



## WINGS OF AN ANGEL

By James MacVeigh

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## 1. The cell.

*The stage is dark.*

*Pause.*

*SOUND: the crackle of static on a short-wave RADIO, accompanied by the clump and squeak of heavy boots as they cross the stage.*

*Beat.*

*SOUND: a jangle of keys, then a heavy steel gate swinging open.*

*Beat.*

*SOUND: the resounding SLAM! of steel gate, so heavily amplified that it rings in the ears of the audience.*

*Pause.*

*LIGHTS come up on a police cell to reveal RUPERT facing the auditorium. Built to hold one person, it has a single BUNK built of concrete with its head against the far wall, upstage left, its foot facing the auditorium. A foam mattress lies on top with a couple of old army BLANKETS twisted across it. The only other piece of furniture is a LAVATORY in the far corner, upstage right. High up on the wall between the two, a WINDOW made of translucent glass bricks. LIGHT is from a bare bulb in a heavy-duty wire cage, too high up to be reached.*

RUPERT: *(to unseen custody cop)* Take my belt off? What for? *(listens)* I'm hardly going to hang myself. This business is bad but it's not the end of the world. All right, if I must. Uh? *(taking his shoes off)* I don't see how anyone could string themselves up on designer laces, they'd break under the weight of a Jack Russell. I wonder if I could -

*The amplified SLAM! of a cell door. Beat.*

- have a drink of something? Oh, Christ.

*Minus his belt so holding his waistband, RUPERT shuffles around the cell, stops beneath the window, looks up at it, then crosses to the LAVATORY, glances into it and shudders.*

God. Worse than animals, it's as bad as anything we saw in India. How d'you

flush? *(looks for a flush but does not find one. My God, you can't!*

RUPERT *moves around until he is looking directly out into the auditorium: he is standing at the cell 'door'. He peers through the spyhole. Shaking his head, he moves to the bed, disturbs it with his foot, lifts the edge of a blanket gingerly and regards it with distaste.*

Filthy.

RUPERT *sits on his haunches beneath the window, hugging himself to keep warm. He shivers spasmodically as the cold gets into his bones then gets to his feet and walks up and down, swatting his torso with his extended arms, trying to get warm. He stands looking at the bed.*

Dammit, can't let myself freeze. It'll only be for...

RUPERT *glances at his wrist where his Breitling normally sits then purses his lips in annoyance: the watch has been put into a property bag by the custody officer.*

...two or three hours, I suppose.

*First sorting the blankets so as to put their more objectionable end at his feet, RUPERT climbs onto the bed. He tries to shield his eyes from the unrelenting overhead light with his arm and when this does not work, pulls the blankets over his head to block it out. His exclamation below is muffled.*

Phwoa!

RUPERT *brings his face out from under the blankets.*

*(in sudden despair)* God, God, what have I done? If Samantha finds out about that girl she'll...

RUPERT *rearranges the blankets, finds a less filthy part, pulls it over his head and lies still.*

*A long pause.*

*As at the start of the scene, SOUND: boots crossing the stage, a loud jangle of keys as the cell door opens.*

*Enter DENNIS.*

DENNIS *speaks over his shoulder to the CUSTODY COP, off.*

DENNIS: (to COP) If you let me phone her, I'll be outta here. That way, you'll have

another...

SOUND: *the amplified SLAM! of the cell door.*

...space. (to RUPERT) Fuckin' crowded in 'ere tonight, man. There's two demos going on, the Evil Defence League against the Socialist Wankers' Party. That's why they've put us in the same peter.

RUPERT: (*sitting up*) Peter? Is that your name?

*Hearing RUPERT's accent, DENNIS looks at him strangely, taking in his expensive clothes and haircut.*

DENNIS: A peter's a cell. Me name's Dennis.

RUPERT: Rupert.

DENNIS: *What?* Fuck! 'Ere y'are, paper plane. Eeeee-oowmmm!

DENNIS *tosses his Rights booklet into the LAVATORY.*

RUPERT: Don't you want that? It tells you your rights.

DENNIS: It's crap. You got the right to make a phone call but when I tried callin' me ma-in-law it on'y went two rings an' the custody sergeant cut it off. (*He DENNIS mimes this, a slow karate chop*) Twat.

DENNIS *crosses to the bunk.*

Budge up.

RUPERT: (*doing so*) You won't like it on here. These blankets are filthy.

DENNIS: What's on 'em? Spew? Shit? (*examines blankets*) Seen worse. This ain't a hotel, you know.

DENNIS *climbs onto the bunk. They sit side by side facing the auditorium, their backs against the back wall, knees drawn up.*

Oh come on, they're disgusting. I was thinking of ringing the bell to see if I could get them changed.

DENNIS *gives a brief snort of laughter.*

DENNIS: Can if you want. No cunt'll come. If they do they'll be madder than a nonce with his bollocks dipped in boiling water.

RUPERT: Nonce?

DENNIS: Someone in for nonsense.

RUPERT: Er..?

DENNIS: Paedo-fuckin'-phile. These ain't bad.

RUPERT: Take a look at that toilet.

DENNIS: No thanks.

RUPERT: Really, have a look. The people who come in here must be worse than animals.

DENNIS: You what?

RUPERT: Present company excepted, of course. I suppose it's understandable as there doesn't seem to be a flush.

DENNIS: It's outside. Stop you getting' rid of anything you might've smuggled in.

RUPERT: Really?

DENNIS *stares at* RUPERT.

DENNIS: The custody cop's supposed to do it. Prob'ly too much effort, lifting his finger an' pressing the button. (*suddenly*) What you in for?

RUPERT: Oh, er. Nothing much.

DENNIS: No? It's a wonder they never give you bail then, this shit-'ole's packed tonight. What was the charge?

RUPERT: (*looks at charge sheet*) Assault and possession of cocaine. I was actually trying to get my property back after I'd been robbed. My lawyer will have it laughed out of court, I'm sure. All the way to the bank, knowing him sand the coke (*shrugs*). How about you? What brought *you* into this...shit-hole?

DENNIS: Non-payment of fines.

RUPERT: That doesn't sound too bad.

DENNIS: It's worse than yours. They've already give me time to pay, now I gotta to pay the whole lot or I'll be in nick tomorrow, an' I won't get out till they're paid in full.

DENNIS *gets off the bunk and paces around.*

All jail an' no bail. Three fuckin' months with no remission!

RUPERT: You don't have the cash, then?

DENNIS: What kinda question's that? (*paces, smacking a clenched fist into his palm*) If on'y me mother-in-law would sell me fish tanks...

*SOUND of uproar, off, with the voice of JEZZ dominant as three or four cops drag him into the cell block and fling him into a cell; this takes a fairly long time.*

*DENNIS presses himself against the 'door', his face grotesque as he screws one eye closed and presses the other against the spyhole, trying to see out.*

*RUPERT follows him over to the 'door'.*

*SOUND of a cell door slamming, off. The uproar subsides.*

DENNIS: Thank fuck.

RUPERT: What? What's happened?

DENNIS: They've put him in a peter nearer the gate. Easier to get the cunt out in the mornin', see?

RUPERT: Look, I don't... What was all that?

*DENNIS retakes his place on the bunk. RUPERT follows.*

DENNIS: Jezz, that guy shoutin', Gerry bleedin' Donnelly, mad cunt. I could see he was gonna kick off when they brung him in. I was in there bein' charged.

*DENNIS shivers, pulling the blankets tighter around him.*

Thank shite they never put him in 'ere.

RUPERT: Bit of a wild man, is he?

DENNIS: No. 'E's a fuckin' monster.

*A longish pause.*

RUPERT: What were you saying earlier? Fish tanks?

DENNIS: They're worth enough to pay off me fines. More than e-fuckin'-nough.

RUPERT: That's your solution, then.

DENNIS: Couldn't get into the flat to get 'em, me wife's... (*shaking his head*) Me ma-in-law promised to flog 'em for me. Don't know if she 'as, though. (*beat*) I hope she ain't pissed up the money. (*Pause*) Street robbery, was it? When you got turned over?

RUPERT: Er. Sort of thing, yes.

DENNIS: What were you doing round 'ere?

RUPERT: Oh, you know.

DENNIS: No. I wouldn't be askin' if I did, would I? You don't live round 'ere, that's for sure.

RUPERT: No.

DENNIS: I bet you don't knock about down here usually, neither. So come on, what were you doin'?

RUPERT: Just out for a drink, you know.

DENNIS: No, I don't.

RUPERT: What?

DENNIS: Know. That's why I'm askin', innit? Where did you go?

RUPERT: Oh, some pub.

DENNIS: Which one?

RUPERT: Didn't get the name. Great place, though, full of black people. Loud music. Salsa. Tremendous atmosphere, you'd never find anything like it where I live.

*Pause. DENNIS ostentatiously twiddles his thumbs for a few moments, at the same time whistling tunelessly.*

DENNIS: *(precipitously)* Don't gimme that.

RUPERT: What? I'm not with you.

DENNIS: What were you really up to?

*DENNIS shifts uncomfortably and moves away sideways, as far as the space on the narrow bunk permits.*

You're not a nonce, are you? It's not in-bloody-*decent* assault you're in for, is it?

RUPERT: No. Of course not. Here, have a look if you don't believe me.

*RUPERT hands the charge sheet to DENNIS, who glances at it and gives it back without having had time to read it.*

DENNIS: Right. You still ain't told me what you was doin' round 'ere.

RUPERT: Oh? I thought I had.

DENNIS *scoffs, shaking his head.*

What's that supposed to mean?

DENNIS: Pub full of black people? That was a safe bet, wannit?

RUPERT: I'm not with you.

DENNIS: *(a flash of anger)* Yes you are. I grew up round 'ere, born an' fuckin' bred. There's on'y one thing people like you come round this area for, it's to buy either drugs or sex.

RUPERT: That's two things.

DENNIS: All right, smart-arse. So which was it?

RUPERT: *(a tad smugly)* As a matter of fact, it was both. When the police intervened during the so-called assault they had this young policewoman with them, and while I was explaining what had been going on she took it upon herself to search my car. Trying to make a name for herself, I suppose. She found the best part of a gram of charlie under the front seat. *(pause)* I'm worried about the car now. They made me leave it in the station car park and it was the only one there.

DENNIS: What were you doing there?

RUPERT: *(guardedly)* The person who robbed me had let it slip that they wanted to get out of town. I thought they might have headed for the station once they got their hands on my money, and I was right.

DENNIS: Wow, it's all happenin' with you, innit? *(beat)* What kind of motor you got?

RUPERT: BMW. 1 Series Convertible.

DENNIS *whistles appreciatively.*

DENNIS: The bwoys down the Front Line'll love that if they get their hands on that.

RUPERT: The car's insured, I'm MORE concerned about my marriage. We've been going through a rough patch as it is. If Samantha finds out about this and doesn't accept my version of events, which she won't, it'll kill things stone dead.

DENNIS: Yeah? *(sadly)* Tell me about it. *(pause)* So who turned you over, Rupe?

RUPERT: What did you call me?

DENNIS: There's no way I'm callin' you *Rupert*. Fuck!

RUPERT: Rupe, eh? *(beat)* I like that. It sounds street.