, sorry. I'm not allowed to do that one anymore.

MELVIN: Name?

RODNEY: Rodney White.

MELVIN: And you, miss?

BETH: Bethany Thomas. I'm known as Beth.

MELVIN: Lovely. This is Mary. She's an alternative clairvoyant.

RODNEY: A clairvoyant? Maybe you could contact the spirit of my first wife.

MARY: When did she pass?

RODNEY: I'm not sure that she has but it would be worth checking. I might be able to stop the maintenance payments.

MELVIN: Can I interest you in a cocktail?

BETH: I'll just have an orange juice thank you. I don't like alcohol. It makes me sociable. (SITS)

MELVIN: Excellent. An orange juice coming up then. And what about you, Rodney?

RODNEY: Martini please. Here's one for you. What did the bartender say after Charles Dickens ordered a martini? Olive or twist. (LAUGHS) I just have a knack for comedy.

MELVIN: A knack. Yes.

MARY: I don't get it.

RODNEY: You'll get used to me by the end of the two days. (HE GOES TO SIT NEXT TO MARY)

BETH: Heaven forbid.

MARY: No! Sorry. You can't sit there.

RODNEY: Apologies. I didn't realise it was someone's seat.

MARY: Yes. Chester is sitting there.

RODNEY: Another guest?

MARY: No. A rat.

RODNEY: A rat?

MARY: Well, an Elizabethan rat to be precise. His spirit seems confined to this room. I suspect it's because he's confused by the mix of modern, nylon-based fabrics in here. It can be quite disorientating for a murine entity to be faced with too much velour.

MELVIN: Mary contacts the spirits of dead animals.

BETH: What a load of rubbish. Clairvoyants are just manipulative charlatans who profit from the grief-driven naivety of others.

MELVIN: Oh, this weekend is going to go swimmingly. We should have gone with my idea. I knew this would be a mistake.

ENTER BERYL.

BERYL: Melvin.

MELVIN: Yes, my little destroying angel?

BERYL: When I suggested that we follow the example of the top hotels in London many of which, you will no doubt remember, I have worked in as duty manager..

MELVIN: Yes dear. I do remember. It's difficult to forget when you remind me several times a day..

BERYL: When I suggested that we follow their example, I said we ought to put a chocolate on the pillows in the guest rooms and you said that you would take care of it for me.

MELVIN: Yes, my little deadly nightshade. And that's exactly what I did.

BERYL: Oh yes. That is exactly what you did. The only thing is, you didn't use chocolates in wrappers, did you? Oh no. Not my Melvin. Not my neuronally challenged buffoon of a husband. No. He had to put unwrapped Milk Tray chocolates directly onto my bleached white, Egyptian cotton pillow cases. It's a warm day, Melvin. Now it looks like a dog with

extremely lax bowels has smeared its backside on all the guests beds.

MELVIN: Ah.

BERYL: I'm definitely going to have a turn.

RODNEY: Do I detect a little friction with the old trouble and strife, Melvin?

MELVIN: Trouble? Good grief, no. Just a friendly little argument.

RODNEY: I see. What's the difference between a woman's argument and a knife?

MELVIN: Oh, um, I'm not sure.

RODNEY: A knife has a point.

BETH: That's a bit sexist.

RODNEY: Damn. And I've been dry for 5 weeks. It's having an audience you see. I can't help it.

BERYL: Okay. Is everyone sitting comfortably with a drink? Yes? Lovely. Can I welcome you all to the historic Cock and Badger Hotel in the charming village of Piddlehinton, a pivotal location in the story of Judge Jeffreys and the Bloody Assizes of 1685. I am Beryl Reynolds and this is - Melvin. We are your hosts for this weekend and I want to kick things off by setting the scene and telling you how this pub was so important in the tragic events that unfolded that year.

BETH: Good because this place isn't mentioned in any of the history books.

BERYL: Come with me on a journey back in time. (PAUSE. GLARES AT MELVIN. HE DOESN'T RESPOND. SHE NODS HER HEAD TOWARDS THE BAR. MELVIN DUCKS DOWN BEHIND THE BAR. EERIE MUSIC STARTS TO PLAY. MELVIN REAPPEARS) The year is 1685 and Judge Jeffreys has just become the Lord Chancellor. In June that year, the Duke of Monmouth leads an uprising against King James II but it is brutally quashed and the leaders executed. Jeffreys is given the task of bringing the rebels to justice and the town of Dorchester is identified as the location for the trials.

THE MUSIC SUDDENLY STOPS AND A RINGNG PHONE IS HEARD. MELVIN DUCKS

BACK BEHIND THE BAR AND COMES BACK
UP HOLDING A MOBILE PHONE.

MELVIN: Sorry, Beryl. Hello. Can I ring you back? Okay.
About half an hour. Bye.

BERYL: That better not be her.

MELVIN: Of course not, dear. I'll just pop the music back
on shall I?

BERYL: Leave it! And so, the Antelope Hotel in Dorchester
is earmarked as the location for what became known
as the Bloody Assizes but, the night before the
trials begin, Judge Jeffreys' room in the hotel
develops a leaky ceiling, and the landlord turns to
his old friend Josiah Kettle, inn keeper of the
Cock and Badger, to help out. So, for one night,
Judge Jeffreys, the infamous Hanging Judge, is
accommodated on this very site.

BETH: That's absolute nonsense. There's no record of him
ever staying here. And, in fact, he didn't even
stay in the Antelope Hotel. The Assizes were held
there but he actually took lodgings in High West
Street in Dorchester.

BERYL: As landlady of this very pub I think I'm likely to
know my own history.

BETH: And I'm writing my Master's dissertation on the
history of the Dorset Bloody Assizes so I think I
know a fair bit as well.

BERYL: Bugger, Melvin. We have another problem.

MELVIN: Just keep going. You're the mistress of blagging. I
remember the profile picture you put up on Plenty
of Fish.

BERYL: (TAKING ANOTHER DRINK OF GIN) Right. So, Judge
Jeffreys is put up for the night at the Cock and
Badger where the landlord, Josiah Kettle lives with
his young and beautiful wife Betty.

BETH: Betty Kettle?

BERYL: Yes. Betty Kettle. Now Josiah was a cruel and
heartless man who had tricked the young Betty into
leaving her happy life on the farm to join him in
running his dilapidated old inn.

MELVIN: This isn't the story we rehearsed.

BERYL: Don't dry up my imaginative juices, Melvin. You're always drying up my juices. Anyway, whilst working from dawn to dusk in this miserable hostelry, Betty met and fell in love with the handsome, swarthy dray driver, Gabriel Oak.

BETH: Isn't he a character in Far from the Madding Crowd?

BERYL: Yes - but - Thomas Hardy was from around here so that was probably where he got the name from. Anyway, so the star crossed lovers confided in Judge Jeffreys because he was such a kindly old man...

BETH: No he wasn't. He was known as a cruel and irritable man.

BERYL: That night he was feeling benevolent! Judge Jeffreys told Betty to follow her heart, so the lovers decided to elope but the evil Josiah discovered their plan and threatened to kill Gabriel. So that they could be together forever, the lovers killed themselves by drinking a poisonous mixture of hemlock and gin.

MELVIN: Now there's a thought.

BERYL: The next day, as Judge Jeffreys presided over the Assizes, they brought before him Josiah Kettle, charged with treason against the king. Jeffreys was not kindly disposed towards the man and had him executed in the traditional way for traitors - he was hung, drawn and quartered. From that day on they say that the wretched spirits of Josiah, Betty and Gabriel roam the corridors of this hotel, unhappy souls, trapped forever between two worlds.