

Old Paper

Stany Crets

Rachel Tired after the day's exertions, are you? Must be hard. Standing there, smiling the odd smile – reluctantly -, taking off your cap, two, maybe three times - equally reluctantly. Terribly hard.

**They get up
J stays seated**

Rachel So you're tired?

Raymond Yes. I'm off to bed. Are you coming?

Rachel I want to finish this game. I haven't finished my game. I can't sleep unless I know the outcome.

Raymond After this game will come another one and then another one...

Rachel It's the last one. I promise.

Raymond I'll wait.

Rachel Okay.

She goes on playing until the game's finished. Raymond occasionally throws in a remark like : 'Red queen on black king'. 'Three of spades on four of aces' etc.

Rachel I've lost.

Raymond Time for bed then.

Rachel You'll switch off the lights?

Raymond Yep. You the radiator?

Rachel Okay.

Raymond You won't forget the radiator, will you? I don't fancy having to come down, barefoot, to check whether we did or not. Radiators are like coffee machines: you're never quite sure whether you did switch them off or not.

**Lights are dimmed.
The curtain drops slowly.
Raymond and Rachel off.**

Rachel I'll tidy away the cards tomorrow.

**Curtain
Dean Martin**

ACT ONE

Rachel in front of curtain

Rachel Raymond was still sleeping when the bell rang. He's a sound sleeper, Raymond. Impossible to wake up. Not even with an electric drill. Snores louder than a drill too. Anyway: the bell rings once. The bell rings twice. I get out of bed and go to the window, open the curtains. We've got this mirror along the façade, so we can check who's at the door from the first floor. I look into the mirror, straight into this woman's eyes. Stylish lass. All dressed in black. She spots me in the mirror and rings a third time. I get away from the window, look at Raymond, but he's still in the land of Nod. Fifteen minutes I stood there, stock-still between bed and window, holding my breath. The bell had stopped ringing. I sneaked back to the window and peeped into the mirror. Nobody on our doorstep now.

Music

Rachel off

Raymond sits centre stage

He is wearing a long red doorkeeper's coat and has a cap on his head

Raymond is reading a letter

It is obviously a death notice

He is pale as death and tears are running down his cheeks

He puts the envelope in a jacket pocket and starts pacing up and down

He takes the letter again and puts it back

The music stops

Raymond I hate getting mail. Letters are bad news. Even good news letters. Before you know it, your good news turns bad. 'Darling, I'll be home soon'. Sounds like good news. Until she does get home. And the shit hits the fan. 'Congratulations. Your chance to win ten grand.' Chance is bad news. It means you're not alone, that others stand just as good a chance as you of winning those ten grand. 'Congratulations, you have won ten grand.' Definitely not good, since you end up spending your ten grand on the wrong stuff. 'I love you, I'll always stay with you.' Either the love bit doesn't last, or the staying gets on your nerves. Bad news, all of it. I don't want any more mail, thank you very much. I sincerely hope this is the last letter I ever get.

And if it isn't, it's definitely the last one I'm reading.
From now until eternity. Amen.

Rachel on with a cardboard box full of old books, newspapers, papers. She drops the box with a thud.

Raymond A breeze. Drop a box of more than five kilos and you create a breeze.

Rachel It used to be worth something. I remember getting tuppence, then one penny and then half a penny. Put a box outside these days and you end up paying a hundred pound fine. The world upside down. Nothing's worth anything these days. Why hang on to anything? The game isn't worth the candle. Old paper's useless. Unless you keep a thousand birds in a cage and need newspapers for them to crap on. Who in his right mind keeps a thousand birds in cages, anyway?

Raymond Yes, Rachel, who?

Rachel It's like the foil tops from milk bottles we used to collect as kids.

Raymond No it's not.

Rachel Near enough. We drank milk for charity as if there were no tomorrow, and what good has it done us? Land of milk and honey, my arse.

(she looks at him)

You look pale.

Raymond Not more than usual.

Rachel Much more than usual. You usually look pale around your nose. Now even your blotches don't show. I never did quite figure that out.

Raymond What, Rachel?

Rachel You having blotches. Farmers get them, fair enough, from working out in the fields. Farmers, butchers and old hags.

Raymond How come you don't have them then...

Rachel I knew it! I knew you'd say that.

Rachel off

Raymond walks up to the box with old paper

Stares at it briefly

Grabs the letter and slips it along one side of the box

Checks the old books, curious

Takes one, interested

Raymond Why are you throwing these away?

Raymond sits down in an armchair and leafs through a book

Rachel on with second box. She puts it next to the first one

Raymond Why are you throwing these away?

Rachel Somebody has to. The back room's full of rubbish that's just sitting there, gathering dust. I may be retired, Raymond, but I'm not your full-time servant.

H sits down on a chair

Raymond My schoolmaster once gave me this. Because I read too fast. Doesn't make sense, does it? Being given lines to write because I was reading too fast. It was the first year of primary school and after a few weeks I'd got the knack of reading. Pear, bear, top...

Rachel Spare me the details.

Raymond What do you mean, 'spare me the details'? You have no idea! We sat reading together and my classmates couldn't keep up. I read nineteen to the dozen: pear, bear, top, pear, bear, top. While those poor kids went: p-e-a-r, b-e-a-r,...

Rachel Top. I know...

Raymond I just went on. If I get a head start today, I said to myself, I can take it easy next year. So I was given lines. Lack of respect for the other kids. Two pages : pear, bear, top... Bo-ring. Mum and dad contacted the teacher to find out what was the matter with me. The man soon realised his mistake. Damn right he did. Talent must be

cultivated. Gave me this book at the end of the year. By way of apology. I never read it. Too difficult. Never got round to it later either.

Rachel Shall I throw it away?

J throws away the book

H forward

Rachel puts the book back in the box

Spots the death notice

Takes it

Rachel How about throwing it away?
This isn't old paper, this is new paper.

She opens the letter

Rachel Did you put this with the rest?

Raymond Hun?

Rachel Did you put this notice with the rest?, I said
Raymond doesn't answer

Rachel **(reads)**
We regret to have to announce the loss of Marc Offord.
The Offord-Mallett families.
How did this get here? Offord-Mallett, Marc Offord.
How did this get here, Raymond? I want to know.

Raymond What makes you think I know? You filled those boxes. Shouldn't you be asking yourself that question? 'How did this get here, Rachel?'

Rachel I fine-tooth combed the lot before filling the boxes and I know for a fact that this notice wasn't there.

Raymond Must have ended up in there somehow.

Rachel Raymond, this is a recent death notice. The rest is old stuff.
It still smells of...

Raymond dead body?

Rachel No, ink.

Raymond I don't know, Rachel. I said I didn't know, and that's exactly what it means: I don't know. Is that clear?!

Rachel I'd rather you didn't work night shifts.

Raymond What's that got to do with it?

Rachel I don't want you under my feet all day, getting on my nerves.

Raymond I told you: I haven't got a clue about the letter... Anyway. I'll be out of your hair in half an hour.

Rachel Now I'm with you. A fairy's snuffed it. Is that it?

Raymond A fairy?

Rachel The brother of the fairy that delivered the letter?

Raymond **(sighs)**
I just can't win with you, can I? I do night shifts, you don't like it because I have a lie in. I get up early, you don't like it because I get in your way. Day shifts are no good either because you don't have enough room in bed. Nagnagnag. Are there any more boxes at the back?

Rachel Planning to help?

Raymond Help? You must be joking. It's just that if there are, I'd get them on the double. I'm running out of patience here.

**Rachel wants to go off
She puts the notice away.**

Raymond Are you taking that notice?

Rachel Why? Did you want it?

Raymond Yes, to jog my memory of that Marc.

Rachel hands him the notice.

Off.

Raymond reads the notice again and pockets it.

Raymond Wouldn't you know it. I said I wasn't going to read any more letters and here I am, reading this one. Never mind. It doesn't count. I'd read it already. I'm not reading any more new letters. Old ones, fair enough. Bad news is bad news. It can hardly get worse, can it? What if it got better, though? I like the sound of that. The first time you read bad news is the worst, the second and third it's not that bad anymore because you've read it before, the news I mean. It will never be good, mind, but certainly no worse.

J removes boxes

J then removes the two boxes

Rachel on with third box

H front stage again, looking for boxes

Rachel **(calls out)**

What's this supposed to mean, Raymond? Don't put them outside. We'll get fined a hundred pounds if you're not careful. The rubbish collectors aren't due until tomorrow.

Raymond back on with the boxes

Raymond What did I say? Nagnagnag.

(spots the third box)

Is this the last one?

Rachel No. Any idea yet?

Raymond What?

Rachel What? Who that Marc bloke is!

Raymond No. I'll think of something.

Rachel Pardon?

Raymond I meant, it'll come back to me.

Rachel How old was he?

Raymond How am I supposed to know, Rachel? I don't even know the guy.

Rachel It says in the letter.

Raymond Oh.

(takes the letter, reads)

Just turned thirty.

H waits briefly

Rachel Much too young, poor sod.

Raymond **(quiet)**

You can say that again.

Rachel There's no stamp on the envelope.

H off

Raymond carefully inspects the envelope, as if looking for a stamp

J desperately looking for a stamp (long)

Raymond A teeny-weeny stamp perhaps? A fairy stamp.

Rachel **(sighs)**

J letter under clock

Rachel off

Raymond takes his book back out of the box

Opens it

Reads

J takes the book

J front stage, reads to the audience

Raymond 'Mum is standing by the fence. She is talking to Uncle George. Uncle George laughs. He waves at John. John waves back'.

J slips the letter inside the book and closes the book

Fuck Uncle George. Bullshit, Uncle George... John stands

there waving at Uncle George. Little does John know that George is not his uncle at all, that Uncle George pops round every other day to have it off with mum... Not to mention Uncle Jason and Uncle Jerry.

He throws the book amongst the boxes

Raymond Marc. With a C, not a K. Unless you're a Frog, of course, in which case you do spell it with a C. 'And what name did you have in mind for your child?' 'Mark'.
'Mark – with a K or a C?' 'Oops, hadn't thought of that one. What's the difference?' 'The letter, Missis, the letter's different.'
'What would you choose?' 'It's up to you, of course, but I'd go for C. There's plenty of Marks with a K. Much easier for your child if there's more than one Mark in his class.' 'Point taken. Let's go for a C'. Who calls his child after Jerry money anyway, just after the war.
Rachel! Bring us some coffee, will you?

Rachel on

Rachel I'm making some. Shall I iron your uniform trousers?

Raymond That'd be nice.

Rachel You know, every time I go shopping and I see you in that smart uniform of yours, I'm ever so proud.

Raymond Why ignore me then?

Rachel Because you're working.

Raymond I'm not a colonel, Rachel. I'm a hotel doorkeeper.

Rachel You're *my* colonel.

Raymond Stop it. This is no laughing matter.

Rachel You still haven't come to terms with it, have you?

Raymond I've yet to meet the first person who'd come to terms with that, Rachel. One minute you're the boss, the next you're being bossed around and wearing fancy dress gear.

Rachel Aren't you glad you don't have the responsibility anymore?

Raymond It was my land, my bricks.

Rachel Fair enough. But it was thirty years ago.

Raymond **(startled)**
What? What was thirty years ago?

Rachel That we went bankrupt.

Raymond Thirty years. That long, is it? We'd been married four years. Other people would never survive a blow like this. A year later it was gone. Razed to the ground. The Creel Hotel, from the first to the last brick: all in skips. My dream smashed to smithereens with an iron ball and dumped in a skip. Did you know, Rachel? Did you know that some of those bricks refused to let go? It wasn't the mortar that kept them together, but the wallpaper I'd hung on the wall with my own hands. A few bricks sticking together because of a bit of paper.

Rachel What makes us stick together, do you reckon? Another bit of paper.

Raymond Pardon?

Rachel Forget it, Raymond, forget it.

Raymond They wouldn't even let me take a door.

Rachel What did you want a door for?

Raymond To keep. Knock on it. Open it. Come in through it. Leave through it. But the foreman said: 'No fucking way. It's all been bought up'. 'What's one door to you?', I went. 'It starts with a door, but where does it end?', he replied.

Rachel Could we change the record, please? How about helping me carry a few boxes?

Rachel off

Raymond 'That's not just any door', I go. 'It's the door to room eight.'

‘It could be the loo door, for all I care. It’s staying right here,’ he said, roaring with laughter. Little did he know what had happened behind that door. Or care. He took a sledge hammer and gave it a good bashing with me looking on. It was as if somebody was smashing my heart to smithereens. The door groaned and snapped. Two, three times he bashed it, and then he spat on it.

Rachel on with a box

Raymond He spat on it, Rachel.

Do you really want to know who that Marc is?

H off.

Rachel ignores her husband; off to fetch a new box

Raymond You don’t care, do you? Fine. I think I’m going to cry.

(pockets the letter)

Rachel!

H on with box

Rachel on

Raymond Sit down. There’s something I must tell you about door eight.

Rachel No, there’s something *I* must tell you about door eight. Mrs T lived behind door eight. Now Mrs T had this affair. And who did Mrs T have this affair with? With you, Raymond, with you.

Rachel off, box down

J waits until H has gone

Raymond **(thrown off balance)**

I was lonely. I had you, but I was lonely all the same. You know. You knew, didn’t you? So why did you put up with it?

Rachel on with coffee.

Rachel I don’t want to talk about it. We swore never to broach the subject again. Coffee?

Raymond Yes. In my cap? Get us some cups.

Rachel off

Raymond We swore never to broach the subject again. It was a youthful lapse, that's all. The minute two people decide not to mention something anymore, they also decide it never happened. Why dredge it up again? We all have affairs. Real or imaginary ones. The latter are the worst, since they're never consummated and therefore never really over. End of story. I won't let you broach the subject again.

Rachel on with two cups of coffee

Raymond Thanks.

Rachel When do you start working?

Raymond I'm not going in today.

Rachel Come again?

Raymond I said I'm not going today. I don't feel like it. Call them and tell them I'm ill.

Rachel You're not going in today?

Raymond Is that what I said?

Rachel Yes.

Raymond Then that's what I meant. I'm not going. I'm not leaving this chair.

Rachel You have to.

Raymond I don't have to do anything.

H sits

Rachel You have to go to work. I don't want you breathing down my neck all day and all night. I never get anything done with you around. 'Rachel, you've left some dust. Rachel, that figurine on the sideboard's not where it's supposed to be. Rachel, the carpet fringes

are all messed up'. I just can't work with you around. You drive me up the wall, you and your nagging.

Raymond *My nagging? I nag, do I? I'm a nagger? If there's one nagger in this place, it's you.*

Rachel Just listen to yourself. Always the last word. Always.

Raymond Always?

Rachel See! I told you!

Raymond The last word?

Rachel Yes.

Raymond Me.

Rachel All right, all right. You win. You can have your last word.

Raymond I don't want it.

Rachel Enough. Shut up.

Raymond Okay, I'll shut up.

Rachel Do it then!

Raymond Mmm.

He drinks his coffee, gets up

Raymond Me. The last word. Ha!

Rachel You're not going to work? Then I'm going out myself.

Raymond Where to?

Rachel Somewhere. Nowhere. Anywhere.

Raymond Going shopping.

Rachel No, Raymond, I'm not going shopping. I'm leaving for the simple

reason I don't want to be here. That's all.

Raymond I'm going with you.

Rachel No you're not. You're staying right here. I'm getting my coat and I'm off. Now.

Rachel off

Raymond Door eight no longer exists. Door eight disappeared along with the Creel Hotel. Replaced by this massive thing whose name I refuse to pronounce. No ground floor rooms. Room numbers start at eleven. First floor, room eleven. As if they've got fifty eight rooms. While in reality they've only got forty.
'So you managed a hotel, did you? Where? Here? Excellent. How about a job as a doorkeeper?' Is that really my only option? What do you say, with debts to pay off? The banks do the talking for you. I wasn't even allowed to choose the colour of my own uniform. 'No, Sir, we're sorry, shades of red across the board. And that includes uniforms.' The first day I spent on the pavement, my head was the same shades of red as their hotel. That's how embarrassed I felt. Pulled my cap way over my eyes, tried to blend in, which isn't easy in this circus gear. The colonel of St James Street they call me now.

**Rachel on in her coat, holding her handbag
She passes Raymond without saying a word**

Raymond See you.

Rachel off

Raymond 'Oh my sweet downy dove,
oh, my shiny, golden love,
where you go roses bloom
when we touch honey bees zoom.
Oh, you tender petal of mine,
I promise I'll always be thine,
being with you is sheer bliss,
day after day I long for your kiss.
I need you to be with me,
My sublime darling Mrs T'.

Raymond ponders silently
The bell rings

Raymond Forgot your key, did you?

J calls out
Bell
The bell rings again

Raymond I thought you were going.

The bell rings again
Raymond sighs and off
Comes back with Bill

Raymond What brings you here? I'm working.

Bill You're not working. You're at home.

Raymond I'm supposed to leave for work in fifteen minutes.

Bill But you're still at home.

Raymond I'm not going, as I said.

Bill You're not going?

Raymond No. So what did bring you here?

Bill I was in the neighbourhood, so I thought I'd pop in and say hello to Rachel... and Raymond.

Raymond Rachel isn't in. You'll have to say hello to me, I'm afraid.

Bill Ah, I see. Hello.

Raymond She's gone. Couldn't stand me anymore, she claimed.

Bill Ah, I see.

Raymond Do you now? She has no right to leave. This is where she belongs. She's called a house wife for a reason. House-wife. Any news?

Bill No. Not really. No. You?

Raymond Marc's dead.

Silence

**Raymond takes the letter and hands it to Bill,
who whistles briefly**

Bill Thirty years. That long ago, is it?

Raymond Yes. That long ago.

Bill Delivered to the house, was it?

Raymond This morning, yes.

Bill No stamp.

Raymond That's right.

Bill So she...

Raymond That's right.

Bill ... came and delivered it herself...
After thirty years. Did you see her?

Raymond No. I was asleep. I'm working the night shifts.

Bill Jeez. And how...

Raymond No idea. Death notices never tell you, do they?

Bill Will you be going to the funeral?

Raymond I don't know.

Bill He... he's your son, isn't he?

Raymond looks at him in silence

Raymond The word never crossed my lips, Bill. Said it to myself many times. 'Son'. It's the first time I've said it. 'Son'.

Bill That's twice.

Raymond What you don't say doesn't exist. Now he's dead, he's stopped existing. I never laid my eyes on him, Bill.

Bill I know.

Raymond Maybe he had my looks.

Bill Mrs T's, with any luck.

Raymond I'd arranged everything. For nine months I'd watched her with that bulging belly of hers...

Bill Not nine months, Raymond. The first few months you hardly see a thing.

Raymond Let me finish. I nursed her in her room, the works. I was prepared to dump Rachel and go off with Mrs T. But she disappeared, a few days before the baby was due. Not a word, no letter, nothing. All of a sudden, room eight was bare. 'Maybe she's had the child adopted and she'll come back, I said to myself.' Two people who only live on in your head. For thirty years. A woman you would have turned your life around for and a child you've never seen. I don't even know what he looked like, Bill.

Bill Does Rachel know?

Raymond shakes his head

Raymond She knows about Mrs T, but not about my son.

Bill That's three.

Raymond Three what?

Bill Three times you've said son.

Rachel on.

Rachel **(taken aback)**
Bill.

Bill Rachel.

Rachel Bill.

Raymond I'm off to work. Now.

Off
Rachel and Bill stay behind

Interludium

Raymond appears in front of the curtain

He is holding an old exercise book

Opens it

Reads

Raymond 'Dear Diary. Raymond is an enterprising lad, full of beans. He'll make it in life. My parents reckon he's a good match. The ideal son in law. But what about me, dear diary? He was ever so sweet yesterday. We went to the pictures together. He paid for my ticket and my ice lolly. We went for a drink afterwards. I had two lemon squashes, he four beers. When he took me home on his bike, he asked if he could kiss me. I did sort of feel like kissing him, but his breath smelled of beer and cigarettes. 'Why rush,' I said. When he drove off, his front wheel got stuck in the tram tracks and he fell on the ground. I pretended not to see. We met his friend Bill in a pub. Handsome chap. Mustn't think such thoughts, though, now I'm going steady, dear diary. Sweet dreams.'

He skips a few pages

Dear Diary, Bill and I went to the zoo. He said Raymond must never find out. So I won't tell him. It was fun. He bought me nice postcards. And at the fish, in the dark, his hand brushed mine. I wonder whether it was on purpose. I had funny dreams about Bill that night and the next day when I saw Raymond, part of me couldn't stand him. When I see Bill I have butterflies. I never do when I see Raymond. Sweet dreams.'

Curtain open

Rachel is lugging a box with old papers across the stage

Raymond throws the diary at her

ACT TWO

Raymond 'When I see Bill I have butterflies!'

Rachel What are you going on about?

Raymond Here! Read it. Whore!

Rachel That's forty years ago, Raymond. I was a young, innocent girl back then. I chose you, didn't I?

Raymond But with Bill on your mind . Always. Admit it. He was there, wasn't he, when we did it? You never really did it with me, but with him.

Rachel I don't have to listen to this.

Raymond Yes you do, because it's the truth and you can't stand the truth. Bill's bald, for Christ's sake.

Rachel He wasn't back then.

Raymond Don't laugh! Or...

Rachel Or what?

Raymond I'm going to that funeral.

Rachel Marc's?

Raymond Yes. A father should attend his son's funeral.

Rachel Wait, Raymond.

Raymond What for?

Rachel I want you to tell me everything. About Mrs T... and about Marc.

Raymond You know most of it.

Rachel I haven't heard it for thirty years.

Raymond Mrs T lived in our hotel in room eight. I had an affair with her and she suddenly did a runner. I told you at the time. End of story.

Rachel Was she beautiful?

Raymond You know her. Stop it, Rachel.

Rachel Was she beautiful?

Raymond Yes, she was beautiful. She wasn't an angel. She was a devil. Devils are usually more beautiful than angels.

Rachel Was she evil?

Raymond No. Yes. She was evil. Glossed over evil, if you get my drift. The sort that's hard to spot at first, but that bites its way into your soul.

Rachel Would you have dumped me for her, given the choice?

Raymond Sure, but she dumped me before I had the chance.

Rachel You could have upped and left. On your own. What did you need her for?

Raymond Where was I to go without her?

Rachel Did you love her?

Raymond Yes. No. I don't know. It's hard to tell. First you fall in love and then, maybe, you really start loving that person. When you fancy someone, you're never quite sure you're also really going to love him or her. You don't know. You just don't.
She was stunningly beautiful. She had a hard, angular face, with cruel lips she painted bright red. She had this beauty spot, it wasn't real, but that's what made it so beautiful. She used to pull her hair back, very tight. She wore white powder on her face. And she had a dream body. The body of a mistress.

Rachel What's that? The body of a mistress?

Raymond A taut body, a hard body. A body that can stand rough handling, so to speak. Angular hips, a hard stomach, muscly arms, hard breasts with nipples that are always erect. Nothing soft,

nothing plump. Mistresses must be hard, mustn't give.

Silence

Raymond That's why I always trusted you with Bill. Bill is no lover. Bill is a granddad. Bill was a granddad when he was barely fourteen.

Rachel Did it ever occur to you I might have been sparing you?

Raymond Pardon?

Rachel I could have run off with Bill. He asked me often enough.

Raymond Bill asked you to run away?

Rachel Why do you think Bill never married? Why did he never take a girlfriend? Because he's been waiting for me, Raymond.

Raymond Why don't you go then?

Rachel I was going to at one point, years ago.

Raymond Why didn't you?

Rachel Because you were ill.

Raymond I was very ill. Fair enough.

Rachel I was just about to leave when you came home with the doctor's results. I can still see you in the doorway, eyes red, face pale. The test results in your hands, shaking. The first half hour you couldn't speak. I sat next to you. You didn't say a word. So I went upstairs and unpacked. And I came and sat by your side again. 'Rachel', you went. 'Rachel, I've got exactly one year to live. I've got cancer'. I didn't speak, I took your hands and kissed them, saying to myself: 'I'll take care of him. One more year, why hurt him now.'
A year later you were still alive, twenty years on you're still here.

Raymond That's hardly my fault, is it?

Rachel No. You know what they say about how God works.

Raymond In mysterious ways?
So all those years, Bill stuck around waiting for his best friend to kick the bucket?

Rachel off

Raymond takes the diary

Opens it

Reads

Raymond ‘Dear Diary, Raymond came home today from the doctor’s with the test results. He’s got lung cancer. When he told me, my heart leapt with joy. Briefly.

Spots a tear stain on the page

A dried up wet spot. A tear.

‘Then I said to myself: Bill won’t mind waiting another year, so I went upstairs and unpacked my bags. My heart is with Bill, my head with Raymond. At times I hate myself for thinking of him like that. But that’s the way it is, dear diary. Sweet dreams.’

He closes the book

Raymond No kidding.

He opens the book again

Reads

Raymond ‘Dear Diary, last night I dreamt Bill was marrying someone else. Nobody I knew. When I woke up, tears filled my eyes. I was out of sorts the rest of the day. Raymond asked what was the matter, but I didn’t tell him. Which got him into a foul mood, so we picked a fight over this silly thing - his bike, which he insists on leaving in the corridor when it’s been raining. After I’ve just cleaned the corridor, dear diary.’
No kidding...

Curtain. Dean Martin.

INTERLUDIUM

Bill in front of curtain

Bill Bill's the name. I'm fifty eight, metal worker all my life. Sheet metal, for generations. Hobbies: model making and the Eurovision Song Contest, but that's not what it used to be. Had a lovely head of hair once; been balding for fifteen years. Fervent wish: kids. Raymond and I were at primary school together. I was always ninth, always. Raymond was always tenth. Don't ask me why. Raymond and I got to know each other when this family circus came to school. Some animals were put on display in the refectory; one of them a flying fox, some sort of bat with a head that looks a bit like that of a fox. A mini Dobermann. Not a bulldog. Anyway. That flying fox was nowhere near as tame as those circus people led us to believe. It flew into Raymond's hair, and made Raymond puke with fear. All over my new sweater. We've been friends ever since. Went to work together at sixteen. Me in my dad's factory. Raymond in an industrial laundry. Hence his interest in the hospitality business. I still live with dad. 'I'm out of here,' I'd say to myself, but my dad's been ill these last few years, so I have to stay and take care of him. My mother's been dead for forty years. Walked under a train. Something to do with the barrier that wasn't working. And my mother being deaf in one ear.

Curtain open

ACT THREE

Bill and Raymond are sitting at the table
Silence

Rachel You don't fancy going upstairs, do you?

Bill How can you even think of going upstairs, Rachel?

 So what does he know?

Rachel What's in my diary.

Bill That you've been in love with his best friend all your life.
 Oh God!

Rachel He doesn't know we're having an affair.

Bill What a relief!

Rachel But I intend to tell him.

Bill For Christ's sake! Have you gone stark raving mad, Rachel? I don't
 want you to. Is that clear? That's just not on. He's my best friend.

Rachel Nice friendship, Bill.

Bill Yes, anyway, you're not telling him. And that's final.

Rachel Leave him.

Bill I can't leave him, you know that.

Rachel If you leave *him*, Bill, I'll leave him too.

Bill I can't dump dad like that.

Rachel Let's run off together. See the world. Don't you ever dream of that,
 Bill? To run away and see the world together. A new life. Byebye
 sick, old, hawking dad.

Bill Every day, Rachel, I dream about it every day.

Rachel Kiss me. Now.

**Bill and Rachel kiss passionately
They let go for a second and immediately start kissing again
Then they stop**

Bill I can't come here anymore. How can I keep coming here? Now that Raymond knows most of what there is to know. He'll give me the cold shoulder, never be the friend he used to be. He'll think it's my fault you fell in love with me. He'll think I've slept with you a thousand times.

Rachel Give or take a few.

Bill Don't say that, Rachel.

Rachel Kiss me again.

Bill No no no. That was the last time...

She looks at him, he looks at her

Bill ...I think.

**They kiss passionately
Rachel takes his hand and drags him upstairs**

Rachel Come, let's go upstairs.

**Bill and Rachel off
Raymond on, bike in hand
He's tipsy
He's still wearing his uniform, but has a mourning band around his arm. Notices he's come in too far with the bike**

Raymond Oops, the corridor. She'll kill me.

Raymond Rachel! Rachel, I'm home!
Beautiful service. Very classy. You're pushing up daisies Marc Offord-Mallett. I've seen Mrs T. After thirty years. She looked ever so beautiful in her black two-piece suit. With her wide-brimmed hat.

And her sunglasses.

I didn't have the courage to speak to her. I stayed in the back of the church and left before the coffin was brought outside. But I did see my son. Our Marc. He'd been laid out in the church portal. Handsome young chap. Pitch black hair, blue eyes. At least that's what I think. They were closed. He did look pale, though.

When I entered the church, I shook Mrs T's hand and said 'condolences'. Sounded like 'control yourself'. I wonder if she recognised me with those sunglasses.

After the service, I went to the pub and blubbered. Came as quite a shock to the lads. One joker asked whether Rachel had done a runner. I almost laid into him. Father of a dead child. How dare they.

Rachel on

Rachel How was it?

Raymond How it was? How it was? Great fun. As usual, at funerals.

Rachel I feel like going to the cinema.

Raymond Who's stopping you?

Rachel Why don't you come along?

Raymond I haven't been to the pictures for forty years, and that's not about to change.

Rachel How about a walk, Darling...?

Raymond What's got into you?

Rachel Let's go out for a meal.

Raymond No thanks! I'm going to bed.

Rachel No! Let's go out for a drink, to the pub.

Raymond I've just come from the pub.

Rachel Another pub then.

Raymond Which one?

Rachel The Majestic

Raymond Okay.

**Raymond and Rachel off
Bill on immediately after**

Bill That was close. He would have killed us. Me anyway. I have to get out of here. I'll wait five minutes. They might still be outside. If I do wait five minutes, however, they may change their minds and come back. I'm going now. Now I'm going.

**Bill off
On again within seconds**

Bill They've gone. That was close.

Bill off

Curtain. Dean Martin

INTERLUDIUM

**Raymond appears in front of the curtain with Rachel's diary
He reads**

Raymond

He closes the book

‘Dear Diary. Today Bill and I went to this clinic, you know the kind. Where the doctors don’t mind. ‘Go to one of those clinics, they said, they’ll help you out.’ I hardly felt a thing, dear diary. Bill was very sweet to me. I don’t know whether God approves, but I had to get rid of the baby.’ Your friend Rachel.

That hurts. That really hurts.

ACT FOUR

Curtain opens
The table's almost fully laid
Raymond is sitting in an armchair
Rachel is laying the table

Raymond Do you still keep a diary?

Rachel Pardon?

Raymond What's for pudding?

Rachel Fruit salad.

Raymond With cream?

Rachel There's cream, yes. Cream for those who like, none for those who don't.

Raymond Vegetable soup. Croquettes with French beans and roast meat. Fruit salad with or without cream.

Rachel Like the sound of it?

Raymond Excellent.

Rachel drops a plate.

Raymond Nervous?

Rachel Nervous? Whatever makes you think that?

She tidies up the shards and off

Raymond Because Bill's coming to eat. Bill hates cream. They say it all started with that train accident with his mother. When the police broke the news to him, he heard '... she didn't even cream', instead of 'scream'. Still breaks out in a rash at the thought of cream.

(calls after Rachel)

Shall I pour the wine?

(he puts on his gloves, uncorks a bottle, takes a tiny bottle from his pocket and empties its contents into the wine)

I've given this a lot of thought. Life in prison can't be much worse than life in this place.

(he puts the bottle on the table and the tiny bottle back in his pocket)

Rachel back on with a new plate, which she puts on the table

Rachel Okay. We're ready. Ready for Bill.

Raymond Shouldn't you change into something else? Or were you planning on looking like a toe rag?

**Rachel looks at her clothes and off
The bell rings**

Raymond Rachel, can you get the door?

Bell rings again

Rachel!

Bell rings a third time

Raymond off and back on with Bill

They do not speak

After a while:

Raymond Glass of wine?

Bill No, thanks, Raymond. I'm on antibiotics. No alcohol for me.

Raymond One won't hurt.

Bill No, honestly. I'd be dead to the world. You go ahead.

Raymond I don't like red wine.

Bill In which case Rachel will have to drink the entire carafe.

Silence

Bill Why did you invite me round for a meal? Special occasion?

Raymond To prove you're still my friend. Regardless.
I've read Rachel's diaries, Bill. I know she's in love with
you and vice versa.

Bill I see.

Raymond I thought we'd clear this up tonight. Either I go or you go.

Bill Jesus.

Raymond Do have some wine.

Bill Thanks, no.

Raymond Too bad.

**Rachel on with the soup
She's dolled herself up**

Rachel Hi Bill

Bill Hi Rachel

Rachel Get us the salt and pepper from the kitchen, would you, Raymond?

Raymond Sure. You want to be left alone, is that it? Have some wine, Rachel.

**Raymond off
Bill takes a tiny bottle and empties it in Raymond's plate
Sits down and hands it to Rachel
Raymond on with salt and pepper
They sit down at the table
They cross themselves.
Raymond takes the salt and wants to put some in his soup
The lid's not screwed on properly and the entire salt cellar ends
up in his soup**

Raymond Shit

**Bon appétit, bon appétit, bon appétit
He takes his plate and goes off with it**

Bill **(takes the bottle of wine and fills Rachel's glass)**
Wine?

Rachel Yes, please.

**Rachel wants to drink from the wine, but the phone rings
She takes the call**

Rachel Hello... Hello...

Raymond returns with a clean plate

Rachel Yes, he's here. Hang on a second.

Raymond I'm not in.

Rachel It's not for you. It's for Bill. Your father.

Bill takes the receiver

Bill Dad? What's up?... There's this red button at the top... Red...
You press it... You've done that and it's not working... Try again
... Nothing? You have to point the thing at the TV, dad... Is it on?
Okay. See you, dad.

(he puts down the receiver)

It was dad. I've bought him a new TV set and he can't figure out
the remote control.

Bill sits down at the table again

Rachel Bon appétit

Bill Bon appétit

Raymond Bon appétit. Do you like the wine, Rachel?

Rachel I haven't tasted it yet.

Raymond What's keeping you?

Rachel I'll finish my soup first.

They eat their soup in silence

Rachel Didn't Bill want any wine?

Bill I'm on anti-biotics.

Rachel I hate drinking on my own.

Raymond **(flies into a rage)**

Sounds like we're going to have fun tonight. With nobody drinking.

**He takes the glass of wine and pours it into the soup tureen,
followed by the rest of the bottle**

Raymond Why eat at all then?

He sits down again

The other two watch him, flabbergasted

Raymond suddenly gets up and goes off

**He soon returns with uncooked croquettes and the rest of
the food**

He throws the lot into the tureen

Off again and back with a container of ready-whipped cream

He squirts it onto the food mountain

Raymond Scream, Bill?

Sits down again

Raymond That was very nice, thank you. Time for a pousse-café.

He gets up again and goes off

He returns with Rachel's diary

He shoves it into her hand

Raymond Rachel will read from her own work.

He opens the book and points out a certain passage

Raymond Read!

Bill Raymond...

Raymond Read, I said!

Rachel **(with trembling voice)**

‘Dear Diary. Today Bill and I went to this clinic, you know the kind. Where the doctors don’t mind. ‘Go to one of those clinics, they said, they’ll help you out.’ I hardly felt a thing, dear diary. Bill was very sweet to me. I don’t know whether God approves, but I had to get rid of the baby.’

Raymond What do you make of that, Bill? Come as a shock, doesn’t it? Of course not. You were there, weren’t you? Mummy and daddy on an outing to have the baby terminated. Read on.

Rachel ‘I didn’t tell Raymond. He would have killed me. I so wanted a baby, but not that way.’

Raymond Stop. That’ll do.

Bill That baby wasn’t mine, Raymond.

Rachel Bill...

Raymond I don’t care whose it was.

Bill The baby was yours.

Raymond looks at Rachel

Raymond What was that Bill said, Rachel?

Bill The baby was Raymond’s.

Rachel He’s right. I was expecting your child, Raymond. But I couldn’t keep it, because I didn’t love you. That’s why I got rid of it.

**Raymond turns deathly pale. He goes for his heart.
Tries to get up from his chair, reels**

Rachel Raymond! Raymond! What's the matter?

Bill Raymond!

Raymond collapses on the floor. The phone rings

Curtain. Dean Martin

INTERLUDIUM

Bill in front of curtain

Bill My father had had a heart attack. He'd switched to a channel which excited him too much, the doctor said. Apparently they can give you a heart attack. Almost at the same time as Raymond. My father didn't survive, Raymond did. In hospital, Raymond confessed to having tried to poison us. So we did the same. He was not amused. Anyway. We're friends again. We have to. He's coming home today.

ACT FIVE

Curtain open

Rachel is pushing Raymond in a wheelchair

He has a plaid on his lap

Bill immediately helps with the drip in Raymond's arm

He's not the man he used to be

When Rachel and Bill have found a spot for the wheelchair

they embrace passionately

Raymond stares at them vacantly

Rachel and Bill are tipsy

Rachel I've had too much to drink.

Bill Same here. We should never have had that last drink. Not a good idea, with Raymond and all.

Rachel I'm going to tell him.

Bill No.

Rachel When?

Rachel kneels down by the wheelchair

Rachel Raymond? Can you hear me? Raymond, listen carefully to what I'm about to say. You'll fall out of your wheelchair with shock. Bill's moved in.

Raymond doesn't react

Rachel He doesn't seem to understand. B i l l h a s m o v e d i n.

Still no reaction from Raymond

Rachel You have a go.

Bill I've moved in, Raymond! Can you hear me? If you can, lift your hand.

Rachel Not stand. Lift your hand. A sign!

Nothing

Rachel **(miming the words)**

While you were in hospital, Bill's father died. Bill couldn't face living on his own. And since I was alone, he moved in. It's for your own good. Now you have two nurses to look after you!

Bill I'm used to nursing people. You're in good hands!

Rachel **(to Bill)**

He refuses to understand. Fine. So it won't hurt him either. It's been a hard day. Care for a drink?

Bill Don't mind if I do.

Rachel Get it yourself. You live here now, don't you? I won't play hostess forever. There's beer in the fridge. I wouldn't mind a beer myself actually. You, Raymond?

(pointing at the drip)

Or have you had enough?

Bill off

Rachel Look at you. I don't know who to pity first. You or myself. A blessing in disguise. That's what it is. You should never have survived. But you can't have it all. A vegetable in need of water. And attention. They say vegetables need TLC too. I'll make sure you get plenty of light, okay? Always wanted a child. Now I've landed myself this big baby. Teach him how to walk. How to talk. Change nappies. Poor Raymond. Poor Rachel.

Rachel Shall I tell you where Bill and I did it for the first time? You were working the night shift. I rang Bill to go to the pictures. 'Kramer vs. Kramer'. The first film in twenty years I actually wanted to see. After the film we went for a drink at the Majestic. Where we've just come from. Before we knew it, we were in the middle of the dance floor.

Bill appears in the doorway, holding two beers.

Rachel We danced and the songs kept getting slower. After the third song we just stared at each other, without speaking. We took the tram home. We went upstairs. To our bed. An hour later Bill went home. He still hadn't said a word.
Since that day, we have made love every night you were out working.
In our bed.

Bill Except that one time after my father's first heart attack.

Rachel Yes, we did it in an empty hospital room then. Kiss me, Bill.

**They kiss
Bill pushes Rachel away**

Bill I'm finding it really hard. It's not the same with him around.

They both look at Raymond

Rachel Kiss me, Bill

Bill He's got eyes on his back, Rachel. I can't.

Rachel Let's go upstairs.

Bill Are you sure?

**Rachel takes his hand
Raymond smiles
Bill and Rachel cannot hear what Raymond says, only by the public does**

Raymond Funny things, heart attacks. You're in a different world. You can't move anymore, you can't talk anymore, yet you see and understand everything. Only those who've been there understand. Folks talk as if you're not there, as if you're dead, but you know better. They don't spare you, so it hurts. I mean, at first they spare you, out of pity, but that's soon over and you become a vegetable, a thing, to everybody. No more pity, nothing but the truth. Only your soul is alive, working overtime. So it grows this massive skin and before you know it nothing touches you anymore. Nothing hurts. The first time you see me like this, you think 'poor sod'. I'm not a

'poor sod'. I'm happy the way I am. As long as my drip gets changed at regular intervals.

Raymond Old fool. He'll have an attack if he's not careful. And she'll have herself a whole vegetable patch. Enough to supply a greengrocer's. He's wearing my y-fronts. What I've been in, he's in. Literally.
I wonder when she'll tire of him.

Bill Not anymore, not with Raymond looking on.

Rachel All the more reason.

She tries to take off his vest

Bill No, I said!

He pushes her away roughly

Rachel **(perplexed)**

No? Not to worry. Just me then.

She turns facing Raymond and takes off her bra

Rachel Hadn't seen them for a while, had you Raymond?

Bill Stop it, Rachel.

Rachel puts her bra back on again and turns around

Rachel I'm going to bed. As in 'sleep'.

Rachel off

Bill Sorry, Raymond. I can't tell you how sorry I am.

Bill parks one of his beers in Raymond's hands.

We've got ourselves into a right little mess, haven't we? I never wanted this. It was great when you were working the night shifts. Now it's different. I've taken your life away from you and I don't

like the idea one bit. If only I could go home now, but I've sold my house. So I go upstairs in your house. To your bed. Under your wedding

photo. In bed with your wife. Raymond, I don't know whether you can hear me at all, but please forgive me.

Oh, I'm drunk. Rachel got sloshed to celebrate. I drank to forget, not to have to face this. I didn't want to move in, but Rachel forced me. It's so different now. I've lost my father. I guess he was the only thing I lived for. My days, no, my entire life were devoted to dad. Up early to help him out of bed, help him into his chair downstairs. Home for lunch to check if he was okay. Spent most nights in, hardly ever went out.

Bill has finished his own beer, grabs Raymond's and in the process, pulls out Bill's drip.

It was hard at first, but you organise your life around it and miss it in the end. Do you know my first thought after dad died? Suicide! With a rope, pills, cut my wrists in a hot bath, throw a hairdryer in the tub... I considered it all and decided against it in the end. Because I was a coward. They say suicide is the most cowardly act, but that's not true. Not to commit suicide can be much more cowardly. It wasn't because of Rachel either. What do I care about Rachel. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. It's as if all my life somebody else has decided for me. First my father, then Rachel. And when did Bill ever decide? Never. Never. Never.

So here I am. Taking your place against my will. It's as if I haven't got a will of my own. Never did have. Imagine I did have a will of my own... What would I want? Now, this very minute? To be elsewhere. But I've sold my house.

What do you reckon, Colonel? Where could I be, except here? Time for old chicken-heart to perform at least one lion-hearted deed.

Reckon that chandelier's strong enough, Raymond?

Dean Martin sings while Bill looks at the chandelier

Curtain

EPILOGUE

Rachel appears in her night dress in front of the curtain

Rachel I couldn't sleep, so I got up in the middle of the night. In the middle of this dream. I dreamt I was riding pillion with Bill along this cobbled street. A bumpy dream alright. I couldn't see a thing, only Bill's back. I'd grabbed hold of his waist. I woke up, so I staggered downstairs, half asleep, and went inside the living room. I didn't say a word. Didn't shriek. I grabbed the phone and rang the doctor. Then the police. They both said they were on their way. What does one say? Yes, what does one say. And to whom, as a matter of fact. Nobody ever listens anyway.

The curtain slowly opens

Bill is standing on a chair, the chandelier on his head

Raymond is sitting in his wheelchair, dead

Dean Martin sings

When I was a little girl, I was mad about Dean Martin. Not that he ever found out. However many times I did tell his photograph. Apparently the real Dean Martin liked his booze. But you don't hear that on the record, do you, or see it on photos?

**She sings along with Dean Martin while the curtain slowly
Closes.**

THE END