Followers of the British press could be forgiven for thinking that an epidemic of modern slavery had overtaken the UK and for concluding that the epitome of its cruelty manifested in the phenomenon of sham marriage. Until the advent of modern slavery law, however, sham marriages, were not usually equated with marriages that were ‘forced’. Instead, they were regarded as ‘marriages of convenience’ pursued throughout history by people: fleeing persecution whether because of their ‘race’ or sexuality; escaping poverty; avoiding marriage to someone they did not wish to live with; securing respectability. Socio-legal critiques of UK immigration law emphasize the high stakes foreign nationals who marry EU citizens face when found inadvertently in breach of immigration rules and practices that define them as inherently suspect. But what of those who deliberately seek to subvert immigration law through marriage, whose marriages are totally shambolic, based on a financial exchange to secure residency within the EU? Who are the sham marriage folk-devils against which politicians, anti-trafficking tsars and the media rile? This paper attempts to answer these questions through the analysis of interviews provided to us by two participants who had had convictions relating to sham marriages offences: Rasheed a Pakistani national in his late 30s and Estelle, also in her 30s, a Portuguese national whose family were Africans who migrated from the Portuguese colony of Cape Verde before she was born.