

(1958. JOHN and PAUL are at PAUL's house, seated, with their guitars.)

JOHN

How does it go again?

PAUL

Like this.

(Demonstrates a chord change; JOHN tries to echo it, and fails)

JOHN

Aagh! Sticky fingers.

PAUL

The trick is not to think about it.

JOHN

If I don't think about it, how can I get it?

PAUL

Your fingers will know what to do. Or they should anyway. Try it again.

(They freeze; lights fade up on MIMI and JULIA having tea)

JULIA

Now, Mimi, you really ought to be easier on him. He's just a boy.

MIMI

He's nearly eighteen, Julia. And he's so disrespectful! You don't know what I go through.

JULIA

No, I suppose I don't. All I did was to have him.

MIMI

I'm sorry, Julia. You know I've never regretted taking him in. You had a chance for happiness, and George, God rest his soul, loved him like a son. But you must let me raise him as I see fit. Particularly now. All he does is sit around with that Paul all day playing his guitar. I'm sorry I ever bought it for him. It's just not practical.

JULIA

Not everyone can be as practical as you, Mimi.

MIMI

I might have known you'd take his side. Meanwhile, he's skipped classes all term, he barely passed his first years' course, and he's not suited for any type of real work.

(JULIA and MIMI freeze; JOHN and PAUL resume their scene. JOHN tries twice to get the chords, and fails both times.)

JOHN

Bollocks to this, Macca.

PAUL

Stick to it, Johnny. If you get this one, I'll spot you a pint.

JOHN

You're serious, aren't you? All right, then.

PAUL

You've nearly got it. Just slow it down.

JOHN

Hmm, hmm, hmm. (Slowly does get it, then quicker) Ha! The joke's on you, son. How about that pint?

PAUL

You know, we ought to get me mate George in with us.

JOHN

Who's this?

PAUL

A fellow at school with me. He's quite good. He can do solos.

JOHN

Bring him round the Jacaranda, then.

PAUL

Aye, will do. Now let's play it once more through.

(Lights fade on JOHN and PAUL, who exit; MIMI and JULIA resume)

JULIA

Mimi, don't you see that the harder you are on him, the worse he'll act? He's a very bright young man. He's got such potential. He knows his own mind. He'll be fine once he goes into second term this autumn. He just needed this past year to settle in. I shouldn't worry.

MIMI

Of course not. You never do.

JULIA

You always do. I've no need. (Rises) I've got to go pick up the girls. We're going shopping.

MIMI

I won't walk you to the stop tonight, Julia. I'll see you tomorrow.

(THEY embrace)

JULIA (at the door)

Don't worry.

(JULIA exits; Lights narrow down onto MIMI alone)

MIMI

What a terrible, terrible shock. One minute she was sitting here, having a cup of tea with me, the next...she'd gone. I never told any of the family where she was struck by the car...too painful. They drive past the spot every day.

(Add special light on JOHN. PETE S. approaches him.)

PETE S.

John...I'm sorry about your Mum.

JOHN

I know, Pete.

(Crosses to sit at a table with STU. Lights fade on PETE S., who exits.)

MIMI

It wasn't just a case of my sister dying in a car accident, either. I'd got her little boy, so our relationship was very special. John and Julia adored each other. It was years before he even mentioned her name.

(Lights out on MIMI; she exits. Lights up on JOHN and STU at Jacaranda Coffee Club. ALLAN WILLIAMS, the owner, a burly, blustery man who fancies himself a sharp businessman, pretends to wipe a nearby table as he eavesdrops.)

JOHN

Listen, Sutcliffe...you have to join.

STU

Why?

JOHN

Because you're me best mate, that's why! Look, I've never asked you a favor before.

STU

You 'aven't.

JOHN

Well, sod it, I'm askin' another one!

ALLAN (approaching)

And I'm askin' a favor as well. Either you layabouts order somethin' quick, or you'll be out of here.

JOHN

Aagh, come off it, Allan. It's not like you've got people queuin' up to get in.

ALLAN

Never you mind, Lennon. I'm certainly not makin' me fortune off you lot.

STU

Anyway, we helped you with that float parade. Saved you a few quid, eh?

ALLAN

Well...I've got me eye on you.

JOHN

Listen, Allan, I've got meself a band now. Can you get us some work?

ALLAN

What, me?

JOHN

I heard you've been doin' some bookin' for Rory and Derry's groups. Couldn't you help us out as well?

ALLAN

Can't be much of a group if you're in it, Lennon. What's the name?

JOHN

Johnny and the Moondogs. Rock and roll, mate!

ALLAN

Bloody awful name. Tell you what, Lennon. Come down and let me hear you play some time. And in the meanwhile, suppose you buy some food for a change, instead of cadgin' off me staff!

(ALLAN exits)

JOHN

Right, then, Stu? We'll be gettin' paying gigs soon enough. What do you say?

STU

Suppose I hate it. What in bloody hell do I do with a bass guitar?

JOHN

Sell it to the next guy.

STU

You mean give it to him.

JOHN

Well?

STU

Shouldn't you ask Paul first? It's his group too.

JOHN

I'm the leader, mate. If I say you're in, you're in.

(CYNTHIA POWELL enters and sits at other table, glancing over periodically. She is 19, attractive and impeccably dressed.)

STU

Oh aye, I'll have a bash. Just so you shut up about it.

JOHN

Really?

STU

Yeah, who knows? It might be fun for a change.

JOHN

Gear! And listen, if you think the birds flock around you now, wait'll you see how they go for rock and rollers.

STU

Speakin' of birds, mate, there's that Cynthia Powell who's been moonin' over you all term.

JOHN (sneaking a glance)

Oh, big fuckin' deal. She's just a teaser.

STU

Oh, really, Lennon? And how would you know?

JOHN

Come on, Stu...she's a drag! Look at the way she dresses...like a bleedin' nun! She always goes straight home after class. And I'm fed up with her starin' at me.

STU

Johnny, my boy, you've got it bad.

JOHN

What? For her? She's so pure it makes me sick.

STU

Well, she's coming over to us. Why not tell her to piss off, that bein' the case?

JOHN

Eh?

STU

You heard me. Brush her off. Now.

JOHN

Not only will I do that, I'll get a drink off her first.

CYNTHIA (approaching)

Hello, Stuart. Hi...

STU

Hello, Cynthia, do you know John?

CYNTHIA

You're in my lettering class, aren't you?

JOHN

Uh...yeah.

CYNTHIA

Would you like a drink?

JOHN

Uh...yeah.

STU

Two pints.

CYNTHIA

I'll be right back.

(She exits; JOHN recovers himself)

JOHN

Wipe that smirk off your face, Sutcliffe, or I'll do it for you.

STU

I can't help it. John Lennon is in love! I never thought I'd see the day.

(CYNTHIA re-enters with drinks)

JOHN
You're soft.

STU
You're hooked, Lennon.

(CYNTHIA sets the drinks on the table)

JOHN
Thanks, Cyn.

CYNTHIA
That's a new one.

JOHN (cuttingly)
Oh, sorry. What is it you're used to, then? Miss Powell? Please forgive me, Miss Powell. I'll try not to forget again.

CYNTHIA
You needn't be mean about it. I only meant...nobody's ever given me a nickname before, that's all.

JOHN
Oh. (Awkward pause)

CYNTHIA
Aren't you going to ask me to sit down?

JOHN (at the same time)
Would you like to dance?

CYNTHIA
Thanks, but I don't think I'd better. I'm engaged to this fellow in Hoylake.

JOHN
I didn't fuckin' well ask you to marry me, did I?

(CYNTHIA starts to speak, stops, turns and goes back to her table, barely avoiding a violent collision with PAUL and GEORGE HARRISON on the way. PAUL eyes CYNTHIA as she walks back to her table. GEORGE H., a gawky 15-year-old, stands at the table and stares at JOHN.)

JOHN
What are you lookin' at, son?

PAUL
John, this is George Harrison. The fellow I told you about?

JOHN
The brilliant guitarist of Liverpool Institute? How old is he, eh? Thirteen? (Beat) Does he talk yet?

GEORGE H.
I'm sixteen. Nearly.

JOHN

Well, come back when you're all grown up, lad. We don't want to have your Mum in here.

PAUL

'ang on a minute. John, let's 'ave a word.

(Leads JOHN away from the table)

Listen, mate. You'd best give George a pull.

JOHN

I hadn't 'best' do anything, McCartney. You're gettin' too pushy. Who started the group, anyway? Who asked you to join? I did. Remember?

PAUL

Never mind that. He tears it up!

JOHN

That kid? I don't believe it.

PAUL

Screw his age, John, it's true. He could really help the sound.

JOHN

What 'sound,' Macca? We sound bloody awful.

PAUL

Aye, we do now. But with George we could get really good. Tighten up the sound, work on more of our own material. You keep saying you want to go professional. This is our chance.

JOHN

He's that good?

PAUL

Trust me.

JOHN

I'll think about it. And by the way, I've got some news of me own. I've found us a bass player.

PAUL

Brilliant! Who is it?

JOHN

Stu.

PAUL

But he can't play a bleedin' note!

JOHN

Right. That's why you're going to teach him.

PAUL

You don't mean it.

JOHN

Oh, I mean it, all right. He's in or George isn't.

PAUL

I hope you know what you're doing, you bastard.

JOHN

Trust me. (crosses away from PAUL, to address CYNTHIA) Well, are you coming?

CYNTHIA

Oh...

(She grabs her bag and rises. As they move towards exit, JOHN puts his arm around her.)

JOHN

You know, you'd look great as a blonde. Ever seen any Brigitte Bardot films?

(They exit together. Lights fade. Lights up on Jacaranda, a year later. STU and GEORGE H. are seated with their instruments. GEORGE H. is teaching STU a chord, or trying to. PAUL is looking on, perhaps with a pint or a ciggie.)

GEORGE H. (wearily)

Let's try that once more, Stu. I think you've nearly got the 'ang of it.

PAUL (sings)

That'll be the day...ooh.

GEORGE H.

Knock it off, Paulie.

PAUL

Oh, why should I? We all know this is a lost cause.

STU

I'm tryin' my bloody best, can't you see that?

PAUL

I know, Stu. But you can't help it if you're hopeless. Maybe you should stick to painting.

STU

Well, maybe I should!

PAUL

It's never too late, now, is it?

GEORGE H.

Lay off, Macca!

JOHN (bursting in)

Listen, mates! Allan Williams says if we can find a steady drummer, he'll get us booked in Hamburg!

GEORGE H.

Hamburg, Germany?

JOHN

No, you little twit, Spain. Of course, Germany!

PAUL

Well, then. Let's put our heads together, lads.

STU

Christ, we don't know any fuckin' drummers.

GEORGE H.

Wait a minute, wait a minute...what about Pete Best?

STU

Who?

GEORGE H.

You remember, Pete. His Mum owns the Casbah.

STU

Oh, right.

PAUL

I don't know. He's only been playing about a year, so he mightn't be much good, isn't that so?

JOHN

Stu's only been playing a year.

PAUL

I rest my case.

STU

Fuck off, McCartney!

JOHN

Shurrup, the lot o' you. George...what about this Pete?

GEORGE H.

Well, 'e's just got himself a new kit, and I hear he's lookin' for a group.

PAUL

Well, let's ring him up, eh?

JOHN

You handle it, Macca. We'll try him out with Allan tomorrow.

PAUL

Gear!

(Blackout. JOHN, PAUL, GEORGE H. and STU exit. Lights up on MIMI and CYNTHIA at Mendips, MIMI's home, having tea. CYNTHIA is now a bleached blonde, wearing fishnets, heels, and a miniskirt.)

MIMI

Cynthia, please listen. You must get him to move back home.

CYNTHIA

There's not a lot I can do, Mimi. He wants to be with Stuart.

MIMI

But that place is filthy and unhealthy.

JOHN (bursting in)

Mimi! Cyn! We've been asked to play in Hamburg!

MIMI

Hamburg! No, certainly not. You can't go there. It's out of the question.

JOHN

I am going. You can't stop me.

MIMI

But, John, what about your studies?

JOHN

Oh, Mimi, you needn't worry about that any longer. You always said I'd never make a livin' at my music, but we'll be gettin' piles of money!

MIMI

And just what do you consider 'piles' of money, John?

JOHN

...One hundred pounds a week. Each!

MIMI

So you're throwing away your future with both hands for some quick cash. I think you're being very foolish, that's all I'll say. (MIMI stalks out)

JOHN

You're happy for us, anyway, aren't you, Cyn?

CYNTHIA

How long will you be gone?

JOHN

We're under contract for six weeks, with a renewal option. I can't say really.

CYNTHIA

What will you do about school?

JOHN

Is that all anyone can talk about? School? Bloody hell, Cyn, don't you see that this is what we've been working towards for years? We're finally gettin' somewhere, and we're gettin' paid for it, and all you're worried about is bloody lessons!

CYNTHIA

How much are you getting paid, really?

JOHN

Does it matter? We're going abroad!

CYNTHIA

I'm sorry, John. It's just, I'm going to miss you, that's all.

JOHN

Well, I'll miss you, too. But I'll write, OK? Don't look so sad. Give me that sexy little Brigitte smile. Come on, do. (Kissing her as the lights fade out) That's better.