

It's a telly programme on ITV.

Frank Ah.

Rita (*wandering towards the door*) You wouldn't watch ITV though, would y'?

Frank Well, I must confess . . .

Rita It's all right, I know. Soon as I walked in here I said to meself, "Y' can tell he's a Flora man".

Frank A what?

Rita A Flora man.

Frank Flora? Flowers?

Rita (*coming back to the desk*) No, Flora, the bleedin' margarine, no cholesterol; it's for people like you who eat pebble-dashed bread, y' know the bread, with little hard bits in it, just like pebble-dashin'.

Frank (*realizing and smiling*) Ah—pebble-dashed bread.

Rita Quick? He's like lightenin'? But these women, you see, they come to the hairdresser's cos they wanna be changed. But if you want to change y' have to do it from the inside, don't y'? Know like I'm doin'. Do y' think I'll be able to do it?

Frank Well, it really depends on you, on how committed you are. Are you sure that you're absolutely serious about wanting to learn?

Rita I'm dead serious. Look, I know I take the piss an' that but I'm dead serious really. I take the piss because I'm not, y' know, confident like, but I wanna be, honest.

*He nods and looks at her. She becomes uncomfortable and moves away a little*

Tch. What y' lookin' at me for?

Frank Because—I think you're marvellous. Do you know, I think you're the first breath of air that's been in this room for years.

Rita (*wandering around*) Tch. Now who's taking the piss?

Frank Don't you recognize a compliment?

Rita Go way . . .

Frank Where to?

Rita Don't be soft. Y' know what I mean.

Frank What I want to know is what is it that's suddenly led you to this?

Rita What? Comin' here?

Frank Yes.

Rita It's not sudden.

Frank Ah.

Rita I've been realizin' for ages that I was, y' know, slightly out of step.

I'm twenty-six. I should have had a baby by now; everyone expects it.

I'm sure me husband thinks I'm sterile. He was amoanin' all the time,

y' know. "Come off the pill, let's have a baby". I told him I'd come off

it, just to shut him up. But I'm still on it. (*She moves round to Frank*)

See, I don't wanna baby yet. See, I wanna discover meself first. Do you understand that?

Frank Yes.

Rita (*moving to the chair u of the desk and fiddling with it*) Yeh. They wouldn't round our way. They'd think I was mental. I've tried to explain

it to me husband but between you an' me I think he's thick. No, he's not thick, he's blind, he doesn't want to see. You know if I'm readin', or watchin' somethin' different on the telly he gets dead narked. I used to just tell him to piss off but then I realized that it was no good doin' that, that I had to explain to him. I tried to explain that I wanted a better way of livin' me life. An' he listened to me. But he didn't understand because when I'd finished he said he agreed with me and that we should start savin' the money to move off our estate an' get a house out in Formby. Even if it was a new house I wanted I wouldn't go an' live in Formby. I hate that hole, don't you?

Frank Yes.

Rita Where do you live?

Frank Formby.

Rita (*sitting*) Oh.

Frank (*getting up and going to the small table*) Another drink?

*She shakes her head*

You don't mind if I do? (*He pours himself a drink*)

Rita No. It's your brain cells y' killin'.

Frank (*smiling*) All dead long ago I'm afraid. (*He drinks*)

*Rita gets up and goes to Frank's chair. She plays with the swivel and then leans on it*

Rita When d' y' actually, y' know, start teaching me?

Frank (*looking at her*) What can I teach you?

Rita Everything.

*Frank leans on the filing cabinet, drinks, shakes his head and looks at her*

Frank I'll make a bargain with you. Yes? I'll tell you everything I know—but if I do that you must promise never to come back here . . . You see I never—I didn't actually want to take this course in the first place. I allowed myself to be talked into it. I knew it was wrong. Seeing you only confirms my suspicion. My dear, it's not your fault, just the luck of the draw that you got me; but get me you did. And the thing is, between you, me and the walls, I'm actually an appalling teacher. (*After a pause*) Most of the time, you see, it doesn't actually matter—appalling teaching is quite in order for most of my appalling students. And the others manage to get by despite me. But you're different. You want a lot, and I can't give it. (*He moves towards her*) Everything I know—and you must listen to this—is that I know absolutely nothing. I don't like the hours, you know. (*He goes to the swivel chair and sits*) Strange hours for this Open University thing. They expect us to teach when the pubs are open. I can be a good teacher when I'm in the pub, you know. Four pints of weak Guinness and I can be as witty as Wilde. I'm sorry—there are other tutors—I'll arrange it for you . . . post it on . . . (*He looks at her*)

*Rita slowly turns and goes towards the door. She goes out and quietly closes the door behind her. Suddenly the door bursts open and Rita flies in*