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THE BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL

by Deborah Moggach

Based on the novel that inspired the hit film

SAMUEL FRENCH

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THE BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL was first performed at Richmond Theatre on 5 September 2022, produced by Simon Friend, in association with Jenny King, Trafalgar Entertainment, Gavin Kalin and David Adkin.

Cast

EVELYN ..... Hayley Mills
DOUGLAS ..... Paul Nicholas
MADGE ..... Rula Lenska
MR GUPTA ..... Tiran Aakel
DOROTHY ..... Richenda Carey
NORMAN ..... Andy de la Tour
SAHANI ..... Shila Iqbal
MRS KAPOOR ..... Rekha John-Cheriyan
KAMILA ..... Kerena Jagpal
JIMMY ..... Harmage Singh Kalirai
JEAN ..... Eileen Battye
SONNY KAPOOR ..... Nishad More
MURIEL ..... Marlene Sidaway
MOHAN & TIKAL ..... Anant Varman

UNDERSTUDIES

JIMMY & TIKAL ..... Tiran Aakel
SAHANI & MRS KAPOOR ..... Kerena Jagpal
NORMAN & DOUGLAS ..... Adam Morris
SONNY & MR GUPTA ..... Anant Varman
DOROTHY, JEAN, MADGE, EVELYN & MURIEL ..... Julie Wood

Special thanks to Sally Knyvette.

Creatives

Deborah Moggach – **Playwright** (**book and script**)
Lucy Bailey – **Director**
Colin Richmond – **Set and Costume Designer**
Mic Pool – **Sound Designer**
Oliver Fenwick – **Lighting Designer**
Kuljit Bhamra MBE – **Composer**
Lucy Hind – **Movement Director**
Chris Cahill – **Costume Supervisor**
Lizzie Frankl for PropWorks – **Props Supervisor**
Ginny Schiller CDG – **Casting Director**

Breman Rajkumar – **Associate Director**
Zoe Wilson for PropWorks – **Associate Props Supervisor**
Kate Godfrey – **Voice Coach**
Gurkiran Kaur – **Dialect Coach**
Digby Robinson – **Production Manager**
Matt McFarlane – **Company Stage Manager**
Ellie Southwell – **Deputy Stage Manager**
Cormac O'Brien – **Technical Assistant Stage Manager**
Matt Collins – **Technical Swing**
Claire Tucker – **Head of Wardrobe**
Rafiena Potter – **Deputy Head of Wardrobe**
Stu Meech – **Production Electrician / Relighter**
Aidan Jones – **Production Sound**
Sebastian Noel – **Design Assistant**
Alan Bartlett, Simon Oliver } **Draftperson**
Visual Scene Lrd – **Set Builder**
White Light Ltd – **Lighting Hires**
Stage Stound Services – **Sound Hires**
Gordon & Co – **Insurance**
Friend Partnership LLP – **Production Accountants**
Muse – **Cover Artwork**
Hanna Osmolska – **For SIMON FRIEND ENTERTAINMENT – Executive Director**
Katie Seeley, Saskia Baylis } **Production Coordinators**
Eden Lack – **Production Assistant and Office Administrator**

CHARACTERS

EVELYN – in her 70s, polite Home Counties widow

DOUGLAS – early 70s, pleasant and amiable retired teacher. Married to Jean

MADGE – in her 70s. Brassy, a bit vulgar but a lot of fun. Ran her own fashion business

MR GUPTA – in his 50s. Bit of a martinet, manages the call centre

DOROTHY – in her 80s. Intellectual, ex-BBC

MRS KAPOOR – in her 50s. Strong-willed, highly-strung mother of Sonny

NORMAN – in his 70s, a racketty old roue

SAHANI – in her 20s. Beautiful, feisty, fun. In love with Sonny

KAMILA – in her 20s. Also works at the call centre

JIMMY – in his 80s. The ancient old hotel servant

JEAN – Early 70s, bossy, smug, left-wing. Retired teacher

SONNY KAPOOR – early 30s. Good-looking, endearing and rather hapless son of Mrs Kapoor

MURIEL – in her 80s. Retired cleaner, working-class Londoner

MOHAN – in his 20s. Works at the call centre

TIKAL – in his 20s. The hotel sweeper

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Most of my novels are triggered by something specific – an overheard conversation, a painting, a newspaper cutting. But some years ago I had a more general thought: what's going to happen to us when we get old? Thanks to the miracles of modern medicine, we're living way beyond our expiry date and there aren't the resources to pay for us.

And we're not behaving like old people, either – 70's the new 50 and so on. I certainly didn't want to spend my last years in a residential home gazing at a ploughed field. I wanted to end my days in the thick of life, rather than removed from it. And I'd certainly be up for another adventure.

So I had a stroke of inspiration. We outsource everything else, why not outsource the elderly? Set up a retirement hotel somewhere warm and cheap, in a country where they still have respect for their elders and speaking English is not a problem. A place where the streets are teeming with life so there's no chance of getting bored. Where there's a whole new culture to stimulate your brain and delight your senses.

I chose India because I love it and it has a deep, two-way relationship with the UK. Then I created seven British pensioners and sent them there, to a charming but dilapidated hotel in Bangalore, to see how India would work its magic on them.

The novel, originally called *These Foolish Things*, was sold to the movies and re-named *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. With an all-star cast the film became a huge hit and this, combined with the novel, helped bring about a sea-change in our attitude to ageing. Instead of seeing old age simply in terms of incipient death, they showed that we're still the same people we always were – the same loves, lusts, joys, resentments, jealousies – we've just got more wrinkles. It's never too late to have another crack at life. Issues of race were also explored, and the culture clash between East and West. And they were funny.

I knew, even then, that it would make a fabulous play. The main action takes place in the hotel, so only one set would be needed. I'd base it on the novel, but developed and altered for the stage. There were great parts for older British actors and a somewhat younger Indian cast – an interesting demographic with huge possibilities, and I hoped the audience would reflect that. The hotel would be a magical place where transformation and reconciliation would be possible – a sort of Indian "Midsummer Night's Dream".

So I sat down to write it. The advantage of adapting my own novel was that I knew the characters inside out. I knew their past lives, their foibles, their hopes and dreams. They'd been in my head for years and this gives one a greater freedom to be bold and unexpected. But the weird thing was that those characters had already had new identities, in the movie, where they'd been played by living breathing actors. It was slightly discombobulating. For instance Evelyn, the demure widow from Chichester, had already become Judi Dench, with a rather different story. Now she was being reborn as the stage version of Evelyn, with another altered story, to be played by somebody completely different (Hayley Mills, in the play's first production).

In novels and films you can flicker around in time, of course. With a play you have to work out how to get the actors on and off the stage. I longed to put a real tuk-tuk puttering back and forth downstage, where the outside world would be, but this proved impossible. So the street scenes were simply suggested by a soundscape of hooting cars and tuk-tuks, the call of the muezzin, and stall-holders shouting their wares. We had a wonderful composer, Kuljit Bhamra, who created haunting music, where sitars slid in and out of children's nursery rhymes, for memory plays a powerful role in the story, especially at night, in the hotel garden, where magical transformations take place. Colin Richmond built a beautiful set, which reflected this, and we had a marvellous director in Lucy Bailey.

I needed to update it, as the novel was written nearly twenty years earlier. Some things in India never change – as Sahani says to the elderly Brits: "Funny how all the things you love about India are the things we're trying to escape." But some things have moved on. A running joke (and plot point) used to be how none of the phones worked. Nowadays the guests would be on zoom and social media, so I had to introduce a somewhat iffy internet. During rehearsals some of the Indian cast suggested some updates which were brilliant.

Then I left them to it. I stayed at home doing re-writes and reading the tantalizing production notes that were emailed each day: The material in the deckchair has disintegrated, can we have a new one please? Could we make a pani puri for rehearsals please? We would like some oven gloves for Muriel. I felt like a general hearing reports from the Front.

Then the troops moved off, to tour the UK for nine months. The play is at last out in the world, thanks to its producer Simon Friend. I hope it will widen our understanding whilst thoroughly entertaining us because, thinking of magic, there's no more magical sound than an audience bursting into laughter.

Special thanks to Anant Varman, our Tikal/Mohan, for his huge help with the Hindi. And to my agent Rochelle Stevens, who's been with me all the way, and beyond, and helped make it such fun.

Deborah Moggach

ACT ONE

(Indian music plays. Spotlight downstage on **MRS KAPOOR**, *(she's in India). She's in floods of tears. Flames flicker on her face, for she's standing at a funeral pyre. She's a large, forceful, middle-aged woman dressed in a white, widow's sari. With her is her grown-up son* **SONNY**. *Nice-looking, thirty two, a bit hapless. He uncomfortably stumbles through the prayer.)*

SONNY. "*Eh ishwar hum asatya e ki orr se satya e ki orr…*" *(Pause, tries to remember the words.)* Er…er… "*jaane e kidudhi do…*"

MRS KAPOOR. *(Sobs.)* Now your dear father is gone I shall throw myself on the flames.

SONNY. Don't be silly, Mummyji –

MRS KAPOOR. Who's going to look after me now?

SONNY. I am –

MRS KAPOOR. Huh! Nobody cares about their old mothers anymore, you'll be getting rid of me –

SONNY. No I won't –

MRS KAPOOR. Putting me on the scrapheap –

SONNY. Of course I won't! *(Puts his arms around her.)*

That's what they do in England.

MRS KAPOOR. And who's going to manage the hotel now he's gone?

SONNY. I will.

MRS KAPOOR. But you haven't got a clue.

SONNY. I helped him out, didn't I?

MRS KAPOOR. *(Snorts.)* When you weren't bopping the night away in the Oberoi Hot Spot. Oh if only your brother was here –

SONNY. He's in Toronto.

MRS KAPOOR. – All my birds flown.

SONNY. *(A little hurt.)* Hello, you've got me!

(A pause, as she gazes at him.)

And it's not as if we're busy.

MRS KAPOOR. No, because it's falling down, that's why. The roof's leaking, the plumbing's up the spout, the whole place is being eaten alive by termites. Who would ever want to stay here?

SONNY. *(Pause. His face suddenly lights up.)* Amma, I have an idea! *(Pause. When he speaks, it's with gathering excitement.)* An idea that will solve all our problems!

(Blackout.)

(Heathrow Airport. Noise, the sound of tannoys. We see **EVELYN**, **JEAN**, **DOUGLAS**, **DOROTHY**, **MADGE**, **MURIEL** & **NORMAN** *sitting on their luggage, waiting, in the Departure Lounge.)*

(They're all well over seventy. **EVELYN** *is tastefully pastel, Home Counties written all over her.* **JEAN** *is a vigorous bossyboots with an amiable and compliant husband* **DOUGLAS**. **DOROTHY** *is a plain, no-nonsense intellectual.* **MADGE** *is still sexy at*

seventy – burnished hair, gold jewellery, plenty of slap – bit vulgar but a lot of fun, with a smoker's throaty laugh. **MURIEL** *is a tough, working-class woman; plenty of grit still.* **NORMAN** *is a rackety old roué – cravat, blazer.)*

(We hear the announcement of their flight departure. "Flight number 178 to Bengaluru is now boarding" etc. As they fade to black, we hear the huge roar of an airplane coming in to land.)

(Lights up, upstage... to reveal The Marigold Hotel, in all its glory. A blast of sunshine and colour. Birds sing. Faintly, the sound of traffic, for the hotel is a calm oasis in the middle of the city.)

(It's a seriously dilapidated Old Raj building, set in a garden. Bedroom windows above. On the ground floor, stage left, is the office. Stage right is the veranda and garden. The interior of the hotel is never seen.)

*(***SONNY** *stands at the entrance with* **MRS KAPOOR**, *now in a bright pink sari. With them is* **JIMMY**, *a frail old retainer who looks about a thousand years old, wearing a stained white jacket and turban. He carries an armful of marigold garlands.* **DOUGLAS**, **JEAN**, **EVELYN**, **MADGE**, **MURIEL**, **DOROTHY** *and* **NORMAN** *appear downstage, weary from their overnight flight, and see the hotel for the first time. They stop, taken aback.)*

NORMAN. Bloody hell.

MURIEL. It's not like the photo.

EVELYN. Are you sure this is the right place?

*(**SONNY** comes forward, beaming, as the guests walk up the garden path. He's followed by **MRS KAPOOR**.)*

SONNY. *Namaste*, ladies and gentlemen! Welcome to the Marigold Hotel! My mother and I hope you'll be very happy here.

*(He bows, and places the garlands around the guests' necks as **JIMMY** starts to wheel in their luggage.)*

I hope you had a good journey?

DOUGLAS. Fine! *(Looks around.)* This is all very... er...

SONNY. Charming? I'm so glad you think so. It's a very special historic building –

MRS KAPOOR. – It's been in my husband's family for many years. There are very few of these buildings left, they've all been pulled down.

*(We can almost feel the heat as the guests take off their coats and jackets, sloughing off England and the winter they've left behind. To reveal that **JEAN** is wearing a full Indian shalwar-kamize tunic and baggy trousers.)*

DOUGLAS. *(Shakes **MRS KAPOOR**'s hand.)* Douglas Ainslie, and this is my wife Jean.

JEAN. *(Puts her hands together, Indian style.) Namaste.*

MRS KAPOOR. *(Noticing her clothing.)* You have been to India before, Mrs Ainslie?

JEAN. *(Nods.)* Had a super trip to Rajastan – Jaipur, the Taj. We love it here, don't we Doug? The sights, the colour, the vibrancy –

MURIEL. Blooming hot, though.

SONNY. You are in Bangalore now, madam! Sunshine all year round.

MADGE. *(To the female guests.)* We can work on our tans, can't we girls? So ageing, but what the hell.

JEAN. And we love it that Bengaluru's just that little bit off the tourist trail –

NORMAN. Where's Bengaluru?

SONNY. Here. But we all still call it Bangalore.

JEAN. – the real India. So we won't be bumping into people like us.

*(***MRS KAPOOR** *leaves, for the office.)*

SONNY. *(Beaming at them all.)* While we check you in, please partake of a complimentary soft drink *(Points to the veranda.)* Then luncheon will be served.

NORMAN. Mmm, something smells good. *(Sniffs with relish.)* I could murder an Indian.

(A startled silence. **SONNY** *recovers and laughs heartily.)*

SONNY. Ah, I see we have a joker in our midst!

MADGE. *(Crisply.)* Yes, he's been entertaining us on the plane.

NORMAN. *(Shakes* **SONNY***'s hand vigorously.)* Norman Purse. You'll find me no trouble. I snooze till noon and then it's time for my nap.

*(***SONNY** *laughs heartily and leads them to the veranda, where he passes out menus.)*

SONNY. And please make your choice from our lunch menu.

DOUGLAS. *(Looking at the menu.)* Good Lord, rissoles!

Haven't had one of them since I was a boy.

SONNY. And for the vegetarian option, we have macaroni cheese.

NORMAN. *(Face falls.)* What?

SONNY. Macaroni cheese!

JEAN. *(To* **SONNY**.*)* We're quite happy with Indian food, you know. Back home, chicken tikka is our national dish.

MURIEL. Speak for yourself! I can't eat Indian food, it doesn't agree with me.

(A crash from the kitchen.)

COOK. *(Offstage.) Ek Number Ka Ghatiya Choalah!*

SONNY. Excuse me!

(He hurries out. The guests sit down with their drinks.)

JEAN. So why exactly are you here, Mavis?

MURIEL. Muriel.

JEAN. Muriel. If you don't like Indian food?

MURIEL. Council gave me a choice, they said stay there or come here, it's a new arrangement they've got due to it being cheaper in this place, and I like the sun, it makes me happy, and now my husband's passed away I got nothing to lose, he was a right stick-in-the-mud, and they said if I don't like it I can go home.

EVELYN. We all can, thank goodness. Because, well, the whole thing is a little bit daunting, isn't it?

JEAN. Not if you have an open mind, Evelyn –

DOUGLAS. – and a cast-iron gut. *(Laughs.)*

JEAN. Stop it, Douggy! You're frightening her.

DOUGLAS. *(To* **EVELYN**.*)* You'll be fine. Just don't drink the water.

JEAN. And when Indian people shake their heads it doesn't mean no, it mean yes –

DOUGLAS. Well, it means yes, if that's what you want to hear.

JEAN. Don't complicate things, Douggy.

MADGE. And we can always go back if we don't like it.

EVELYN. The problem is, I haven't travelled much on my own. Since my husband died –

JEAN. Ha! Count yourself lucky! Honestly, Douggy can be more trouble than he's worth, always dragging me off to see some ancient monument or other –

NORMAN. No worries there then.

JEAN. What?

NORMAN. *(Indicates the others.)* This time you've brought 'em with you.

MADGE. Sod off, Norman.

(A startled silence. **JEAN** *turns to* **MADGE**.*)*

JEAN. And what brought you here, Madge?

MADGE. I'm going to find myself a nice rich maharaja. I've heard they're two a penny down at the Gymkhana Club.

(A little silence. **EVELYN** *turns to* **DOROTHY**.*)*

EVELYN. And what about you, Dorothy?

DOROTHY. *(Pause.)* There was nothing left for me in England any more.

NORMAN. *(Bitterly.)* Tell me about it.

EVELYN. I'm so sorry about your wife.

MURIEL. What happened to his wife?

NORMAN. She died. A wonderful woman, God bless her.

EVELYN. – He told me about her on the plane –

NORMAN. – never a cross word, but the house wasn't the same without her, too full of memories –

MURIEL. Oh you poor duck –

NORMAN. – So I sold up and moved into a retirement home for a bit of company but it didn't work out, what with one thing and another, so when I saw the ad for this place –

MADGE. *(Suddenly blurts out.)* Actually I've got masses of friends, nobody wanted to get rid of me, I just haven't got a man because everywhere you look it's women women women – they're over the place like a rash, on cruises and tours and shuffling around stately homes, there should be trained snipers stationed at National Trust properties to cull them and give the rest of us a chance, because it's no fun coming home to a dark house and having nobody to laugh at *Gogglebox* with or answer the door when you're on the loo. *(Pauses for breath.)* There's seven hundred million men in India so the odds are pretty high. *(Pause.)* And we needn't have sex, it's just the cuddles I miss. *(Pause.)* Though I wouldn't say no.

(Another startled silence.)

JEAN. *(Taking* **DOUGLAS***'s hand.)* We're just glad to be here, aren't we love? Our last big adventure, after so many. *(Smiles.)* Should've seen their faces when we told them we were selling up and heading for India.

DOUGLAS. They thought we were mad.

EVELYN. Maybe we all are.

(Lights up in the office. **MRS KAPOOR** *sits there, exhausted already.* **SONNY** *hurries in.)*

SONNY. The cook's drunk again.

MRS KAPOOR. He's a Christian, what can you expect?

SONNY. Today of all days –

MRS KAPOOR. *(Shrugs.)* He's never been the same since your father died.

SONNY. Lunch will be late, and they'll all be needing their naps. The poor old buggers look half dead already.

MRS KAPOOR. You would, if you'd flown halfway across the world. *(Sighs.)* The whole things mad.

SONNY. *(Exasperated.)* I told you a million times, Mummyji, it's a brilliant idea!

MRS KAPOOR. I still don't understand why they want to come here.

SONNY. Because nobody wants them in England, cluttering up the place. They outsource everything else, why not outsource the elderly?

MRS KAPOOR. But what happens when they die?

SONNY. *(Shrugs.)* What happens when we all die? We're going bankrupt. You want to save our hotel or not? *(Pause.)* I'll get them checked in.

MRS KAPOOR. There is another option –

SONNY. Not that one, please!

(He takes the room list and hurries out. She sits there, pretty frustrated.)

(Meanwhile, out on the veranda, **JEAN** *turns to* **MADGE**.*)*

JEAN. Don't you think it's a little sad, to see yourself entirely in terms of men?

MADGE. *(Sharply.)* It's all right for you, you've got one! And I haven't been a kept woman, if that's what you're thinking, I built up my business from scratch and it paid for a six-bedroom house in Potters Bar.

DOUGLAS. What sort of business was it?

MADGE. Ladies fashion. Had a string of boutiques in the Home Counties.

JEAN. I'm afraid I know nothing about fashion.

MADGE. *(Gazing at* **JEAN***'s outfit.)* No.

(An awkward silence. It's broken by **SONNY** *coming in, clutching his piece of paper.)*

SONNY. Mr and Mrs Ainslie, you're in the Mountbatten Room. *(To* **MURIEL**.*)* And Mrs Donnelly… *(To* **NORMAN**.*)* And Mr Norman Purse, please come with me.

(The four of them leave, with **SONNY**.*)*

(A small silence. **DOROTHY** *turns to* **MADGE**.*)*

DOROTHY. Madge, don't get upset with Jean.

MADGE. That woman's getting on my tits. Douggy this and Douggy that. Parading her husband around like a prize bull. If there's anything I loathe it's smug marrieds.

EVELYN. She seems perfectly pleasant.

MADGE. Oh Evelyn, don't be so nice!

DOROTHY. Madge! We're in this together, we've got to rub along.

MADGE. *(To* **EVELYN**.*)* Sorry, sweetie. *(Hugs her.)* I'm just a bitch.

EVELYN. Anyway, if you're desperate, there's always Norman.

(The three women look at each other and suddenly burst into laughter.)

(They freeze, however, as **NORMAN** *comes out.)*

NORMAN. Ladies! Forgot this.

(He picks up his panama hat and leaves.)

*(***EVELYN**, **MADGE** *and* **DOROTHY** *look at each other and start giggling again.)*

(Suddenly **DOROTHY** *points.)*

DOROTHY. Look! Isn't that a monkey? *(They peer into the audience.)*

EVELYN. What's it doing? *(Reacts.)* Oh.

MADGE. At least someone's enjoying themselves.

(They burst out laughing again.)

EVELYN. *(Gesturing at the hotel.)* I must say, this is rather more exotic than the other homes I've looked at.

MADGE. I'd prefer the term hotel. It still has possibilities.

DOROTHY. – And it's so ridiculously cheap.

*(***JIMMY** *appears and removes the empties, tremblingly, on a tray.)*

EVELYN. *(Lowers her voice.)* Though I do feel it should be *us* looking after *him*.

(They laugh. Just then **DOUGLAS** *and* **JEAN** *come out, dressed for sightseeing – guide book, sunhats, bottles of water.)*

MADGE. Where are you going?

JEAN. To the Old City!

EVELYN. But what about lunch?

JEAN. We'll find a simple *thali*, won't we Douggy? We love pavement food and it's perfectly safe. Don't want to hang around here when there's so much to see! Adventure before dementia!

(They stride off, hand-in-hand.)

MADGE. *(Rolls her eyes.)* Christ.

*(***SONNY** *comes out, to collect them.)*

SONNY. Your rooms are ready, if you'd like to come with me.

(They get up to go into the hotel. As they do, **EVELYN** *turns to* **MADGE**.*)*

EVELYN. I liked what you said about hotels.

MADGE. Actually, it's more like an airport. *(Pause.)* Just don't look at the departure board.

(Lights up in the hotel office. It's a few days later. **MRS KAPOOR** *and a beleaguered* **SONNY**.*)*

MRS KAPOOR. She's a lovely girl –

SONNY. I don't want to meet her –

MRS KAPOOR. – from a very good family –

SONNY. I told you I don't –

MRS KAPOOR. – am I to die without a grandchild?

SONNY. *Amma,* I'm run off my feet. The pipes are blocked again, the internet's down –

MRS KAPOOR. Your poor father –

SONNY. But it was just as bad when he was alive –

MRS KAPOOR. *(Tearfully.)* – the one thing he wanted was to see you happily married –

SONNY. There's plenty of time for that –

MRS KAPOOR. Don't you want to please your mother in her twilight years?

SONNY. You're only fifty-five –

MRS KAPOOR. – who'll die alone, without little ones around her . After all, I had an arranged marriage and look how happy it made me –

SONNY. Don't start that again. *(Starts to leave.)*

MRS KAPOOR. *(Pulls him back.)* Her father is the director of L B Pharmaceuticals! That girl is super wealthy. With her dowry we could wipe out all our debts!

SONNY. *(Desperately.)* I must see to our guests!

(He hurries out. She shouts after him.)

MRS KAPOOR. She's much brighter than you! She has a degree in German literature!

(But he's gone. She sighs deeply.)

(It's night. Lights down in the bedrooms. In the dark, mysterious garden, the sound of tree frogs and the faint hum of traffic, where India begins. Faint Bollywood music comes from somewhere – maybe the servants' quarters, where the guests never go.)

*(***SONNY** *comes out of the hotel and waits anxiously. He looks pretty frazzled. His face lights up as* **SAHANI** *hurries up the garden path. She's a gorgeous, feisty young woman. They greet each other with a hug.)*

SONNY. Hi, Sahani!

SAHANI. Hi!

SONNY. I've only got ten minutes –

SAHANI. OK. *(Starts walking.)* Shall we go inside?

SONNY. *(Stops her.)* Er, my mother's still up –

SAHANI. – I've never seen inside –

SONNY. – she wants me to watch *Downton Abbey* with her. It's the only way she can get to sleep.

SAHANI. *(Looks at him.)* Why don't you let me meet her?

(They stop. **MURIEL** *appears at the back of the garden, in her dressing gown, carrying a saucer of milk.)*

MURIEL. Puss? Puss?

SAHANI. *(Whispers.)* Who's that?

SONNY. Mrs Donnelly. She's feeding the cat. They all do. They're British, you see.

*(***MURIEL** *wanders off.)*

SAHANI. It just seems a bit strange.

SONNY. *(Evasively.)* I think she's still upset about my father's death.

SAHANI. I know. But I could still meet her, just to say hello.

SONNY. You will, you will! Just give me time, to talk to her first.

(They stop, and dart behind a pillar. **JEAN** *appears, talking on her mobile phone.)*

JEAN. *(On phone.)* What? ... Well, it's all women of course, so I have to keep Douggy on a tight leash. *(Laughs.)* Only joking. You know Douggy, he's devoted to me... Oh, there is another man, a ghastly old lech called Norman. Looks like a Tory, but then they all look like Tories...

(She wanders off, still talking. **SONNY** *and* **SAHANI** *emerge, now the coast is clear.)*

SAHANI. *(Pretty upset.)* I mean, don't, if you don't want to.