

**"THAT
SINKING
FEELING "**

(A Floating Pantomime)

by Paul Davies

Private and Confidential
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IT'S NIGHTTIME. THERE'S A RIVERBOAT TIED TO ITS LANDING ON THE SOUTH BANK OF THE YARRA JUST UNDERNEATH THE ARTS CENTRE.

PEOPLE ARE STREAMING TOWARDS IT, ATTRACTED BY ITS BRIGHT LIGHTS AND PARTY ATMOSPHERE.

AS THEY COME ABOARD THEY DISCOVER A LARGE OPEN SPACE DECORATED WITH STREAMERS, BALLOONS AND OLD THEATRICAL POSTERS. THERE'S MUSIC, A FEW PEOPLE ARE DANCING.

A CENTRAL TABLE IS COVERED WITH DRINKS AND "FINGER FOOD". OVER IN ONE CORNER THERE'S A SMALL STAGE WITH A MIKE STAND ON IT, AND BEHIND THIS HANGS THE COMPANY BANNER:

" ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE . . . "
The Very Moving Theatre Co. Ltd.
 Extraordinary General Meeting

ALTHOUGH IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE A FORMAL MEETING EVERYONE IS HANDED A BADLY TYPED AGENDA AND GIVEN A NAME TAG AS THEY ENTER.

THESE IDENTIFY PEOPLE AS "ACTORS," "BOARD MEMBERS," "TECHNICIANS," "DESIGNERS," "WRITERS," "DIRECTORS," "CRITICS," "HANGERS-ON," "THEATRICAL GROUPIES," "PERSONS FROM THE DRAMATIC ARTS COUNCIL," "FREELoadERS," "HOPEFUL AMATEURS," OR JUST PLAIN "FRIENDS" OF THE COMPANY.

PEOPLE ARE THUS INVESTED WITH A ROLE, A PURPOSE FOR BEING THERE. AND THEREBY IMPLICATED IN THE EXTRA - ORDINARY MEETING THAT IS ABOUT TO UNFOLD.

BARBARA SHARPE ("DIRECTOR") IS THE WOMAN HANDING OUT THE AGENDAS. SHE IS 38, SHORT HAIR, PROBABLY A BUSINESS SUIT-CERTAINLY SHOULDER PADS. WHAT BARBARA LACKS IN STATURE SHE MORE THAN MAKES UP FOR WITH HER LETHAL VOICE. UNFORTUNATELY, A CHEMICAL IMBALANCE HAS ALSO GIVEN HER A HYPERACTIVE PERSONALITY.

IN SHORT, (NO PUN INTENDED) SHE'S A TYRANT. BUT YOU WOULD NEVER GUESS THIS FROM THE WARM SMILE AND HELPFUL, MANNER WITH WHICH SHE GREET'S PEOPLE.

ON THE OTHER HAND, WAIN KERR ("ACTOR") IS HELPING HIMSELF TO COPIOUS AMOUNTS OF "FOOD" AND "DRINK." WAIN OFFERS, INDEED EXPECTS, TO SIGN AUTOGRAPHS FOR PEOPLE, JOKING THAT HE HOPES THEY DON'T TRY TO CASH A CHEQUE WITH IT.

FOR SOME INEXPLICABLE REASON, OTHERWISE SENSIBLE WOMEN FIND HIM ATTRACTIVE. RIGHT NOW HE'S FULL OF COMPLAINTS- ESPECIALLY ABOUT HOW THIS E.G.M. HAS BEEN CALLED "AS USUAL" AT THE LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT. HE FEELS SORRY FOR THE COMPANY- THAT IT'S COME TO THIS! HE IS PARTICULARLY OBSESSED WITH BARBARA'S LACK OF ORGANISATION. HE ALSO REMINDS ANYBODY HE CAN BUTTON-HOLE THAT HIS OBJECTIONS AT THE LAST A.G.M. HAVE NOT BEEN RECORDED IN THE MINUTES. AND WAIN HAS A LOT OF OBJECTIONS. HE'S ALSO KEEN TO FIND OUT IF PEOPLE HAVE ANY "GOSS" ON BARBARA OR BYRON- ANYTHING THAT "WE CAN USE AGAINST THEM?"

BYRON TIME, OF COURSE, IS THE COMPANY WRITER. 45 GOING ON 70. UNHEALTHY, CLUMSY, ROMANTIC, IDEALISTIC, HAUNTED AND A BIT SMELLY. BYRON IS AN EASY GOING, ALL ROUND GOOD BLOKE. HOWEVER A RECENT STROKE HAS CONFINED HIM TO A WHEELCHAIR. ONE ARM OF WHICH HAS A STUBBY HOLDER GLUED TO IT AND THE OTHER HAS AN ASHTRAY. BYRON POINTEDLY IGNORES THE "NO SMOKING" SIGNS REGARDING ALL SUCH WOWERISH RESTRAINTS AS A HANGOVER FROM OUR PROTESTANT/ CONVIC'T ORIGINS. AND ON HANG-OVERS BYRON IS A TRUE AUTHORITY.

HIS ARRIVAL CAUSES QUITE A FLURRY OF ACTIVITY AS IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO MANOEUVRE HIS WHEELCHAIR UP THE GANGPLANK. SEVERAL PEOPLE HAVE TO BE ENLISTED TO VIRTUALLY LIFT HIM ABOARD.

ALSO SWANNING AROUND THE ROOM IS TIFFANY BEST (FRIEND) 30-ISH, SUMPTUOUSLY DRESSED, WITH EXPENSIVE TRIMMINGS AND ACCESSORIES.

TIFFANY HAS THE CONFIDANCE, FREEDOM, POISE AND ARROGANCE THAT COMES FROM EXTREME WEALTH. SHE IS IMMEDIATELY AND LOUDLY CONFUSED BY BOTH THE AGENDA AND THE NAME TAG. SHE IS UNDER THE APPARENTLY MISTAKEN IMPRESSION THAT SHE'S COME TO SEE A PLAY.

EVENTUALLY, WHEN EVERYONE HAS ARRIVED THE RAMP IS LOADED AND THE BOAT PULLS AWAY FROM THE JETTY.

BYRON WHEELS HIMSELF FORWARD TO THE MICROPHONE, CLEARING HIS THROAT A LITTLE, PUTTING HIS DRINK TO ONE SIDE. HE NODS TO BARBARA WHO FADES OUT THE MUSIC. BARBARA THEN HAS SOME DIFFICULTY LOWERING THE MIKE STAND DOWN TO BYRON.

Byron

Thanks for coming. . .

(there's bad feedback on the mike)

Thanks for . . .

(still not working)

Oh sorry. . .

BYRON TRIES TO MOVE AWAY FROM THE SPEAKERS AND IN HIS CLUMSY, NERVOUS WAY GETS THE CABLES ALL MIXED UP WITH HIS WHEELS. BARBARA TRIES TO HELP, FIDDLES WITH THE VOLUME. BUT LIKE ALL GOOD STAGE DIRECTORS SHE IS TECHNICALLY ILLITERATE.

Wain

(quietly, but so half the crowd can hear)

Stuffing it up already. . .

Byron

Thanks for. . . Is that better ?

(it seems to be)

Thanks for coming everybody, it's great to see so many familiar faces here tonight- workers from so many shows over those wonderful, amazing years we had together. . . through all the tumult and heartache, the highs and lows, the pinnacles and the valleys. . .

Wain

Oh get on with it !

BYRON MANAGES TO IGNORE HIM BY TURNING FOR SUPPORT TO A THICK WAD OF PROMPT CARDS.

WAIN GROANS WHEN HE SEES HOW MANY THERE ARE.

Byron

The Salvation Committee has asked me to kick things off and break the ice so to speak. Don't know why-
(shy smile)
perhaps they think a writer's got something to say.

Wain

That's an novel idea.

Byron

And we all know there's been a fair bit of ice floating around. But that's water under the bridge as far as I'm concerned. Tonight's about looking forwards, not backwards.

Wain

Aw Christ!
(holding his head in his hands)

Byron

(riding right over him)

It's especially gratifying to notice Hilary and Malcolm from the Dramtic Arts Council.

(nods at them, smiles)

Thanks a lot guys for cutting us off back there without any notice . Your timing's impeccable. It was certainly the worst Xmas present I've ever received. No- I mean that sincerely. Thank you for having the guts to sink the boot at the worst possible moment. How else would I have discovered the incredible amount of rotten vegies you can buy for \$2 just on closing time at the market ? Seriously, if Hilary and Malcolm hadn't pulled the plug I would never have saved my colon by becoming a vegan.

Wain

Oh where's the violin accompaniment !?

AMAZINGLY, VIOLIN MUSIC DOES START UP IN THE BACKGROUND. WAIN REACTS, BRYON CHECKS HIS NEXT CARD.

Byron

'Course Helen and I didn't have hot water that winter . But that's character building isn't it ? And you see a lot more when you can't afford to run a car. You do all this fantastic walking, or- in my case- wheeling. And that hour or so you spend waiting for the tram to come-that's incredibly valuable thinking time. Especially for a writer.

5.
BYRON'S VOICE TAKES ON A DEEPER, MORE
COMMANDING TONE. THE MUSIC ALSO REACHES
A KIND OF "LAND OF HOPE AND GLORY"
CRESCENDO.

Byron

And oh yes, I thought a lot in those bleak, freezing tram
shelters. I thought about a company that actually stood
for something!

A FEW WHISTLES AND CAT CALLS BREAK OUT,
SCATTERED APPLAUSE. (BARBARA LEADS THE
WAY) THE SOUNDTRACK "ENHANCES" IT ALL.

Byron

(his voice cracks, hoarse with emotion)

Cut down in its prime!

MORE APPLAUSE, HOOTS OF APPROVAL
BYRON REACHES FOR HIS DRINK.

Byron

The Very Moving Theatre Company pushed theatre
into literally New Territory. We took the Proscenium
Arch by the scruff of its grotty neck and gave it a
bloody good shaking

(voice rising with emotion)

We were the shock troops of a Theatrical Revolution !!

SCATTERED CHEERING AND "HEAR HEARS"

Byron

Shakespeare said it, but we actually did it: "All the
World's a Stage." We proved it with our Swimming
Pool Show. We proved it with a play in a Laundromat.
What other company in the world would have had the
sheer daring to stage a play in a Lift !! Full houses
every night!

Wain

It only held 11 people

Byron

'Fabulous also to have the tech crew back on speaking
terms with us again. Welcome home fellas- Rod, Steve
and Sue. . . We never personally blamed you for the
fire. I still say that fuse box wasn't your fault-

(quickly)

Our fault! We had trouble with the National Estate
from the moment we tried to hire the bloody lift.

Byron

What do they expect when you try and patch our lighting board to their rotten old Nineteenth Century fuse box ? Ok, we're sorry about the building. We appreciate it was 120 years old and completely unique. Of course it's unfortunate that it burnt to the ground. But if it hadn't been for all that bureaucratic nit-picking they put us through- all that time we spent negotiating to get the damn place- we would've noticed the electrical problems. We would've organised public liability...

Wain

Yes, why didn't you organise public liability, Byron .
Tell everybody that !

BARBARA, WHO HAS BEEN STRAINING TO PLAY LOW STATUS, CAN NO LONGER CONTAIN HERSELF . SHE LUNGES FORWARD, GRABBING THE MIKE ROUGHLY OFF BYRON.

Barbara

Why didn't you organise public liability, Wain?!!

Wain

' Cause I'm just one of the slaves around here.

Barbara

Oh yes, it's all very well for you to be part of the collective when you want to cast your mates, or give yourself the plum role. But when it comes to actually doing any of the work around here- to keep the frigging ship afloat...

Byron

(cutting in)

We're doing it again. We said we wouldn't do this. We all agreed, right ? Item 6 point 1: " Everybody has the right to say their piece- in a positive and non-threatening atmosphere." That's the way we've always done it. Everyone gets their turn. That's our motto.

Wain

I didn't stuff up the company if that's what you're suggesting.

FINALLY FED UP WITH WAIN, BYRON STARTS SHAKING THE AGENDA AT HIM

Byron

Look, with 70 odd people wanting to have their say at 3 minutes each- that's already going to take 4 hours !

Barbara
So shut-up, Wain and let the chair be heard.

Wain
Oh, I've heard all the squeeks in that chair thank you very much.

AND HE STORMS OUT OF THE MEETING TOWARDS THE BACK DECK SUCKING ALTERNATELY ON HIS VENTOLIN AND AN ANGRY FAG.

Byron
(calling after him)
You're burning the candle at both ends, mate.

BARBARA, EQUALLY ANGRY, FOLLOWS WAIN, SHOUTING AFTER HIM.

Barbara
The main point about this E.G.M., Wayne, is not the fact that we didn't have public liability, but the fact that some of us are actually trying to do something about it.

BY NOW SHE HAS JOINED HIM OUTSIDE, BUT UNFORTUNATELY HER HARANGUE CAN STILL BE HEARD.

Barbara
(off)
Do you want our board members to go under ? Is that it ?

BYRON LOOKS DOWN AT HIS PROMPT CARDS, WISHING HE COULD GO TO THE TOILET.

Wain
(off)
I'm calling for a spill of the board !
The rot's gone on far too long.

Barbara
(off)
Spill the Board ? They've spilt their guts for us you ungrateful bastard. How do you think we ever got any money in the first place ?

THEIR ARGUMENT CONTINUES BUT SUBSIDES IN VOLUME AS WAIN TRIES TO AVOID HER BY MOVING FURTHER AWAY. BUT THAT'S DIFFICULT ON A SMALL BOAT. AND, INDEED, QUITE IMPOSSIBLE WITH SOMEONE AS PERSISTENT AS BARBARA.

BACK INSIDE, BYRON IS SHUFFLING THROUGH HIS NOTES- DISCARDING A BIG PILE (THANKFULLY). HE SLOWLY BECOMES AWARE THAT THE FOCUS IS BACK ON HIM.

Byron
I'll take the minutes as read.

Wain
(storming back in)
Bullshit you will.

Byron
(ignoring him)
Any business arising ? Comments ?
Those in favour ?

Wain
No ! Definitely **not** in favour.
(to the audience)
Get your hands down.

Barbara
(still hot on his heels)
Wain, I'm not going to let you sabotage this meeting.

Wain
Well who sabotaged the minutes ? Why weren't my objections to the artistic policy noted ?

Byron
(railroading)
Can I have a motion from the floor ? Thank you. Moved "Dulcie Thwaites," Seconded "Mark Thompson." All those in favour ? I think the ayes have it.

Wain
The ayes don't have it. I demand a recount !

Byron
(sighs)
Could we have those hands again please ?

PEOPLE PUT UP THEIR HANDS. BYRON AND WAIN BOTH COUNT.

Byron
Against ?

Wain
(his hand high)
Come on you bastards, don't let them get away with it.

Barbara
You've lost the motion Wain. So just shut up.

BYRON JOTS THE RESULT IN HIS NOTEBOOK AND MOVES ON .

Byron
Item 2 point 1. McWhirter Rental Fund.

Wain
This is absolutely typical. No wonder we're being sued.

HE GOES OUTSIDE AGAIN, LIGHTING ANOTHER FAG. BYRON SOLDIERS ON.

Byron
As you know two of our board members didn't take out personal legal insurance and now, as a result of that damn fire, Tom and Maureen McWhirter look like losing their family home in a Section 10 Bankruptcy action .

(takes a deep breath)

All I can say is- its bloody unfair the way the system takes it out on the little people. So it gives me very great pleasure indeed to announce that this evening's meeting, has raised a total of. . . fanfare please. . .

TRUMPET MUSIC SOUNDS. BYRON TEARS OPEN AN ENVELOPE.

Byron
Six dollars eighty five. . . towards their future rental. . . costs
. . . sorry . . .
(frowns)

THERE'S OBVIOUSLY SOMETHING WRONG WITH SUCH A PATHETICALLY LOW FIGURE. BYRON CHECKS HIS NOTES, LOOKS FOR HELP TO THE WINGS. BARBARA WHISPERS IN HIS EAR.

Byron
Sorry- \$68. 50 ! Phew, the decimal point was in the wrong spot. What a typo ! I'll just initial the change there, Len.

BYRON SCRIBBLES HIS SIGNATURE ON THE "CHEQUE" - SPILLING A BIT OF ASH, SLOPPING BEER AROUND.

Byron
Thank you everyone for a fantastic response.

BYRON LEADS THE GENERAL APPLAUSE AS HE BLOWS THE ASH AWAY AND OFFERS THE "CHEQUE" TO THE "MC WHIRTERS".

Byron

We'll stand by you Len, no worries, mate. . . Maureen
(shaking "Len's" hand,
pecking "Maureen" on the cheek)

You two are the unsung heroes of this business. Unfortunately, you're also the only ones with any property worth losing. So let's put our hands together for an incredible sacrifice above and beyond the call of nature. Item 3 point 1.

WAIN BLUSTERS BACK IN, OVER RIDING BYRON

Wain

Item 1 point 1: Why weren't my comments about the artistic policy of this company recorded in the minutes !

BYRON'S HEART SINKS.

Barbara

Because actors are children, that's why. You wouldn't know an artistic policy if you fell over it.

Wain

The artistic policy is why we're in this mess.

Barbara

You don't see do you. You just won't acknowledge what a director gives you. I put myself on the line for you, over and over again.

Wain

Actors are the the ones who put themselves on the line, Barbara . Who else is left with egg on their face when the script is a turkey ? And that's most of the time in this bloody joint.

Barbara

Oh yes, that's right, air our dirty washing in public. Let the whole world know. Why don't you just print our hate mail in the local paper ! ?

Wain

All publicity's good publicity, Barbara.

Barbara

Geezus ! You think you know ? You think you understand ? What do you know ? What do you understand ? I've carried this company like a bloody mill stone round my neck. I mean look:

SHE HOLDS UPAN OVERSTUFFED PORTA-FILE.

Barbara

This is with me night and day: the corporate registration, workcare, the cheque books, bank statements, defamation suits, letters of demand . . . We're the Very Moving Theatre Company alright because that's what our assets come down to: a portafile full of bills!

Byron

Yes, Wain, so show a bit of gratitude.

Barbara

I've sweated blood over how we're going to pay the 'Age' ads, the venue hire, the legal action by the printers. What did you have to worry about? Which costume to wear? How to have your hair done?

Wain

I've half a mind to walk right now.

Barbara

Half a mind! I'll tell you what exercises the "half a mind" of an actor- it's who gets their photo in the paper alongside the review.

Byron

Which is always misguided and utterly wrong.

Barbara

In fact a bad review is actually better than a good one. Isn't it Wain? Because success only produces envy. Failure on the other hand, is pure dynamite

Wain

Yeah, failure- that's one subject you would know a lot about.

Barbara

Failure flashes round the theatre community like a Drama Student at a Arts Council Party. It guarantees notoriety. A bad review has one's peer group slavering at the mouth, hovering delightedly over every cruel sentence and barbed invective.

Byron

Invariably written by a brain dead hack seconded from the classifieds.

Wain

It isn't just the critics who hate our shows, it's the millions of people who stay away. But flop after flop hardly interrupts your stride.

Byron

They aren't all flops !

Wain

Geezus. Byron.

Byron

"Waiting for Godot on the 8.15 from Epping" ran for nearly five weeks.

Wain

And lost fifteen grand.

Byron

Train's are expensive.

Wain

Your ideas are expensive. We can't afford them anymore. That's what I mean about the Artistic Policy.

Byron

I made this company what it is today.

Wain

I rest my case.

Barbara

You're cruel, Wain, very cruel.

Wain

Well where are we exactly ? Today ? On a boat going up shit creek without a paddle. We all tried to warn you. Rod Steve and Sue tried to warn you. Even Helen tried to warn you.

BYRON IS FLABBERGASTED. CAN'T BELIEVE HIS EARS.

Byron

But I asked for your input. I've never been precious about my work. You know that. I'm not like some writers- won't let you change a sentence.

Wain

It's not the sentences that are the problem. It's the whole frigging idea ! The same old Byron Time formula. Well, big wow. That's drain city, man. Garbage town.

13.

Barbara

Didn't seem to worry you once upon a time. Once upon a time when you we're trying to get a job here. Didn't concern you that we were the only company that gave you a call back on your first audition out of Acting School.

Wain

I had lots of offers.

Barbara

Hampton Amateur Dramatic Society.

BARBARA POINTEDLY YAWNS

Wain

Oh what's the point ! I don't need this company- unlike some people- who couldn't get a job anywhere else.

HE STORMS TO THE DOOR.

Byron

Why didn't you tell me you were feeling so negative ? There were lots of chances in rehearsals when we could've talked through this stuff.

Wain

That's all we did in rehearsals. ! We just sat around and talked. Then a week before opening night we'd panic at the thought of having to actually put this dreaded crap on in some public place- where we'd actually be seen by people.

BYRON JUST SITS THERE SORT OF DUMBSTRUCK.

Byron

Look, I'm not saying there isn't room for a little improvement here and there.

Wain

Our combined debt stands at over \$100,000 !!!!

Barbara

You think *I* needed the Travelling Players ? Are you joking ? I'm the only one who got a job in television.

Wain

(contemptuous)

Directing Soap Opera. Your bullshit detector must've gone on holiday.

Barbara 14.
I'm not saying I could change mainstream TV
overnight.

Wain
One night is all you did have. They never gave you
another episode.

Barbara
The reason why you're left with egg on your make-up,
darling, is not Byron's writing- it's your performance.

Wain
Oh come on !

Barbara
It's all form and no content. I've tried to hide it, god
knows, I've tried to dress it up with clever technique
and subtle lighting. But, struggle as I might, Wain, your
innate superficiality always shines through.

Wain
How dare you !

Barbara
The problem is my dear-
(taps his head)
Knock, knock, nobody's home. Flat's vacant upstairs.

Byron
(warning)
Barbara !

Wain
You rotten, desperate has-been.

BARBARA SLAPS HIM. WAIN RECOILS,
THEN RECOVERS AS BEST HE CAN.

Wain
(chastened, softer)
Thanks for that.
(suddenly contrite)
I . . . I guess I needed it.

Barbara
You deserved it ! You know why ? Do you ?

Wain
Please enlighten your humble slave, mein fuherer.

Barbara
Because deep down nobody can believe a word you
say.

Byron
(warning)
Barbara !

Wain
That's it, I'm walking. Now !
I should've done it years ago.

Byron
You can't walk, Wayne, this is a boat !
Who do you think you are ? Jesus Christ ?

WAIN ROUNDS ANGRILY ON BRYON.

Wain
I don't know why you keep sucking up to her !
She's stabbed you in the back.

Byron
What do you mean ?

Wain
Didn't you see that episode of "Girlfriends" she
directed?

Byron
You know I can't afford a television.

Wain
It was a complete rip-off of the Gym Show.

Byron
"Sweaty Sox" ?

Wain
She lifted whole scenes from your work.

Barbara
I didn't write that episode.

Byron
But, Barbara , you never liked "Sweaty Sox " . In fact
you wanted your name taken off it.

Wain
I heard her only yesterday on the radio. She was
talking as if the whole idea of doing plays in real places
was hers from the start.

BYRON FROWNS AT BARBARA, PERPLEXED.

Barbara

We were a collective! We rejected all that nonsense about intellectual property.

BYRON GOES QUITE PALE. HIS VOICE SEEMS DRAINED OF EMOTION- AS IF IN THE SHOCK.

Byron

But it was my idea, Barbara , you must remember that ? I mean I thought of it first.

Wain

Let me shed some light on her notion of "collective."

TRIUMPHANTLY WAIN PRODUCES A MAGAZINE CLIPPING

Wain

(holding it up)

From this month's "Women's Choice" And I quote:
" My . . . my idea for pushing back the theatrical boundaries came from a frustration with the patriarchal nature of the proscenium arch."

Byron

She's just stirring- bit of skite-ing's good for publicity.

Wain

(reads on)

"I found the *frisson* that comes from the intersection of a fictional world with a real one in my location work. . . "

Byron

"Frisson," that- that was my word.

Wain

(holding up a hand for Byron to wait)

" . . . the frisson that comes from the intersection of a fictional world with a real one in my location work was a much more feminine idea, less controlled, less controllable, capable of a diverse maternal richness.

Byron

"Maternal- " what ?

BYRON LOOKS PAINED, TURNS TO BARBARA. HE SIMPLY CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT. SHE'S BEEN LOOKING A TOUCH GUILTY.

Byron

What's going on ?

BARBARA IS STARING DAGGERS AT WAIN.

Wain
(to Byron)

You think I'm dumb? Wake up Australia!

Barbara

I directed those shows, it was a creative partnership.

Byron

Yeah, but I wrote them. Ok, so everybody in town eventually did their own version. I mean, you know, after a while you couldn't find a disused building, or panel beating shop that wasn't being dressed up as some kind of exotic theatrical set. . . I suppose it's a form of flattery. I never got a cent in royalties. . . but it was my idea- originally. I mean, I'm the one who took performance out of the theatres, out of the studios.

Barbara

Byron, ' hate to disillusion you, darling, but I don't think you were exactly the first person to do a play "en pleine air." The Ancient Greeks might have something to say about that.

Byron

But it wasn't just outdoors- it was real locations. Some of them were inside.

Wain

Helen could see it. I could see it. Rod, Steve, and Sue could see it. Everybody could see it except you, you poor bastard. Good old, don't-rock-the-boat, Byron. You were too timid, too easy going. She suckered you mate. She used you like she's used every other poor sap who's stood in the way of her capital "K" Kareer.

Barbara

Are you quite finished? Item 3 point 1, Byron, forgodsake- or we're going to be here all night. . .

Wain

You know I've just had a brilliant idea. We should have a reunion of all the victims of Barbara Sharpe's Kareer! We could start a 008 number like the Christian Brothers.

Barbara

You're three minutes are up, Wain. And thank you for shedding absolutely no light on the matter whatsoever.

Wain

Who's got the stop watch ? - You see! She just assumes she's in charge. Either you're useful to her or you're sucked up, digested, squeezed, drained and spat out the rear end. She's the worst nightmare of the theatre: a rapacious, dangerous, blood sucking, "visionary" director.

Barbara

Apart from that- I'm generally Ok ?

Wain

I tried to warn people. I jumped up and down at all the General Meetings. I called the points of order and generally made a right prat of myself. But who would listen ? You all thought "Oh yeah, it's just Wain having his annual anxiety attack."

WAIN GRABS BYRON'S NOTE BOOK AND SHAKES IT IN THE AIR.

Wain

Item 1 point 1. Why weren't my objections to the artistic policy noted in the minutes ?

Barbara

What are you a broken record ? This meeting has more important business before it than your dented ego.

BYRON LOOKS DANGEROUSLY PALE, HIS MIND IS RACING. HE MOPS HIS BROW WITH A FILTHY HANDKIE.

Byron

(clutching his chest)

Sorry, I just feel a bit. . . Suddenly I feel very tired. Very tired. . .

HIS VOICE TRAILS OFF.

Wain

You look bloody terrible.

BUT BARBARA'S MIND IS FOCUSSED ON ONLY ONE THING.

Barbara

Just to set the record straight, Wain ! We never had an artistic director, right ? So you can forget all that "dangerous visionary" crap. We were an Artistic Directorate!

Wain
'Could've fooled me.

Barbara
You'll recall all the trouble we had getting the Dramatic Arts Council to accept that in the first place? It would've been very easy, very easy indeed- it would've been a snap in fact- for me to put my name forward. To claim that I ran the company. Hilary and Malcolm would've greeted that with open arms. In fact they were hoping I would take charge. Isn't that right ?

SHE TURNS TO "HILARY" AND "MALCOLM" FOR CONFIRMATION. THEY NOD, OF COURSE.

Barbara
See! The Cultural Bureaucracy loves a strong individual at the helm. They want that authoritarian control. Because that's how they work. Power flows from above like a wonderful gift. They don't want this grass roots shit. They want excellence and achievement-

Wain
No wonder they cut us off.

Barbara
Funding is about profile. It's about being seen in carpeted foyers. People don't put their money into theatre to see plays get made ! It's to get the deals done at the cocktail party afterwards. We could've had funding years before if I'd put my hand up. No question. Instead, we made them accept us - as a collective, a director^{ate}. That's what made us different. That was our strength. No one person was ever in charge. We rejected all that name director horseshit.

Byron
Yeah, but the location thing- the Lift Show- it was my idea.

Barbara
Oh, forcrissake! It was our idea. Intellectual property is intellectual theft remember.

Byron
I'm just so tired.

Barbara
Well go to bed then! You're only in that wheelchair because you're too bloody lazy to walk!

Byron
You took advantage of my... easy going nature.

Barbara
Spare me the sob story forcrissake.

Byron
I'm too Piscean: faithful talented, romantic. You've taken advantage of me.

Wain
At last the penny drops.

Barbara
(suddenly tired, herself)
Look, Bryon, you're an OK writer.

Byron
OK ?!!!!

Barbara
You've had one or two good ideas. But, darling, there's probably one or two good ideas among all the people in this room right now. The world is full of good ideas. The trouble with you is there's no follow through. You drink too much. You smoke too much dope.

Byron
No hope without dope !

Barbara
Why take anything ?! Try meditation for a change !
"A still mind in a still body." It's perfect for you.

Byron
Look, I'm 45, I've had angioplasty and two colonoscopies ! That's what I've done for this company. I've put my bloody life on the line for the joint.

SUDDENLY,SOMEWHERE IN THE ROOM A MOBILE PHONE STARTS RINGING. WAIN SPEWS HIS VENOM OUTWARDS TO THE CROWD.

Wain
Oh who's the wanker with the yuppie toy ?

NOBODY LOOKS GAME ENOUGH TO CLAIM IT.

Wain
Go on, answer it, you middle class bastard.

WAIN MOVES TO A CLUMP OF PEOPLE THAT INCLUDES "TIFFANY BEST." TIFFANY QUICKLY WHIPS THE PHONE OUT OF HER PURSE AND TRIES TO ANSWER IT QUIETLY.

Tiffany

Sorry we can't come to the phone right now, please leave a message after the tone and we'll call you back as soon as we can. Pip!

(hiding the phone)

Wain

She's been voting! She voted against my motion!

Barbara

Friends are automatically members, Wain.

Wain

SINCE WHEN!

Barbara

SINCE THE LAST AGM!

We just passed the minutes as a true record.

Wain

Oh shit. You've stacked the bloody numbers.

Haven't you? You've stacked it full of people like her.

We haven't got a hope.

Barbara

I can't stop people trying to help this company!

Why should I? We need all the help we can get.

(to Tiffany)

I must apologise...

Tiffany

(thrown)

I beg your pardon?

Are you talking to me?

Barbara

Please don't take any notice of him.

Tiffany

That's a bit hard.

Barbara

Yeah, sorry about that.

Tiffany

You don't come to the theatre and expect to be insulted.

Barbara

Indeed.

TIFFANY TAKES A DEEP BREATH.

Tiffany
Look, when does the play start ?

Wain
What ?

Byron
What ?

Barbara
What ?

Tiffany
When . . . does . . . the . . . play . . . start ?

WAIN CONTINUES TO LOOKS BLANK

Tiffany
You know- when do you start acting ?

Wain
You think we're acting ?

Tiffany
No, I certainly wouldn't call this acting.

WAIN TURNS TO BYRON AND BARBARA

Wain
What is she talking about ?

Tiffany
Look, all we've had so far is a whole lot of of name calling.

Byron
Yes, this is the Very Moving Theatre Company.

Tiffany
And it's not terribly exciting if you don't mind me saying so. I mean, I thought. . . I thought we were coming here to be "entertained"- not shouted at.

Wain
You may think an Emergency General Meeting of this poor company is something to scoff at, madam, but I can assure you there are people in this room who's very livelihood depends on the outcome here tonight.

TIFFANY WAVES THE AGENDA AT THEM BUT READS FROM THE REVERSE SIDE ON WHICH THE "PROGRAMME" IS PRINTED.

Tiffany
 "That Sinking Feeling- A Floating Pantomime"
 Well I mean, I know my dictionary defines a
 "pantomime" as a dumb show based on a fairy tale -
 but this is hardly "Peter Pan" or "Sleeping Beauty" is it?

Byron
 Who are you?

Tiffany
 (indicating her name tag)
 "Tiffany Best" apparently, I suppose that means I must
 be the "best person in the room." Ha Ha Ha.

Wain
 Barbara, have you been selling tickets to something we
 don't know about?
 (looking around for hidden cameras)
 You're not . . . videotaping this are you?
 Nobody told the finance committee.

Barbara
 There is no finance committee because there are no
 longer any finances.

Wain
 Why would she think we're characters in some sort of
 play?

Barbara
 What, am I responsible for everybody's mental state
 now?

Tiffany
 Oh I see, I have to pretend to be part of the "show" do I
 ?
 - the demented character. Great. I just love parting with
 hard earned cash, expecting to be entertained, only to
 find its do-it-yourself time! Wonderful, you can't afford
 to pay your actors a decent wage so you get the
 audience to put on the show themselves. Fantastic.

Barbara
 Madam, I have some bad news for you. What's
 happening here unfortunately is terribly, horribly, real.
 I know sometimes I think I'm going to wake up and find
 that it's all been a very bad dream. Unfortunately, when
 I pinch myself it hurts.

Wain
 (holding it out)
 Yes, yes, feel my arm. Please. . .

TIFFANY BACKS OFF.

Wain

Is it not real ? Marry, my good woman, if you prick me
do I not bleed ?

Byron

Well, you're a bleeding prick, we all know that.

Wain

(riding straight over that)

I am real. She-

(indicating Barbara)

despite the alien plasma that flows in her veins, is also
unfortunately, real.

Byron

Please stop using my lines!

Wain

(indicating Byron)

Him, too ,although he's barely alive he, also, is real.

Tiffany

Real ? There isn't a single thing that's real about the
place! I mean, look, look at this "food." It's like what
you see stuck on notice boards outside Japanese
restaurants. As for the wine. . . I've been struggling to
get mildly sloshed on this stuff since I arrived and all I
can manage is a congested bladder . It's about as mind
altering as a night in bed with Sir Robert Menzies.

CURIOUS, BYRON TASTES THE WINE, WINCES.

Byron

Have you been injecting the casks with water again,
Barbara ?

Barbara

How else do you think we scraped together \$68 for the
McWhirter Rental Fund ?

Tiffany

Your food is fake. Your wine is apple juice. Your
cheques are probably monopoly money.

EVERYONE LOOKS LOST FOR WORDS.
THEY TURN TO BARBARA.

Barbara

Well. . .

(sudden inspiration)

of course they are, they're props ! Aren't they ?

Byron
What ?

Tiffany
Props !

Barbara
Yes, props.They're obviously fake so this must be a play!

Tiffany
A play ! ? It doesn't bear the slightest resemblance to any other piece of theatre I've ever seen.

Byron
We always were a pioneering company.

Wain
So your are screwing some kind of performance out of us for nothing.

Barbara
("aside" to Wain)
Just humour her forcrissake.

Wain
I'm taking this to Equity.

BARABARA TWIRLS A FINGER OPPOSITE HER TEMPLE- INDICATING TIFFANY IS MAD.

Tiffany
How dare you. I came here like all these people, in good faith, expecting to see a play !

Byron
Look, madam, who ever you are, Barabara Sharpe is a lot of things, but she is not dishonest.

Wain
Could've fooled me.

Byron
You may not like it,Wain, but frankness is part of her strength.

Wain
Frankness !

Byron
Yes.

Wain
She's frank with you is she ?

Byron

That's the difference. Some of us aren't afraid of criticism. It's how you learn things.

Wain

Well, here's something for you to learn, Byron. Ask her who she's frankly developing a screenplay with.

Barbara

I told you that in confidence.

BYRON FROWNS, TURNS TO BARBARA

Wain

Go on, ask her.

Byron

(weakly)

Another writer?

Barbara

We don't have to do everything together.

Byron

So you are working with Amanda Morgan.

Barbara

Thank you Wain, if you'd like to drown yourself now I'd be happy to give you a push overboard.

Byron

(hurt, can't understand it)

I asked you if you were interested in doing a film and you said no.

Barbara

Look it may not be a film, at the moment it's just an idea for a musical.

Wain

Yeah, great title- "Rhythm Method."

Byron

(spitting it out)

Yeah, but Amanda Morgan.

Barbara

In my humble opinion he's stumbled across a simply fabulous idea.

Byron

I thought we were supposed to be a team

Barbara
Can't I work with a woman for a change?

Byron
Her plays are so- so Twee ! They're like a lecture in how to behave properly. All I see is career women with shoulder pads. I want to throw up just thinking about it.

Barbara
You need to try another director anyway.

Byron
Her characters are so self satisfied. So successful. So cutely politically correct and sensitive. So gaggingly, wonderfully liberated. Oh god it's awful.

Barbara
Yes, her characters are well rounded. That will be a nice change for me.

Byron
I thought we had an understanding ?!

Barbara
"Forever" is not a word that's in my vocabulary.

Wain
Along with "integrity", "loyalty" "commitment"...

Byron
I hope you've got a lot of pre-production to keep you busy. Amanda Morgan only takes about 4 years to write something.

Barbara
Which is invariably brilliant.

Byron
I could write a bloody good play if I had half a decade to do it in.

Barbara
No you couldn't and that's a fact, Byron. Please take this personally- if you'd written one moderately successful play in 10 years we wouldn't be in this mess.

Wain
Precisely my point about the artistic policy of this company. Why weren't my comments recorded in the minutes ?!

Tiffany
Is this going to go on much longer ?

BYRON'S EYES GLAZE OVER SLIGHTLY. HE SEEMS TO CRACK A LITTLE.

Byron

There are more chickens in the world now than human beings. Did you know that ? It's been confirmed statistically. We're officially outnumbered by chooks.

Wain

(to Barbara)

I mean look at him, he's babbling. That's our great hope ?

Byron

Amanda Morgan's last play was as about as real as something cooked up by Enid Blyton.

Barbara

Amanda is doing better because she is better than you. She's heaps better than you. That's why all the State Companies want her. Sorry, to be so blunt, but that's a fact. She's even got a play optioned in New York.

Bryon

It's so. . . Woman's Weekly, so polite, so frigging middle class !

Viola

We're all middle class. This is a theatre company.

Byron

I squirmed in my seat. Even Helen was confused.

Barbara

The critics loved that play

Bryon

Of course.

Barbara

She's the one winning all the prizes, Byron. I don't see you getting invites to Writer's Week.

Byron

And guess what ? I'm not on any assessment panels either. I wonder why ?

Barbara

I think you **are** finished, Byron. And I'm not saying you didn't have **some** ideas in your own peculiar way; but the fact is there's no follow through. Lots of plans but no delivery mechanism. Your characters have stopped driving the action, their dialogue all sounds the same.

Barbara

Your story structures are like this limp rope bridge that shoots out across the gap but can't quite make it up the other side. You've lost the plot, me old kidney and I mean that quite literally.

Wain

Well he lost a kidney.

Byron

OK, So I've had some bad luck lately. Both my parents died, my dog got run over by a truck, our funding was cut off, along with the gas, electricity and telephone. The second colonoscopy showed up some pre-cancerous cysts. It's been a simply fabulous year. I've personally had a delirious time just bursting with fabulous ideas and energy.

Barbara

Look, Bryon, it wasn't just the lift burning down- It was everyone getting flu during the swimming pool show.

Wain

I said we shouldn't've done it in winter.

Barbara

It was the taxi play accident. The audience members we lost in the moving bicycle idea. There was the flood that happened when we tried to do something in that basement. "*Coriolanus On Ice*". . . "*King Lear*" in Latin. Beautiful ideas but nobody came !

Byron

If Helen was here we would'nt be in this mess.

Viola

Helen ! Helen ! Helen isn't here OK ? Got it ? There's just us. Sorry to break it to you bluntly but there is no Santa Claus, Byron, we're on our own now. We have been for some time. Since Helen left.

Byron

She didn't leave.

Barbara

She left us Byron . Dig ?
Got the picture. She walked.

Byron

She didn't.

Barbara

She walked out and she didn't come back.

Byron
That's a lie ! She never left us.
(sadly)
We left her.

Barbara
(shrugs)
Well, if that's your delusion. . .

Byron
We abandoned her vision. We did. We changed. It's a fact.

Barbara
Change is what its all about, darling. Don't you get it ?
That's the only thing that is truely dramatic.

Byron
She always noticed how you cut out my political bits.

Barbara
I saved your scripts. I made them entertaining. If you want to send messages- try a fax machine.

Byron
We heard a lot about jobs for the girls whenever there was something you wanted.

Barbara
This is so boring, so really, really boring.....

Tiffany
Can I second that ?

Byron
I see now why they went for you in television. You're perfect for it: popular but. . . sort of mediocre.

Barbara
Item 3 point 1. Amendment to the Memorandum and Articles of Association. Article Seven. You'll see the relevant clause underlined here in the agenda. It's all pretty straight forward.

Byron
Item 7 ?

Barbara
It's just a technical legal requirement.

Byron
Item 7 is to do with winding up the company.

Barbara

Look, don't ask me why. Talk to the lawyers.

Byron

You're winding up the company ?

Barbara

No. It's just a legal oversight we have to correct it.

Wain

The Amendment reads: "If upon dissolution of the company there remains after the satisfaction of all the debts and liabilities any property whatsoever the same shall not be distributed amongst the members of the company but shall be given or transferred to some institution having objectivess similar to the obctives of the Very Moving Theatre Co.

BYRON IS SHOCKED.

Byron

What's going on ?

Barbara

If we're going to apply for debt stabilisation funding we have to do it.

Byron

You're giving our assets away ?

Barbara

What assests ? We're technically bankrupt.

Byron

Helen would never have stood for this.

Wain

A company with similar objectives ? You wouldn't be setting something up yourself would you Barbara ? Putting our assets in your own pocket ?

Barabara

We don't have any assets ! We're broke.

Wain

How do we know we're broke? She's the one with the file.

BARBARA BACKS OFF.

Barbara

You think this company owns anything. You said yourself we're \$100,000 in debt. !

Byron

Not if we win the public liability counter claim.

Barbara

Fat chance of that !

Wain

I want to see the Balance Sheet.

HE GOES TO GRAB THE PORTA-FILE, BARBARA RESISTS, THEY STRUGGLE FOR A FEW MOMENTS UNTIL PAPERS GO FLYING EVERYWHERE.

Byron

Kerr-rist !

Barbara

Satisfied !?

Bryon

(wistfully)

I had fire in my belly once. I actually used to think what I said was important. That it could amount to something, actually change things

Wain

What a joke.

Barbara

(indicating the papers)

Pick that up Wain !

Wain

I don't work here anymore.

Byron

I've been a bloody fool. The critics were right. The location thing was all a gimmick.

(indicating Barbara)

She made it "palatable."

(almost choking on the word)

Why didn't I see it at the time.

Barbara

I'm not saying the Lift Show wasn't a bad idea. It's true, people had never seen anything like that before. All that interaction with real shoppers and people in the street. That was magic. Nobody can take that away from us.

Byron

Wain's right, it didn't make any money.

Barbara
It put this company on the map !

Byron
What an idiot. I should've left when Helen did.

Barbara
You stayed because you were committed.

Byron
What is the point of it all, Barbara? I mean, what's it all amount to anyway? This "play-acting" that we do? This pretending to be other people. Is this woman right.
(indicating Tiffany)

BYRON WHEELS OVER TO HER. GENTLY TAKES HER HAND

Tiffany
Please don't involve me.

Byron
Are we just Peter Pans who never grew up? Just kids out for a lark?

Barbara
What's wrong with that? We should liberate the child in all of us.

Byron
But this pretending that goes with it. It's not right, is it? It's not normal.

Tiffany
(backing away)
Is there a toilet around here?

Barbara
People like a story. It's primeval. It's the old sitting-round-the-campfire thing.

Byron
But essentially it's a "Lie". There's no... umpff anymore. No pizzazz. No idealism.

Barbara
Idealism? You want idealism? In the Theatre?
Excuse me, this is planet earth calling.

Byron
If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem, Barbara.

Barbara

If you're not part of the box office you're part of the dole queue ! You want to know why I'm working with Amanda ? Because she's got more balls than you.

BYRON DROPS HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS.

Byron

I'm so tired.

Barbara

You're tired, you're burnt out. It's a wonder you have the gumption to breath sometimes. I hardly know why you bother to get out of bed in the mornings

Bryon

Sometimes I don' t!

Wain

Give him a break. He's sick forcrissake.

Barbara

Nobody owes him a living just because he calls himself a writer.

BYRON TUGS AWAY AT HIS LEFT BREAST,
MASSAGING IT DISTRACTEDLY

Byron

At least I asked the big questions ?

Barbara

What big questions ? Where's the next drink coming from ? How to lie on a beach pretending to spend an Arts Council Fellowship ? I've got a big question for you Byron: Why don't you just give up ?!

Byron

You're just like the critics. You think because it's funny it can't be about anything. Comedy is the only way you can make a point. We had three years of guaranteed funding! You came in and used the goodwill that Helen built up and the first thing you did was pay yourself a big fat salary and pretend that the whole history that she created had never existed. Your first mailout said it all: " Newsletter No 1" - as if all the Newsletters she put out had never happened. It was year zero wasn't it as far as you were concerned- just like the Kimer Rouge.

Barbara

Are you quite finished with the defamation ?

Byron
Helen never paid herself a salary unless she was in a show. That was the difference. With her the company came first.

Barbara
I've got news for you Byron. Our funding wasn't cut off. You threw it away. You lost Helen and therefore you had to kill all memory of her. You wanted to destroy the company because you didn't have the guts to destroy yourself!

BYRON IS SO INCENSED THAT HE LEAPS TO HIS FEET AS IF TO STRIKE BARBARA JUST AS SUDDENLY HE LOOKS DOWN AT HIS LEGS, AMAZED AT WHAT HE'S JUST DONE.

Byron
My god I can walk!

HE'S RUBBING HIS CHEST MORE FRANTICALLY.

Barbara
What are you doing to your left breast, Byron, are you trying to lactate or something?

BYRON HANGS THERE AS IF SUSPENDED IN MID-AIR, TRYING TO MOUTH THE WORDS THAT JUST WON'T COME OUT. ALL HE CAN MANAGE IS

Byron
Pills!

BEFORE COLLAPSING ON HIS FACE ON THE FLOOR.

Tiffany
Oh, at last something happens!

Wain
(fiercely at Barbara)
Now you've done it you tyrant.

Barbara
That's not my fault.

Wain
Why can't you contain yourself occasionally!?

Barbara
He's just playing fox, trying to get our sympathy.
(nudging him with her foot)

Barbara
 Come on Byron.
 (yelling down at him)
 Stop this attention getting behaviour immediately!

WAIN IS RUMMAGING THROUGH BYRON'S FILTHY CLOTHING. HE FINDS MANY BOTTLES OF PILLS, ALL SHAPES AND SIZES AND COLOURS

Barbara
 Look, the thing with Amanda is not set in concrete, OK ?

Wain
 Which pills are they ?

Barbara
 How would I know !?

Wain
 He's a walking chemist shop !

Barbara
 (looking around hopefully)
 Does anybody here know mouth to mouth ?

Wain
 Are you kidding ? With his breath ?

RELUCTANTLY, BARBARA GETS DOWN ON HER KNEES- HAS A LOT OF TROUBLE LIFTING HIM.

Barbara
 Give me a hand will you ?

WAIN GETS DOWN TO HELP. THEY FINALLY ROLL BYRON ON HIS BACK

Wain
 He never tried dieting, did he ?

OVERCOMING HER NATURAL AVERSION TO THE VERY PROSPECT, BARBARA OPENS BYRON'S MOUTH AND LEANS DOWN TO BREATHE INTO IT. BUT HALF WAY DOWN SHE RECOILS, FANNING THE AIR.

Barbara
 Oh God, the smell !

Wain
 You've only got to look at the colour of his teeth.

Barbara
I'll hold his mouth open you try the breathing.

Wain
You're joking!

Barbara
He'll die!

Wain
We'll we've all gotta go sometime.

Barbara
Do I have to do **everything** around here?
(again, pleading)
Is there a Doctor in the house?

Wain
You don't seriously expect them to admit it do you?

Barbara
This is a theatre company, there's got to be a doctor!

WAIN FANS THE AIR. STILL ON HIS KNEES NEXT
TO BYRON

Wain
It's that mixture of nicotine and beer! You know like a...
a public bar the next morning- before the cleaners have
been through.

Barbara
Don't lean on that!

Wain
What?

Barbara
That!

Wain
What?

Barbara
You're squashing his cholestomy bottle!

WAIN REACTS AND GOES TO STEP OUT OF THE
WAY BUT ITS THE WRONG DIRECTION URINE
SPALSHERS STRAIGHT INTO HIS FACE.

WAIN
OH KERR- IST !!!

HE STAGGERS TO HIS FEET DRIPPING WET.
AGHAST AT WHAT'S HAPPENED.

Barbara
Oh- WAIN !

Tiffany
Look, do you think the boat could stop somewhere so
some of us could get off !

Barbara
Would you mind doing something useful with that
phone of yours and call an ambulance ?

Tiffany
What the water ambulance ?

Wain
Yes !

Tiffany
There's no such thing.

Wain
Look, there's water police isn't there ? There's got to be a
water ambulance.
(exasperated)
Give me that !

ANGRY, WAIN LASHES AT THE PHONE. TIFFANY
REELS BACK NOT WANTING TO GET SPLASHED
EITHER AND IN CONSEQUENCE THE PHONE
DROPS.

WAIN PICKS IT UP, PUNCHING NUMBERS. BUT
NOTHING'S HAPPENING.

Tiffany
You've broken it.

Barbara
Great, Wain, you're now responsible for a minor
playwright's death.

Tiffany
You're supposed to get him on his feet.
Keep him moving.

Wain
(shaking the phone)
What's the matter with this thing ?

Tiffany

I saw it in a episode of GP. You're supposed to keep the aerobic momentum up, keep the heart beating- it gets the oxygen to the brain.

Wain

What brain ?

Barbara

Right, get him on his feet then.

WAIN AND BARBARA STRUGGLE TO GET BYRON ON HIS FEET. HE SLOWLY COMES ROUND.

Byron

(groggily)

"The root of what dazzles us is in our hearts."

Wain

Get a grip on yourself mate.

Byron

Did we dazzle anybody's heart, Helen ?

WAIN AND BARBARA START TO STAGGER ROUND THE TABLE WITH BYRON PROPPED BETWEEN THEM LIKE A HOOKER IN A RUGBY SCRUM. INEVITABLY THEY DRIFT OFF COURSE ALL OVER THE PLACE.

Barbara

(feeling his wrist)

His pulse is settling down.

Wain

I don't know this is such a great idea, Barbara.

Byron

What does it all amount to ?

Barbara

Keep him moving, talk to him. I know it's a big ask, but we've got to keep his brain active.

Wain

Talk to him ? About what ?

Barbara

About the good old days. Isn't that what he likes to talk about ?

Wain

What good old days ?

Byron

What does it all amount to ? Really ? In the over all scheme of things what's it all about ?

Barbara

That's it Byron, keep your pecker up.

Byron

You know, I've got that sinking feeling that we no more know where we come from that we know where we're going. We're born, we're alive for a while, and then what ? Is there light at the end of the tunnel ? - Or is it just a slow fade to black ?

Wain

Lighten up a bit mate. It's not over yet.

Byron

Don't you see !? Don't you get it !? That's why we invented religion- because we couldn't face the horrible reality of our own demise. The point is not to die for God, but to live in spite of him.

Barbara

Can't you think of something better to talk about Byron ? Something with a bit more lift to it.

Wain

The Lift Show, that was fun wasn't it, Byron ?

Byron

God, yes. Restored my faith in Theatre.
Made me realise there was a point to it all.

Wain

Remember that night an off duty cop happened to be in the store and tried to arrest me for shoplifting ?

Byron

The audience thought he was part of the show,
ha ha ha . . .

BYRON'S LAUGHTER TURNS INTO AN ALMOST UNCONTROLLABLE COUGHING FIT.

Barbara

Don't overdo it, Wain.

Wain

Poor bastard. He looked so embarrassed when we got to the 13th floor and Helen showed him a programme.

Byron

He didn't like having egg on his tie, did he? Went straight back and complained to his senior sergeant.

Wain

What did they try and charge us with ?

Byron

" Public Nuisance" - the cops were going to arrest an entire play ! Ha ha ha . . .

Wain

That'd be a good title for something.

Byron

Yeah, "Public Nuisance" - I'm thinking of using it for my autobiography.

IN THE BACKGROUND TIFFANY GETS HER PHONE WORKING AND STARTS RINGING FOR AN AMBULANCE.

Wain

What about that night the lift really did break down !

Barbara

It was more than once.

Wain

I hated climbing out that manhole.

Barbara

Your character was the only one who could do it.

Wain

I never had vertigo until the Lift Show-

Byron

You should develop a workcare claim.

Barbara

We've got enough debts !

Byron

Yeah, Kraig was more agile than you in that respect wasn't he - better at getting out of the manhole.

Wain

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Yeah, Kraig was more agile than you in that respect wasn't he - better at getting out of the manhole.

Wain

(glancing at it)

I mean, where is "Dulcie Thwaites" ? Who is
"Mark Thompson"? - seconding the minutes ?

(looks around)

Well ? See ! They don't exist ! I'm sure he just makes
the whole thing up !

Barbara

I don't think this is really the time to go into it.

Tiffany

Look, I've been trying to get an ambulance, but there
are no ambulances right now! Apparently there's a
30 minute traffic jam in Punt Road and Swanston St. !

BYRON'S PERSONAL FATE SEEMS IRRELEVANT
TO HIM NOW, HE SITS BY HIMSELF, OFF TO ONE
SIDE, TIRED OF THE WALKING.

Byron

Pity it didn't say anything.

Wain

What ?

Byron

The lift show.

Wain

(giving up)

Geezus !

Barbara

It did say something.

Byron

(resignedly)

No it didn't.

Barbara

Byron, I directed it, remember ?

Byron

That's my point.

Barbara

I saw the sparkle in the audiences' eyes.
They loved that show.

Byron

(unsure)

You think so ?

Barbara
It worked forcrissake. It worked brilliantly.

Byron
As soon as Helen left. . . something went with her.

BARBARA GROANS AT THE MENTION OF
HELEN

Byron
Some spark went out. A certain dimming took place.
I couldn't get excited by my work anymore. The
blank page just stared back at me out of the
Remington. Mocking- taunting me with my own
failure.

Wain
He did write some absolute clangers after that.

Byron
Shit, they weren't that bad !

Wain
I can't look at the old videos anymore- all the records
of the shows. It's too embarrassing.

Byron
I committed the Cardinal Sin. I tried to be both
daring and popular.

Wain
Cardinal Sin is alive and living in the Phillipines

Byron
Ha ha ha ha. He's right though, something is
missing from the video record.

Wain
Helen's missing.

Barbara
Geezus, you don't get it do you ? Helen bailed out
because she took one good, hard look at you two and
knew this company was doomed.

Byron
Helen was the rock on which this company was
founded.

Barbara
She was the rock on which it founded alright.
Founded, is exactly what did happen. I mean, look at
us !

Bryon
 She held it together. Her selfless energy.
 Her unbounded enthusiasm !

Barbara
 Helen is dead, Byron.

Wain
 Christ, Barbara! You're subtle aren't you !

BYRON GOES DEATHLY PALE AGAIN, STARTS
 RUBBING HIS CHEST.

Bryon
 (weakly)
 What ?

Barbara
 (speaking as if to a deaf child)
 She died when she rolled the van, remember .

Byron
 (almost in tears)
 Helen's not dead !

Barbara
 Car accident, 1988, taking the props to the Adeladie
 Arts Festival. She'd come back to do us one last
 favour.

Bryon
 No !

Wain
 (warning)
 Barbara!

Barbara
 You know that she's dead. Stop living this lie. Wake
 up to yourself.
 (really spelling it out)
 Helen . . . does . . . not . . . share . . . the planet . . . with
 . . . us . . . anymore !

BYRON COLLAPSES FACE DOWN ON THE
 TABLE JUST AS THE BOAT APPROACHES A
 JETTY. BARBARA TAKES CONTROL.

Barbara
 Swing his legs up.

Wain
 What ?

Barbara
 (to others)
 Clear the table.
 (to the captain)
 Stop at that jetty. If an ambulance won't come to us
 we'll go to it.

BARBARA SPREADS THE PLASTIC TABLE
 CLOTH OVER BYRON LIKE A SHROUD

Wain
 Shouldn't that go underneath him ?

Barbara
 Geezus, Wain, what an appalling imagination you've
 got.

Wain
 I was only thinking of the carpet !

Barbara
 It's a heart attack, not incontinence. Keep him
 breathing, have a cup of tea or something. Just relax
 for a minute. . .

Wain
 Relax !!

Barbara
 Yeah, have a good time. Put some music on.

Wain
 What, with him just lying here like a great bloody
 wet blanket ?

BUT BARBARA'S ALREADY RACING UP THE
 GANG PLANK.

Barbara
 (off)
 I'll be back as soon as I can.

Wain
 (calling out the door)
 Should I cover his face ?

Barbara
 He's not dead yet !!

AND SHE DISAPPEARS INTO THE NIGHT.
 WAIN LOOKS SORT OF LOST BESIDE BYRON.

Wain.

Oh great!

Well, ahm... wouldn't say no to a drink myself.

(yelling down at him)

Want a squirt in your glass, Byron?

NO RESPONSE BYRON IS TOTALLY OUT TO IT.

Wain

No I guess best not. Ship, ship, old buddy. Just ah, take it easy, eh?

RATHER SHEEPISHLY AND AT A TOTAL LOSS WAIN DISMEMBERS AN EMPTY WINE CASK AND BLOWS UP THE ALUMINIUM BAG INSIDE - MAKING A "PILLOW" FOR BYRON.

Wain

Well, it may not be normal, but at least it's appropriate... for a writer.

AND WAIN WANDERS OFF TO FIND SOME MORE LIQUID FOR HIS OWN GLASS. AS...

INTERVAL BREAKS OUT

AND FOR THE NEXT TWENTY MINUTES OR SO PEOPLE ENJOY A DRINK OR TWO WHILE BYRON LIES UNCONSCIOUS IN THE MIDDLE OF IT ALL.

EVENTUALLY BARBARA RETURNS WITH A HANDSOME WOMAN IN AN ELEGANT JOGGING OUTFIT. THIS NEWCOMER CARRIES A THICK BLACK BAG. SHE MOVES WITH A SLEEK ELEGANCE.

Wain

Where's the ambulance?

Susan

I'm afraid I'm it for the moment. There's actually no traffic going anywhere in the city. Big jam round the MCG.

Barbara

This is Doctor Susan Willing.
I caught her jogging home.

Susan
 You were lucky I lived nearby.
 (opening her bag)
 I was about to catch Amanda Morgan's latest play.

Barbara
 Isn't it fabulous ?

Susan
 So everyone says.

Barbara
 We're a bit of a thespian outfit ourselves.

Susan
 Oh, really . . .

SUSAN SPOTS BYRON AND COMES OVER TO HIM.

Barbara
 He's got a of a history of heart problems unfortunately.

SUSAN GOES INTO MEDICAL EMERGENCY MODE AS SHE SPEAKS, TAKING BYRON'S PULSE, PULLING A STETHOSCOPE OUT OF HER BAG.

Susan
 We'll need an intensive care unit.
 Has anybody got a mobile phone ?

Tiffany
 Yoo, hoo . . .
 (holding up her hand)

Barbara
 Call 593742, quote account number SW94 tell them we need an I. C. C. U. to attend. . . what's the nearest jetty to the Alfred ?

Barbara
 That'd be Moray Street wouldn't it ?

Susan
 Right, tell the captain to put his foot down, head there as fast as he can.

BARBARA GOES OFF TO DO SO WHILE IN THE BACKGROUND TIFFANY MAKES THE CALL.

Susan

Bring me that mike stand.

AS WAIN BRINGS THE MIKE STAND OVER SUSAN RIGS UP A DRIP ON IT AND INSERTS THE NEEDLE END INTO BYRON WHO REMAINS UNCONSCIOUS. THE BOAT STARTS MOVING FASTER.

Tiffany

(reporting from her phone)

They can't send anyone to Moray street- there's a 40 minute traffic delay all around the city. We'll have to meet them at the South Bank jetty where ever that is.

Susan

How long will that take ?

Barbara

About 20 minutes

Susan

Halve it !

BARBARA GOES OFF TO INSTRUCT THE CAPTAIN AGAIN AS SUSAN TAKES BYRON'S BLOOD PRESSURE. HER BLACK BAG SEEMS TO CONTAIN ALL MANNER OF USEFUL THINGS.

Wain

Thank god we're on a boat.

Susan

Who, ah... how exactly did this happen actually ?

ITS AN INNOCENT QUESTION BUT THERE'S A DISTINCT AWKWARDNESS.

NOBODY SAYS ANYTHING.

SUSAN LOOKS UP AT THE LACK OF RESPONSE.

Susan

There'll have to be a report.

Barbara

A report !?

Susan

A coronor's report- if he doesn't make it.

Barbara

Why- he's been sick for ages. I just told you.

Susan
(shrugs)

Well- any death in unusual circumstances. . .

Barbara
(unnecessarily defensive)

What's unusual about it ?

Susan

Well, public meeting, on a boat, lots of alcohol. . .

Wain

Look, this is a perfectly normal way for a bloke like him to go- surrounded by friends, a bit of an audience. Some writer's would give their eye teeth to cark it like this.

Susan

I don't know about you but when I pass on I certainly hope it's a bit more dignified than this !

Barbara

Dignified ? ! We do happen to be a professional company.

Susan

It doesn't matter who you are, automatically the coroner is involved.

Barbara

Well, thanks for the vote of confidence.

Susan

I take it this is a publically licenced boat ?

SHE LOOKS AROUND, AGAIN NOBODY SEEMS TO BE SURE.

Barbara

We've got public liability.

Susan

Well, that's all right then.

Barbara

Haven't we Wain ?

Wain

(can hardly believe it)

What ? Don't look at me !

Barbara

I gave you the cheque to post. Remember ? About a month ago.

Susan

Look, it's just that medically speaking, these episodes are usually brought on by some kind of shock, or . . . incident. . . the relatives will want to know.

Barbara

For heavens sake we were just sharing a few old memories in a convivial and relaxed atmosphere.

Wain

Relaxed ! Our meetings ?

BARBARA KICKS HIM UNDER THE TABLE.

Susan

He was working ? This was a company meeting ?

Barbara

Oh, no no, just a social occasion. There's absolutely no worker's comp

(quickly correcting herself)

- er work involved.

OVER THE NEXT FEW MINUTES BARBARA TRIES TO TAKE DOWN THE BANNER WITHOUT SUSAN SEEING IT.

Barbara

Look, he's been sick for a long time. Really sick. Disgustingly ill. Horribly blighted. God am I responsible for his appalling lifestyle now !

Susan

(calming)

As long as your public liability's in order then there shouldn't be any problem.

Barbara

I'm sure the receipt for the premiums must be around here somewhere.

SHE TRIES TO LOCATE THE DOCUMENTS FROM THE PAPER FROM HER PORTA FILE THAT WAIN HAD SCATTERED ALL OVER THE PLACE

Barbara

You were going to have your nails done, remember Wain . . .

Barbara
(voice rising louder)
The post office was right next door ! To the beauty salon !

Wain
You're setting me up. I get it, when everything else goes wrong you dump on the poor bloody actor.

BARBARA'S RUMMAGING BECOMES MORE FRANTIC, COMPANY PAPERS START SPEWING ALL OVER THE PLACE

Barbara
(rising panic)
I asked you to make a simple visit to the post office. It would've taken you about 30 seconds !

THERE'S A RATHER DESPERATE AND FRIGHTENING EDGE TO BARBARA'S VOICE.

Wain
After all that shit about the fire you mean you still haven't organised proper public liability !??

Barbara
You've not only wiped out the company you've financially ruined every single individual in this room !

Tiffany
(genuinely shocked)
What ?

Barbara
Without proper public liability the assets of all of the members here tonight could be sold to pay the beneficiaries of Byron's will.

Wain
What ? Alcoholics anonymous !

Tiffany
I don't know about the rest of you but I certainly can't afford to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars in some stupid legal action.

Susan
Sadly and unfortunately, there are lots of cases where that's exactly what does happen.

Tiffany

But . . . we're not responsible. It wasn't our fault.
God, we didn't . . . We're just innocent bystanders.

SWINGING AROUND, SELF DEFENSIVELY
LASHING OUT AT BARBARA.

Tiffany

It was her- this dreadful woman. She, she. . .
taunted him all night.

Barbara

Look, he's not dead yet !

Wain

Yes, it was her. She's been tongue lashing him for 11
years.

Tiffany

She monstered the poor fellow unremittingly.

Barbara

(flabbergasted)

L . . . ! L . . . !

Wain

I've got that sinking feeling you're going to have to
organise another fundraiser, Barbara- for your bail
money.

Barbara

(going for Wain)

If you hadn't mentioned Amanda's project !

Wain

Of course it's all my fault ! How appropriate.

Barbara

"Let the bastard die !" that's what you said.
We all heard you, I've got 90 witnesses.
(hopefully)

Wain

What !

Barbara

Yes, yes, that's what you said !
"Let the bastard die !"

Wain

Who kicked him while he was on the floor ?

Barbara
Who squashed his cholostomy bottle !

Susan
(checking Byron's ribs)
There are some contusions here.

Barbara
Keep it up Wain this is the best performance I've
seen from you in a long time.

Wain
I'll show you who's performing!

AND WAIN STORMS OUTAGAIN SUCKING
VENTOLIN UP ONE NOSTRIL.

Barbara
Personally I think he's snorting coke in that thing !

Susan
(nodding down at Byron)
Does he have a lot of bad luck this bloke ?

Barbara
Bad luck ! Does a psyche hospital have a mental
block ? Does a lion tamer do a roaring trade ? This
poor sod is so unlucky bookmakers follow him
around racecourses raising the odds on everything
he backs. He's a walking disaster.

BRYON SHOOTS BOLT UPRIGHT

Byron
I heard that !

Barbara
Thank God you're alive.
(and she really means it)

Susan
Try not to excite him !

BYRON TURNS TO SUSAN. HIS FACE LIGHTS UP
LIKE LUNA PARK

Byron
Helen !

Barbara
(realising)
Oh, no !

Susan
What ?

Byron
(grabbing her hand, kissing it madly)
Helen, My darling ! I knew it. I told them you weren't dead. I'm not dead either. And guess what ? I've seen the light- the white light they all talk about. I've just had. . . a near death experience and it's all true what they say. A voice was calling me, I felt the warm inner glow.

Barbara
That was you, ya poor bastard, you've lost your bag.

Byron
(strangely cheerfully)
There is a light at the end of the tunnel, Helen, I've seen it. All it took was a heart attack ! Can you believe it ! A ha ha ha, how appropriate, an attack of the heart.

AGAIN BYRON'S LAUGHTER TURNS INTO AN AWFUL COUGHING FIT.

Susan
You ever thought of doing an ad for the Passive Smokers' Society ?

Byron
You're my angel, Helen, my guardian angel, I knew you'd come back. I know now there's an afterlife- where we can be together.

Susan
We'll have you in hospital soon, alright ?

Byron
God I love you.

Susan
Try not to put any more strain on your heart.

Byron
Strain on my heart ! That's a laugh. The old pump's had so much strain I'm donating it to the Weightlifters Society.

BYRON HOLDS SUSAN'S HAND NEXT TO HIS CHEST.

Byron

Forgive me, darling, I know I've treated you badly. I know you had to leave. There wasn't a day when I haven't thought about you. I adore you- my goddess, my angel.

Tiffany

Oh, yes, this is more like it.

Byron

Take off your headband, Helen, leave the glasses- let me see you as you always were.

SUSAN LOOKS TO BARBARA

Susan

Who's Helen ?

Barbara

You do bear a sort of superficial resemblance.

Byron

Let down your hair darling, give us a look.

NOT SURE WHY SHE'S DOING IT SUSAN TAKES OFF HER GLASSES AND HEAD BAND, THEN SHAKES OUT HER HAIR. THERE'S AN AUDIBLE GASP OF RECOGNITION FROM BARBARA.

Byron

(triumphant)

You see ! You see !

Barbara

You do look incredibly like her.

Byron

(opening his wallet)

Your photo, Helen, I always keep it next to my heart.

SUSAN STUDIES THE PHOTO. THE RESEMBLANCE IS UNCANNY.

Bryon

I love your strength. Your thighs, your knees. I worship the ground you walk on.

HE ROLLS OFF THE TABLE AND GROVELS AT HER FEET.

Susan
(jumping back)
Hang on you're pulling out the drip !

Byron
Please let me kiss your knee.

Susan
What !!??

Byron
So gorgeous, so round and muscular, so feminine.

SUSAN STANDS HER GROUND, CAUGHT
BETWEEN AVOIDING HIM AND TRYING TO RE-
RIG THE DRIP.

Byron
(grabbing for her knee)
Just one kiss ! A dying man's wish.

Susan
Let go of me !

BYRON GOES TO REMOVE ONE OF SUSAN'S
JOGGING SHOES

Byron
Your toes then. I always thought you had beautiful
feet.

Susan
(really annoyed now)
Excuse me !

Barbara
Actually, it's not much of an ask.

Susan
What ?!!

Barbara
Just a couple of toes, what's the harm in it.
His sense of smell is gone.

Susan
Let him kiss your toes !

Barbara
What's the harm in it. It maybe the last human
contact he ever has.

Byron
Darling!

WITH A SIGH SUSAN REMOVES ONE NIKE AND
LETS HIM KISS HER TOES.

Byron
Oh thank you thank you. My goddess

HE SCRAMBLES TO HIS FEET, DRAGGING THE
DRIP AND THE MIKE STAND WITH HIM.

Byron
You never were just a woman to me, Helen.
You were all women. All the your sex rolled into
one.

CONFIDANT AND MORE STEADY NOW HE
TAKES HER FONDLY IN HIS ARMS.

Byron
So smooth, the touch of your skin. Such a soft
complement to a man. Our twin souls. I love your
feistyness, the feline rhythm of your movements.
Your self assurance, your mind!

Tiffany
Well, this is certainly picking up.

Byron
I know you wanted kids, I know I was too selfish to
have them. But I'm ready now. I've seen the light.
I was drawn towards it - sucked through the tunnel.
I heart the music and then I felt your hand taking
my pulse. Your voice was calling me back. I want to
spend the rest of my life utterly devoted to making
you happy.

Susan
In my professional opinion, right now, the rest of
your life is not a terribly huge proposition.

Byron
I suppose sex would be out of the question?

Susan
Well, I've been sweet talked by some smooth
bastards. . .

Byron
Oh thank you!

HE GETS BACK ONTO THE TABLE FOR A LIE
DOWN PULLING HER TO HIM.

Byron
Thank you, darling.

Susan
That doesn't mean "yes."

Byron
Well, just a hug then. A horizontal cuddle.

Susan
Look. . .

Barbara
Oh hug him forcrissake.

Susan
What ?!

Barbara
Just pretend can't you.

Susan
I'm a doctor ! We're not equipped to deal with
human emotions.

Barbara
It's only a hug. It won't kill you.

Byron
What's it all about Helen ? Huh ? Really, when it's
all said and done ? When you add it all up and draw
the line under ? What's a person's life amount to ?
We no more know where we come from than we
know where we're going. . .

Barbara
You've told us that already.

Byron
The only thing we can be sure of is that the greatest
feelings we ever have are something to do with love.
And maybe ultimately, that's what it's all about.
Not to be loved but to love- To offer one's whole
soul to another human being; that rush of blood that
goes to the head when you say: (big pause)
I love you.

Tiffany
(touched)

Aw-

AND HE REALLY MEANS IT. AND SUSAN
KNOWS HE MEANS IT.

Susan
Oh Byron...

SHE FLINGS HER ARMS AROUND HIM,
HUGGING HIM.

Susan
It's incredible how sexy pessimism can be.

Byron
I'll stop drinking if you marry me.

BYRON AND SUSAN HANG ON THE EDGE OF A
KISS, THEIR LIPS CLOSE BUT STILL AN
INSURMOUNTABLE FEW INCHES APART.
SUSAN HOLDS BACK A LITTLE.

Byron
I've never said that to any other person.

Susan
That'll you marry them?

Byron
That I'll stop drinking.

Susan
Byron, you're not unattractive, granted.
(twirling a lock of his hair)

Barbara
You don't have to overdo it.

Susan
I'll bet he was pretty good looking once.

Byron
What do you mean once!

Susan
You have got gentle eyes.

Byron
Just my Piscean nature : sensitive, warm, loving...

Susan

Yes, intelligent eyes. Romantic? Definitely. There's a kindness in them. . . an innocence, a loyalty. . .

Byron

The eyes are the windows of a house and the windows are the eyes of of the soul.

Barbara

(amazed)

Yes, well he does seem to be on the mend. No need worry about any damages now, thank god.

SUSAN TAKES HIS HAND.

Susan

I don't ever want to take you for granted.

Barbara

Maybe we are in a play- this has got to be make-believe. I mean, god, is he writing this?

TIFFANY'S PHONE RINGS AGAIN.
SHE ANSWERS IT IN THE BACK GROUND.

Byron

What did we stand for, Helen?
What was it all about?

Susan

It was about having something to say, about achieving a better society. About giving people something. . . I dunno, an insight perhaps. To hold the mirror up. To say "here, here is a life, take it for what it is."

Byron

I'll take yours darling, now and forever.

THEY HOLD HANDS AGAIN, SMILING INTO EACH OTHER'S EYES.

Byron

But something went wrong. We sort of lost our way didn't we?

Susan

It's hard, Byron, it's hard to kick goals all the time. show after show.

Byron

Especially when they keep moving the posts.

Susan
 Basically, Australians don't support their artists.
 You're caught in a convict mentality.

Barbara
 Oh come on! Byron you are writing this.

Byron
 That's what I keep saying, Helen.
 That's what drove us on. We had something to say!

Barbara
 What? What did we have to say?

Byron
 We had a lot to say. About a whole lot of things.

Barbara
 What sort of things?

Byron
 (struggling)
 About... how people lived and travelled... and
 where they did their laundry... and lifts and...
 (running out of steam)
 and stuff...

Barbara
 (dismissing that)
 Oh rubbish.

Byron
 (firmer)
 About justice and freedom.

SUDDENLY, CURIOUSLY, SUSAN STARTS TO
 ACT AS IF SHE IS HELEN. THE LIGHTS DIM,
 GIVING HER THE FOCUS. EVEN THE STIRRING
 "LAND OF HOPE AND GLORY" MUSIC OF
 BYRON'S OPENING SPEECH COMES BACK IN A
 REPRISE.

Susan
 And what is freedom? What did we say about it?
 That it was the ability to do whatever we want?

Byron
 No.

Susan
 Freedom from want, pain, or oppression?
 Freedom to choose?

Susan

Or is freedom was just another word for "nothing left to lose ?" People think its got something to do with money and power. But the more we gain the less satisfied we become.

Byron

Exactly.

Susan

Others think it's something to do with God. With placing your faith in a higher being. But how come we can now see to the edge of the universe and nobody else is home.

Byron

That's what I say !

Susan

We can now travel faster, and higher and further than ever before. But where are we going ?

Byron

Nowhere.

Susan

We communicate globally, at the speed of light. But what, finally, have we got to say ?

Byron

Nothing !

Susan

We expect the truth but hate the person who tells it. And the more we find out the less we know.

Barbara

Don't get too carried away. He only did shows in moving vehicles so nobody could walk out on him.

SUSAN TAKES BYRONS HAND, KISSES IT.

Susan

Nothing in the world is higher or more pleasurable , more sought after than this. Not to be loved, but to be able to love. To give ourselves utterly to another human being. And maybe that's ultimately, why we're here. Not to find ourselves alone and free. But to live through someone else- bound and committed.

Barbara

Now you are using his lines.

Susan

Not to find that we're all unique. But to accept that basically, deep down, we're all the same.

SHE PLACES HERSELF IN BYRON'S ARMS. HE RESTS CONTENT.

Tiffany

(trying to get their attention-
indicating her phone)

Excuse me.

Barbara

(impatiently)

God what is it now !?

Tiffany

(still holding the phone open)

The ambulance. . .

SUSAN PULLS HERSELF TOGETHER AND STRAIGHTENS UP, TUCKING THE SHEET GENTLY AROUND BYRON. HE SEEMS TO HAVE PASSED OUT FROM AN OVERDOSE OF ECSTASY AND CONTENTMENT.

Susan

(struggling with new found emotions)

Yes.

Tiffany

They've found us one.

Susan

Thank god !

Barbara

Where is it ? !

Tiffany

Well, it's coming, it's meeting us at the South Bank near the Arts Centre- in front of the restaurants but ahm. . . There's one slight problem.

Barbara

Problem ?

Tiffany

All the ah. . . all the proper ambulances are still tied up in the traffic jam.

Susan
Proper ?

Tiffany
Yes. All the human ones.

Susan
(expressing the general consternation)
Huh ?

Tiffany
They're sending the one from Lort Smith.

BYRON SHOOTS BOLT UPRIGHT AGAIN.

Byron
(exploding)
An animal ambulance !!!!

Barbara
Calm down Byron.

Byron
I'm not going.

HE CLIMBS OFF THE TABLE.

Susan
You haven't got much choice.

Byron
I'm not going to die in a dog cart !

Susan
You're not going to die, period !

SUDDENLY A VERY LOUD "ABANDON SHIP"
SIREN DROWNS OUT EVERYTHING.

Tiffany
What's that ?

Barbara
The... the engine's stopped.

Bryon
(rising panic)
We're drifting. Why are we drifting ?

Tiffany
Drifting ! On this river ? In the middle of a shipping
lane ? What if we hit an enormous tanker?

Byron
(hysterical)
Cripples and children first !

PANIC BREAKS OUT

Susan
(shouting)
Don't rush to one side. Stay in the middle we could
topple over !

SUDDENLY WAIN DASHES BACK IN LAUGHING
MANICALLY. HE CARRIES A HUGE PLUG- LIKE
A BATH PLUG ONLY IT'S THE SIZE OF A LARGE
PIZZA AND ITS STILL DRIPPING WITH WATER.
WAIN HIMSELF IS PRETTY WET, HE HOLDS IT
BY THE CHAIN.

Wain
Thought you'd accuse me of killing him, did you ?

Barbara
He's pulled the plug. He's pulled the frigging plug,
the bastard.

TIFFANY SCREAMS PANDEMONIUM BREAKS
OUT, ALL THE FOLLOWING STARTS TO
HAPPEN AT ONCE. THE SIREN CONTINUES,
HEIGHTENING THE SENSE OF PANIC.

Barbara
(taking charge)
Put that plug back Wain !

Wain
NO !

Barbara
(firmly)
Put it back, you bastard.

Wain
You've tormented me enough. You're going down
with the ship.

Barbara
Put the plug back, Wain !

Wain
It's too late. The holds are flooded

Susan
You want Byron to die ?

Wain

You're all doing to die !

Barbara

Oh very good, Wain, remind me to cast you as Atilla the Hun in our next horse show.

Wain

You're all going to die except me !

WAIN SMASHES OPEN AN EMERGENCY CUPBOARD AND TO HIS SLIGHT SURPRISE ALL THAT HE FINDS THERE, INSTEAD OF LIFE JACKETS, IS A SMALL PLASTIC TODDLERS POOL. NEVERTHELESS HE CLUTCHES IT TO HIM.

AT THE SAME TIME BARBARA SMASHES OPEN AN EMERGENCY CUPBOARD NEXT TO HER AND QUICKLY PULLS OUT A LONG TUBE-LIKE WEAPON MARKED "SHARK REPELLENT" . SHE AIMS IT STRAIGHT AT WAIN.

Barbara

Drop the plug.

WAIN ROTATES THE SWIMMING POOL AROUND TO CATCH ANY REPELLENT THAT MAY HIT HIM- HE CROUCHES BEHIND IT LIKE A SHIELD.

Wain

You know, the funniest part is: I was actually going to kill myself. I was gunna fling myself off the back of the boat. But I thought, "hang on a minute- Don't get mad, get even." Why should I drown ? - when she's responsible . . . "

(indicating Barbara)

Susan

Then why take it out on us as well ?

Wain

I don't care.

Barbara

Drop the plug or I'll fill you full of shark repellent.

Wain

There's no such thing as shark repellent.
(but he's not quite sure)

Byron
'Course there is

Wain
How would you know ?

Byron
My father was eaten by a shark, you heartless mongrel, that's how I know. He'd just been fertilizing the garden with fish oil. It was a hot day so he went for a surf, poor bastard never had a chance.

THERE'S A STAND OFF BETWEEN WAIN AND BARBARA, NEITHER MOVES.

Tiffany
Are there any strong swimmers here ?
Could you please take me on your back ?
I'll pay.

Susan
What's in Shark Repellent anyway?

Byron
Something pretty horrible that's for sure.

Wain
(dismissive)
Hoh ! Rubbish.

Barbara
If it kills sharks it'll make a bloody good mess of him.

Wain
It doesn't kill sharks, it just makes them go away.
(uncertain- wavering)
It's . . . just like mosquito repellent only bigger.

Barbara
Bullshit.

Wain
It's the same thing for all biting animals.

Barbara
It'd still have to be pretty bloody horrible.

Wain
(faltering)
It doesn't work outside of water.

Barbara
Oh yes it does.

Tiffany
Are you sure it's not going to spread ?

Barbara
What ?

Tiffany
Well, it's not going to splash all over the rest of us is it ? - some horrible chemical cocktail. I still want to have children you know.

Barbara
(less sure of her ground)
Look, it's got to be pretty bloody awful , right !

Wain
But sharks themselves are awful.

Barbara
So ?

Wain
So, to drive them away it must be something nice.
Something nice to drive something horrible away.

Tiffany
Look, we're sinking, forgodsake, somebody do something !!!

WHILE BARBARA IS MOMENTARILY DISTRACTED WAIN DROPS THE PLUG AND FRANTICALLY STABS AN ARM INSIDE HIS EMERGENCY CUPBOARD TO PULL OUT A GIANT DISTRESS FLAIR- LIKE A BIG SKYROCKET WITH "DANGER HIGH EXPLOSIVE" WRITTEN ALONG THE SIDE.

Barbara
(to Susan)
The plug !

SUSAN LUNGES FOR THE PLUG AND DASHES OUTSIDE WITH IT LOOKING FOR A HOLE TO PUT IT IN.

MEANWHILE WAIN IS QUICKLY JABBING THE DISTRESS FLAIR IN AN EMPTY WINE BOTTLE. HE POINTS IT AT BARBARA HOLDING HIS LIGHTER THREATENINGLY CLOSE TO THE WICK.

NOW IT'S BARBARA'S TURN TO LOOK
UNCERTAIN

Wain
Checkmate, I think.

BARBARA FALTERS WHEN SHE SEES THE SIZE
OF THE ROCKET POINTED AT HER.

Tiffany
You can't use that, it's a total fire ban day.

Byron
He's sinking the company like he's sunk everything
he's ever had anything do with. He's been white-
anting us from day one.

WAIN TRAINS THE ROCKET ON BYRON, THEN
SPINS IT QUICKLY BACK TO BARBARA, UNSURE
NOW WHO TO FACE.

Byron
It wasn't the fuse box that burnt the lift down it was
it, Wain? It was you! You tried to destroy us then
just like you're trying to destroy us now.

Wain
Yes, alright, I tampered with our lighting board. I
burnt the building down. Now I'm sinking this ship.

THE ALARM STOPS- SUSAN'S FOUND THE
HOLE.

Byron
I think not, somehow.

SUSAN RUSHES BACK IN.

Barbara
Why Wain, why?

Wain
(to Susan)
Because I loved her too. I loved you, Helen.
And I couldn't bear the way you latched on to this
decaying alcoholic.
(indicating Byron)
I couldn't accept it. It was too painful to see you
going out with him. I couldn't sleep at night.
It drove me mad.

Barbara
You're not going anywhere Wain.

Wain

No ?

Barbara

No.

SHE MARCHES STRAIGHT UP AND STABS THE
"RAFT" WITH A KNIFE FROM THE FOOD TABLE.

Barbara

You're not going anywhere except prison.

Wain

(still threatening with the rocket)

No ! NO ! I can't go to prison. I'm an actor ! I couldn't
possibly live in a room with the toilet in one corner.
It's out of the question-

Byron

This is like the boat trip in Apocalypse Now.
A one way ticket to a nightmare.

Susan

Look, there's South Bank! There's the ambulance.

THE BOAT DOES INDEED SEEM TO BE
CRAWLING TOWARDS THE JETTY IN FRONT OF
THE SOUTH BANK COMPLEX.

Barbara

We're going to make it, Byron's going to make it,
and he's

(indicating Wain)

going to rot in gaol for the rest of his unnatural life.

Wain

No I'm not, I'm not going to gaol. You are.

Barbara

Let's humiliate him. Wain-Kerr Wain-Kerr

SHE ENCOURAGES THE OTHERS TO JOIN IN A
CHORUS OF HUMILIATION

All

Wank-er! Wank-er !

Wank-er ! Wank-er !

Wain

(shouting over them, nervous)

Shut-up ! SHUT-UP all of you ! How dare you !

Nobody's insulted me like this since primary school.

72.
THE CHORUS CONTINUES HE RUSHES
FRANTICALLY AROUND BLOCKING HIS EARS.

All
Wank-er ! Wank-er !

Wain
You're all going to gaol. Not me.
You know why ?

Barbara
Don't be ridiculous.

Wain
Because . . .

WAIN LOOKS AROUND DESPERATELY FOR AN
ANSWER

Wain
Because . . .

HE FINDS A GAMES CUPBOARD, ITS FULL OF
MONOPOLY GAMES, PACKS OF CARDS,

Wain
Because you hired this boat for an illegal gambling
trip. It happens all the time, the police know about it.

Barbara
Don't be absurd !

Wain
Yes, you, all of you. You hired the boat to go out in
the middle of the bay and conduct an illegal casino.
Hilary and Malcolm, the McWhirters, you're all
implicated.

WAIN RUSHES ROUND THE BOAT, SCATTERING
CARDS AND MONOPOLY MONEY INTO
PEOPLE'S LAPS. HE THEN GRABS BYRON'S
BOTTLES OF COLOURED PILLS- THROWING
THEM EVERYWHERE.

Wain
See- here's the chips. You used smarties as money,
so you could swallow them when the police arrived.

Susan
I'm a doctor. They'll never take an actors word above
mine.

Barbara
You threatened us with a distress flair.

Wain
No I didn't, I used it to alert the police.

Barbara
We've got 90 witnesses

Wain
You all ganged up on me cause I blew the whistle.

HE DASHES OUTSIDE AND LIGHTS A SKY
ROCKET . IT BLASTS OFF INTO THE NIGHT SKY.

Wain
See, I did the right thing, as a citizen.
I lit the flair that exposed your racket.

HE BLASTS OFF ANOTHER ROCKET.
IT CASCADES BEAUTIFULLY UP HIGH.

Wain
I blew the whistle.

HE BLOWS AN EMERGENCY WHISTLE.

Barbara
The game's up Wain. It's 90 to 1.
You'll be laughed out of court.

Tiffany
Besides I've had this phone line open for the last ten
minutes. Everything you've just said has been heard
by people at Russel Street Police Station. They're
sending a car as soon as it can get through the traffic
jam.

WAIN REALISES HIS GAME IS UP. HIS DEFENCE
COLLAPSES.

Wain
(to Susan)
I only did it 'cause I loved you.

HE BREAKS DOWN WEEPING. BARBARA COMES
FORWARD, HOLDS HIM.

Barbara
You see, you see why you need me.

Wain
He's allowed to have a nervous breakdown, why can't I?

GENTLY, BUT FIRMLY BARBARA PUTS A PAIR OF HANDCUFFS ON WAIN, WHO SEEMS TO ACCEPT HIS FATE.

Barbara
You always needed me. That's what I'm there for. To give you direction. To show you the way.

Wain
I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.

Barbara
(comforting him)
You've been a naughty boy, Wain. A very naughty boy. Give Byron a hug. Tell him you're sorry.

WAIN FLINCHES

Barbara
Go on!

Wain
Sorry Byron

THEY TRY TO HUG BUT WAIN CAN'T QUITE GET HIS ARMS AROUND HIM SINCE THEY'RE CUFFED TOGETHER.

Byron
It's Ok Wain.

Barbara
And Helen...

Wain
(withdraws)
I can't.

Barbara
Go on! Sometimes touching a person is the scariest thing you can do.

WAIN HUGS SUSAN AS THE BOAT DOCKS AT THE SOUTH BANK.

Wain
Sorry, Helen.

Susan
Don't worry about it, Wain.

Barbara
Now help me carry him out to the ambulance

THEY COME OUT ONTO THE THE SOUTH BANK
JETTY OPPOSITE THE WAITING LORT SMITH
AMBULANCE: A KIND OF RUN DOWN
CONVERTED PANEL VAN WITH A FLASHING
GREEN LIGHT.

SUSAN , BARBARA, WAIN AND A FEW OTHERS
CARRY BYRON ON THE TABLE TOP- DOUBLING
AS A STRETCHER

Byron
Shit I've just had this fabulous idea for a boat show !
We haven't done a boat yet. It's perfect. There's this
Extraordinary General Meeting of a small theatre
company see, and they decide to have it on a boat
but then they all start blaming each other as to what
went wrong.

Barbara
Let's think about it when you're better.

THE CROWD REFORMS ON DRY LAND AROUND
THE AMBULANCE.

Tiffany
What sort play would it be where the writer spends
the whole time either getting pushed around or flat
on his back !

Byron
Pretty accurate one I reckon. Anyway it doesn't
matter how it starts
(to Susan, reaching for her hand)
long as I end up with you.

Susan
(significant pause)
I'll come with you to the hospital.

Barbara
He must be writing this. He must be. Nobody that
good looking would want to end up with him !

THE DOORS OF THE AMBULANCE OPEN AND
WE SEE A SMALL DOG ALREADY IN THERE
WITH A BANDAGE ROUND ITS HEAD.

Byron
Do I have to go in there ?

Susan
If you don't go in that ambulance, Byron, you'll regret it. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon and for the rest of your life.

Byron
No, no, don't come with me.

Susan
I am with you, Byron.

Byron
No ! Leave me, leave me for godsake ! Barbara's right, Wain's right, I'm a decaying alcoholic. What would a beautiful young woman like you want with a rotten old burnt out hack ?

Susan
Let me decide , OK ?

Byron
No- I'm no good. I'll never amount to anything. I could never satisfy you.

Susan
You sure know how to sweet talk a girl.

BYRON SENSES SOME HOPE.

Byron
Could you really be bothered ?

Susan
That's what I'm saying.

Byron
Oh thank you, thank you.

MEANWHILE BARBARA PULLS WAIN BY THE HANDCUFFS TOWARDS THE FRONT SEAT OF THE "AMBULANCE" AND SHOVS HIM IN .

SHE THEN COMES BACK TO THE REAR DOORS WHERE SUSAN IS MAKING HER FINAL SPEECH.

Susan
It's funny how our destinies seem to rest on such small decisions, to go with you now or to stay here would change the course of my life. I guess that's the beauty of a fresh new start.

Byron

Did we make a difference? In our own small way?
Did the Very Moving Theatre amount to anything
anyway?

AGAIN THE STIRRING MUSIC.

Susan

You held the mirror up, Byron. You made them
laugh, you made them cry- but most of all you made
them think-planted a seed of doubt, maybe. And
that's the most important thing. So yes, the world is
better off because you existed.

Byron

Thank you- I'll die happy

THEY SLIDE THE "STRETCHER" IN.

Barbara

Hang on- where do you think you're going?

Susan

To hospital of course.

Barbara

Is he the chair of this meeting or what?

Byron

(checks his notebook and agenda)

Sorry, Barbara. . . Ahm - Item 5 point 1. Presentation
of audited accounts.

Barbara

They've been presented. Wain presented them all
over the boat.

Byron

Item 6. Memberships: nominations, cancellations,
resignations. . .

Barbara

Wain's resigning.

Byron

Right, Item 7. Everyone gets their say.

Barbara

We can take that one as read.

Byron

Item 8. Any Further Business?

Barbara
I think we've covered it all.

Byron
Next meeting ?

Barbara
Date to be fixed.

Bryon
(writing in his notebook)
Twelfth of Never.
(checks his watch)
I declare the meeting closed at 10.45 pm.
You'll get your minutes in the mail.

SUSAN JUMPS IN WITH HIM, THE DOORS
CLOSE AND THE "AMBULANCE" DRIVES OFF.

Tiffany
(coming forward to Barbara)
Well it had a rocky start but it certainly picked up
towards the end.

Barbara
You think so ?

Tiffany
Definitely, I was convinced. You must be pleased
with the way it turned out.

TIFFANY PUTS HER ARM THROUGH
BARBARA'S AS THEY WALK OFF TOWARDS THE
COFFEE SHOPS AND RESTAURANTS OF THE
SOUTH BANK COMPLEX .

Tiffany
I must apologise for what I said before about you
being vile and all that.

Barbara
Heat of the moment. Think nothing of it.

Tiffany
It was shameful of me to say those things about you.

Barbara
We were all under a lot of strain.

Tiffany
You, know, I'm rather interested in this musical .

Barbara
" *Rhythm Method* " ?

Tiffany
Yes, I've got a few spare thousand lying around and I thought you know, why give it to a bank to earn zero interest when it could be doing something useful.

Barbara
Oh well- of course any investment in the show would be tax deductible.

Tiffany
That settles it then.

Barbara
Great. I'll call Amanda tomorrow

Tiffany
Would you like a cheque now ?

Barbara
We'd have to start a new account- new company actually.

Tiffany
Sounds like a good idea to me.

Barbara
Yes, don't want to get it mixed up with all the old baggage of this lot.

Tiffany
Oh, absolutely.

Barbara
Best to make a clean break.

Tiffany
You know with my money and your talent I feel we could really go somewhere.

Barbara
How does the "Very Moving Women's Theatre Co. sound ?

Tiffany
Excellent. Just my cappucino.

Barbara
Would you like a coffee ?

Barbara
" *Rhythm Method* " ?

Tiffany
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