

Royal Court Theatre presents
DUMB SHOW
by Joe Penhall

First performance at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs Sloane Square, London on 2
September 2004.

Characters

Barry

Liz

Greg

Act One

Scene One

Five-star hotel room.

Barry *is wearing an immaculate suit.*

Greg *is holding a bottle of champagne.*

Liz *is carrying a laptop computer case.*

Liz and Greg *are wearing pinstripe.*

Barry Barry. How you doing?

Liz Hi, I'm Jane ...

Greg John ...

Barry Jane. John ...

Greg Jane. Barry ...

Liz Barry. John. Hi ...

Greg Excellent ...

Barry and Liz *shake hands.*

Barry Cor, that's a good handshake. You've got a grip like a boa constrictor.

Liz Oh, I'm a weakling really ...

Barry and Greg *shake hands.*

Barry Hello. You're not a mason. There was nothing funny about your handshake. That was the classic chop from the top. That was a classic money handshake. *(Does it.)* 'I'm going to dominate you and take all your money.' And this is a showbiz handshake. *(Does it.)* 'You're not paying for this, you want my soul, leave me alone.'

Greg Very witty.

Liz You must be tired.

Greg Give that man a drink.

Liz Give him a seat.

Greg Give that man a cigar as they say.

Liz You must be exhausted.

Barry Oh - you know –

Liz Exhausted.

Barry Used to it really ... you know ...

He loosens his tie.

Greg Loved the show.

Liz Loved it.

Greg You really sweat under those lights.

Barry Do I smell ...?

Liz You smell fine.

Barry I'm a fright without my make-up.

Greg You were brilliant.

Liz Brilliant.

Greg Brilliant.

They go to sit. They pause. He goes to sit. He pauses. They almost sit. Wait.

They sit.

Sorry.

Liz Sorry.

Barry No, I'm -

Greg Is this a good time?

Liz Ruth said it was best to bring you here.

Barry Usually the green room is the ...

Liz Oh, but you had all your friends ...

Greg We wanted somewhere nice and quiet so we could have you all to ourselves.

Liz I'm such a big fan.

Greg Huge fans. Very big fans indeed.

Liz I've never been in a TV studio before.

Greg That was hilarious.

Liz I've never been in a 'green room'. It wasn't very green.

Greg I laughed until I stopped.

Barry Y ... oh very good ...

Greg (You like that?)

Barry (Very witty.)

Greg O-ho, you've got competition.

Liz Stop it, John. He's teasing. Really he's not very funny at all.

Greg Ouch. Blimey. Say what you really think, Jane.

Liz I really liked the stuff about your wife.

Greg Lovely stuff. The wife gags. Classic. What is he like?

Barry Well, you see my wedding anniversary was last week actually . . .

Greg All good stuff. Have a little celebration? Take her out somewhere swank?

Barry Took her to the Ivy.

Liz It's all right for some.

Greg And why not, sir?

Liz It's all right for some, Eh, John?

Greg Why not, sir?

Barry Well, they're very good with names, you see. They're trained to remember Valerie's. If you buy smokes they're trained to unwrap them and put them on a little dish. They get you a car afterwards. You keep expecting somebody to come up and groom you for nits.

Liz What does Valerie do?

Barry She just looks blank and sort of lets it all wash over her.

Greg Classic! (See ...? He's just ...)

Liz No, for a living. She still works, doesn't she?

Barry Absolutely, she's trying to breed ponies. It's not going very well. I think she's got a few duds. She's forever cleaning up after them. The stable's a pigsty ...

Pause. They suddenly laugh.

Greg Classic! Oh, that's very good. Very, very good indeed. (Isn't he marvellous? This is what I was telling you about-)

Liz Brilliant, mm ..,

Greg (He's 'on' tonight.) Very, very funny. Very witty. Very astute. I like it a lot. You really know your stuff, Barry - seriously, that thing about chickens was just brilliant. It was brilliant.

Barry You liked the chicken gag?

Greg I am a sucker for chicken gags. Chicken gags kill me. Do the one about the genie and the bottle.

Liz Oh, that's such an old joke.

Greg An oldie but a goodie. That joke kills me.

Barry No - I don't want to kill you -

Greg Oh, go on. A drunk sees a genie in a bottle of brandy and the genie says, 'I'll give you three wishes ... '. And the drunk has a drink and he looks at the bottle and he goes-

Barry OK, yeah ...

Greg 'I want a bottle that never empties ... '

Barry Yeah, I don't really ...

Liz OK, John ...

Greg And the genie - no, listen - the genie waves his magic wand and 'poof ... ' and there it is ... bottle that never empties ... The drunk drinks it down ... it fills up again ... and the genie says -

Liz (John, please ...)

Greg 'You've got two wishes left ... ' Hold on, and the drunk says ... listen ... the drunk says, 'I'll have another two of these.' (*He laughs.*)

Pause.

Barry What's funny about it?

Greg I just really like ... I think it's a funny, a funny -

Barry He's obviously a really sad individual. It's not funny any more.

Greg It's just a bit of innocent fun ...

Barry It isn't innocent any more either. He's a drunk. He's got problems. What's funny about that? Why is it funny?

Greg Bec ... because ... why is it funny, Jane?

Barry I can remember when heart attacks were funny. In the seventies. Big sight gag. Until Tommy Cooper croaked on live television. Drunks used to be a scream - until Boris Johnson was elected - and began governing like one. The Irish: We used to laugh at Irishmen. Now they laugh at us. Jokes about religion stopped being funny after Nine/Eleven - jokes about fat people stop being funny after 7/Elevens and McDonald's. We're running out of things to laugh at, so now we laugh at things which aren't even funny, just to feel normal. We're living in a world of hollow laughter and forgive me for not joining in but quite frankly I preferred the real thing.

Pause.

Greg Now you see now that's brilliant. Really.

Liz That's deep.

Greg Very deep.

Liz The *insight*.

Greg Very wise.

Liz *Astute*. Mm ...

Greg You know, it's so nice to see somebody like yourself at the, you know, at the top of your game, at the pinnacle of your powers, as they say, it really is a privilege ...

Liz Absolutely a real privilege.

Liz *crosses her legs.*

Greg Jane, will you please put your legs away please - what is she like - flashing her knickers all over the shop - she is so naughty ...

Liz Don't look then, John ...

Greg If you put the goods in the window ...

Liz Don't look then ... nobody noticed ...

Greg Well, I think they did.

Liz (Sorry. Office politics.)

Greg It's Friday night.

Liz And it's Friday night. 'Crazy-crazy-crazy.' Everybody has to be silly. It's compulsory..

Faint laughs.

Liz *starts unwrapping the foil. From the champagne.*

Greg Come on, Jane. Put your wrist into it. You've had enough practice.

Liz Shut up, John ...

Liz *massages the cork.*

Greg That's right, massage its cork.

Liz It's quite hard.

Greg I'm quite hard now. Eh? Now we're talking. A nice '92. Now we are talking.

He produces three champagne glasses from the minibar.

Now we are speaking. All the trimmings ...

Barry No, actually - thanks all the same. Much as I'd love to.

Liz Go on. Treat yourself

Barry Well, I - well ...

He watches as she uncorks the bottle.

Liz Ooh goodness!

Greg Blimey, shake it up why don't you, Jane? Give it a big spurt. You can't help yourself

Liz *pours and tries to hand Barry a glass of champagne but Barry*

waves it away.

Barry No, no, no, no, not for me ...

Liz I've poured it now.

Barry I'm fine. Thank you. Really. No ... thank you ...

Liz Sure?

Liz hands Greg a glass and chinks glasses and they drink and smack their lips.

Greg. Oh, that's a good drop.

Liz That's lovely.

Greg That's a good drop.

Liz That's very good.

Greg That's a very good drop.

Liz Fruity.

Greg 'A fruity, a fruity, a cheeky little number - cheeky but butch.' Eh?

Barry watches them drink.

Greg Chin-chin.

Liz Cheers.

They sit.

You sure I can't twist your arm?

Barry You can twist anything you like, love, won't make any difference to me.

Greg (*handing over a glass, pouring*) Oh go on. Why not, sir. Eh? That's what it's all about. (*Winks.*) Go on.

Barry stares, hesitates. Then almost takes a sip but changes his mind and puts the glass down. Greg puts his glass down too, rubbing his hands together, brisk.

Greg Anyway. So. OK. I expect Ruth filled you in ...

Barry She mentioned she had an account.

Greg OK.

Barry She said everybody had accounts. Everybody upstairs. One of the writers. I never talk to the writers. It only encourages them ...

Liz Ruth thought you'd be keen ...

Barry I adore Ruth. Really. She's smart, she's funny, she's sexy- in a kind of bluestocking, slightly mumsy type of way. I'll tell you something else. She has fought tooth and claw to get the series into the shape it's in. Loyal, you see. Loyalty goes a long way with me.

Liz She mentioned you weren't entirely happy with certain things . . .

Greg Certain arrangements ...

Barry I told them, I said, 'You pay chicken feed, you get monkeys.' Ruth knows. She's on to it. She won't let me down. You see, we go back a long way Ruth and I ...

Greg Well, you see, we'd take you on just on the basis of what you're going to earn in your retirement -

Liz In residuals -

Greg In residuals, absolutely.

Barry I have no end of trouble with banks. It's impossible to speak to anyone. You can't ring up, everything's menu this, password that, it's like ringing MI5 ...

Greg You're not getting the right kind of service.

Barry Well, quite frankly, at this point in my career, with my-

Liz With your earning power.

Barry Precisely. I tend to expect-

Greg You don't belong on the high street.

Barry You know, I really feel I don't ...

Greg Nothing wrong with the high street if you're a wage monkey, they provide an efficient, perfectly satisfactory service for your average working person -

Barry Sure, if you're just an average stiff-

Greg But the thing is this, Barry: if you own a Roller you don't go to a back-street mechanic. D'you follow what I mean? You don't just call the AA. You go first class.

Barry Or at the very least business ...

Liz (*simultaneous with 'business'*) Business ...

Greg You pick up the phone and you speak to me.

Barry Well, that's what I want. I want to speak to a human being.

Greg You pick up the phone and you speak to me. That's all.

Barry OK ... nobody else?

Greg Nope. Just me. Or Jane here if I'm not at my desk or on another call. Any time of the day, anywhere in the world. Which I should imagine is especially useful to somebody like yourself in your line of work ... I can also arrange traveller's cheques, foreign currency, a new mortgage -

Liz We can get you a great mortgage.

Greg Have you got a mortgage?

Barry I have - yes - but -

Greg What sort of mortgage?

Barry Oh - it's not a very good one -

Greg We should take a look at it -

Barry Well - OK -

Greg Whatever-whenever you are, whenever, I take care of everything.

Barry You ... ?

Greg I take care of everything. Has Ruth talked to you about the talk?

Pause

Barry A ... what do you mean? What talk?

Greg You don't know about this? (Why doesn't he know about this?)

Liz We were going to ask you to come and do a talk at the bank. Nothing freaky. Just come and talk.

Barry Just ... talk to ... some ... who?

Greg Everybody. Staff. A few selected clients. We'll have a dinner.

Liz And after dinner you could do your talk. Totally informal. They'll love it.

Greg Totally informal. Exactly. The exact opposite of, of formal ...

Liz And fun. We want people to have fun.

Greg You see, everybody has the idea it's no fun where we work. They think it's soulless. Far from it. Private banking is fun. Investment banking is a lot of fun as well. And what's more, it's very *lucrative*. Which is also, obviously, a whole lot of fun too ... And that's where, you know, that's where you come into it.

Barry I-?

Greg Because you're a very important person now, Barry, [don't know it you realise ...

Liz A very important client, Barry, if it all goes -

Greg If this works out, yes, we would really value your account and, if I may say, the pleasure of your company, good sir.

Pause.

Barry Well, OK. W ... what would you want me to talk about?

Liz What do you want to talk about?

Barry I don't want to talk about anything, it was your idea.

Greg Talk about the new series. Your experiences. Your views. I can imagine you can be quite, you know, quite 'controversial' when you put your mind to it and we'd actually welcome that.

Liz Nothing wrong with a bit of controversy ...

Greg Controversy is crucial ...

Liz Crucial.

Greg Tell it like it is.

Liz We can show people a side of you they haven't seen before.

Barry There isn't a side of me they haven't seen before, love. Ask Ruth. I'm what they call 'well documented'.

Greg There will be a fee of course.

Barry You can't 'buy' me. (*Snorts.*) What sort of fee are we talking about?

Greg Well. A substantial fee ...

Barry How substantial?

Greg A very substantial fee, Barry. A very 'substantial financial' as we say in the trade.

Barry O-ho. 'Very substantial', eh? How substantial?

Greg *nods to Liz who takes out a card from the case and writes on it.*

Greg This is how much we've got in the kitty. For corporate hospitality. Wining and dining. (*Pause. Barry stares.*) You see, you're a very clever man. I don't know if you're aware of it. But I think people could really learn from you - and have a laugh while they do it.

Barry *stares at the card again.*

Barry W ... I don't often come up to town, that's all. It's only when I'm taping shows.

Greg Pick a day, any day. We'll get you back, we'll book you in here, nice bit of lunch in the room with Jane - do what you have to do - go and do the talk in the evening.

Liz You should see the room service here. Steaks the size of sofa cushions.

Barry Y - I don't need feeding, love. I'm hardly a starving waif. .

Greg You can come up here and she'll talk you through it, nothing to be nervous about. .

Liz It would mean a lot to us ...

Greg Barry, I'm not 'blowing smoke up your arse'.

Barry I would have noticed ...

Faint laughs.

Greg Look. We're serious about this. Talk to your agent.

Barry Well, no, no, you know, there's no need for him to know about this just at the moment ...

Liz But if it makes it easier ...

Barry No, well, you see, he won't want a commission for this, you see. It's too much paperwork. I don't mind giving him ten per cent when he's earned it ... but then there's the VAT ... paying *his* VAT; on *his* commission is taking the piss a bit ... then there's VAT on paperwork - I have to pay a bookkeeper and an accountant - they all charge VAT-

Greg The thing is, Barry, you're a bit of a 'national treasure' as they say.

Liz And it's about time people remembered that ...

Barry Well, it's very nice of you to ... uh... realise that ... uh ... could I just ... ? *(Pause. Almost drinks but stops, puts glass down.)* Perhaps if I take a ...? Give me your number and I'll ... *(Flips card over.)* Oh, I see it's ... OK ... *(Flips, stares.)* (I don't suppose it could do any ...) Why not?

Greg *puts Barry's glass in Barry's hand.*

Greg Why not indeed?

Greg *drinks. Liz drinks. Barry stares.*

Blackout.

Scene Two

Liz *is in a classy evening dress, examining herself in the mirror. She rearranges her clothes, her hair, applies lipstick.*

Barry *is rummaging in the minibar, examining miniature bottles.*

Barry Dogs believe in heaven and hell and cats don't. Dogs believe in everything. They're not choosy. They're man's best friend. Dogs are morally superior to cats, but cats have a better sense of irony. It's obvious. When a dog does something wrong - chases a cat up a tree, savages a small child and so on and so forth - you say, 'Bad dog,' and the dog panics and puts his tail between his legs and looks all guilty. He's going, 'Oh no. What have I

done? It wasn't me.' They feel terrible. They get so embarrassed. When a cat does something wrong - you leave a piece of fish out of the fridge, the cat chews the fish, the cat scratches the baby, you scold the cat, he just looks at you like you're stupid. 'Don't look at *me*, *you* left it there.' It's written all over their faces. They don't care. You say, 'I'm gonna kill you,' and they're going, 'I don't care, I'm a cat, I've got nine lives. Fuck you.' (*Gestures, V-sign.*) •

Liz Excellent, no, yeah, that's really good ...

Liz *places the computer case on the table and positions it carefully as they talk.*

Barry Is that the sort of ...? (*Gestures.*)

Liz Yeah, no, yeah, that's, you know ...

Barry OK ...

Liz If you did away with the, the routine and the, you know, the Jokes and just talked, just chatted about your life your philosophies ... the ups and downs ... yeah? You see? It's more truthful. More authentic.

Barry Do away with the jokes?

Liz Tell your story. Tell us something we don't know ...

Barry The whole point about jokes is they're just jokes. They're not true stories. The whole point about why the chicken crossed the road is that A) we don't know the chicken personally and so B) who cares? It's a chicken. Chickens are funny. They just are.

Liz But we still want to know why it crossed the road. What's its, you know, background?

Barry It's a chicken. It'll be lunch soon. That's its background, A horse walks into a bar and the barman says, 'Why the long face?' It's funny because it's a horse. Not because the horse may or may not be alcohol-dependent ...

Liz It's funny because it's *true* ...

Barry It's funny because it's funny. It isn't remotely true. Why is a horse in a bar true?

Liz Bec ... because horses really do have long faces. They do! (**Barry stares.**) If you said, 'A, a, a *monkey* walks into a bar and the barman says,

"Why the long face?" it wouldn't be funny because monkeys have hairy faces...

(Barry stares.)

Liz Anyway, no, yeah ... let's push on, shall we? I'd really like to nail it before dinner ...

Barry pours a brandy, sips.

Liz Have another brandy ... yes ... that's really helpful ...

Barry Would you possibly be able to make it out to cash? My fee. Will you be able to, to -?

Liz I'll talk to John. Absolutely. It'll go straight into your new account.

Barry But give it to me first ...

Liz Eh?

Barry Give it to me first ...

Liz OK. I'll give you the cheque and you can put it in an envelope and send it to John.

Barry Yes, but - you see - cash would be better ...

Liz He'll organise the cash. Don't worry about any of it ...

Barry It's just the VAT thing ...

Liz I'll sort it out.

Barry If I could trust my bank not to *lose* it ...

Liz I'll make a note of it.

Barry No, but you see they could *lose* the cheque. This always happens when you change banks. They say it went to the new bank, the new bank swears it went to the old bank. They're such bullshitters ... present company excepted ...

Barry tops up his brandy and sips.

Liz You might want to slow down a bit actually -

Barry O-ho. I want to speed up -

Liz All the same, Barry, there's plenty of time to, you know ... there's a lot to get through ...

Barry (*refills the tumbler, sips*) 'Behind the scenes' and all that shit.

Liz Sorry?

Barry 'Behind the scenes.' You want me to talk about the show. Behind the glamour ... the reality ... the banality ... all that crap...

Liz Well, if that's -

Barry. 'The crap behind the crap: a show made by idiots, for idiots ... because of idiots.' I don't want to talk about it. It's a waste of time.

Liz OK ... fine ...

Barry I get letters all the time. 'Dear Barry, I want to be on TV. Help me.' You know. The wannabes ... they send me pics with their tits out. 'I'm very nice. About five three. Forty-five years old. I can *juggle*. I will give you a blow job.' They're always obese ... or ... terminally spotty ... they can never spell. Terrible handwriting. They come to my dressing room after the show and just hang about, staring, utterly blank, waiting to be blessed, waiting for the laying on of hands. (*He mimics open-mouthed blank stares.*) Like the victims of some sort of terrible natural disaster. (*He mimics again.*) Lobotomised. Like they're catching flies. They're wankers.

Pause.

Liz I suppose it can't be easy ...

Barry Well, I'd miss them if they weren't there obviously...

Liz And they'd miss you, I think ...

Barry Well, it's not my problem. Fuck 'em. D'you know what I really wanted to be before all this? I wanted to be a schoolteacher. Something which enabled me to use my brain, Jane. To, you know, 'give something back'. You see? Pass on my knowledge. There is no greater gift. My mum used to say, 'You've got a good brain, use it.' She wanted me to be a teacher. Nurses and teachers are the real people. They're the ones who count. I should have been a fucking headmaster or just, you know, Just, worked with animals or something. (*Belches, sips.*)

Pause.

Liz You don't seem very, if you don't mind me ... you don't seem very happy, at the moment, I must say ...

Pause.

Barry (*stares*) Y ... well ... no ... no, not so happy lately, I suppose, in some ways ... Just ... you know...

Liz Do you want to ... you know ... talk about it?

(Gestures.)

Barry Well I, well there's nothing to ... really ... (*Pauses*) Uh ... I work too hard, you see. Lots of travelling, you see, when I'm on tour. Sometimes have to come up to London to tape the show ... do publicity ... I haven't been home in ... I'm always in some shitty hotel, you know, the Ramada, the Holiday Inn, washing with, you know, those tiny soap bars, shampooing with tiny shampoo bottles, drinking out of miniatures - who designs those places? Midgets? People with tiny hands like monkeys? They're so stingy. In the not-too-distant future, they won't even have you soap. You'll have to give them soap. You'll check in at reception, you'll hand over your credit card, a bar of soap and a bowl of fruit and only then will they give you the key. You'll go up to your room, you'll have to make your own bed, then you'll have to find the maid and make her bed. The air conditioner never goes off, there's no extractor fan in the bathroom, so the room always smells vaguely of warm shit ... it's probably not even mine. Probably wafts in from the air conditioning. It's somebody else's, recycled. I just want to go home. I never see my kids ... I miss my family ...

Liz I can see they're very important to you. I can see Valerie's obviously very, you know, good for you ...

Barry W ... y ... n ...

Liz Oh ... she is ... I'm sure she is ... isn't she?

Barry Well ...

Liz Yeah - no - it's none of my business obviously, I didn't mean to, to pry.

Silence.

Barry You see, my mother died a few months ago. That's probably where this all ... it's the one thing I couldn't handle really, death. (*Pause.*) She was

lovely, my mum. She was a nurse at Cromwell Hospital. I adore nurses. I feel safe with nurses. Never had a harsh word for anybody. She taught me to always try to see the best in people. 'Never let the sun go down on an argument,' she used to say. 'Always give people the benefit of the doubt.' Erm ... 'Never mistrust your friends.' 'If you can't do a good turn never do a bad turn.' What a load of old balls. Different generation, see. Wartime. The Blitz. 'Never let the sun go down on an argument because you don't know what could happen in the night.' Could wake up dead. Then you'd be sorry. *(Pause.)* No, you see, it's not that I'm unhappy. I'm just ... I'm sensitive. Yes. And just generally probably, you know ... a bit of a mummy's boy really, I suppose, and so now ... I'm a bit of a ... I'm a bit of a complicated guy ...

Liz A 'mass of contradictions'.

Barry Well no I'm just weak and easily confused and I always need 'to be the centre of attention, that's all... I need the, you know, the love of an audience. Which is pathetic. I know. It's –

Liz No ... not at all ...

Barry On the other hand ...

Liz What's wrong with that?

Barry My point exactly. And there's nothing wrong with that. What's wrong with that? It's a good living. *(Pause.)* But, you see, then I meet somebody like yourself and I ... see, I yearn for normality. Dullness, even.

Liz Thank you very much ...

Barry No, I yearn to have ... what you have. You're a, a, a lovely, straightforward, lovely, ordinary woman ... there's no side to you, no pretence ...

Liz I don't know. I am a bit dull, really, truth to be told ...

Barry No. Not at all. You're just ...

Liz Bit plain ...

Barry Not at all ...

Liz 'Plain-Jane.'

Barry I think plain women are marvellous. You know where you stand with plain women. It's what's inside that gets me going.

Liz I'm pretty uninteresting on the inside too ...

Barry No, no, no, no, no, - not in the least.

Liz Oh ...

Barry No.

Liz Yeah.

Barry No! I think you're ... you know ...

Liz Sometimes I worry I'm actually a bit, boring ... sometimes...

Barry Oh no. 'Boring.' Heaven forbid. The worst thing in the entire world.

Liz I think John thinks I'm boring .. .

Barry Well, I think he's boring .. .

Liz He just sometimes gives me this look ... you know ... like he's bored with me. Probably because I'm not some kind of grinning, bleachy blonde Barbie-doll type of a woman like everybody else in finance ... I expect

Barry You look OK to me ...

Liz Because of course he's addicted to porn ...

Barry (*beat*) Uh-huh ...

Liz It's always on his laptop. I don't mind a bit of porn, everybody likes porn ...

Barry Y ... in small doses ...

Liz I can look at, you know, I look at women's bodies sometimes ...

Barry I'm the same ...

Liz Everybody has, you know, fantasies ...

Barry Nothing wrong with fantasy .. .

Liz But you know, within reason ... !

Barry You have to draw the line somewhere ...

Liz You have to be sensible about it ... all these melon-breasted, tiny-waisted women, shaved to within an inch of their lives, lolling about with their mouths open. It's all so fake and phoney .. .

Barry It's not realistic ...

Liz Women have hair!

Barry I adore hairy women ...

Liz I've got a moustache ...

Barry I like moustaches on women ... *(Pause.)* ... Are you, uh, married, Jane?

Liz Jesus Christ, no ...

Barry Have you ... uh ... have you got a boyfriend?

Liz *(laughs)* Not at the moment ...

Barry Why haven't you got a boyfriend?

Liz You call them partners nowadays, Barry ...

Barry Alright ... Why haven't you got a 'partner'?

Liz I don't know... Come to think of it, not many of my friends have partners ... it's just how things are these days ...

Barry Is it? Why?

Liz Well, it's just ... people today prefer their independence.

Barry When was the last time you had a ... partner?

Liz I don't know ... two years ago ...

Barry Two years ago! That's ridiculous. You need to get a 'boyfriend.' 'Boyfriends' are fun.

Liz It's never really worked out for me ...

Barry I don't believe you ...

Liz It's, uh, you don't want to hear all this ... and I don't really want to tell you, so ...

Barry Go on. I'm listening.

Liz No, it's all bollocks ...

Barry Spit it out! Tell your Uncle Barry ...

Liz It seems to be getting harder to get to know people. Maybe it's just getting harder to 'want' to know people.

Barry (You know me.)

Liz It's not as if I have high expectations ... I'm, you know, I'm quite hard work, I suppose ...

Barry I like you ...

Liz I talk too much, as you can hear ...

Barry I like talking to you ...

He looks her in the eye.

A 'moment'.

Silence.

She fidgets with the case.

Liz ... Anyway ... perhaps you should have some water now. You really are pretty ... getting quite ...

Barry What? Getting what?

Liz All those little bottles ... they add up don't they?

Barry What have I done?

Liz You're just, you know, you've become very ... you're drinking quite a lot now ... I don't mind ... you can drink as much as you like ... I just don't want to encourage you to -

Barry O-ho! I love a drink. I got drunk on my nan's sherry when I was five years old. I thought it was Ribena.. When I got it in my mouth, cor! Rocket fuel. I nearly blasted off. I was doing backflips before I could do, you know, somersaults. And so, you see, after that I wanted to try everything. And then I got a taste for ... I got a taste for everything. *(Pause.)* People think it's this great truth serum, in actual fact it makes you lie. Makes you say things you've never said before, think things you've never thought before. Not because you've repressed them but because they've never even occurred to you. You see, human beings, Janie, need an alternate reality like a whale needs a blowhole. We need things to appear differently to what they really are or else we go insane. We're not interested in reality. We're interested in distorting it. Because it's the only way we can bear to be human. It's the only way we can bear this ONSLAUGHT ... of death and loss and disaster ... and the joy, you see, the joy ... of birth ... new life ... love ... sex? Eh? Sex is God's way of saying 'sorry'. It's compensation for growing up. But, you see, it

confuses us. All this joy and then the 'paradox', see, when you kick the bucket.

Pause.

Liz Wow, that's ... no ... yeah ... I love the way you really just, you know, you don't give a fuck what people think about you ...

Barry Well, you see, it's a talent. It takes practice.

Liz I don't think you need to practise. You're a natural.

Barry O-ho. You should see me when I'm coked up to the eyeballs.

Liz Well, I've never even tried it ...

Barry You've never tried sherbet? Never? In your line of work ... ?

Liz Not so much in private banking ...

Barry Truly?

Liz You're thinking of corporate banking ...

Barry Speed? Amphetamines?

Liz I've led a rather sheltered existence Barry ...

Barry You've never been curious? When I was a kid you could have a haircut, go to the flicks and buy a bag of amphetamine sulphate for a couple of bob and still have change for Liquorice Allsorts.

Liz You sound like an expert.

Barry I dabbled. I'll put my hand up to that.

Liz Aha.

Barry I dabbled every night. Gassed. Zipped. Ripped. Space . Fried like bacon and eggs. Wired to within an inch of my life ...

Liz I've tried slimming pills ...

Barry Coupla slimming pills and a pint of IPA, you'll think you're Spiderman. Pills. Powder. Uppers. Downers. Leapers. Bombers. Blues: Speed's marvellous! (Obviously you have to, uh, be a bit sensible about it. It messes with your mind a bit ...)

He pours another brandy. Drinks.

Liz Have you got any?

Barry 'Have I got any?' Priceless.

Liz Have you? Show me.

Barry OK, listen: Jane, Janie, I've obviously given you slightly the wrong impression here ...

Liz I like how you call me, Janie.

Pause.

Barry W ... ?

Liz (*crossing her legs*) It's friendly ... 'Janie'... Maybe this is something you should address in your speech.

Barry Eh?

Liz Your speech tonight ...

Barry What's wrong with my speech? Am I slurring?

Liz No, I meant the past, the old, you know, habits ...

Barry You mean ... make it a bit more, you know, 'confessional' perhaps, and all that?

Liz If you want to. You might find it, you know, cathartic.

Barry I might find it addictive. (*Fishing in his pocket.*)

He produces from his pockets a wrap of powder and tosses it on to the table in front of them.

Barry Here you go. Go on. Have some of that. Go on, you're all right. Dig in.

Liz Oh ... goodness me ...

Barry It's not much but it'll give you a bump. Go on. Do it on the cistern in the bathroom. It's a flat cistern ...

Liz Goodness gracious ... you're so naughty ... 'Mad, bad and dangerous to know.'

Barry O-ho. I used to be mad, bad and dangerous to know. Now I'm just mad, bad, sad and a dad.

Liz Well, you really must've been, back in the day ... !

Liz places her hand on the case, moves it slightly.

Barry sits and rubs powder into his gums.

Barry It's good stuff. Not rubbish. Zippy.

Liz Well, we have got a long day ahead of us ...

Barry I'll get you some for later. How much d'you want? Half a gram? I can ping my dealer and it'll be here in five minutes.

He drains his drink and takes out his mobile

Liz Actually, no. Please, really, no, I couldn't ...

Barry Go on. Take hard drugs with me. Rub it into your gums.

Liz Blimey ... no ... oh ...

Barry Go on. It's nice. Tingly.

Liz Put it away ... God ... what are you like?

She checks her watch.

He puts mobile down.

He puts powder away.

He fidgets, taps his foot.

He drums on the table.

He stares.

OK ... so ...

Barry What are you looking at me like that for?

Liz Like what?

Barry Like ... funny ...

Liz I'm not.

Barry What have I ... ? You seem distant all of a sudden.

He gets up, wanders a bit.

Liz I really ought to be making a move actually -

Barry W... what about our grub?

Liz Perhaps you could call up for a sandwich ...

Barry A sandwich? No. (*Staring.*) Look at you, you're all ... you're so skinny ... you're all legs and arms and eyes like ... electromagnets ... (*He grabs her elbow.*) Eh? Look at this ...

Liz No ...

Barry (*tickling her*) Eh? You're like a little bird!

Liz I'm all right really. Thank you. I have to go now ...

Barry (*clutching at her hand*) No, don't let go - hold on - just touch - (*Touches her hand to his face.*)

Liz Barry ...

Barry No just - touch ... I haven't been touched by a woman since I went to the dentist ... (*A hand around her waist.*)

Liz What are you - ?

Barry My wife, you see - my Valerie - she's very - she's not very -

Liz What are you do - ?

Barry Just hold ... hold me ...

Liz Doing?

Barry (*drawing her close*) You see, I've been very -

Liz Just-

Barry Just -

Liz Just-

Barry I'm *lonely* ...

Liz (*drawing away*) I said NO!

Silence.

Barry But that's enough about me. Who are you?

Blackout.

---++-Scene Three

Barry is standing around, doing up his tie, checking his appearance in the mirror, stretching, etc.

Liz is pouring coffee.

Greg is in shirtsleeves.

Barry Right. I'm hot to trot.

Greg Well, all right then. Barry Locked and loaded. Greg Great.

Barry Let's get ready to rumble.

Greg OK, great ...

Barry Let's go. Where is it? On the Strand?

Liz Coffee?

Barry (Please ...) How do we get there? I usually have a car ...

Liz How do you have it?

Barry (Black no sugar – no – actually white.)

He bounces on the balls of his feet.

It's just like doing stand-up ...

He clears his throat, 'la-las' a scale.

I am an expert craftsman of the witty bon mot and a master philosopher. I'm a smooth-talking, fast-walking, fire-stoking, heavy-smoking, straight-shooting, heavy-hitting, side-splitting motherfucking hunka-hunka ramalama ding-dong, baby. And I can dance. *(He does a little tap dance.)* A voice like syrup of figs. I'm what they used to call a triple threat.

He goes into a boxing crouch, shadow-boxes Greg.

Greg OK, well ... *(Sitting.)* Sit down a minute, Barry, please, I want to talk to you.

Barry sits, fidgets. Liz hands him coffee, he sips.

Greg There's just a few things I need to clarify.

Liz Just a few details.

Barry (Did I not ... I gave you all my bank ... ?)

Liz Not your bank details ...

Barry Is there a problem? (Because you know they always do this. They fuck about with the standing orders ...)

Greg No, look – certain things have happened ...

Barry What's happened?

Greg Things in your life. To do with you.

Barry What about me?

Liz Interesting things.

Barry Well, I think we've covered most of it. I think we should just get over there now ... I'm wasting my juice.

Greg Well, all the same, I think you should just listen a minute.

Liz The thing is -

Barry Sock it to me.

Greg The thing is, Barry -

Barry Tell me, what is the thing, John? Because do you know something? Sad to say, I have a better relationship with you people than I do with my own wife these days. Eh? Doing this makes me feel useful. Doing this makes me feel ... real.

Greg OK, well, just - there's no easy way to tell you this ...

Barry No easy way? I should cocoa. Spit it out.

Greg Are you listening?

Barry What? What is it? Yes ...

Greg I'm here to question you ...

Barry What have I ... ?

Greg ... about a serious criminal offence ...

Barry O-ho - yes - *funny* ...

Greg Committed in this room and captured on camera on digital video.

Barry I ... what?

Greg OK. Let's start from day one. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Barry ... ?

Greg I'm not playing now.

Barry Y ... n ...

Liz Barry, please, just listen a minute ...

Greg This is very serious.

Pause.

Barry You're ... are you joking? I don't know what you're ... what have I done?

Liz Greg -

Greg Just a minute -

Barry 'Greg'? What did you ... ?

Greg *produces a press ID card.*

Barry You're ... wh ... ?

He studies the card.

Is that real? Who are ... ?

He stares.

Who are you?

Liz *just stares at her feet.*

Greg I am in fact the Investigations Editor, OK, you see, and so, you see.

Barry 'The Investigations Editor'?

Greg For the purposes of this –

Barry What the fuck?

Greg - investigation - it was necessary to deploy a certain degree of subterfuge in the name of, of, of -

Barry (to Liz) And, and, and you already knew about this?

Liz *produces her press card. Pause.*

Barry (mystified) So you're not Ruth's bank manager?

Greg No.

Long pause.

Barry (*cogs whirring*) And this has nothing to do with private banking?

Liz Absolutely nothing.

Barry Well, now I'm lost.

Greg Which bit don't you understand?

Barry I don't understand any of it.

Greg The thing is you offered her cocaine.

Barry *looks from one to the other.*

Greg You offered to purchase cocaine for her.

Barry Whaaaaat?

Greg I'm afraid you did and my friend here will attest to that.

Liz (Speed.)

Greg (Eh?)

Liz (It was speed.)

Barry 'Speed'? I don't even know what that is. Is that some kind of, of, of drug?

Greg You did, Barry, and you know how I know you did? Because we've got it on video.

Barry Video? What video?

Greg We've recorded it all.

Barry I've no idea what you're . : .

Greg *picks up the computer case and shows it to Barry.*

Greg See that?

Barry What? That little ... ?

Greg The little dot?

Barry What about it?

Greg Tiny, isn't it?

Barry Minuscule.

Greg That's a camera lens. We put a digital camera lens in the case with a wire on Liz and there's another one in the bathroom. Amazing, isn't it? Just like James Bond.

Barry *stares.*

Barry 'Liz'?

Greg All the gadgets.

Barry I'm confused.

Greg Well, it's actually pretty straightforward.

Barry Talk me through it.

Greg A person, look, a very well-respected member of the public - no, listen - a very close friend of yours, in fact -

Barry Who?

Greg Hear me out - in actual fact a very well-respected professional -

Barry Who?

Greg - came forward - no, listen - came forward to talk about your situation ...

Barry 'Situation'?

Greg About your problem - and so on ...

Barry Ruth?

Greg Because you're not doing your job, Barry ...

Barry Ruth? You pay her?

Greg And you've let down your colleagues and your family and your friends ...

Barry That bitch. What would she know about it?

Greg She worked very closely with us actually ...

Barry Let me tell you something about Ruth. Ruth would work with the Nazis if the price was right ...

Greg OK, I'd like you to be quite careful what you say to me from here on in ...

Barry This is insane! You people are insane! What the bloody fuck ... ? What the f ... ?

He stands.

I think if it's all the same to you I really have to be going now ...

Greg 'Going'? Where are you going?

Barry I'm going to - all sorts of places.

Greg But I haven't finished yet.

Barry Well, I'm a very, a very busy man -

Greg You took out your phone and you offered to 'ping' your dealer. Am I right? You offered to supply class-A substances to my colleague here, and that's, you know, that's illegal.

Barry 'Supply'? No -

Greg Who else have you supplied to, Barry? Other celebrities?

Barry This is ridiculous.

Greg It is pretty ridiculous, regrettably, and what's more it's a very serious offence. You're a drunk and a drug addict and a drug supplier and, you know, it's really got to stop.

Barry You actually said to me - you said to me - she said - she - you - I - I got the distinct impression -

Greg But you still did it and whether you like it or not my job is to report the facts dispassionately.

Barry You encouraged me to talk about -

Greg Do you admit it?

Barry I think I'll just call my agent now please, love, please ...

Greg What's your agent going to say?

Liz *passes his mobile to Barry.*

Barry Perhaps I could have a little privacy?

Greg He's not getting a commission. You were quite specific about that.

Barry No, no, I didn't say that-

Greg You just tried to cheat him out of his commission.

Barry What I actually said was -

Greg In actual fact, he told me it wasn't really working out with you ...

Barry W-

Greg He's had enough of you, my friend, he was quite clear about that ...

Barry *selects his agents number on his mobile*

Barry Will you get the fuck out of my face right now or I am going to gouge your left eye out with my thumb! (*Brandishing his mobile.*) I'll beat you to death with my bare hands and this phone ...

Greg Because you're a bit of a liability is what he said ...

Barry *hangs up crossly.*

Greg You asked her to 'touch' you. What was that about?

Barry I - what?

Greg Touch you. Earlier. You asked her to touch you. Where did you want her to touch you, Barry?

Barry I ... w ... over there. By the thing.

Greg That's not what I'm getting at.

Barry I was off my crust.

Greg And that makes it acceptable?

Barry I don't know what you're talking about.

Greg Do you want to see the video?

Barry And, and, and even if I did - which I'm not admitting to –

Greg You did.

Barry Big deal. What are you, a nun?

Greg It's not very pleasant, is it?

Barry It was a joke.

Greg What's funny about it?

Barry I was just being silly ...

Greg And even if it is funny, which I don't think it is, but even if it is (which it really isn't ...), why does that make it acceptable? Do you follow what I'm trying to say? I mean, for God's sake! What were you thinking?

Barry I was thinking ... I wasn't thinking.

Greg Why do you do these things?

Barry Something just comes over me.

Greg You were showing off?

Barry It's my job.

Greg That's your job, is it? Showing off to girls in hotel rooms and groping them like Donald Trump?

Barry You tricked me. (*To Liz.*) I, I, I ... Remember how I said about my mother - ?

Liz You said you wanted to be a schoolteacher, yes, I remember.

Greg They don't want people like you teaching children.

Barry I could - I'm determined -

Greg They want good people - they don't want bad hats like you.

Barry I am fucking good!

Greg No - don't get upset now ...

Liz Don't take it personally, Barry ...

Greg Don't be such a baby ...

Liz There's no need to lose your temper ...

Barry Whose side are you on? I confided in you ...

Liz Well, I think we all know what that was about ...

Barry I poured my heart out .. .

Liz Well, I'm sorry about that .. .

Barry We really connected ...

Liz I honestly didn't mean to 'connect' with you, Barry ...

Barry I thought you cared, you cow .. .

Liz Well, I don't, I'm sorry, I just don't .. .

Barry All that stuff about the, the, the, the, the, the, the ... and ... your, your, your, your, your 'fantasies' ... ? Eh? And, and, and, and I mean, what was all that about ... ? I suppose that was supposed to, what, just mindlessly titillate me, I suppose ... ?

Liz Well, obviously, of course it was, yes..

Greg OK. Let's just park that to one side for a minute. OK. Simmer down now. Because the thing is, see, whether we do this now or not, Barry ... are you listening? ... sooner or later, somebody is going to run this and, you see, if somebody else gets hold of this ... one of the other more downmarket publications ... the shock monkeys ... you know what they'll write about you, don't you? Family man. Big TV star. Not a very nice person. Mm.

Pause. Barry stares.

Or ... you see, with your 'Full Cooperation', I would run a, a, a 'Heartfelt Confession'. You could, you know, just chat to us. Talk about what you're going through. The highs and lows. The mistakes you've made. Eh? All the *emotion*. Talk about your beliefs and feelings. Because a lot of people might be interested to know that behind all the clowning, there's a, you know, there's actually a bit of a, a, a 'dark side'. Eh? A few, you know, 'demons', as they say. Do you follow what I'm trying to say?

Barry *stares from one to the other.*

Liz What he's saying is it's for your own good.

Greg This is exactly the kind of thing people respond to, it's really good stuff.

Barry Not in my world, chum.

Greg Well, Barry, you know, I really am sorry but we're not really living in your world any more. We're living in my world. Eh? There's no point in talking to us about your old mum in the Blitz because we can't actually use any of that ...

Liz It's just not relevant, Barry ...

Greg Now is there anything you don't understand about what we've just said? Because we don't want you to feel you're being pressured here.

Liz We're trying to be sensitive about this.

Greg We're absolutely sensitive. Sensitivity is the key.

Pause.

Barry Well, do I get a fee ... ?

Greg 'A fee'? Bloody Hell. No, you can't profit from it ... that would be silly.

Barry *goes into the bathroom.*

Greg Dear oh dear. What is he like? He's bonkers.

He rummages in his camera bag. He produces a recording device and microphone. During the following Liz systematically removes her wig, fake breasts, bottom and make-up to reveal a totally different more mature woman.

(*Snorts.*) I loved it when he did that thing with his phone. 'I'll bloody well bash you up with this phone, mate.' Classic! I nearly pissed myself. Hilarious! I nearly cacked myself. Mind you, he had me going when he tried to get hold of his agent. That's all we need. You were brilliant. You were brilliant. That was excellent when you crossed your legs. Phew. It was really convincing. Fuck. This is such a buzz. This is so exciting. My God ... I feel glorious ... Sometimes I feel so, I dunno, constipated ... but now I just feel so purged and alive!

Liz Do you think he's all right in there? You don't think he's, you know, overdosing or, something?

Greg (*snorts*) I wish! (*They listen to various crashes and bangs.*) He's looking for the camera. They always do this. Start tearing out the toilet seat and stuff. It's really funny. He'll be out in a minute, looking all wild-eyed ...

He rummages in his camera bag and produces some crisps, sits, eats.

(Mouth full.) I love this job. I love the dressing up. Working up an 'act'. Learning lines. Remembering them. Getting, you know, butterflies ... it's just like being an actor ...

Liz Do you want to be an actor?

Greg Nah ... I'm just saying ... It's just really creative and, you know, 'empowering' and you know ... I just think it's good ... (Hold still a sec ...)

Greg *fiddles with the wire under her dress, removes it*

Liz I quite like him, really. He makes me laugh.

Greg What do you mean?

Liz He's a funny guy.

Greg You think he's funny? I don't think he's particularly funny.

Liz He's quite funny ...

Greg You like funny guys; that's just your thing. It doesn't do anything for me. In fact, I'd even go so far as to say I prefer humourlessness. With humourlessness you know where you stand.

Liz He's really got it, hasn't he?

Greg What?

Liz 'It.' The 'it' factor.

Greg I don't see it myself ...

Liz Trust me, it's there. I don't know what it is. Charisma. Warmth. 'Inclusiveness.' He just makes you want to be around him. Makes you 'wanna be in his gang'. Don't you think?

Greg No. You see, that's what happens when you meet famous people. You think you know them. You think you like them. You sometimes think they're tremendously wise. It's all bullshit. They're fakes. They are, by definition, unknowable and unlikeable - you just can't tell because you don't know them. He's a fucking 'entertainer'. He tells 'good jokes'. He can sing and dance a bit. Big deal. They're not important, these people. They're not special. They're pariahs. Fame is a cancer. It's a cancer! It's a plague. And it's fucking everywhere. And it's destroying us. And so, you see, it's our

responsibility to, you know, just, take him down a peg or two. Eh? Because if we don't ... yeah? ... nobody else will.

He starts setting up the recorder and directional mike.

Liz looks in the mirror, turns side-on, examines her figure.

Liz Do my tits look alright in this?

Greg Can tits ever look wrong? Eh? (*Snorts.*)

Liz Do you think I look, old?

Greg You look marvellous. You're a stunner. Are you hungry? I'm starving. I could murder a curry. Or a Chinky. You fancy a Chinky? Liz? You fancy a Chinky later? We'll go for a bite, we'll debrief.

Liz No thanks! I've had enough of your debriefings, Greg.

Greg Oh, you'll debrief all right. You're not going home without debriefing. I'll debrief you if it's the last thing I do. So, to speak. Eh?

Liz Forget it!

Greg C'mon ... I'll take you out for dinner. We'll chew the fat.

Liz I'm not hungry!

Greg It'll do you good. And apart from anything else ... it's the least you can do ... eh? Sit with me, break bread, break a, a poppadom. As they say ...

Liz Who says that?

Greg Eh?

Liz Who says, 'break a poppadom'?

Greg I don't know ...

Liz What does that mean?

Greg I don't know ...

Barry comes out of the bathroom at speed, staring, panting a little. See's Liz transformed, glares

Barry (to Liz) Who the fuck are you?

Greg That's Liz.

Barry Jane?

Liz Yes it's me, plain Jane, nice to meet you (*shakes his hand.*)

Barry *refers to the packet of cocaine on the table*

Barry I've really got to stop taking this shit ... Alright then plain Jane ... Where's the thing?

Greg Barry-

Barry Where's the, where's the wire ... ? (*Lunging.*)

Greg Hey - hey - hey -

Liz What did you do that for? That really hurt.

Greg People, please ...

Liz Did you see that? (Fucking idiot ...)

Greg (I know it's ...)

Barry Take your dress off.

Greg Now what's he doing?

Liz Get away from me -

Barry (*grabbing her*) Take your dress off -

Greg What the fuck - ?

Liz You'll rip my-don't you touch me - GET OFF ME - GET HIM OFF OF ME!

Barry *stops. They all stare at each other.*

Blackout

Act Two

Scene One

Barry *sitting, stares into space.*

Liz *offers Barry a whiskey from the mini bar.*

He takes it, screws off the top and downs it in one.

Greg *is setting up a mike*

Greg All done? Comfy? (*Adjusting mike.*) Excellent. So! (*Very gently now.*) The thing is. (*Pause.*) You are a man who has everything? A wonderful family? Two healthy happy kids in good schools? You're rich? Famous? And yet you show contempt for fame. You show contempt for ordinary people out there who look up to you and will be so disappointed. Because, you see, the thing is, Barry, in the eyes of decent society, your behaviour is not very responsible, is it?

Barry I haven't done anything.

Greg Barry, you've done *everything*.

Barry OK, look ...

Greg I'm looking.

Barry 'Greg ...' it is Greg, isn't it? You know what this is all about? You want 'the scoop'? I'll tell you. *Insurance*. They can't insure me for the next series ... because I wouldn't take a drugs test.

Greg Why not, Barry?

Barry Because it would go on my record I took a drugs test.

Greg So?

Barry People would talk. Obviously Ruth **must** have decided because of...

Greg Because of a *drugs test*?

Barry Because nobody would *insure* me. And because I'm not, I'm probably not getting the exact *ratings* or something. eh? And that makes me a *terrible person* ... and so, and so now, you see, everybody hates me ... and now it's all this. (*Pause.*) I made a mistake. *Who cares?*

Liz 'Who cares?' Apart from your wife? After everything she's been through.

Barry My w ... my wife?

Liz Do you behave like this at home?

Barry I... sometimes ...

Greg What we're saying is that to normal people, to your wife and kids, to people like us ... people like you are special. You've had a life most people can only dream about, and this is how you repay them. By setting a bad example.

Barry Well, I think you're setting a bad example.

Greg How's that, Barry?

Barry People read this spiteful, sneaky bullshit and they think it's OK to be spiteful, sneaky bullshitters.

Greg Well, I disagree.

Barry Is that the example you want to set? Is that the kind of world you want to live in?

Greg OK, well, OK, you see, the point is, you're a pretty morally bankrupt person ...

Barry This is ridiculous . .

Greg ... and nobody even realises. And it's time that they did. It's time people knew who you really are, Barry.

Barry Why?

Greg Don't you think people have a right to know about you?

Barry Why?

Greg Because if they found out what you were really like they might not find you so funny. And it's in the public interest that they do find out.

Barry What's interesting about it?

Greg It's in the public interest.

Barry Tell me. What's interesting about it? I'm interested ...
Greg Bec ... because it's wrong.
Barry Are you — is he serious?
Greg It is! It's against the law.
Barry Are you mad?
Greg And it's, you know, it's bad for you. And it's bad for, you know...
Barry Who?
Greg *Society ...*
Barry How is 'society' going to know?
Greg They'll know when they read it in the paper.
Barry Don't put it in the paper.
Greg I'm sorry?
Barry Don't put it in the paper, you fuckwit.
Greg Are you going to take out an injunction?
Barry You bet your life.
Greg On what grounds?
Barry On the grounds that you're a fuckwit. I'm going to get up a writ and I'm going to have you in chunks ...
Greg Well, I'm sorry you feel that way about it.
Barry Using the 'privacy laws' ...
Liz Clause ten in the European Convention on Human Rights, absolutely, the right to privacy.
Greg (Liz ...)
Liz And clause eight is the right to freedom of expression.
Barry Because ... what are you expressing?
Liz Sorry?
Barry What are you expressing? You can't even say. What are you expressing? Come on.
Liz *looks blank.*
Barry See? It's like waiting for an egg to boil.
Greg I think that that would be a very dangerous idea, Barry ...
Barry Really? Enlighten me ...

Greg Because, you see, I think that would be very harmful ...

Barry That's the idea ...

Greg Because, you see, if you take out an injunction —

Barry Harmful to who?

Greg Are you listening ...?

Barry Harmful to whom?

Greg If you take out an injunction? You are harming . . no, listen ... the Judiciary. No, don't laugh — because you see if you go around pretending to be 'Mister Saturday Night' when, in reality, you are actually some kind of randy, womanising, drug-addicted bully and you can stop me writing the truth, then anybody can. If you can stop me, Barry, then any old lying, cheating, gerrymandering, arms- dealing, flag-sucking, sadomasochistic, parliamentary wide boy can and that's just not good enough.

Barry Who did you have in mind?

Greg The point is you're not who you say you are.

Barry Who am I?

Greg You're a hypocrite.

Barry It takes one to know one. Don't you have anything better to do? If Jesus Christ were alive today you'd be going through his *bins*. What do you get paid to do this? What do they give you, eternal youth?

Liz You just assaulted me ...

Barry Do they teach you to fly?

Liz You just assaulted me ...

Barry I wish I had ...

Liz I could've called the police ...

Greg What if you do it to somebody else, Barry? Eh? It's not very nice, is it? Because, you see, when people like you do things like that then people like us have no option than to do things like this, otherwise you'll only do it again.

Barry *stares from one to the other.*

Liz We're not saying you weren't provoked ...

Greg There's two sides to everything ...

Liz Nobody's saying it's all your fault ...

Greg I'm sure everybody understands that you're under a lot of pressure ...

Liz Pressure ...

Greg And you're in a business where the highs are very high ...

Liz Very high, Greg ...

Greg But the lows are also pretty, you know, deep ...

Liz (*simultaneous with 'deep'*) Low — deep — mm ...

Greg I'm sure Valerie does her best. She's only human.

Liz You're only human ...

Greg Nobody's perfect ...

Liz We're not perfect.

Greg (*gently*) Would you like to tell us what happened there, Barry? Would you like to talk us through that, because I'm sure people would like to know about that and I'm sorry, whether you like it or not — it's in your interest that we nail the exact details because otherwise how else do we explain this to your, to your public? Because this is all going to come as quite a, quite a shock to some people. Eh? Can you, can you understand what I'm trying to say?

Barry *stares.*

Barry W ... I don't know what you want me to ...

Greg No, OK, don't start that again, she told us all about it.

Barry She ... who?

Liz Valerie. Your wife.

Greg She told us, Barry.

Barry She ...?

Greg Yes. Yes. Everything. She was very, you know, very forthcoming.

Pause.

Barry (*stares*) She ... wouldn't ... she ... wouldn't ...

Greg She's very worried about you. Says you have a lot of problems, my friend.

Barry No ...

Liz She gave us all the juice, Barry.

Greg (OK, Liz, just —)

Barry ... I don't believe you ...

Liz Why don't you ask her?

Barry I think I'd know if my own wife

Liz Then how did we know? How could we know unless she told us?

Barry Everybody knows ...

Pause.

Greg Tell us about Valerie, Barry.

Barry Look, she's just ... we're no longer together. OK? We separated. She doesn't like my yolks ... OK? Is that what you want? You want funnies.

Greg If you think it's funny.

Barry I don't really like to talk about it, strangely enough ...

Liz Just as a way of simply *understanding* ... it might help ...

Greg Right now, Barry probably needs all the understanding he can get, I'd say, Lizzie ...

Liz I'd say so, Greg ...

Greg Eh, Barry? Eh, mate?

Pause.

Barry (*stares*) OK ... huh ... (*Pause.*) You see ... OK ... she's a bit of a, what we say in the trade, 'difficult to work with'. Erm ... it's a bit difficult to explain. It's complicated, I put my hand up to that ...

Liz What's complicated about it?

Greg Give it a go.

Long pause.

Barry (*stares, sits*) She ... she's found somebody else. Someone she went to school with. Not from showbiz. A normal person.

Liz Well, that's terrible.

Barry Mm. The kids like him. Because he's just an ordinary bloke, I suppose. They can go to the park, nobody bothers them.

Greg So it's pretty serious?

Barry I, oh, I don't think so ...

Greg Still. It just goes to show.

Barry You see — we've been in 'mediation'. Trying to thrash out a, a settlement. She wants the house, and she'll get it because of the, because of the kids. But it's my house in the first place. I bought it when I signed my first contract with London Weekend Television

Liz Are you a good father?

Barry I — I'm not a bad father ...

Liz And yet here you are ...

Barry Is this about money? Is that what she ...? She hasn't got any money and so now it's all this ...? I'll tell you something about money. No matter how much you've got it's never enough. It's never enough.

Greg When was the last time you took the kiddies to McDonald's, Barry?

Barry I'm not allowed to take the kiddies to McDonald's. They're on diets. When was the last time you took yours?

Greg That's none of your concern ...

Barry See? See how you like it.

Liz What sort of diets?

Barry OK. Look ... she wants custody of the ... I don't know what to do ... marvellous, isn't it ... you have children to take away the, the *bitterness*, that's why we have them, to take away the cynicism — then somebody takes away the children. She's a, she's a lovely woman, you see, but to all intents and purposes, perfectly *nuts*. D'you follow what I ... ? (*Pause. Staring.*)

Greg You said earlier that you'd made a mistake. Do you think you've made quite a few mistakes perhaps ... if you add them up?

Liz Everybody makes mistakes ...

Greg Absolutely ...

Liz Would you like to talk about that?

Pause.

Barry I made some mistakes, absolutely ...

Greg Yes — *good* —

Liz Excellent.

Barry And I don't know how to put things right ...

Greg Mm. Sure. (Into the mike.)

Barry (Eh?)

Greg (Into the mike.)

Barry (*into mike*) I've lost everything. I've lost my wife. My family. My *agent* probably ...

Greg You have now.

Barry I don't really know what to do.

Liz I really liked what you said about how you loved the ordinary people, the ordinary fans, the nurses and the teachers. Do you think they might still love you? Even after everything you've done.

Barry I ...

Greg Even after all of this?

Barry I... I hope so.

Liz Do you still love them?

Barry Y ... I think ...

Liz Then why did you do what you did?

Barry I... I don't know.

Greg Would you say you were an angry person?

Barry I can get angry ...

Liz We've seen that. And some of the things you said about your fans ... you said they were 'obese', and 'spotty', you said that some of them had been 'lobotomized' ... that's quite *cruel*, isn't it?

Barry Mm ...

Liz Quite callous.

Barry Mm ...

Liz Do you think the pain in people's lives is funny?

Barry *just stares.*

Liz Do you think the darkness in people's lives is funny?

Barry *just stares.*

Greg Don't you think it's time you grew up? (*Pause*) Do you have any regrets?

Barry Yeah ... I have a few, (*and then again too few to mention. Ha!*)

Greg What do you regret?

Barry Everything.

Greg Do you regret what happened with Valerie?

Barry I regret what happened there, obviously, and with my ... with my kids. I miss them all the time. I just ... miss them ...

Greg Well, we can see that ...

Pause.

Barry Sometimes I wonder whether I... whether I drove her away. Something did. The pressures of fame perhaps. The pressures of fame on me, obviously, which, indirectly, I expect she bore the brunt of ...

Liz And how does that make you feel? About your fame? Do you -

Barry Well. I'm very annoyed. Obviously.

Liz Do you blame fame?

Barry W ... how do you mean?

Liz For what's happened to you. Do you blame fame?

Barry N ... yeah, yes. I do. As a matter of fact.

Liz You blame fame.

Barry I blame fame.

Liz The 'fame game'.

Barry Yes.

Liz You blame ... ?

Barry I blame the f ... the fame game. Mm. It's like a, a, a drug, you see. It's more like a drug than ... than drugs!

Greg Excellent. Oh, that's very good.

Liz So you don't blame yourself.

Barry I blame myself a bit too. It's a sort of two-pronged attack ...

Greg And what would you like to say to all those people who looked up to you and respected you, who you've betrayed now?

Barry I'd just ... I'd just ... I'd like to say I'm, you know, I'm sorry and all that.

Liz You don't seem very sorry. Don't you feel ashamed?

Barry Uh?

Greg 'Ashamed.' Aren't you terribly ashamed by what's been going on?

Barry I am. Yes. I am ashamed.

Liz How ashamed?

Barry Very ashamed.

Greg How do you hope that people will respond to this dreadful news? When they buy the paper with their hard-earned money and they open the paper and it's all, you know, they have to read all this? How do you think they'll feel? How would you like them to respond? With compassion?

Barry I'd ... I'd hope ...

Greg Well, do you think you can change?

Barry I don't know.

Liz Would you like to try?

Barry Y ... yes. (*Into mike*) I'll certainly give it a go ...

Greg And what happens if you aren't able to change? What happens if, say, if Valerie or your kids ask you to change but you still can't stop ... what would happen then?

Pause.

Barry I'd rather, I'd rather ... you know, I should think my life wouldn't be worth living.

Greg I see, so you'd rather ... what does that mean? 'Life wouldn't be worth living.' What does ...?

Barry It means what ... what I just said. It means what it means.

Greg I see — so — I'm sorry — I have to ask these questions — are you saying — what are you actually saying? That if that happened, you'd rather ...?

Barry In a, in a funny way, maybe, I would rather ... not go on living ... mm ...

Greg You'd rather 'not go on living' ... What does that ... does that mean you'd rather, what, you'd rather ...?

Barry I'd rather —

Greg You'd rather 'die' ...? (*Pause.*) And that's a solemn vow.

Barry That's a solemn vow.

Greg On your children's lives?

Barry On my children ... on my ... on my k ... on my kids'

He stares into space. He puts his head in his hands, sniffs, wipes eyes.

Greg Excellent. This is really good stuff, Barry. Are you ready to do some pictures now?

Greg *takes a camera from the bag and changes lenses.*

Barry No, come on now. Look at me. I'm welling up now ...

He turns away. Wipes his eyes, sniffs. Blows his nose.

Greg It's all right, take your time ...

Barry *raises a glass to drink. Greg raises the camera to take a shot.*

Barry *lowers the glass without drinking.*

Greg That's right, with the, with the glass ...

Barry *raises the glass to drink again. Greg raises the camera to take a shot. Barry lowers the glass.*

Beat.

Barry *raises the glass and quickly lowers it. Greg simultaneously does the same with the camera.*

Greg How about a cigarette?

Barry *shakes his head, he just stares*

Greg *takes flash photos. Barry doesn't respond.*

Greg just, turn your head to — no, towards me ... splendid ...

Flash photos

Barry OK, well, anyway I think I'd like to just call my legal representative now please ...

Greg ... Sorry?

Barry Well, erm, he probably ought to know about this ... I'm not so sure about making vows ...

Greg We won't hold you to it ...

Barry *puts the glass down.*

Barry I'm not supposed to be drinking ...

Liz Well, Barry, you had plenty from the minibar ...

Greg And yes, and, you see, no, because I couldn't stop you ... could you, Liz — ?

Barry (*takes out his phone*) Well, anyway, I'm calling Kevin just to be on the safe side.

Greg You helped yourself to drinks from the minibar and then you threatened me and then you assaulted her.

Liz D'you want me to 'legal it', Greg?

Greg 'Legal it' Liz...

Liz I'll text them, legal the story, it's 'zoo time' right?

Greg It's 'zoo time' Liz.

Barry 'Zoo time'? What the f...

Liz (*texting*) It'll go out tomorrow morning ... early.

Barry Jesus Chr... (*into phone*) Hello, Kevin? I'm sorry, Gwen? Hello love. Look, can I possibly speak to Kevin ever so briefly? This is rather urgent ... no, OK, no, ... I'll ... I'll hold. Marvellous. Thank you, dear ... (*He waits.*)

Greg Why was your wife in hospital, Barry?

Barry (*confused*) Wh ...?

Liz Why was Valerie in hospital, Barry?

Barry Hospital? What hospital?

Greg That hospital that your wife was in. Is that why she left you?

Barry No — no — no —

Greg No — hold on —

Barry She's been very ill.

Greg I know she has, I know, Barry, and why is she ill?

Barry I... I don't know ... nobody really knows. It's just one of those things.

Greg Just one of those things. OK, well, you see the thing is, she's been under a lot of pressure, hasn't she, Barry? A lot of stress, a lot of strain ...

Barry Y ... well ... we both have, yeah ...

Greg And you say your behaviour might have contributed?

Barry ...Sorry?

Greg The stress you have caused might have contributed to her illness?

Barry It's a sort of vicious circle ...

Liz It is rather vicious, isn't it, Barry? Eh? Don't talk about your fame, don't talk about your lawyer, eh? You, you big *bully*. Eh? What did you do to her?

Barry W ... I don't know what you're talking about.

Greg Well, I think you do.

Barry She found a lump.

Pause.

Greg A, a, a ... how do you mean?

Barry She found a lump ... she had a biopsy ... we thought it was a cyst ... she started getting these pains... she went into hospital for tests, at Christmas, just for a, just for a scan. Then it was the, you know, the barium enema and the ... we went private, went first class, do it properly. Well, there's no messing around then. It's all been a bit sudden ...

Liz Why didn't you tell us all this?

Barry Well, I don't tell you *everything*. It's none of your business.
(*Phone.*) Kevin, my dear, dear friend. How the fucking hell are you ...?

He takes the phone to the bathroom and shuts the door.

Pause.

Greg Fuuuuuck.

Pause.

Liz Good story though ...

Greg It's a great story. In fact, it's probably a better story ... The *divorce* ... the kiddies ... (I know what that's like.)

Liz (OK, Greg ...)

Greg (When there's children involved, Lizzie —)

Liz (Whatever ...)

Greg And now she's having all these problems, health prob — no, don't laugh, this is what happens as you get older ...

Liz Oh please.

Greg It's really sad ...

Liz Yes. 'Sad.' Excellent ...

Greg ... It really is, it's a, it's tragic ... I mean ...

Liz 'Tragic', good. I like that ... (God, look at my hair.)

Greg A perfectly ordinary, *normal* woman ... married to a brilliant,

gifted entertainer, an irresistible double act inseparable for all those years right up until the tragic end — which is when the strain began to show a bit, and she ran off with somebody else. It's perfectly understandable.

Liz *concentrates on removing her make-up in the mirror.*

Liz Simple and effective.

Greg Simple and at the same time ... uniquely complex

Liz Two uniquely complex people ...

Greg In *his* pain he turned to...

Liz Unable to face it he regrettably found himself turning to ...

Greg Yes, yes, but only because of *her* pain ...

Liz Absolutely. Or: he didn't even care.

Greg How do you mean?

Liz Maybe he didn't even feel any pain. That's the kind of person he is. They had everything *and yet* ... even as she lay dying, he was in a five-star luxury hotel room snorting large amounts of fucking hard drugs ... eh? Propositioning other *women*. Eh?

Greg O-ho. Cynical.

Liz People like cynicism.

Greg It's risky.

Liz I like the risk.

Greg What if he's lying? He's so manipulative...

Liz We could check with the hospital ...

Greg Check it with Valerie ...

Liz I'm not checking with her ...

Greg Check it with her, and we'll know what we've got.

He goes to the bathroom door, listens.

Shit. What are they talking about?

He grabs a glass and tries to listen through the door

Fuck it ... can't hear a thing

Liz *roots through his bag to find the earpiece from the bug he planted*

What if he's talking to Valerie? I could just ...

She waves the earpiece at him. He slaps his forehead

Of course, the bathroom's bugged ... give me ...

He listens through the earpiece

Fuck ... it's dead ...

Liz Found it ...?

Greg He must have.

He comes back and sits.

I feel a bit sorry for him really ...

Liz What do you mean?

Greg I'm saying ... I just ... I feel sorry for him now.

Liz I don't understand what you mean.

Greg Well, don't you?

Liz (*blank, mystified*) Don't I what?

Greg Feel a bit sorry for him?

Liz No. He's an idiot.

Greg Exactly. He's just an idiot. It's not against the law to be an idiot.

Liz And it's not against the law to call him an idiot. He knows what he's doing.

Greg His wife is dying.

Liz Well, he should have thought of that before.

Greg Before what?

Liz Before he became famous and started acting like this. It's no use crying to us. Just because some relative — OK, his wife or whatever — may or may not be rather ill — which we don't know for a fact — it could well change — she might make a full recovery — she might be in remission as we speak — but does this make his behaviour excusable?

She produces a mobile phone and dials.

Hiya, Valerie, it's Liz. 'Lizabeth from the newspaper. How are you? I'm very-very-well indeed thank you very much. Busy-busy-busy. Still at it. Mm. Ha-ha. How are the ponies? (*Pause.*) Oh, they're quarter-horses, really? Quarter horses, twice the fun. Ha-ha. (*Pause, moving on.*) OK, well, anyway, what I wanted to talk to you about ... mm ... I saw him this evening ... mm ... well, to be perfectly honest he was a bit on the ... you could sort of smell it ... on his breath, mm ... well, you see, Valerie, I am rather concerned ... yes, I know you are, I am too ... just a little anxious ... well, you see, he's been saying some rather disturbing things. about you actually ... well, he said you'd been very poorly ... mm ... mm

... which is something I didn't ... no I didn't ... I didn't know that either ... really? You poor thing ... actually, have you got a minute? (*Pause.*) No, OK, sure, that's absolutely ... OK ... bye-bye ... take care ... bye-bye ...

She hangs up, stares.

Greg Is she OK?

Liz Irritable bowel syndrome.

Greg Irr ... wh ... ?

Liz That's what she said.

Greg W ... was she joking?

Liz I don't think so. That's what she's got. IBS.

Greg Oh ...

Liz Yes. 'Oh ...'

Greg That's a pity.

Pause.

Liz Well, it's probably still pretty unpleasant, Greg.

Greg Mm. Oh. Very uncomfortable.

Liz And quite worrying, I should imagine.

Greg Some people die if they eat nuts ...

Liz I know, and he doesn't even care. He doesn't.

Pause

Greg D'you think she's lying?

Liz I... no. I think it's more likely he's lying.

Greg D'you think it's a wind-up?

Liz Maybe they're both liars.

Greg Well, that's just wrong.

Liz Yes and I'm sorry but no, that's just not on.

Greg I'm sorry.

Liz That's just rude.

Greg It's not very helpful.

Liz Now what are we supposed to do?

Barry *comes back in, replaces the phone, examines himself in the mirror, straightens his tie, smooths his clothes.*

Barry OK. So, Here's the situation —

Liz Why was your wife really in hospital, Barry?

Barry This is my position —

Liz Really, for real. In real life. What did you do to her?

Barry My position is this —

Liz Did you lose your temper ...?

Barry What I think —

Liz Did you lose your temper with her ...?

Barry What I think is that this is 'slander' ...

Liz Well, I disagree, because, you see, I think that there's something you're not telling us here ...

Barry And if you write it then it's 'libel' ...

Liz Because we've talked to Valerie.

Barry And what you just did, love, is called 'entrapment'. OK? And Kevin my lawyer just spent all week in the High Court, and he loves it there, he's really good at it, and so, you see, now I'm going to get a writ and sue you ...

Liz I phoned Valerie and —

Barry And the next time I see you will be in the High Court —

Greg Barry —just —

Liz I phoned Valerie —

Barry Because I'll tell you another thing —

Greg OK, let's just —

Barry You picked the wrong guy to do this to -

Greg Settle down now —

Barry OK, but you picked the wrong guy.

Greg OK.

Barry You think I'm bullshitting? You think everybody's bullshitting. Because you're a bullshitter and so you assume that everybody else is too ...

Liz I phoned Valerie. She didn't say anything about a biopsy.

Barry Well, are you surprised?

Liz Why didn't she, OK, then, why didn't she tell us ... ?

Barry BECAUSE IT'S PRIVATE! DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? IT'S PRIVATE! IT'S PRIVATE! YOU STUPID BITCH — JESUS! *(Pause.)* Tell me something. Does it bother you being so dumb? Because that's, you see, I think that's the problem here. The trouble is that you have no imagination ... you have zero imagination ... and so humanity is a mystery to you ... the stink of your own spleen and bile — the pain you inflict — is a mystery to you ... you people ... I don't think you know what you do. I don't think you know what you do. And that's a very frightening thing. *(Pause.)* Is my life worth so little? Is my life worth so little now that unless I'm in the paper, making a fool of myself, I'm, what, no good to anyone anymore?

Greg Anyway, getting back to what we were talking about ...

Barry You think I'm a schmuck?

Liz Please —

Barry Sue you? I should kill you! Then you'd learn.

Greg I've no doubt you're quite capable of that, Baz —

Barry *(going over to Greg)* You think this is funny? I'll show you something funny ... I'll show you something funny ... I'll show you something funny, eh?

Barry *grabs him by the elbow, drags him to one side.*

Greg Wait — wait — wait — wait — wait — wait — wait — wait —

Barry *(squeezing Greg's balls)* If you ever come near me or my family again I'm going to get hold of you and I'm going to shoot you in the balls.

Barry *spits on the floor and goes.*

They stare.

Silence.

Greg OK. Look. OK. Look. OK. Look. OK. Look. OK. Look. There is actually an editorial issue here. The issue being that — we have no idea what's going on — and — if we don't get our story straight — we're going to look foolish. We'll have to spike the story, or he'll get up a writ and sue the paper — cost him two hundred pounds — no, listen to me — I believe him.

Liz We've still got the recording ...

Greg How much did he drink? How pissed was he ... ?

Liz You know how pissed he was ...

Greg Then it's tainted evidence — it really is entrapment — and now

I'm going to lose my job — because you fucked it up — and it was my idea — and, and, and I'm the chief correspondent on this...

Liz You won't lose your job.

Greg Liz, the IPSO.

Liz (*scoffs*) Oh, fuck the Independent Press Standards Organisation!

Greg I'm on the Board of the IPSO! I've got a family to feed. This is how I put food on the table.

Liz Face it Greg — they all hate you.

Greg That's none of your business.

Liz You're not even trying now. Why don't you just go after him and lick his arsehole?

Pause

Greg Why don't I just lick yours?)

Liz (Sorry .. . ?)

Greg (Why don't I lick yours?)

Pause.

Liz (Don't be revolting.) Just pull yourself together . (*Pause.*) Are you listening to me? Greg? (*Producing mobile phone.*) I'm going to legal it.

Greg WILL YOU STOP SAYING THAT! (*Grabbing her phone.*)

Liz If you can't stand the heat then go back to the Wandsworth Guardian and raise money for charity — buy your local hospital a new incubator — go to church fêtes and stare at prize marrows until your fucking eyeballs bleed ...

Greg OK, shut up ...

Liz What on earth has happened to you?

Greg Shut up, Liz ...

Liz What did he do to you? Just calm down —

Greg I AM PERFECTLY FUCKING CALM!

Blackout.

Scene Two

Barry *in a tracksuit.*

Liz *dressed casually.*

Liz It's just such a shock.

Barry It was ... very ... sudden.

Liz God. I know.

Barry Yes.

Liz God.

Pause.

Barry She went back into hospital just after you ... it was everywhere, you know ... nothing they could do ... (*Gestures.*) She went home for a while and they put her on a, you know they gave her oxygen in a tank which helped for a bit, but she had so little ... (*Gestures. Stares.*) She didn't want to go into a hospice, you see ... she wanted to be at home with ... with her ... ponies. I'd go round there a bit just to keep her company ... comfort her when she ... she sometimes would cry in the night and so on ... she couldn't sleep ... she'd just be thinking about ... I'd hear her crying to herself quietly and ... uh, broke my heart really ... She was just ... very frightened, you see ... poor old thing ... (*Pause.*) I'd try and be there to hold her hand. Give her a cuddle and cheer her up a bit ... I took her out a bit when she wanted to get some air. I took her around a few of the old ... all her favourite places ... took her for a curry, to her favourite curry place down in the village, she wanted to say hi, or bye ... but you know there was no tables, you see, we couldn't get a table and nobody was, nobody she knew was on that night and so it was a bit of a ... it was just a ... uh ... I felt so sorry for. She was just being friendly. She just wanted to say goodbye. (*Pause.*) I took her to the market ...took her around all the old stalls, the cheese stall, the flower stall, the fishmonger, you know the kind of ... so she could tell them. Tell them she was actually going to die and all that. They didn't believe her. I told them, I said ... (*Gestures.*) They didn't believe me. Thought I was joking. Typical. (*Pause.*) So, you see it was all very ... six weeks it took. Seventeen years of marriage all gone in ... (*Pause.*) It was ... very, very sad really ... very sad.

Liz Would you like a banana? They're good for you.

She hands him a banana from the fruit bowl. She takes one too.

Barry Mm. Packed with zinc.

Liz I know it's ...

Barry Good for the nut.

Liz Mm.

Barry Full of antioxidants. I'm an expert on all that now ...

He peels his banana. Liz peels hers.

Silence.

Liz It must have been unimaginably awful ...

Barry Yeah, yes, it was. Unimaginably ...

Liz I can't imagine what you went through ...

Barry No, I know you can't ... *(he takes a bite.)*

Pause. She takes a bite.

Liz At least you'd had a chance to, you know, say your peace and all that. At least you'd had a chance to, you know, make amends.

Barry In our fashion, I suppose ...

Liz ... I think you probably did.

Barry Mm. Well ...

They eat. He is becoming emotional, gesturing with the banana between bites.

Technically speaking she'd filed for divorce. I'd thought maybe I could talk her out of it. But I couldn't change her mind after ... *(Pause.)* She was all the more determined . once they make their minds up, you see, the good ones, there's no going back.

They eat in silence.

Liz Thanks for meeting me. *(Pause.)* It's very kind of you. *Pause.)* After all the ... you know ... *(Pause.)* Greg lost his job. *(Pause.)* I got a pay rise ... *(Pause.)* I bought a car. A Mini. *(Mimes 'driving'.)* Are you all right?

Barry You ... you don't know what you did. Her last few weeks ... you took away her ... will to ... her dignity, you see. The strain, you see. The stress. Calling her up all hours accusing me ... accusing me of ... you don't know what it did to her ...

Liz Well, Barry, you know ... she was quite, she was probably quite ill before I came along ...

Barry She wasn't fucking dying before you came along!

Liz I didn't come here to argue ...

Barry Well, I did. I came here to argue. Come on, let's argue.
(Pause.) They axed my show.

Liz I'm sorry about the show ... it was so

Barry No you're not.

Pause.

Liz I never wanted to do this, you know. I wanted to be a music critic ... or a, you know, a rock journalist.

Barry Yeah, really 'make a difference' ... Really 'give something back...'

Liz You don't know what I'm really like.

Barry O-ho, I think I do ...

Liz You don't know what I think about or what I, you know, really care about ... don't laugh ... don't laugh at me ... I know you think I'm 'shallow'. You're entitled to your —

Barry Entitled to my opinion? What's it got to do with opinion?

Pause.

Liz I'm not shallow ...

Barry You're so shallow you're evaporating ...

Liz Well, I'm trying to say I'm sorry ...

Barry Mm-hmm — is it going to take long ... ? (*Checks his watch*)

Liz I just want you to be happy now ...

Barry Do I *look* happy? (*Snorts.*) Jesus. How *likely* do you think that is?

Pause.

Liz I'm just ... so sorry now ... I don't know what to ...

Silence

Barry *takes milk from the minibar and drains most of it.*

Barry My dearest wish ... I wish I could say: 'My wife ... my loving wife ... she loved me ... we had a good innings.' I'd give anything. The nicest, gentlest, dearest woman. The dearest woman. It was a priv ... a privilege to have known her.

He finishes flit banana and drops the skin on the floor. She puts hers down without finishing.

Liz I know how much you two people really meant to each other. I know you loved her very dearly.

Barry Yes, yeah, I did.

He sits and drinks milk.

Liz And she loved you very dearly.

Barry Y ... well ... (you know ...)

Liz She did. And if you don't mind me saying (knowing her as I did —)

Barry (Well, you —)

Liz You came back from all sorts of terrible ... personal. I mean, you were bonkers. You! Cor! You were mad for it!

Pause.

Barry I don't do that any more. I don't drink.

Liz None of my business.

Barry I don't.

Liz Even if you did —

Barry I don't.

Liz Even if you did —

Barry Well, I don't. I stopped.

Liz OK. Good. As a mark of respect.

Barry I stopped because I wouldn't have been able to handle it.

Liz *And* as a mark of respect.

Barry Because I would have probably gone insane. Waiting about in that hospital day and night. Waiting for the end. I had to be ... I had to be fit. For Valerie. For the kids ...

Liz Exactly. Respect for your, for your family —

Barry I even went to the gym. That's how much I... that's how scared I was ... I don't get depressed any more.

Liz You feel you've atoned?

Barry Eh?

Liz You feel you've *atoned*.

Barry I'm quite toned, yeah, I haven't let myself' go. I swim a lot ...

Liz You don't get depressed any more. Why?

Barry Well, you see, to put it bluntly ... because I'm alive, love. What have I got to be depressed about? To put it brutally, I'm not lying flat on my back being slowly suffocated to death. It's like I've got a, a ...

Liz A second chance.

Barry Well ...

Liz A new lease on life.

Barry I pulled myself together a bit, yeah.

Liz Do you think she knows?

Pause.

Barry How would she know?

Liz Do you think she's, you know, watching you?

Barry How d'you mean?

Liz From above. Do you think she's perhaps watching over you?

Pause.

Barry (*snorting*) I doubt it, love.

Liz How do you know? She might be. How else do you explain it? You're a reformed character. It's a miracle.

Barry I just —

Liz If there's any consolation this is it.

Barry What?

Liz In a sense you could say that by, that — almost — by dying, Valerie basically, in a sense, saved you.

Pause.

Barry Oh, OK, well, I see where you're coming from ...

Thy stare at each other. Silence.

Liz Could I qu ... could I, you know, quote you on this?

Barry W... ?

Liz Could I, could I, sort of, I'm saying ... just in case I do a piece ... just a small piece ...

Pause.

Barry I'd rather you didn't.

Liz Fine, fine, no, obviously —

Barry I thought you —

Liz No, I know you came to —

Barry You said you wanted to —

Liz Pay my, yes, pay my respects. Give my, you know, condolences. And all that. Mm. (You've got a little bit of ...) (*She gestures.*)

He wipes away a milk moustache.

(Hang on ...)

Barry (I get it?)

Liz (*wipes*) (I got it.)

Silence.

I was only going to say — you know — if you don't mind me saying — I'm sorry but I really have to say this — I think it's a very special story and what's more a, a very moving story and I would like very much if you could find it in yourself to allow me to share, to *share* this very *private* story ...

Barry Share it with who?

Liz With everybody.

Pause.

Barry No, if it's all the same, I think I'll be on my way ...

Liz Are you going home?

Barry Yes, I've got the car and I'll just ... you know ... have a biscuit and go to bed.

Liz Well, I really think we should do this. For, you know, if not for you then for V ... Valerie ... and at least ... for the *children* ...

Pause.

Barry No, I'd just as soon keep my powder dry.

Liz (*gently*) OK. Good. That's all right. That's fine (*pause.*) I'm only saying, you know, I don't know what *your* memories are but *my* memories, most people's memories of you two are pretty, you know ... (*Pause.*) I think people think you, you know, had your differences ... I think they think you had your ups and downs . . I think they think you perhaps didn't like each other a whole lot sometimes ... perhaps you weren't very nice to each other sometimes ... and so they draw the wrong conclusions ...

Pause.

Barry Well, all the same, I'd rather just be left alone now.

Liz But, you see, only the other day I was saying to my features editor — who absolutely agrees with me on this by the way — which is nice —

Barry (*stands*) Could I just ... get back to you on this?

Liz Well, if you need reassuring ...

She produces a mobile phone.

Barry I don't . .

Liz I know how much she loved you. I know she *adored* you ... deep down. I know she *forgave* you. She didn't want to leave you.

Pause.

Barry She ... ? How do you know?

Liz (*dials*) It's *obvious*. She loved you to bits. (Hold on. It's gone to voicemail. I'll text.)

She texts.

He hovers.

Barry (*staring*) I remember once she told me, she said she'd never wanted anybody else.

Liz (*simultaneous with 'else'*) Never even wanted anybody else, well, there you go ...

Barry One of the last things she said: she never even looked at anybody else. Not seriously ...

Liz And why would she?

Barry It, it haunts me to this day ... I had this dream about her ... I dream about her every night ...

Liz (*texting, not listening*) Mm, I know ... that's right ...

Barry It's always the same dream ... every single night. I dream she's still here ... or she's come back somehow. But, you see, she's terrifically old, for some reason, a little old lady. A happy little old lady. Like my mum. Older than me. I'm like her toyboy. And I take her in my arms ... it's so good to hold her, just to hold her, she's very warm ... it doesn't matter that she's so old, it's still her as far as I'm concerned ... the only trouble is, she's so old and frail, I'm afraid she's going to kick the bucket again.

Liz Well, it's time to put the record straight. This is a, you know, a really great love story.

Barry You know ... my kids .. my children ... are the only people who've ever ... *(Pause.)* People talk about being a single mother ... being a single father isn't a million laughs ...

Liz Well, anyway, I really believe in this. I'm passionate about it. I can, you know, really make it happen ...

Barry You ... ?

Liz And I can get you a really good/es.

Her phone rings.

Barry *stares into space.*

Liz Get you a decent chunk of ... probably spread it over two consecutive ... you know ... *(Into phone.)* Hi, hi-ya. I'm here now. Oh. Is she at lunch? Again? Greedy bitch. Ha, ha. No. No, don't tell her ... ha, ha, ha, you know what she's like ... 'sensitive', I know ... ha, ha, ha, ha ... I know, she gets so cross ... no, yeah, I'll ... oh, has she? Great. Put her on. *(lives thumbs up to Barry.)* Hi, it's me. Liz. Yeah I'm here now. He's with me now. Absolutely fine. Absolutely. Hold on. *(She offers the phone to Barry.)* Go for it. Go on. *(Into phone.)* I'm going to put him on.

She offers phone to Barry. He hesitates

For the children. Barry. For the children.

She offers the phone again.

He takes the phone, stares at it, puts it to his ear, still hesitates confused.

She gives him the thumbs up.

Barry What sort of fee are we talking about?

Blackout.