



# CARYL CHURCHILL

EDITED BY BILL NAISMITH AND NICK WORRALL

# Synopsis

## **Act One: Restaurant. Saturday night**

Marlene hosts a dinner party in a London restaurant to celebrate her promotion to managing director of 'Top Girls' employment agency. Her five guests are women from the past. In order of arrival they are Isabella Bird (1831–1904), who lived in Edinburgh and travelled abroad extensively between the ages of forty and seventy; Lady Nijo (b. 1258), Japanese, who was an Emperor's courtesan and later a Buddhist nun who travelled on foot through Japan; Dull Gret, who is the subject of the Brueghel painting *Dulle Griet*, in which a woman in an apron and armour leads a crowd of women charging through hell and fighting the devils; Pope Joan, who, disguised as a man, is thought to have been Pope between 854–856; and, arriving late, Patient Griselda, the obedient wife whose story is told by Chaucer in 'The Clerk's Tale' of *The Canterbury Tales*.

Marlene orders a bottle of wine from the waitress who proceeds to serve the dinner during the scene without speaking at all. On their arrival and throughout the meal the guests recount their individual histories, picking up on each other, interrupting and overlapping. Marlene acts as hostess, ordering courses, drawing out her guests and adding her own comments to the individual stories. This long opening scene, lasting some forty minutes in performance, is one of continuous excited conversation. The orchestration of the dialogue provides climaxes of horror and dismay, humour and celebration. For convenience the lives and stories may be recounted separately, but it is essential to appreciate how the force and energy of the scene is derived from the interconnected structure of the dialogue. It is an extremely challenging scene for practitioners – actors and director – who must find the rhythm in performance to ensure not only that the meal is served and eaten without distracting from the dialogue, but that the guests, however distinctively different, become a chorus communicating more than their individual stories.

*Isabella Bird*

The daughter of a Church of England clergyman, she moved to live in Scotland. She tried to please her father by conforming to the 'role' of clergyman's daughter, engaging in needlework, music and charitable schemes. She suffered a tumour of the spine and studied poetry, Latin and hymnology. However, she grew to prefer practical things – manual work, cooking, washing, mending, riding horses and a rough open-air life. At forty she was sent to Australia for the good of her health. She found the country hideous, but then she loathed the constant murk and dismal houses of home. She thought her life was over. However, she was greatly cheered and excited travelling from Australia to the Sandwich Islands. She fell in love with the sea. Conditions were awful on board but she felt completely liberated, discovering 'a new world'. She grieved at her father's death, but soon forgot her Latin, and theology made her head ache. She always travelled as a lady and repudiated any suggestion that she was other than feminine. She was admired by a Mr Nugent – Rocky Mountain Jim – who proposed to her because she could both make scones and lasso cattle. He was, unfortunately, unacceptable as a husband. On her return to England she had a vision of him in his trapper's clothes; it was on the day he died with a bullet in his brain. She had felt a yearning to 'save' Jim Nugent, but the real loves of her life were her sister Hennie and the husband she did marry, Dr John Bishop, who had cared for Hennie during her last fatal illness. She married at fifty, and although Dr Bishop had a 'sweet character' she found married life a drudgery and she fell ill again. When her husband died she determined to leave grief behind and set off for Tibet where, despite suffering from an agonising spine and in face of harsh difficulties, she had great adventures. She always felt dull when stationary. Her memories include being nearly murdered by a howling mob in China, and the little Indian bay mare she rode in the Rocky Mountains. She always suffered guilt on returning to England because she felt her life abroad to be one of self-gratification, so she hurled herself into committee work and wore herself out with good causes. She never left her husband while married but she resented all she had to do in domestic and social work. She declares, 'I cannot and will not live the life of a lady . . . Why should I? Why should I?' At seventy she visited Morocco, although very ill, and she was the first European woman ever to see the Emperor. It was only a temporary return of vigour 'but how marvellous while it lasted'.

*Lady Nijo*

Nijo tells a story of a life of two halves, first at Court and later, in obedience to her father's wish, as a vagrant Buddhist nun. 'The first half of my life was all sin and the second all repentance.' At fourteen she was one of the maidens passing the sake at Court when the Emperor (aged twenty-nine) told her father to send Nijo to him. He sent her an eight-layered gown which she sent back, not understanding its meaning. She was distressed when the time came, but soon became reconciled to her role – it was what she had been brought up for – and was sad if the Emperor stayed away. She never enjoyed taking other women to him, which was also part of her role. Nijo came from a line of eight generations of poets; her father was a religious man and a poet. He instructed her to 'serve His Majesty, be respectful, if you lose his favour enter holy orders'. When her father died she had only His Majesty and when she fell from favour she had nothing. She adopted religion as a kind of nothing, as if she were dead already. As a nun she travelled the country on foot – she walked every day for twenty years – following the tradition of priests, who were often vagrants. Her travels revealed a determined spirit, full of hope and relishing new sights. One of her lovers was a priest, Ariake. He 'dedicated his life to her' when he came to her and knew he would fall into 'one of three lower realms' when he died. 'Misery in this life and worse in the next, all because of me.' Nijo believed at first that the Emperor was of sweet character because he did not mind about Ariake, but really this was because he no longer cared for her. One night he even sent her to a man who had been pursuing her and listened to their lovemaking from behind the screens. She depended on the Emperor's favour. When she incurred the Empress's displeasure, who claimed that Nijo had no right to wear three-layered gowns, it was explained that she was the adopted daughter of her grandfather, the Prime Minister, and had been granted permission to wear thin silk. She remembers having some babies, often in embarrassing situations, but she always avoided scandal. Her first child was His Majesty's, which died, and her second was Akebono's. She was seventeen and he had loved her since she was thirteen. He was upset when she had to go to the Emperor, and wrote a lot of poems to her. It was very romantic. When she became pregnant by Akebono she hid the fact from the Emperor. Akebono helped at the birth and took the baby away. It was 'only a girl but I was sorry to lose it'. She saw her daughter once, three years later; Akebono's wife had adopted the child who was being brought up to be sent to the

palace, as Nijo had been. Her third child was the son of Ariake the priest, and she never saw the baby after it was born. Her fourth was also the priest's child, but Ariake died before the birth and she stayed alone in the hills not wanting to see anyone. She felt nothing for the child.

Nijo shows considerable interest in Griselda's story, which has many parallels, and cries at the memory that she did not get her children back, unlike Griselda. Other painful events in her life were the deaths of her father and the Emperor. She was not allowed to see the Emperor when he was dying so she hid in the room with his coffin. Then she couldn't find her shoes and had to chase the funeral in bare feet, arriving late, when all that was left was a few wisps of smoke in the sky. She is deeply anxious and concerned to know whether, if she had still been allowed at Court, she would have been permitted 'to wear full mourning'.

Nijo remembers an incident that made her particularly angry. She was eighteen. At the Full Moon Ceremony the men make a special rice gruel and stir it with their sticks. They then beat their women across the loins so that they will bear sons, not daughters. The Emperor beat them hard, which was not exceptional, but on this occasion he allowed the attendants to beat them too. In response the ladies devised a plan to attack the Emperor and beat him in return. Nijo beat him with a stick until he promised he would not order anybody to hit them again. There was a terrible fuss. The nobles were horrified. That she had beaten the Emperor with a stick is Nijo's last, exultant, memory.

### *Dull Gret*

Gret makes an early entrance and remains a powerful physical presence throughout the scene but says little until the end. She is more preoccupied with the table and the meal than any of the other guests, being a stranger to sophisticated surroundings. She eats crudely and steals bottles and plates when no one is looking, putting these in her large apron. Her rare monosyllabic interjections are coarse, reductive and amusing and her relative silence adds an element of suspense up to the point when she delivers her climactic, inspirational story derived from the surrealistic painting by Brueghel.

She describes coming to hell through a big mouth and finding it – all black and red – very similar to her own village after it had been fired and looted by soldiers. Surrounded by devils, including one who showered her and her neighbours with money scooped from his

arse, and strange and horrible creatures, she set about beating and fighting these devils. The women were unstoppable. They had known worse than these devils in the form of the Spanish invaders who had slaughtered their families. Gret had lost her eldest son and her baby, killed by soldiers. Finally she could stand no more and shouted to her neighbours, 'Come on, we're going where the evil comes from and pay the bastards out.' They followed her, in aprons and ordinary clothes, and as they pushed down the street the ground opened up to reveal a big mouth. Gret, waving a sword, led her women, running and fighting, through the mouth into 'a street just like ours but in hell', and gave the devils a beating.

### *Pope Joan*

Joan was an infant prodigy, excited from the age of ten by theology, metaphysics and the teachings of John the Scot. She was always more concerned with knowledge than with active Christianity; she was not a missionary, not concerned to convert. She left home at the age of twelve, dressed as a boy, with a sixteen-year-old friend. She left because, being female, she was denied access to the library. The two wanted to study in Athens. She went undiscovered and was recognised as very clever. She slept with her friend in a lodging house and nursed him when he fell ill until he died – arguing all the time over the beliefs of famous theologians. She decided to stay a man and devote her life to learning. She went to Rome because Italian men didn't have beards. She studied, obsessed with the pursuit of truth, and taught at the Greek School in Rome. She worked hard and became famous as a speaker when still young. When she was made a Cardinal she fell ill – 'full of terror and regret' – but she recovered and studied in pursuit of the absolute. When Pope Leo died she was elected. She believed she would know God because he would speak to her directly. But He didn't, knowing she was a woman. She eventually took another lover – a chamberlain who was very discreet. She enjoyed being Pope, consecrating bishops and receiving royalty. When there were natural disasters, however, such as earthquakes or plagues, she felt personally responsible. She might have survived happily and successfully were it not for her baby. Here she was finally exposed as a woman and 'Women, children and lunatics can't be Pope'. She hardly knew what was happening during her pregnancy, not being fully conscious of a woman's body, but the chamberlain knew the truth. There was, of course, no question of an abortion and she didn't realise when the baby was due. Her baby was eventually born

during the procession of all the Roman clergy on Rogation Day. She experienced labour pains, spasms, contractions and loss of breath. She realised what was happening but couldn't do anything about it. The people thought that she, the Pope, was ill but the baby just slid out on to the road. One Cardinal cried 'The Antichrist!' and fainted. Joan was taken by the feet, dragged out of town, and stoned to death. The baby was also killed. Later the procession always avoided the street journeyed through on the fateful day. The clergy introduced a pierced marble chair in the Chapel of the Saviour to confirm the sex of the Pope. Two clergymen made sure he was a man while the Pope retained his public dignity.

Joan drinks steadily throughout the meal and is quite drunk by the end when she begins to recite Lucretius in Latin before being thoroughly sick.

### *Griselda*

Griselda arrives late and at the most embarrassing possible moment for her. All the guests are drunk and laughing, hugely enjoying the ludicrous idea of the Pope's 'pierced chair', and Gret shouting 'Balls!'. She is diffident, apologetic and orders only cheese and biscuits to eat. Marlene introduces her as famed for an extraordinary marriage recorded by Boccaccio, Petrarch and Chaucer. Her story begins with her marriage.

The daughter of a peasant, Griselda had been spotted for her beauty by the ruling marquis, Walter, when she was fifteen. On the day of his wedding no one knew whom he was to marry, but the procession stopped at her home and he spoke to her father. He had selected Griselda to be his bride. She could refuse, but if she accepted the one condition was that she would always obey him in everything. Ladies dressed her in a white silk dress and put jewels in her hair. At first Walter was kind, but when her first child, a daughter, was six weeks old Walter explained that the people were becoming restless because of her privileged marriage and so he had to remove the child to keep them quiet. She obediently gave up the child, asking only that she be buried where no animals could dig her up. It was Walter's child, to do with as he liked. She never spoke about what had happened and continued to live happily with Walter. After four years she had a son, and two years later Walter again said that the people were angry that their heir was a peasant's grandson. Griselda believed that when he took her children it was to test her love for him, but 'it was always easy because I always knew I would do what he said'.

Twelve years later she was tested again. Walter decided he must marry someone who could give him an acceptable heir. Griselda was sent home, barefoot and dressed only in a slip. Her father and everyone else were crying but she was perfectly content. Quite soon afterwards she was sent for again, to prepare his wedding to a young girl from France – a beautiful girl of sixteen who had her younger brother with her as a page. The guests entered for the feast but Walter stayed behind and put his arms around Griselda and kissed her. She felt half asleep with shock, and he said, ‘This is your daughter and your son.’ Griselda fainted, then cried and kissed her children. She was dressed in a cloth of gold and lived happily with Walter who had ‘suffered so much all those years’.

The guests react with amazement at Griselda’s remarkable story but Marlene follows it with a particularly scathing commentary on Walter. Eventually, following Nijo’s story of the attack on the Emperor, even Griselda begins to rethink – ‘I do think – I do wonder – it would have been nicer if Walter hadn’t had to.’

### **Act Two, Scene One: Joyce’s back yard – Sunday afternoon**

The scene is Joyce’s back yard. Squashed together in a shelter made of junk are Angie, who is sixteen, and Kit, who is twelve. The girls are hiding from Joyce (who appears to be Angie’s mother) and ignore her calls from the house. Angie’s disturbed animosity towards Joyce (‘Wish she was dead’) is reflected in her bullying of the younger Kit. She frightens Kit with stories of making pictures fall from the wall and hearing a dead kitten they know about; she accuses her of being timid, of being sexually ignorant, and her mother of being a slag. This clearly spills over from her unsatisfactory life with Joyce (‘I’m going to kill my mother and you’re going to watch’ . . . ‘If I don’t get away from here I’m going to die’). They continue to ignore Joyce when she offers them a cup of tea and a biscuit. Kit, obviously fond of Angie, confides her fears of a possible war. Angie wants to go to London to see her aunt who is ‘special’ and ‘gets people jobs’ – thus establishing a possible connection with Marlene. She says that Joyce hates her aunt and, intriguingly, ‘I think I’m my aunt’s child. I think my mother’s really my aunt.’ The girls cuddle each other for comfort. Joyce comes down to the shelter where she knows the girls are hiding. Kit wants to go to the cinema but Joyce insists that Angie tidies her room first. Angie leaves reluctantly to do so, and Joyce



talks about her concern for Angie to Kit. She sees little chance of her getting work when jobs are hard to get. 'She's one of those girls who might never leave home.' It worries Joyce that Angie plays with children much younger than herself, but she resents the suggestion that she is 'simple'. She is 'clever in her own way' and 'always kind to little children'. Kit is a confident young girl, conscious that she is clever. She mentions the possibility of becoming a nuclear physicist. Angie returns wearing an old best dress, slightly small for her. This inexplicable change of clothes irritates Joyce even more and she is yet more insistent that Angie cleans her room before anything else. Angie picks up a brick. When it begins to rain Joyce's harassment is compounded. She and Kit run into the house; Angie stays out in the rain. When Kit returns to fetch her in Angie says, 'I put on this dress to kill my mother.'

### **Act Two, Scene Two: 'Top Girls' Employment Agency – Monday morning**

The scene moves from a main office area to a small interviewing area and back again – the changes defined in the theatre by lighting. Win and Nell have arrived at the 'Top Girls' Employment Agency on Monday morning. They drink coffee and discuss the weekend. Win has spent the weekend with a man at his home in West Sussex while his wife was away. Nell has been with two different men but won't be drawn to discuss her private life in detail. One of the men, Derek, has asked her again to marry him but she doesn't want to be tied down, 'to play house'. She prefers to work. They consider the position in the office now that Marlene has been promoted to Managing Director. Howard Kidd is upset because a woman has got the job he considered was his by right, because he is a man. The likelihood is that he will change his job. Nell would also like a change. She has had plenty of offers but 'most of them can't afford me. Or you' she says to Win. The two discuss their day's clients and are contemptuous of most of the men whose careers they are concerned with. One prospective client impresses them because her experience suggests she is a 'tough bird like us'.

Marlene arrives and Win and Nell applaud her promotion. Howard Kidd's resentment is again mentioned. Nell is dismissive of Win's secretive affair mentioned earlier ('Don't know why you bother'), and she is displeased that Marlene has been promoted rather than her ('I don't like coming second').

*Interview: Jeanine and Marlene*

Marlene interviews Jeanine and quickly establishes the relevant details concerning her career. She has six 'O' level passes and moderate secretarial skills. She could have continued her formal education but preferred to go to work. She started as a typist in a small friendly office where she has progressed to being a secretary, shared by three executives. She earns £100 a week, which Marlene considers 'not bad', but she feels that there are limited prospects of advancement. She wants a change of job basically because she needs more money. She is saving to get married. She isn't wearing an engagement ring because she and her fiancé wanted to save the money. Marlene favours not wearing a ring ('saves taking it off'). A single woman is a safer prospect to an employer, being less likely to leave to have children, and a ring could signal this possibility. Jeanine mentions advertising as a desirable line of work and is not very impressed when Marlene offers one job in a 'knitwear' marketing department and another at a promising concern selling 'lampshades'. Both are advances on her present position but they are evidently too mundane for Jeanine. She has a hazy notion of a job involving travelling, but no sense of a career structure ('I can't think about ten years'). Marlene strongly encourages her to go for one of the recommended jobs.

The scene shows Marlene at work. She wastes no time. She very quickly establishes what she needs to know about Jeanine in a professional context and smoothly moves her on. Jeanine has no focused ambition and Marlene, sensing her limitations, forcefully convinces her that the jobs she recommends are very worthwhile.

*Interview: Louise and Win*

Win's questions elicit the essential facts about Louise who, in two long speeches, succinctly defines the changing attitude of women to work. She is embarrassed about her age. She is forty-six but claims at first to be in her 'early forties'. Win acknowledges this is a handicap for women in business but is hopeful that Louise's experience will count in her favour. She explains that she has worked for the same company for twenty-one years and now wants to make a change. She deeply resents how she is taken for granted. Her mother has died, she has no social life, and she has come to the awful realisation that she is 'stuck there', having given her life to the company. She has been in middle management for twenty years and has built up an extremely efficient department. She has trained younger men who have gone on

to higher things. Her work is always perfect and consequently nobody notices her. Now she wants to make them sorry to lose her. She would refuse any offer of more money that the company might make. She has doubts about working with other women and believes that she passes as a man at work. She did take on one younger woman who had excellent qualifications and who progressed to being on the board of a competitor. Louise doesn't wholly approve of the new style she displayed. The new kind of attractive, well-dressed woman is not as careful as she had always been. They take themselves for granted whereas Louise has 'had to justify [her] existence every minute'. Win explains that any vacancies would be ones where Louise would be in competition with younger men. She offers one in a cosmetic company – a field easier for a woman – at a salary of £8,500 (less than Louise is currently earning). Louise is not so much concerned about money as about making a change. For her 'it's more important to get away'.

### *The Office*

Marlene is working at her desk when Angie enters. Taken by surprise, Marlene does not recognise her at first. We soon make the connection that Angie is Marlene's niece and Joyce is her sister. Angie has come to London to visit her aunt and, hopefully, to stay with her. Marlene is not enthusiastic about this inconvenience, 'Unfortunately you've picked a day when I'm rather busy, if there's ever a day when I'm not.' Angie is overawed by the office and Marlene's status in it. Marlene explains that she is going to be in charge, and have a new office where 'there's just the one big desk in it for me'. Angie is thrilled ('I knew you'd be in charge of everything'). Marlene is anxious to know how long Angie intends to stay but Angie avoids giving a direct answer. She reminds Marlene of when she came to visit her and Joyce the year before. 'That was the best day of my whole life,' she says.

Howard Kidd's wife enters the office unannounced and is not at first recognised by Marlene. She assumes that Mrs Kidd wants to see her husband, Howard, but in fact she wants to talk to Marlene on a matter of some urgency. She notices Angie, who is introduced and who then retires to an inconspicuous part of the office where she overhears the conversation that ensues but takes no part in it. Mrs Kidd explains that Howard is in a state of shock about not getting the job of Managing Director. He is very upset and hasn't been able to sleep. The idea of working for a woman has appalled him and he has begun to denounce women in general, including his wife. She has had to take the blame. She has 'put him first every inch of the way' and

now she warns Marlene that she will have to be very careful in her handling of him. Marlene listens to all this without much sympathy and, feeling that she is being reproached, she tries to cut the meeting short. She says she will treat Howard fairly and properly, and blames him for 'taking it out' on his wife. Mrs Kidd expresses her own, deeply felt opinion that what has happened is wrong. Howard Kidd has a family – a wife and three children – to support and it is only fair that he should have the job. Marlene begins to appreciate the real reason for Mrs Kidd's visit: that she might be persuaded to give up the job to Howard. She responds briskly and aggressively. She says that Howard has the choice of leaving if he isn't satisfied, and invites Mrs Kidd to leave. Mrs Kidd loses her self-control and, agreeing with her husband, she accuses Marlene of being 'one of these ballbreakers . . . You'll end up miserable and lonely. You're not natural.' Marlene tells her to 'please piss off', a crude, uncompromising dismissal which leaves Mrs Kidd with no alternative but to go.

Angie has heard this exchange and is immensely impressed by Marlene ('I think you were wonderful'). Marlene has to do some work and leaves Angie in the office which is 'where I most want to be in the world'.

*Interview: Shona and Nell*

Shona appears confident and successful. Nell's questions elicit that she is twenty-nine (though young-looking), earning a healthy £9,000 annually selling for a company, but would like a change. Nell questions Shona on her attitude to selling and is assured that she has no qualms, no womanly hesitancy about concern for 'the customer's needs and his feelings'. Shona is uncompromising: she says 'I never consider people's feelings' and 'I'm not very nice'. She is interested in selling computers ('a top field') or video systems ('a high-flying situation') and to the suggested salary of £10,000 to £15,000 and upwards she replies blandly 'Sounds OK'. The brash confidence of Shona's replies so impresses Nell, who recognises an equally ambitious career-woman, that she suggests the possibility of working for the 'Top Girls' agency sometime in the future ('We could keep in touch'). Shona is asked to describe her present job and she proceeds to recount a typical day – selling electrical goods in the North of England. Her exotic account of expense-account living – driving a Porsche and staying in sophisticated hotels – gradually exposes her as a fraud. The picture is an unconvincing concoction of advertising clichés and fantasies. Nell says, 'Not a word of this is true, is it?'.

Shona turns out to be twenty-one and inexperienced – but unabashed when exposed by Nell.

### *The Office*

Returning to the office, Win discovers Angie. Angie would like to work in the office but she has no formal qualifications at all. Asked what she can do she replies, 'I don't know. Nothing.' In response to Angie's questions we hear Win's story. She had been headhunted by the 'Top Girls' agency who offered her more money than the firm she was working for, so she broke her contract. Her career began with a science degree and working in medical research, but she left to earn more money. She went abroad. She was always successful but, being a woman, her success made her unpopular. She would drink to cheer herself up. She soon discovered that she could do better than any of the men she worked with, who always made their work sound harder than it was. She lived with a man for four years and supported him as he couldn't get work. She went to California and enjoyed the sunshine and the lifestyle. Then to Mexico, still in 'sales', but it wasn't a suitable country for a single woman, so she came home. She went 'bonkers' for a time, thinking she was five different people, but recovered. The psychiatrist told her she was sane and very intelligent. She got married 'in a moment of weakness' but her husband has been in prison for the last four years and she doesn't visit him much any more. Win explains that she prefers working in the employment agency to selling because you can help people. Selling requires aggression and the customers don't usually want to meet you: 'It's no good if you like being liked.'

Nell and then Marlene re-enter the office. Nell reports that Howard Kidd has had a heart attack, but she is unaffected by the news: 'Lucky he didn't get the job if that's what his health's like,' she says. Win points to Angie and remarks on her wish to work in the office. Marlene dismisses any chance of future success for Angie: 'She's a bit thick. She's a bit funny . . . she's not going to make it.'

### **Act Three: Joyce's kitchen – Sunday evening, a year earlier**

Marlene has come to visit Joyce and Angie. She has brought some presents. Angie, who is very excited, has opened a box of chocolates and unwraps the dress which she had put on in Act Two, Scene One. Joyce has a present of perfume. Angie goes to her room to try on the

new dress. Joyce is unprepared for Marlene's visit and both sisters are irritated by the discovery that Angie had invited Marlene without letting Joyce know. There is a definite prickliness between the two. When Angie reappears, thrilled about the new dress she is wearing, she justifies her invitation on the grounds that she hasn't seen her aunt for six years.

Kit enters to play with Angie but Angie, enchanted by the presence of Marlene, won't go out and Kit leaves alone. Joyce explains that Kit is like a little sister to Angie. She is the only girl who lives close to them and Angie is 'good with little children'. Marlene wonders if Angie might work with little children but Joyce dismisses the suggestion ('She hasn't an idea in her head what she wants to do'). Marlene produces a bottle of whisky and, offering Joyce a drink, remembers the last time they drank together – the night their father died. Joyce still tends his grave and visits their mother every week. They discuss local news and Marlene learns that Joyce's husband 'moved out' three years previously. These details add to the sense of Marlene's estrangement from her family. Joyce remembers that Marlene was in America at the time. Angie produces a postcard which Marlene had sent them. The message gives an image of Marlene's life that is far removed from the present situation of drab domesticity: 'Driving across the States for a new job in L.A. It's a long way but the car goes very fast. It's very hot.'

Angie's excitement at Marlene's visit irritates Joyce who sends Angie to bed. Marlene is conscious of a deep resentment in Joyce and this erupts when Marlene says that she has visited their aged mother that day. Joyce visits their mother every week. Her bitterness focuses on Marlene's leaving home: 'Look, you've left, you've gone away, we can do without you.' The fraught situation develops into a furious argument during which the facts of the past come tumbling out. Marlene left home to escape the awfulness of her parents' working-class existence. She got pregnant when seventeen and let Joyce adopt the child. It seemed at the time that Joyce couldn't have children of her own. Angie is now confirmed as Marlene's daughter. Joyce later had a miscarriage because she was so exhausted looking after Marlene's baby. She hasn't been able to have any other children. Marlene has subsequently had two abortions. Eventually Marlene breaks down in tears and is comforted by Joyce ('Everyone's always crying in his house. Nobody takes any notice').

They talk about their men. Joyce's husband, Frank, was thrown out when he started having an affair with a younger woman ('He

was always carrying on'). Joyce now has four different cleaning jobs in order to survive. She won't, however, accept financial help from Marlene. Marlene has always attracted men friends who like to be seen with a 'high-flying lady' but she won't conform to the required role of 'the little woman' at home. She prefers adventures and looks forward to the 1980s which she thinks will be stupendous.

The sisters quarrel passionately about the immediate political situation in Britain, holding opposite views about the recent victory of Margaret Thatcher, the new Conservative Prime Minister. For Marlene this signals a new era of opportunity, when monetarist economic policy heralds revival and the individual with drive and initiative can prosper as never before. For Joyce, nothing has significantly changed. She reminds Marlene of the rotten life of their parents who were 'treated like rubbish': the mother went hungry and the father worked in the fields like an animal. She defends his domestic violence and his drinking as the inevitable consequence of his oppression. For Joyce 'nothing's changed and it won't with them in'. Marlene despises the working class and Joyce loathes the wealthy people she has to work for. Marlene believes simply that 'Anyone can do anything if they've got what it takes', and Joyce points to Angie who is 'stupid, lazy and frightened' and asks what might be done for people like her. Joyce believes Angie's life is doomed to waste but Marlene thinks 'she'll be all right'. Joyce won't be reconciled and goes to bed, leaving Marlene alone. She sits wrapped in a blanket and has another drink. Angie comes in, calling for her mother. Marlene says, 'No, she's gone to bed. It's Aunty Marlene.' Angie speaks only one word, 'Frightening'.

### Note on characters

ISABELLA BIRD (1831–1904) lived in Edinburgh, travelled extensively between the ages of forty and seventy.

LADY NIJO (b. 1258) Japanese, was an Emperor's courtesan and later a Buddhist nun who travelled on foot through Japan.

DULL GRET is the subject of the Brueghel painting, *Dulle Griet*, in which a woman in an apron and armour leads a crowd of women charging through hell and fighting the devils.

POPE JOAN, disguised as a man, is thought to have been Pope between 854–856.

PATIENT GRISELDA is the obedient wife whose story is told by Chaucer in 'The Clerk's Tale' of *The Canterbury Tales*.

### Note on layout

A speech usually follows the one immediately before it BUT:

1: when one character starts speaking before the other has finished, the point of interruption is marked / .

e.g. **Isabella** This is the Emperor of Japan? / I once met the Emperor of Morocco.

**Nijo** In fact he was the ex-Emperor.

2: a character sometimes continues speaking right through another's speech:

e.g. **Isabella** When I was forty I thought my life was over. / Oh I was pitiful. I was

**Nijo** I didn't say I felt it for twenty years. Not every minute.

**Isabella** sent on a cruise for my health and I felt even worse. Pains in my bones, pins and needles . . . etc.

3: sometimes a speech follows on from a speech earlier than the one immediately before it, and continuity is marked\*.

e.g. **Griselda** I'd seen him riding by, we all had. And he'd seen me in the fields with the sheep\*.

**Isabella** I would have been well suited to minding sheep.

**Nijo** And Mr Nugent riding by.

**Isabella** Of course not, Nijo, I mean a healthy life in the open air.

**Joan** \*He just rode up while you were minding the sheep and asked you to marry him?

where 'in the fields with the sheep' is the cue to both 'I would have been' and 'He just rode up'.



*Top Girls* was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on 28 August 1982 with the following cast:

Marlene		Gwen Taylor
Isabella Bird	}	Deborah Findlay
Joyce		
Mrs Kidd		
Lady Nijo	}	Lindsay Duncan
Win		
Dull Gret	}	Carole Hayman
Angie		
Pope Joan	}	Selina Cadell
Louise		
Patient Griselda	}	Lesley Manville
Nell		
Jeanine		
Waitress	}	Lou Wakefield
Kit		
Shona		

*Directed by* Max Stafford Clark

*Designed by* Peter Hartwell

This production transferred to Joe Papp's Public Theatre, New York, later the same year, and returned to the Royal Court early in 1983.

ACT ONE            Restaurant. Saturday night.

ACT TWO

Scene One:        Joyce's back yard. Sunday afternoon.

Scene Two:        'Top Girls' Employment agency. Monday morning.

ACT THREE        Joyce's kitchen. Sunday evening, a year earlier.

I originally wrote the play with this three-act structure – the dinner party, Angie goes to London, and a year earlier. For the first production at the Royal Court Theatre in 1982, it was decided that there should only be one interval and that the parts of Nell and Jeanine should be doubled, so the play was divided in the middle of Act II and one of the interviews was moved out of the main office scene. In earlier editions, I left the option of performing it as two or three acts, but left the interview scene in its new place. Since then, I have found I prefer the original simple structure, which has been used in several recent productions, and this is the way I would like the play to be performed in future. There is no need for two full-scale intervals, where the audience leave the theatre, if that is inconvenient – there can be a short break after Act I and a main interval after Act II, when we have had Saturday, Sunday and Monday and come to the chronological end of the play, before going back a year.

Caryl Churchill, May 2012

## *Act One*

*Restaurant. Table set for dinner with white tablecloth. Six places. Marlene and Waitress.*

**Marlene** Excellent, yes, table for six. One of them's going to be late but we won't wait. I'd like a bottle of Frascati straight away if you've got one really cold.

*The Waitress goes.*

**Isabella Bird** *arrives.*

Here we are. Isabella.

**Isabella** Congratulations, my dear.

**Marlene** Well, it's a step. It makes for a party. I haven't time for a holiday. I'd like to go somewhere exotic like you but I can't get away. I don't know how you could bear to leave Hawaii. / I'd like to lie in the sun forever, except of course I

**Isabella** I did think of settling.

**Marlene** can't bear sitting still.

**Isabella** I sent for my sister Hennie to come and join me. I said, Hennie we'll live here forever and help the natives. You can buy two sirloins of beef for what a pound of chops costs in Edinburgh. And Hennie wrote back, the dear, that yes, she would come to Hawaii if I wished, but I said she had far better stay where she was. Hennie was suited to life in Tobermory.

**Marlene** Poor Hennie.

**Isabella** Do you have a sister?

**Marlene** Yes in fact.

**Isabella** Hennie was happy. She was good. I did miss its face, my own pet. But I couldn't stay in Scotland. I loathed the constant murk.

**Marlene** Ah! Nijo!

## 2 TOP GIRLS

*She sees Lady Nijo arrive.*

*The Waitress enters with wine.*

Nijo Marlene!

Marlene I think a drink while we wait for the others. I think a drink anyway. What a week.

*The Waitress pours wine.*

Nijo It was always the men who used to get so drunk. I'd be one of the maidens, passing the sake.

Isabella I've had sake. Small hot drink. Quite fortifying after a day in the wet.

Nijo One night my father proposed three rounds of three cups, which was normal, and then the Emperor should have said three rounds of three cups, but he said three rounds of nine cups, so you can imagine. Then the Emperor passed his sake cup to my father and said, 'Let the wild goose come to me this spring.'

Marlene Let the what?

Nijo It's a literary allusion to a tenth-century epic, / His Majesty was very cultured.

Isabella This is the Emperor of Japan? / I once met the Emperor of Morocco.

Nijo In fact he was the ex-Emperor.

Marlene But he wasn't old? / Did you, Isabella?

Nijo Twenty-nine.

Isabella Oh it's a long story.

Marlene Twenty-nine's an excellent age.

Nijo Well I was only fourteen and I knew he meant something but I didn't know what. He sent me an eight-layered gown and I sent it back. So when the time came I did nothing but cry. My thin gowns were badly ripped. But even

that morning when he left / – he'd a green robe with a scarlet lining and

**Marlene** Are you saying he raped you?

**Nijo** very heavily embroidered trousers, I already felt different about him. It made me uneasy. No, of course not, Marlene, I belonged to him, it was what I was brought up for from a baby. I soon found I was sad if he stayed away. It was depressing day after day not knowing when he would come. I never enjoyed taking other women to him.

**Isabella** I certainly never saw my father drunk. He was a clergyman. / And I didn't get married till I was fifty.

*The Waitress brings menus.*

**Nijo** Oh, my father was a very religious man. Just before he died he said to me, 'Serve His Majesty, be respectful, if you lose his favour enter holy orders.'

**Marlene** But he meant stay in a convent, not go wandering round the country.

**Nijo** Priests were often vagrants, so why not a nun? You think I shouldn't? / I still did what my father wanted.

**Marlene** No no, I think you should. / I think it was wonderful.

**Dull Gret** *arrives.*

**Isabella** I tried to do what my father wanted.

**Marlene** Gret, good. Nijo. Gret. / I know Griselda's going to be late, but should we wait for Joan? / Let's get you a drink.

**Isabella** Hello Gret! (*Continues to Nijo.*) I tried to be a clergyman's daughter. Needlework, music, charitable schemes. I had a tumour removed from my spine and spent a great deal of time on the sofa. I studied the metaphysical poets and hymnology. / I thought I enjoyed intellectual pursuits.

#### 4 TOP GIRLS

Nijo Ah, you like poetry. I come of a line of eight generations of poets. Father had a poem / in the anthology.

Isabella My father taught me Latin although I was a girl. /  
But

Marlene They didn't have Latin at my school.

Isabella really I was more suited to manual work. Cooking, washing, mending, riding horses. / Better than reading books,

Nijo Oh but I'm sure you're very clever.

Isabella eh Gret? A rough life in the open air.

Nijo I can't say I enjoyed my rough life. What I enjoyed most was being the Emperor's favourite / and wearing thin silk.

Isabella Did you have any horses, Gret?

Gret Pig.

Pope Joan *arrives.*

Marlene Oh Joan, thank God, we can order. Do you know everyone? We were just talking about learning Latin and being clever girls. Joan was by way of an infant prodigy. Of course you were. What excited you when you were ten?

Joan Because angels are without matter they are not individuals. Every angel is a species.

Marlene There you are.

*They laugh. They look at menus.*

Isabella Yes, I forgot all my Latin. But my father was the mainspring of my life and when he died I was so grieved. I'll have the chicken, please, / and the soup.

Nijo Of course you were grieved. My father was saying his prayers and he dozed off in the sun. So I touched his knee to rouse him. 'I wonder what will happen,' he said, and then he was dead before he finished the sentence. / If he'd died saying

Marlene What a shock.

Nijo his prayers he would have gone straight to heaven. /  
Waldorf salad.

Joan Death is the return of all creatures to God.

Nijo I shouldn't have woken him.

Joan Damnation only means ignorance of the truth. I was  
always attracted by the teachings of John the Scot, though he  
was inclined to confuse / God and the world.

Isabella Grief always overwhelmed me at the time.

Marlene What I fancy is a rare steak. Gret?

Isabella I am of course a member of the / Church of  
England.\*

Gret Potatoes.

Marlene \*I haven't been to church for years. / I like  
Christmas carols.

Isabella Good works matter more than church attendance.

Marlene Make that two steaks and a lot of potatoes. Rare.  
But I don't do good works either.

Joan Canelloni, please, / and a salad.

Isabella Well, I tried, but oh dear. Hennie did good works.

Nijo The first half of my life was all sin and the second / all  
repentance.\*

Marlene Oh what about starters?

Gret Soup.

Joan \*And which did you like best?

Marlene Were your travels just a penance? Avocado  
vinaigrette. Didn't you / enjoy yourself?

Joan Nothing to start with for me, thank you.

Nijo Yes, but I was very unhappy. / It hurt to remember

## 6 TOP GIRLS

Marlene And the wine list.

Nijo the past. I think that was repentance.

Marlene Well I wonder.

Nijo I might have just been homesick.

Marlene Or angry.

Nijo Not angry, no, / why angry?

Gret Can we have some more bread?

Marlene Don't you get angry? I get angry.

Nijo But what about?

Marlene Yes let's have two more Frascati. And some more bread, please.

*The Waitress exits.*

Isabella I tried to understand Buddhism when I was in Japan but all this birth and death succeeding each other through eternities just filled me with the most profound melancholy. I do like something more active.

Nijo You couldn't say I was inactive. I walked every day for twenty years.

Isabella I don't mean walking. / I mean in the head.

Nijo I vowed to copy five Mahayana sutras. / Do you know how

Marlene I don't think religious beliefs are something we have in common. Activity yes.

Nijo long they are? My head was active. / My head ached.

Joan It's no good being active in heresy.

Isabella What heresy? She's calling the Church of England / a heresy.

Joan There are some very attractive / heresies.



Nijo I had never heard of Christianity. Never / heard of it.  
Barbarians.

Marlene Well I'm not a Christian. / And I'm not a Buddhist.

Isabella You have heard of it?

Marlene We don't all have to believe the same.

Isabella I knew coming to dinner with a pope we should keep  
off religion.

Joan I always enjoy a theological argument. But I won't try  
to convert you, I'm not a missionary. Anyway I'm a heresy  
myself.

Isabella There are some barbaric practices in the east.

Nijo Barbaric?

Isabella Among the lower classes.

Nijo I wouldn't know.

Isabella Well theology always made my head ache.

Marlene Oh good, some food.

*Waitress is bringing the first course.*

Nijo How else could I have left the court if I wasn't a nun?  
When Father died I had only His Majesty. So when I fell out of  
favour I had nothing. Religion is a kind of nothing / and I  
dedicated what was left of me to nothing.

Isabella That's what I mean about Buddhism. It doesn't brace.

Marlene Come on, Nijo, have some wine.

Nijo Haven't you ever felt like that? Nothing will ever  
happen again. I am dead already. You've all felt / like that.

Isabella You thought your life was over but it wasn't.

Joan You wish it was over.

Gret Sad.

## 8 TOP GIRLS

**Marlene** Yes, when I first came to London I sometimes . . . and when I got back from America I did. But only for a few hours. Not twenty years.

**Isabella** When I was forty I thought my life was over. / Oh I

**Nijo** I didn't say I felt it for twenty years. Not every minute.

**Isabella** was pitiful. I was sent on a cruise for my health and I felt even worse. Pains in my bones, pins and needles in my hands, swelling behind the ears, and – oh, stupidity. I shook all over, indefinable terror. And Australia seemed to me a hideous country, the acacias stank like drains. / I had a

**Nijo** You were homesick.

**Isabella** photograph for Hennie but I told her I wouldn't send it, my hair had fallen out and my clothes were crooked, I looked completely insane and suicidal.

**Nijo** So did I, exactly, dressed as a nun. I was wearing walking shoes for the first time.

**Isabella** I longed to go home, / but home to what? Houses

**Nijo** I longed to go back ten years.

**Isabella** are so perfectly dismal.

**Marlene** I thought travelling cheered you both up.

**Isabella** Oh it did / of course. It was on the trip from

**Nijo** I'm not a cheerful person, Marlene. I just laugh a lot.

**Isabella** Australia to the Sandwich Isles, I fell in love with the sea. There were rats in the cabin and ants in the food but suddenly it was like a new world. I woke up every morning happy, knowing there would be nothing to annoy me. No nervousness. No dressing.

**Nijo** Don't you like getting dressed? I adored my clothes. / When I was chosen to give sake to His Majesty's brother,

**Marlene** You had prettier colours than Isabella.

**Nijo** the Emperor Kameyana, on his formal visit, I wore raw silk pleated trousers and a seven-layered gown in shades of red, and two outer garments, / yellow lined with green and a light

**Marlene** Yes, all that silk must have been very . . .

*The Waitress starts to clear the first course.*

**Joan** I dressed as a boy when I left home.\*

**Nijo** green jacket. Lady Betto had a five-layered gown in shades of green and purple.

**Isabella** \*You dressed as a boy?

**Marlene** Of course, / for safety.

**Joan** It was easy, I was only twelve. Also women weren't / allowed in the library. We wanted to study in Athens.

**Marlene** You ran away alone?

**Joan** No, not alone, I went with my friend. / He was sixteen

**Nijo** Ah, an elopement.

**Joan** but I thought I knew more science than he did and almost as much philosophy.

**Isabella** Well I always travelled as a lady and I repudiated strongly any suggestion in the press that I was other than feminine.

**Marlene** I don't wear trousers in the office. / I could but I don't.

**Isabella** There was no great danger to a woman of my age and appearance.

**Marlene** And you got away with it, Joan?

**Joan** I did then.

*The Waitress starts to bring the main course.*

**Marlene** And nobody noticed anything?

## 10 TOP GIRLS

Joan They noticed I was a very clever boy. / And when I

Marlene I couldn't have kept pretending for so long.

Joan shared a bed with my friend, that was ordinary – two poor students in a lodging house. I think I forgot I was pretending.

Isabella Rocky Mountain Jim, Mr Nugent, showed me no disrespect. He found it interesting, I think, that I could make scones and also lasso cattle. Indeed he declared his love for me, which was most distressing.

Nijo What did he say? / We always sent poems first.

Marlene What did you say?

Isabella I urged him to give up whisky, / but he said it was too late.

Marlene Oh Isabella.

Isabella He had lived alone in the mountains for many years.

Marlene But did you – ?

*The Waitress goes.*

Isabella Mr Nugent was a man that any woman might love but none could marry. I came back to England.

Nijo Did you write him a poem when you left? / Snow on the

Marlene Did you never see him again?

Isabella No, never.

Nijo mountains. My sleeves are wet with tears. In England no tears, no snow.

Isabella Well, I say never. One morning very early in Switzerland, it was a year later, I had a vision of him as I last saw him / in his trapper's clothes with his hair round his face,

Nijo A ghost!

Isabella and that was the day, / I learnt later, he died with a

Nijo Ah!

Isabella bullet in his brain. / He just bowed to me and vanished.

Marlene Oh Isabella.

Nijo When your lover dies – One of my lovers died. / The priest Ariake.

Joan My friend died. Have we all got dead lovers?

Marlene Not me, sorry.

Nijo (to Isabella) I wasn't a nun, I was still at court, but he was a priest, and when he came to me he dedicated his whole life to hell. / He knew that when he died he would fall into one of the three lower realms. And he died, he did die.

Joan (to Marlene) I'd quarrelled with him over the teachings of John the Scot, who held that our ignorance of God is the same as his ignorance of himself. He only knows what he creates because he creates everything he knows but he himself is above being – do you follow?

Marlene No, but go on.

Nijo I couldn't bear to think / in what shape would he be reborn.\*

Joan St Augustine maintained that the Neo-Platonic Ideas are indivisible from God, but I agreed with John that the created

Isabella \*Buddhism is really most uncomfortable.

Joan world is essences derived from Ideas which derived from God. As Denys the Areopagite said – the pseudo-Denys – first we give God a name, then deny it / then reconcile the

Nijo In what shape would he return?

Joan contradiction by looking beyond / those terms.

Marlene Sorry, what? Denys said what?

## 12 TOP GIRLS

**Joan** Well we disagreed about it, we quarrelled. And next day he was ill, / I was so annoyed with him, all the time I was

**Nijo** Misery in this life and worse in the next, all because of me.

**Joan** nursing him I kept going over the arguments in my mind. Matter is not a means of knowing the essence. The source of the species is the Idea. But then I realised he'd never understand my arguments again, and that night he died. John the Scot held that the individual disintegrates / and there is no personal immortality.

**Isabella** I wouldn't have you think I was in love with Jim Nugent. It was yearning to save him that I felt.

**Marlene (to Joan)** So what did you do?

**Joan** First I decided to stay a man. I was used to it. And I wanted to devote my life to learning. Do you know why I went to Rome? Italian men didn't have beards.

**Isabella** The loves of my life were Hennie, my own pet, and my dear husband the doctor, who nursed Hennie in her last illness. I knew it would be terrible when Hennie died but I didn't know how terrible. I felt half of myself had gone. How could I go on my travels without that sweet soul waiting at home for my letters? It was Doctor Bishop's devotion to her in her last illness that made me decide to marry him. He and Hennie had the same sweet character. I had not.

**Nijo** I thought His Majesty had a sweet character because when he found out about Ariake he was so kind. But really it was because he no longer cared for me. One night he even sent me out to a man who had been pursuing me. / He lay awake on the other side of the screens and listened.

**Isabella** I did wish marriage had seemed more of a step. I tried very hard to cope with the ordinary drudgery of life. I was ill again with carbuncles on the spine and nervous prostration. I ordered a tricycle, that was my idea of adventure then. And John himself fell ill, with erysipelas and anaemia. I

began to love him with my whole heart but it was too late. He was a skeleton with transparent white hands. I wheeled him on various seafronts in a bathchair. And he faded and left me. There was nothing in my life. The doctors said I had gout / and my heart was much affected.

**Nijo** There was nothing in my life, nothing, without the Emperor's favour. The Empress had always been my enemy, Marlene, she said I had no right to wear three-layered gowns. / But I was the adopted daughter of my grandfather the Prime Minister. I had been publicly granted permission to wear thin silk.

**Joan** There was nothing in my life except my studies. I was obsessed with pursuit of the truth. I taught at the Greek School in Rome, which St Augustine had made famous. I was poor, I worked hard. I spoke apparently brilliantly, I was still very young, I was a stranger; suddenly I was quite famous, I was everyone's favourite. Huge crowds came to hear me. The day after they made me cardinal I fell ill and lay two weeks without speaking, full of terror and regret. / But then I got up

**Marlene** Yes, success is very . . .

**Joan** determined to go on. I was seized again / with a desperate longing for the absolute.

**Isabella** Yes, yes, to go on. I sat in Tobermory among Hennie's flowers and sewed a complete outfit in Jaeger flannel. / I was fifty-six years old.

**Nijo** Out of favour but I didn't die. I left on foot, nobody saw me go. For the next twenty years I walked through Japan.

**Gret** Walking is good.

*The Waitress enters.*

**Joan** Pope Leo died and I was chosen. All right then. I would be Pope. I would know God. I would know everything.

**Isabella** I determined to leave my grief behind and set off for Tibet.

14 TOP GIRLS

**Marlene** Magnificent all of you. We need some more wine, please, two bottles I think, Griselda isn't even here yet, and I want to drink a toast to you all.

**Isabella** To yourself surely, / we're here to celebrate your success.

**Nijo** Yes, Marlene.

**Joan** Yes, what is it exactly, Marlene?

**Marlene** Well it's not Pope but it is managing director.\*

**Joan** And you find work for people.

**Marlene** Yes, an employment agency.

**Nijo** \*Over all the women you work with. And the men.

**Isabella** And very well deserved too. I'm sure it's just the beginning of something extraordinary.

**Marlene** Well it's worth a party.

**Isabella** To Marlene.\*

**Marlene** And all of us.

**Joan** \*Marlene.

**Nijo** Marlene.

**Gret** Marlene.

**Marlene** We've all come a long way. To our courage and the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements.

*They laugh and drink a toast.*

**Isabella** Such adventures. We were crossing a mountain pass at seven thousand feet, the cook was all to pieces, the muleteers suffered fever and snow blindness. But even though my spine was agony I managed very well.

**Marlene** Wonderful.



**Nijo** Once I was ill for four months lying alone at an inn. Nobody to offer a horse to Buddha. I had to live for myself, and I did live.

**Isabella** Of course you did. It was far worse returning to Tobermory. I always felt dull when I was stationary. / That's why I could never stay anywhere.

**Nijo** Yes, that's it exactly. New sights. The shrine by the beach, the moon shining on the sea. The goddess had vowed to save all living things. / She would even save the fishes. I was full of hope.

**Joan** I had thought the Pope would know everything. I thought God would speak to me directly. But of course he knew I was a woman.

**Marlene** But nobody else even suspected?

*The Waitress brings more wine.*

**Joan** In the end I did take a lover again.\*

**Isabella** In the Vatican?

**Gret** \*Keep you warm.

**Nijo** \*Ah, lover.

**Marlene** \*Good for you.

**Joan** He was one of my chamberlains. There are such a lot of servants when you're a Pope. The food's very good. And I realised I did know the truth. Because whatever the Pope says, that's true.

**Nijo** What was he like, the chamberlain?\*

**Gret** Big cock.

**Isabella** Oh Gret.

**Marlene** \*Did he fancy you when he thought you were a fella?

**Nijo** What was he like?

16 TOP GIRLS

Joan He could keep a secret.

Marlene So you did know everything.

Joan Yes, I enjoyed being Pope. I consecrated bishops and let people kiss my feet. I received the King of England when he came to submit to the church. Unfortunately there were earthquakes, and some village reported it had rained blood, and in France there was a plague of giant grasshoppers, but I don't think that can have been my fault, do you?\*

*Laughter.*

The grasshoppers fell on the English Channel and were washed up on shore and their bodies rotted and poisoned the air and everyone in those parts died.

*Laughter.*

Isabella \*Such superstition! I was nearly murdered in China by a howling mob. They thought the barbarians ate babies and put them under railway sleepers to make the tracks steady, and ground up their eyes to make the lenses of cameras. / So

Marlene And you had a camera!

Isabella they were shouting, 'child-eater, child-eater'. Some people tried to sell girl babies to Europeans for cameras or stew!

*Laughter.*

Marlene So apart from the grasshoppers it was a great success.

Joan Yes, if it hadn't been for the baby I expect I'd have lived to an old age like Theodora of Alexandria, who lived as a monk. She was accused by a girl / who fell in love with her of being the father of her child and –

Nijo But tell us what happened to your baby. I had some babies.

Marlene Didn't you think of getting rid of it?

Joan Wouldn't that be a worse sin than having it? / But a Pope with a child was about as bad as possible.

Marlene I don't know, you're the Pope.

Joan But I wouldn't have known how to get rid of it.

Marlene Other Popes had children, surely.

Joan They didn't give birth to them.

Nijo Well you were a woman.

Joan Exactly and I shouldn't have been a woman. Women, children and lunatics can't be Pope.

Marlene So the only thing to do / was to get rid of it somehow.

Nijo You had to have it adopted secretly.

Joan But I didn't know what was happening. I thought I was getting fatter, but then I was eating more and sitting about, the life of a Pope is quite luxurious. I don't think I'd spoken to a woman since I was twelve. The chamberlain was the one who realised.

Marlene And by then it was too late.

Joan Oh I didn't want to pay attention. It was easier to do nothing.

Nijo But you had to plan for having it. You had to say you were ill and go away.

Joan That's what I should have done I suppose.

Marlene Did you want them to find out?

Nijo I too was often in embarrassing situations, there's no need for a scandal. My first child was His Majesty's, which unfortunately died, but my second was Akebono's. I was seventeen. He was in love with me when I was thirteen, he was very upset when I had to go to the Emperor, it was very romantic, a lot of poems. Now His Majesty hadn't been near

me for two months so he thought I was four months pregnant when I was really six, so when I reached the ninth month / I

**Joan** I never knew what month it was.

**Nijo** announced I was seriously ill, and Akebono announced he had gone on a religious retreat. He held me round the waist and lifted me up as the baby was born. He cut the cord with a short sword, wrapped the baby in white and took it away. It was only a girl but I was sorry to lose it. Then I told the Emperor that the baby had miscarried because of my illness, and there you are. The danger was past.

**Joan** But Nijo, I wasn't used to having a woman's body.

**Isabella** So what happened?

**Joan** I didn't know of course that it was near the time. It was Rogation Day, there was always a procession. I was on the horse dressed in my robes and a cross was carried in front of me, and all the cardinals were following, and all the clergy of Rome, and a huge crowd of people. / We set off from

**Marlene** Total Pope.

**Joan** St Peter's to go to St John's. I had felt a slight pain earlier, I thought it was something I'd eaten, and then it came back, and came back more often. I thought when this is over I'll go to bed. There were still long gaps when I felt perfectly all right and I didn't want to attract attention to myself and spoil the ceremony. Then I suddenly realised what it must be. I had to last out till I could get home and hide. Then something changed, my breath started to catch, I couldn't plan things properly any more. We were in a little street that goes between St Clement's and the Colosseum, and I just had to get off the horse and sit down for a minute. Great waves of pressure were going through my body, I heard sounds like a cow lowing, they came out of my mouth. Far away I heard people screaming, 'The Pope is ill, the Pope is dying.' And the baby just slid out onto the road.\*

Marlene The cardinals / won't have known where to put themselves.

Nijo Oh dear, Joan, what a thing to do! In the street!

Isabella \*How embarrassing.

Gret In a field, yah.

*They are laughing.*

Joan One of the cardinals said, 'The Antichrist!' and fell over in a faint.

*They all laugh.*

Marlene So what did they do? They weren't best pleased.

Joan They took me by the feet and dragged me out of town and stoned me to death.

*They stop laughing.*

Marlene Joan, how horrible.

Joan I don't really remember.

Nijo And the child died too?

Joan Oh yes, I think so, yes.

*Pause.*

*The Waitress enters to clear the plates. They start talking quietly.*

Isabella (to Joan) I never had any children. I was very fond of horses.

Nijo (to Marlene) I saw my daughter once. She was three years old. She wore a plum-red / small-sleeved gown.  
Akebono's

Isabella Birdie was my favourite. A little Indian bay mare I rode in the Rocky Mountains.

**Nijo** wife had taken the child because her own died.  
Everyone thought I was just a visitor. She was being brought up carefully so she could be sent to the palace like I was.

**Isabella** Legs of iron and always cheerful, and such a pretty face. If a stranger led her she reared up like a bronco.

**Nijo** I never saw my third child after he was born, the son of Ariake the priest. Ariake held him on his lap the day he was born and talked to him as if he could understand, and cried. My fourth child was Ariake's too. Ariake died before he was born. I didn't want to see anyone, I stayed alone in the hills. It was a boy again, my third son. But oddly enough I felt nothing for him.

**Marlene** How many children did you have, Gret?

**Gret** Ten.

**Isabella** Whenever I came back to England I felt I had so much to atone for. Hennie and John were so good. I did no good in my life. I spent years in self-gratification. So I hurled myself into committees, I nursed the people of Tobermory in the epidemic of influenza, I lectured the Young Women's Christian Association on Thrift. I talked and talked explaining how the East was corrupt and vicious. My travels must do good to someone beside myself. I wore myself out with good causes.

**Marlene** Oh God, why are we all so miserable?

**Joan** The procession never went down that street again.

**Marlene** They rerouted it specially?

**Joan** Yes they had to go all round to avoid it. And they introduced a pierced chair.

**Marlene** A pierced chair?

**Joan** Yes, a chair made out of solid marble with a hole in the seat / and it was in the Chapel of the Saviour, and after he was

**Marlene** You're not serious.

Joan   elected the Pope had to sit in it.

Marlene   And someone looked up his skirts? Not really?

Isabella   What an extraordinary thing.

Joan   Two of the clergy / made sure he was a man.

Nijo   On their hands and knees!

Marlene   A pierced chair!

Gret   Balls!

Griselda *arrives unnoticed.*

Nijo   Why couldn't he just pull up his robe?

Joan   He had to sit there and look dignified.

Marlene   You could have made all your chamberlains sit in it.\*

Gret   Big one, small one.

Nijo   Very useful chair at court.

Isabella   \*Or the laird of Tobermory in his kilt.

*They are quite drunk. They get the giggles.*

Marlene *notices Griselda.*

Marlene   Griselda! / There you are. Do you want to eat?

Griselda   I'm sorry I'm so late. No, no, don't bother.

Marlene   Of course it's no bother. / Have you eaten?

Griselda   No really, I'm not hungry.

Marlene   Well have some pudding.

Griselda   I never eat pudding.

Marlene   Griselda, I hope you're not anorexic. We're having pudding, I am, and getting nice and fat.

Griselda   Oh if everyone is. I don't mind.

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**Marlene** Now who do you know? This is Joan who was Pope in the ninth century, and Isabella Bird, the Victorian traveller, and Lady Nijo from Japan, Emperor's concubine and Buddhist nun, thirteenth century, nearer your own time, and Gret who was painted by Brueghel. Griselda's in Boccaccio and Petrarch and Chaucer because of her extraordinary marriage. I'd like profiteroles because they're disgusting.

**Joan** Zabaglione, please.

**Isabella** Apple pie / and cream.

**Nijo** What's this?

**Marlene** Zabaglione, it's Italian, it's what Joan's having, / it's delicious.

**Nijo** A Roman Catholic / dessert? Yes please.

**Marlene** Gret?

**Gret** Cake.

**Griselda** Just cheese and biscuits, thank you.

**Marlene** Yes, Griselda's life is like a fairy-story, except it starts with marrying the prince.

**Griselda** He's only a marquis, Marlene.

**Marlene** Well everyone for miles around is his liege and he's absolute lord of life and death and you were the poor but beautiful peasant girl and he whisked you off. / Near enough a prince.

**Nijo** How old were you?

**Griselda** Fifteen.

**Nijo** I was brought up in court circles and it was still a shock. Had you ever seen him before?

**Griselda** I'd seen him riding by, we all had. And he'd seen me in the fields with the sheep.\*

**Isabella** I would have been well suited to minding sheep.



Nijo And Mr Nugent riding by.

Isabella Of course not, Nijo, I mean a healthy life in the open air.

Joan \*He just rode up while you were minding the sheep and asked you to marry him?

Griselda No, no, it was on the wedding day. I was waiting outside the door to see the procession. Everyone wanted him to get married so there'd be an heir to look after us when he died, / and at last he announced a day for the wedding but

Marlene I don't think Walter wanted to get married. It is Walter? Yes.

Griselda nobody knew who the bride was, we thought it must be a foreign princess, we were longing to see her. Then the carriage stopped outside our cottage and we couldn't see the bride anywhere. And he came and spoke to my father.

Nijo And your father told you to serve the Prince.

Griselda My father could hardly speak. The Marquis said it wasn't an order, I could say no, but if I said yes I must always obey him in everything.

Marlene That's when you should have suspected.

Griselda But of course a wife must obey her husband. / And of course I must obey the Marquis.\*

Isabella I swore to obey dear John, of course, but it didn't seem to arise. Naturally I wouldn't have wanted to go abroad while I was married.

Marlene \*Then why bother to mention it at all? He'd got a thing about it, that's why.

Griselda I'd rather obey the Marquis than a boy from the village.

Marlene Yes, that's a point.

Joan I never obeyed anyone. They all obeyed me.

24 TOP GIRLS

Nijo And what did you wear? He didn't make you get married in your own clothes? That would be perverse.\*

Marlene Oh, you wait.

Griselda \*He had ladies with him who undressed me and they had a white silk dress and jewels for my hair.

Marlene And at first he seemed perfectly normal?

Griselda Marlene, you're always so critical of him. / Of course he was normal, he was very kind.

Marlene But Griselda, come on, he took your baby.

Griselda Walter found it hard to believe I loved him. He couldn't believe I would always obey him. He had to prove it.

Marlene I don't think Walter likes women.

Griselda I'm sure he loved me, Marlene, all the time.

Marlene He just had a funny way / of showing it.

Griselda It was hard for him too.

Joan How do you mean he took away your baby?

Nijo Was it a boy?

Griselda No, the first one was a girl.

Nijo Even so it's hard when they take it away. Did you see it at all?

Griselda Oh yes, she was six weeks old.

Nijo Much better to do it straight away.

Isabella But why did your husband take the child?

Griselda He said all the people hated me because I was just one of them. And now I had a child they were restless. So he had to get rid of the child to keep them quiet. But he said he wouldn't snatch her, I had to agree and obey and give her up. So when I was feeding her a man came in and took her away. I

thought he was going to kill her even before he was out of the room.

Marlene But you let him take her? You didn't struggle?

Griselda I asked him to give her back so I could kiss her. And I asked him to bury her where no animals could dig her up. / It

Isabella Oh my dear.

Griselda was Walter's child to do what he liked with.\*

Marlene Walter was bonkers.

Gret Bastard.

Isabella \*But surely, murder.

Griselda I had promised.

Marlene I can't stand this. I'm going for a pee.

Marlene *goes out.*

*The Waitress brings dessert.*

Nijo No, I understand. Of course you had to, he was your life. And were you in favour after that?

Griselda Oh yes, we were very happy together. We never spoke about what had happened.

Isabella I can see you were doing what you thought was your duty. But didn't it make you ill?

Griselda No, I was very well, thank you.

Nijo And you had another child?

Griselda Not for four years, but then I did, yes, a boy.

Nijo Ah a boy. / So it all ended happily.

Griselda Yes he was pleased. I kept my son till he was two years old. A peasant's grandson. It made the people angry. Walter explained.

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Isabella But surely he wouldn't kill his children / just because –

Griselda Oh it wasn't true. Walter would never give in to the people. He wanted to see if I loved him enough.

Joan He killed his children / to see if you loved him enough?

Nijo Was it easier the second time or harder?

Griselda It was always easy because I always knew I would do what he said.

*Pause. They start to eat.*

Isabella I hope you didn't have any more children.

Griselda Oh no, no more. It was twelve years till he tested me again.

Isabella So whatever did he do this time? / My poor John, I never loved him enough, and he would never have dreamt . . .

Griselda He sent me away. He said the people wanted him to marry someone else who'd give him an heir and he'd got special permission from the Pope. So I said I'd go home to my father. I came with nothing / so I went with nothing. I

Nijo Better to leave if your master doesn't want you.

Griselda took off my clothes. He let me keep a slip so he wouldn't be shamed. And I walked home barefoot. My father came out in tears. Everyone was crying except me.

Nijo At least your father wasn't dead. / I had nobody.

Isabella Well it can be a relief to come home. I loved to see Hennie's sweet face again.

Griselda Oh yes, I was perfectly content. And quite soon he sent for me again.

Joan I don't think I would have gone.

Griselda But he told me to come. I had to obey him. He wanted me to help prepare his wedding. He was getting

married to a young girl from France / and nobody except me knew how to arrange things the way he liked them.

Nijo It's always hard taking him another woman.

Marlene *comes back*.

Joan I didn't live a woman's life. I don't understand it.

Griselda The girl was sixteen and far more beautiful than me. I could see why he loved her. / She had her younger brother with her as a page.

*The Waitress enters.*

Marlene Oh God, I can't bear it. I want some coffee. Six coffees. Six brandies. / Double brandies. Straight away.

Griselda They all went in to the feast I'd prepared. And he stayed behind, and put his arms round me and kissed me. / I felt half asleep with the shock.

Nijo Oh, like a dream.

Marlene And he said, 'This is your daughter and your son.'

Griselda Yes.

Joan What?

Nijo Oh. Oh I see. You got them back.

Isabella I did think it was remarkably barbaric to kill them but you learn not to say anything. / So he had them brought up secretly I suppose.

Marlene Walter's a monster. Weren't you angry? What did you do?

Griselda Well I fainted. Then I cried and kissed the children. / Everyone was making a fuss of me.

Nijo But did you feel anything for them?

Griselda What?

Nijo Did you feel anything for the children?

Griselda Of course, I loved them.

Joan So you forgave him and lived with him?

Griselda He suffered so much all those years.

Isabella Hennie had the same sweet nature.

Nijo So they dressed you again?

Griselda Cloth of gold.

Joan I can't forgive anything.

Marlene You really are exceptional, Griselda.

Nijo Nobody gave me back my children.

Nijo *cries. The Waitress brings brandies.*

Isabella I can never be like Hennie. I was always so busy in England, a kind of business I detested. The very presence of people exhausted my emotional reserves. I could not be like Hennie however I tried. I tried and was as ill as could be. The doctor suggested a steel net to support my head, the weight of my own head was too much for my diseased spine. / It is dangerous to put oneself in depressing circumstances. Why should I do it?

Joan Don't cry.

Nijo My father and the Emperor both died in the autumn. So much pain.

Joan Yes, but don't cry.

Nijo They wouldn't let me into the palace when he was dying. I hid in the room with his coffin, then I couldn't find where I'd left my shoes, I ran after the funeral procession in bare feet, I couldn't keep up. When I got there it was over, a few wisps of smoke in the sky, that's all that was left of him. What I want to know is, if I'd still been at court, would I have been allowed to wear full mourning?

Marlene I'm sure you would.

**Nijo** Why do you say that? You don't know anything about it. Would I have been allowed to wear full mourning?

**Isabella** How can people live in this dim pale island and wear our hideous clothes? I cannot and will not live the life of a lady.

**Nijo** I'll tell you something that made me angry. I was eighteen, at the Full Moon Ceremony. They make a special rice gruel and stir it with their sticks, and then they beat their women across the loins so they'll have sons and not daughters. So the Emperor beat us all / very hard as usual – that's not it,

**Marlene** What a sod.

**Nijo** Marlene, that's normal, what made us angry, he told his attendants they could beat us too. Well they had a wonderful time. / So Lady Genki and I made a plan, and the ladies all hid

*The Waitress has entered with coffees.*

**Marlene** I'd like another brandy please. Better make it six.

**Nijo** in his rooms, and Lady Mashimizu stood guard with a stick at the door, and when His Majesty came in Genki seized him and I beat him till he cried out and promised he would never order anyone to hit us again. Afterwards there was a terrible fuss. The nobles were horrified. 'We wouldn't even dream of stepping on your Majesty's shadow.' And I had hit him with a stick. Yes, I hit him with a stick.

**Joan** Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis,  
 e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;  
 non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas,  
 sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est.  
 Suave etiam belli certamina magna tueri  
 per campos instructa tua sine parte pericli.  
 Sed nil dulcius est, bene quam munita tenere  
 edita doctrina sapientum templa serena, /  
 despicere unde queas alios passimque videre  
 errare atque viam palantis quaerere vitae,

**Griselda** I do think – I do wonder – it would have been nicer if Walter hadn't had to.

**Isabella** Why should I? Why should I?

**Marlene** Of course not.

**Nijo** I hit him with a stick.

**Joan** certare ingenio, contendere nobilitate,  
noctes atque dies niti praestante labore  
ad summas emergere opes retumque potiri.  
O miseras / hominum mentis, I pectora caeca!\*

**Isabella** Oh miseras!

**Nijo** \*Pectora caeca.

**Joan** qualibus in tenebris vitae quantisque periculis  
degitur hoc aevi quodcumquest! / nonne videre  
nil aliud sibi naturam latrare, nisi utqui  
corpore seiunctus dolor absit, mente fruatur.

**Joan** *subsides.*

**Gret** We come into hell through a big mouth. Hell's black and red. / It's like the village where I come from. There's a river and

**Marlene** (to Joan) Shut up, pet.

**Isabella** Listen, she's been to hell.

**Gret** a bridge and houses. There's places on fire like when the soldiers come. There's a big devil sat on a roof with a big hole in his arse and he's scooping stuff out of it with a big ladle and it's falling down on us, and it's money, so a lot of the women stop and get some. But most of us is fighting the devils. There's lots of little devils, our size, and we get them down all right and give them a beating. There's lots of funny creatures round your feet, you don't like to look, like rats and lizards, and nasty things, a bum with a face, and fish with legs, and faces on things that don't have faces on. But they don't hurt, you just keep going. Well we'd had worse, you see, we'd had the



Spanish. We'd all had family killed. My big son die on a wheel. Birds eat him. My baby, a soldier run her through with a sword. I'd had enough, I was mad, I hate the bastards. I come out my front door that morning and shout till my neighbours come out and I said, 'Come on, we're going where the evil come from and pay the bastards out.' And they all come out just as they was / from baking or washing in their

Nijo All the ladies come.

Gret aprons, and we push down the street and the ground opens up and we go through a big mouth into a street just like ours but in hell. I've got a sword in my hand from somewhere and I fill a basket with gold cups they drink out of down there. You just keep running on and fighting / you didn't stop for nothing. Oh we give them devils such a beating.

Nijo Take that, take that.

Joan Something something something mortisque timores tum vacuum pectus – damn.

Quod si ridicula –

something something on and on and on and something splendorem pupureai.

Isabella I thought I would have a last jaunt up the west river in China. Why not? But the doctors were so very grave. I just went to Morocco. The sea was so wild I had to be landed by ship's crane in a coal bucket. / My horse was a terror to me a

Gret Coal bucket, good.

Joan nos in luce timemus  
something  
terrorem.

Isabella powerful black charger.

Nijo *is laughing and crying.*

Joan *gets up and is sick in a corner.*

*Marlene is drinking Isabella's brandy.*

So off I went to visit the Berber sheikhs in full blue trousers and great brass spurs. I was the only European woman ever to have seen the Emperor of Morocco. I was seventy years old. What lengths to go to for a last chance of joy. I knew my return of vigour was only temporary, but how marvellous while it lasted.

## Act Two

### Scene One

*Joyce's back yard. The house with back door is upstage. Downstage a shelter made of junk, made by children. Two girls, Angie and Kit, are in it, squashed together. Angie is sixteen, Kit is twelve. They cannot be seen from the house. Joyce calls from the house.*

Joyce    Angie. Angie are you out there?

*Silence. They keep still and wait. When nothing else happens they relax.*

Angie    Wish she was dead.

Kit    Wanna watch *The Exterminator*?

Angie    You're sitting on my leg.

Kit    There's nothing on telly. We can have an ice cream.

Angie?

Angie    Shall I tell you something?

Kit    Do you wanna watch *The Exterminator*?

Angie    It's X, innit.

Kit    I can get into Xs.

Angie    Shall I tell you something?

Kit    We'll go to something else. We'll go to Ipswich. What's on the Odeon?

Angie    She won't let me, will she?

Kit    Don't tell her.

Angie    I've no money.

Kit    I'll pay.

Angie She'll moan though, won't she?

Kit I'll ask her for you if you like.

Angie I've no money, I don't want you to pay.

Kit I'll ask her.

Angie She don't like you.

Kit I still got three pounds birthday money. Did she say she don't like me? I'll go by myself then.

Angie Your mum don't let you. I got to take you.

Kit She won't know.

Angie You'd be scared who'd sit next to you.

Kit No I wouldn't.

She does like me anyway.

Tell me then.

Angie Tell you what?

Kit It's you she doesn't like.

Angie Well I don't like her so tough shit.

Joyce (*off*) Angie. Angie. Angie. I know you're out there. I'm not coming out after you. You come in here.

*Silence. Nothing happens.*

Angie Last night when I was in bed. I been thinking yesterday could I make things move. You know, make things move by thinking about them without touching them. Last night I was in bed and suddenly a picture fell down off the wall.

Kit What picture?

Angie My gran, that picture. Not the poster. The photograph in the frame.

Kit Had you done something to make it fall down?

Angie I must have done.

Kit But were you thinking about it?

Angie Not about it, but about something.

Kit I don't think that's very good.

Angie You know the kitten?

Kit Which one?

Angie There only is one. The dead one.

Kit What about it?

Angie I heard it last night.

Kit Where?

Angie Out here. In the dark. What if I left you here in the dark all night?

Kit You couldn't. I'd go home.

Angie You couldn't.

Kit I'd / go home.

Angie No you couldn't, not if I said.

Kit I could.

Angie Then you wouldn't see anything. You'd just be ignorant.

Kit I can see in the daytime.

Angie No you can't. You can't hear it in the daytime.

Kit I don't want to hear it.

Angie You're scared that's all.

Kit I'm not scared of anything.

Angie You're scared of blood.

Kit It's not the same kitten anyway. You just heard an old cat, / you just heard some old cat.

Angie You don't know what I heard. Or what I saw. You don't know nothing because you're a baby.

Kit You're sitting on me.

Angie Mind my hair / you silly cunt.

Kit Stupid fucking cow, I hate you.

Angie I don't care if you do.

Kit You're horrible.

Angie I'm going to kill my mother and you're going to watch.

Kit I'm not playing.

Angie You're scared of blood.

Kit *puts her hand under her dress, brings it out with blood on her finger.*

Kit There, see, I got my own blood, so.

Angie *takes Kit's hand and licks her finger.*

Angie Now I'm a cannibal. I might turn into a vampire now.

Kit That picture wasn't nailed up right.

Angie You'll have to do that when I get mine.

Kit I don't have to.

Angie You're scared.

Kit I'll do it, I might do it. I don't have to just because you say. I'll be sick on you.

Angie I don't care if you are sick on me, I don't mind sick. I don't mind blood. If I don't get away from here I'm going to die.

Kit I'm going home.

Angie You can't go through the house. She'll see you.

Kit I won't tell her.

Angie Oh great, fine.

Kit I'll say I was by myself. I'll tell her you're at my house and I'm going there to get you.

Angie She knows I'm here, stupid.

Kit Then why can't I go through the house?

Angie Because I said not.

Kit My mum don't like you anyway.

Angie I don't want her to like me. She's a slag.

Kit She is not.

Angie She does it with everyone.

Kit She does not.

Angie You don't even know what it is.

Kit Yes I do.

Angie Tell me then.

Kit We get it all at school, cleverclogs. It's on television. You haven't done it.

Angie How do you know?

Kit Because I know you haven't.

Angie You know wrong then because I have.

Kit Who with?

Angie I'm not telling you / who with.

Kit You haven't anyway.

Angie How do you know?

Kit Who with?

Angie I'm not telling you.

Kit You said you told me everything.

Angie I was lying wasn't I?

Kit Who with? You can't tell me who with because / you never –

Angie Sh.

*Joyce has come out of the house. She stops halfway across the yard and listens. They listen.*

Joyce You there Angie? Kit? You there Kitty? Want a cup of tea? I've got some chocolate biscuits. Come on now I'll put the kettle on. Want a choccy bicky, Angie?

*They all listen and wait.*

Fucking rotten little cunt. You can stay there and die. I'll lock the back door.

*They all wait.*

*Joyce goes back to the house.*

*Angie and Kit sit in silence for a while.*

Kit When there's a war, where's the safest place?

Angie Nowhere.

Kit New Zealand is, my mum said. Your skin's burned right off. Shall we go to New Zealand?

Angie I'm not staying here.

Kit Shall we go to New Zealand?

Angie You're not old enough.

Kit You're not old enough.

Angie I'm old enough to get married.

Kit You don't want to get married.



Angie No but I'm old enough.

Kit I'd find out where they were going to drop it and stand right in the place.

Angie You couldn't find out.

Kit Better than walking round with your skin dragging on the ground. Eugh. / Would you like walking round with your skin dragging on the ground?

Angie You couldn't find out, stupid, it's a secret.

Kit Where are you going?

Angie I'm not telling you.

Kit Why?

Angie It's a secret.

Kit But you tell me all your secrets.

Angie Not the true secrets.

Kit Yes you do.

Angie No I don't.

Kit I want to go somewhere away from the war.

Angie Just forget the war.

Kit I can't.

Angie You have to. It's so boring.

Kit I'll remember it at night.

Angie I'm going to do something else anyway.

Kit What? Angie come on. Angie.

Angie It's a true secret.

Kit It can't be worse than the kitten. And killing your mother. And the war.

Angie Well I'm not telling you so you can die for all I care.

Kit My mother says there's something wrong with you playing with someone my age. She says why haven't you got friends your own age. People your own age know there's something funny about you. She says you're a bad influence. She says she's going to speak to your mother.

Angie *twists Kit's arm till she cries out.*

Angie Say you're a liar.

Kit She said it not me.

Angie Say you eat shit.

Kit You can't make me.

Angie *lets go.*

Angie I don't care anyway. I'm leaving.

Kit Go on then.

Angie You'll all wake up one morning and find I've gone.

Kit Good.

Angie I'm not telling you when.

Kit Go on then.

Angie I'm sorry I hurt you.

Kit I'm tired.

Angie Do you like me?

Kit I don't know.

Angie You do like me.

Kit I'm going home.

Kit *gets up.*

Angie No you're not.

Kit I'm tired.

Angie She'll see you.

Kit She'll give me a chocolate biscuit.

Angie Kitty.

Kit Tell me where you're going.

Angie Sit down.

Kit *sits in the hut again.*

Kit Go on then.

Angie Swear?

Kit Swear.

Angie I'm going to London. To see my aunt.

Kit And what?

Angie That's it.

Kit I see my aunt all the time.

Angie I don't see my aunt.

Kit What's so special?

Angie It is special. She's special.

Kit Why?

Angie She is.

Kit Why?

Angie She is.

Kit Why?

Angie My mother hates her.

Kit Why?

Angie Because she does.

Kit Perhaps she's not very nice.

Angie She is nice.

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Kit How do you know?

Angie Because I know her.

Kit You said you never see her.

Angie I saw her last year. You saw her.

Kit Did I?

Angie Never mind.

Kit I remember her. That aunt. What's so special?

Angie She gets people jobs.

Kit What's so special?

Angie I think I'm my aunt's child. I think my mother's really my aunt.

Kit Why?

Angie Because she goes to America, now shut up.

Kit I've been to London.

Angie Now give us a cuddle and shut up because I'm sick.

Kit You're sitting on my arm.

*Silence.*

*Joyce comes out and comes up to them quietly.*

Joyce Come on.

Kit Oh hello.

Joyce Time you went home.

Kit We want to go to the Odeon.

Joyce What time?

Kit Don't know.

Joyce What's on?

Kit Don't know.

Joyce Don't know much do you?

Kit That all right then?

Joyce Angie's got to clean her room first.

Angie No I don't.

Joyce Yes you do, it's a pigsty.

Angie Well I'm not.

Joyce Then you're not going. I don't care.

Angie Well I am going.

Joyce You've no money, have you?

Angie Kit's paying anyway.

Joyce No she's not.

Kit I'll help you with your room.

Joyce That's nice.

Angie No you won't. You wait here.

Kit Hurry then.

Angie I'm not hurrying. You just wait.

*Angie goes into the house. Silence.*

Joyce I don't know.

*Silence.*

How's school then?

Kit All right.

Joyce What are you now? Third year?

Kit Second year.

Joyce Your mum says you're good at English.

*Silence.*

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Maybe Angie should've stayed on.

Kit She didn't like it.

Joyce I didn't like it. And look at me. If your face fits at school it's going to fit other places too. It wouldn't make no difference to Angie. She's not going to get a job when jobs are hard to get. I'd be sorry for anyone in charge of her. She'd better get married. I don't know who'd have her, mind. She's one of those girls might never leave home. What do you want to be when you grow up, Kit?

Kit Physicist.

Joyce What?

Kit Nuclear physicist.

Joyce Whatever for?

Kit I could, I'm clever.

Joyce I know you're clever, pet.

*Silence.*

I'll make a cup of tea.

*Silence.*

Looks like it's going to rain.

*Silence.*

Don't you have friends your own age?

Kit Yes.

Joyce Well then.

Kit I'm old for my age.

Joyce And Angie's simple is she? She's not simple.

Kit I love Angie.

Joyce She's clever in her own way.

Kit You can't stop me.

Joyce I don't want to.

Kit You can't, so.

Joyce Don't be cheeky, Kitty. She's always kind to little children.

Kit She's coming so you better leave me alone.

*Angie comes out. She has changed into an old best dress, slightly small for her.*

Joyce What you put that on for? Have you done your room? You can't clean your room in that.

Angie I looked in the cupboard and it was there.

Joyce Of course it was there, it's meant to be there. Is that why it was a surprise, finding something in the right place? I should think she's surprised, wouldn't you Kit, to find something in her room in the right place.

Angie I decided to wear it.

Joyce Not today, why? To clean your room? You're not going to the pictures till you've done your room. You can put your dress on after if you like.

*Angie picks up a brick.*

Have you done your room? You're not getting out of it, you know.

Kit Angie, let's go.

Joyce She's not going till she's done her room.

Kit It's starting to rain.

Joyce Come on, come on then. Hurry and do your room, Angie, and then you can go to the cinema with Kit. Oh it's wet, come on. We'll look up the time in the paper. Does your mother know, Kit, it's going to be a late night for you, isn't it? Hurry up, Angie. You'll spoil your dress. You make me sick.

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*Joyce and Kit run in.*

*Angie stays where she is. Sound of rain.*

*Kit comes out of the house and shouts.*

Kit Angie. Angie, come on, you'll get wet.

*Kit comes back to Angie.*

Angie I put on this dress to kill my mother.

Kit I suppose you thought you'd do it with a brick.

Angie You can kill people with a brick.

Kit Well you didn't, so.

Scene Two

*Office of 'Top Girls' Employment Agency. Three desks and a small interviewing area. Monday morning. Win and Nell have just arrived for work.*

Nell Coffee coffee coffee coffee / coffee.

Win The roses were smashing. / Mermaid.

Nell Ohhh.

Win Iceberg. He taught me all their names.

*Nell has some coffee now.*

Nell Ah. Now then.

Win He has one of the finest rose gardens in West Sussex. He exhibits.

Nell He what?

Win His wife was visiting her mother. It was like living together.

Nell Crafty, you never said.

Win He rang on Saturday morning.



Nell Lucky you were free.

Win That's what I told him.

Nell Did you hell.

Win Have you ever seen a really beautiful rose garden?

Nell I don't like flowers. / I like swimming pools.

Win Marilyn. Esther's Baby. They're all called after birds.

Nell Our friend's late. Celebrating all weekend I bet you.

Win I'd call a rose Elvis. Or John Conteh.

Nell Is Howard in yet?

Win If he is he'll be bleeping us with a problem.

Nell Howard can just hang on to himself.

Win Howard's really cut up.

Nell Howard thinks because he's a fella the job was his as of right. Our Marlene's got far more balls than Howard and that's that.

Win Poor little bugger.

Nell He'll live.

Win He'll move on.

Nell I wouldn't mind a change of air myself.

Win Serious?

Nell I've never been a staying put lady. Pastures new.

Win So who's the pirate?

Nell There's nothing definite.

Win Inquiries?

Nell There's always inquiries. I'd think I'd got bad breath if there stopped being inquiries. Most of them can't afford me. Or you.

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Win I'm all right for the time being. Unless I go to Australia.

Nell There's not a lot of room upward.

Win Marlene's filled it up.

Nell Good luck to her. Unless there's some prospects moneywise.

Win You can but ask.

Nell Can always but ask.

Win So what have we got? I've got a Mr Holden I saw last week.

Nell Any use?

Win Pushy. Bit of a cowboy.

Nell Good-looker?

Win Good dresser.

Nell High flyer?

Win That's his general idea certainly but I'm not sure he's got it up there.

Nell Prestel wants six high flyers and I've only seen two and a half.

Win He's making a bomb on the road but he thinks it's time for an office. I sent him to IBM but he didn't get it.

Nell Prestel's on the road.

Win He's not overbright.

Nell Can he handle an office?

Win Provided his secretary can punctuate he should go far.

Nell Bear Prestel in mind then, I might put my head round the door. I've got that poor little nerd I should never have said I could help. Tender heart me.

Win Tender like old boots. How old?

Nell Yes well forty-five.

Win Say no more.

Nell He knows his place, he's not after calling himself a manager, he's just a poor little bod wants a better commission and a bit of sunshine.

Win Don't we all.

Nell He's just got to relocate. He's got a bungalow in Dymchurch.

Win And his wife says.

Nell The lady wife wouldn't care to relocate. She's going through the change.

Win It's his funeral, don't waste your time.

Nell I don't waste a lot.

Win Good weekend you?

Nell You could say.

Win Which one?

Nell One Friday, one Saturday.

Win Aye aye.

Nell Sunday night I watched telly.

Win Which of them do you like best really?

Nell Sunday was best, I liked the Ovaltine.

Win Holden, Barker, Gardner, Duke.

Nell I've a lady here thinks she can sell.

Win Taking her on?

Nell She's had some jobs.

Win Services?

Nell No, quite heavy stuff, electric.

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Win Tough bird like us.

Nell We could do with a few more here.

Win There's nothing going here.

Nell No but I always want the tough ones when I see them.  
Hang on to them.

Win I think we're plenty.

Nell Derek asked me to marry him again.

Win He doesn't know when he's beaten.

Nell I told him I'm not going to play house, not even in  
Ascot.

Win Mind you, you could play house.

Nell If I chose to play house I would play house ace.

Win You could marry him and go on working.

Nell I could go on working and not marry him.

Marlene *arrives.*

Marlene Morning ladies.

Win *and Nell cheer and whistle.*

Mind my head.

Nell Coffee coffee coffee.

Win We're tactfully not mentioning you're late.

Marlene Fucking tube.

Win We've heard that one.

Nell We've used that one.

Win It's the top executive doesn't come in as early as the  
poor working girl.

Marlene Pass the sugar and shut your face, pet.

Win Well I'm delighted.

Nell Howard's looking sick.

Win Howard is sick. He's got ulcers and heart. He told me.

Nell He'll have to stop then won't he?

Win Stop what?

Nell Smoking, drinking, shouting. Working.

Win Well, working.

Nell We're just looking through the day.

Marlene I'm doing some of Pam's ladies. They've been piling up while she's away.

Nell Half a dozen little girls and an arts graduate who can't type.

Win I spent the whole weekend at his place in Sussex.

Nell She fancies his rose garden.

Win I had to lie down in the back of the car so the neighbours wouldn't see me go in.

Nell You're kidding.

Win It was funny.

Nell Fuck that for a joke.

Win It was funny.

Marlene Anyway they'd see you in the garden.

Win The garden has extremely high walls.

Nell I think I'll tell the wife.

Win Like hell.

Nell She might leave him and you could have the rose garden.

Win The minute it's not a secret I'm out on my ear.

Nell Don't know why you bother.

Win Bit of fun.

Nell I think it's time you went to Australia.

Win I think it's pushy Mr Holden time.

Nell If you've any really pretty bastards, Marlene, I want some for Prestel.

Marlene I might have one this afternoon. This morning it's all Pam's secretarial.

Nell Not long now and you'll be upstairs watching over us all.

Marlene Do you feel bad about it?

Nell I don't like coming second.

Marlene Who does?

Win We'd rather it was you than Howard. We're glad for you, aren't we Nell.

Nell Oh yes. Aces.

#### Interview

*Marlene and Jeanine.*

Marlene Right Jeanine, you are Jeanine aren't you? Let's have a look. Os and As. / No As, all those Os you probably

Jeanine Six Os.

Marlene could have got an A. / Speeds, not brilliant, not too bad.

Jeanine I wanted to go to work.

Marlene Well, Jeanine, what's your present job like?

Jeanine I'm a secretary.

Marlene Secretary or typist?

Jeanine I did start as a typist but the last six months I've been a secretary.

Marlene To?

Jeanine To three of them, really, they share me. There's Mr Ashford, he's the office manager, and Mr Philby / is sales, and –

Marlene Quite a small place?

Jeanine A bit small.

Marlene Friendly?

Jeanine Oh it's friendly enough.

Marlene Prospects?

Jeanine I don't think so, that's the trouble. Miss Lewis is secretary to the managing director and she's been there forever, and Mrs Bradford / is –

Marlene So you want a job with better prospects?

Jeanine I want a change.

Marlene So you'll take anything comparable?

Jeanine No, I do want prospects. I want more money.

Marlene You're getting –?

Jeanine Hundred.

Marlene It's not bad you know. You're what? Twenty?

Jeanine I'm saving to get married.

Marlene Does that mean you don't want a long-term job, Jeanine?

Jeanine I might do.

Marlene Because where do the prospects come in? No kids for a bit?

Jeanine Oh no, not kids, not yet.

Marlene So you won't tell them you're getting married?

Jeanine Had I better not?

Marlene It would probably help.

Jeanine I'm not wearing a ring. We thought we wouldn't spend on a ring.

Marlene Saves taking it off.

Jeanine I wouldn't take it off.

Marlene There's no need to mention it when you go for an interview. / Now Jeanine do you have a feel for any particular

Jeanine But what if they ask?

Marlene kind of company?

Jeanine I thought advertising.

Marlene People often do think advertising. I have got a few vacancies but I think they're looking for something glossier.

Jeanine You mean how I dress? / I can dress different. I

Marlene I mean experience.

Jeanine dress like this on purpose for where I am now.

Marlene I have a marketing department here of a knitwear manufacturer. / Marketing is near enough advertising.

Secretary

Jeanine Knitwear?

Marlene to the marketing manager, he's thirty-five, married, I've sent him a girl before and she was happy, left to have a baby, you won't want to mention marriage there. He's very fair I think, good at his job, you won't have to nurse him along. Hundred and ten, so that's better than you're doing now.

Jeanine I don't know.



**Marlene** I've a fairly small concern here, father and two sons, you'd have more say potentially, secretarial and reception duties, only a hundred but the job's going to grow with the concern and then you'll be in at the top with new girls coming in underneath you.

**Jeanine** What is it they do?

**Marlene** Lampshades. / This would be my first choice for you.

**Jeanine** Just lampshades?

**Marlene** There's plenty of different kinds of lampshade. So we'll send you there, shall we, and the knitwear second choice. Are you free to go for an interview any day they call you?

**Jeanine** I'd like to travel.

**Marlene** We don't have any foreign clients. You'd have to go elsewhere.

**Jeanine** Yes I know. I don't really . . . I just mean . . .

**Marlene** Does your fiancé want to travel?

**Jeanine** I'd like a job where I was here in London and with him and everything but now and then – I expect it's silly. Are there jobs like that?

**Marlene** There's personal assistant to a top executive in a multinational. If that's the idea you need to be planning ahead. Is that where you want to be in ten years?

**Jeanine** I might not be alive in ten years.

**Marlene** Yes but you will be. You'll have children.

**Jeanine** I can't think about ten years.

**Marlene** You haven't got the speeds anyway. So I'll send you to these two shall I? You haven't been to any other agency? Just so we don't get crossed wires. Now Jeanine I want you to get one of these jobs, all right? If I send you that means I'm putting myself on the line for you. Your presentation's OK, you look fine, just be confident and go in there convinced that

this is the best job for you and you're the best person for the job. If you don't believe it they won't believe it.

Jeanine Do you believe it?

Marlene I think you could make me believe it if you put your mind to it.

Jeanine Yes, all right.

### Interview

Win *and* Louise.

Win Now Louise, hello, I have your details here. You've been very loyal to the one job I see.

Louise Yes I have.

Win Twenty-one years is a long time in one place.

Louise I feel it is. I feel it's time to move on.

Win And you are what age now?

Louise I'm in my early forties.

Win Exactly?

Louise Forty-six.

Win It's not necessarily a handicap, well it is of course we have to face that, but it's not necessarily a disabling handicap, experience does count for something.

Louise I hope so.

Win Now between ourselves is there any trouble, any reason why you're leaving that wouldn't appear on the form?

Louise Nothing like that.

Win Like what?

Louise Nothing at all.

Win No long-term understandings come to a sudden end, making for an insupportable atmosphere?

**Louise** I've always completely avoided anything like that at all.

**Win** No personality clashes with your immediate superiors or inferiors?

**Louise** I've always taken care to get on very well with everyone.

**Win** I only ask because it can affect the reference and it also affects your motivation, I want to be quite clear why you're moving on. So I take it the job itself no longer satisfies you. Is it the money?

**Louise** It's partly the money. It's not so much the money.

**Win** Nine thousand is very respectable. Have you dependants?

**Louise** No, no dependants. My mother died.

**Win** So why are you making a change?

**Louise** Other people make changes.

**Win** But why are you, now, after spending most of your life in the one place?

**Louise** There you are, I've lived for that company, I've given my life really you could say because I haven't had a great deal of social life, I've worked in the evenings. I haven't had office entanglements for the very reason you just mentioned and if you are committed to your work you don't move in many other circles. I had management status from the age of twenty-seven and you'll appreciate what that means. I've built up a department. And there it is, it works extremely well, and I feel I'm stuck there. I've spent twenty years in middle management. I've seen young men who I trained go on, in my own company or elsewhere, to higher things. Nobody notices me, I don't expect it, I don't attract attention by making mistakes, everybody takes it for granted that my work is perfect. They will notice me when I go, they will be sorry I think to lose me, they will offer me more money of course, I will refuse. They will see when I've gone what I was doing for them.

**Win** If they offer you more money you won't stay?

**Louise** No I won't.

**Win** Are you the only woman?

**Louise** Apart from the girls of course, yes. There was one, she was my assistant, it was the only time I took on a young woman assistant, I always had my doubts. I don't care greatly for working with women, I think I pass as a man at work. But I did take on this young woman, her qualifications were excellent, and she did well, she got a department of her own, and left the company for a competitor where she's now on the board and good luck to her. She has a different style, she's a new kind of attractive well-dressed – I don't mean I don't dress properly. But there is a kind of woman who is thirty now who grew up in a different climate. They are not so careful. They take themselves for granted. I have had to justify my existence every minute, and I have done so, I have proved – well.

**Win** Let's face it, vacancies are going to be ones where you'll be in competition with younger men. And there are companies that will value your experience enough you'll be in with a chance. There are also fields that are easier for a woman, there is a cosmetic company here where your experience might be relevant. It's eight and a half, I don't know if that appeals.

**Louise** I've proved I can earn money. It's more important to get away. I feel it's now or never. I sometimes / think –

**Win** You shouldn't talk too much at an interview.

**Louise** I don't. I don't normally talk about myself. I know very well how to handle myself in an office situation. I only talk to you because it seems to me this is different, it's your job to understand me, surely. You asked the questions.

**Win** I think I understand you sufficiently.

**Louise** Well good, that's good.

**Win** Do you drink?

Louise Certainly not. I'm not a teetotaller, I think that's very suspect, it's seen as being an alcoholic if you're teetotal. What do you mean? I don't drink. Why?

Win I drink.

Louise I don't.

Win Good for you.

Main office

Marlene *and* Angie.

Angie *arrives*.

Angie Hello.

Marlene Have you an appointment?

Angie It's me. I've come.

Marlene What? It's not Angie?

Angie It was hard to find this place. I got lost.

Marlene How did you get past the receptionist? The girl on the desk, didn't she try to stop you?

Angie What desk?

Marlene Never mind.

Angie I just walked in. I was looking for you.

Marlene Well you found me.

Angie Yes.

Marlene So where's your mum? Are you up in town for the day?

Angie Not really.

Marlene Sit down. Do you feel all right?

Angie Yes thank you.

Marlene So where's Joyce?

Angie She's at home.

Marlene Did you come up on a school trip then?

Angie I've left school.

Marlene Did you come up with a friend?

Angie No. There's just me.

Marlene You came up by yourself, that's fun. What have you been doing? Shopping? Tower of London?

Angie No, I just come here. I come to you.

Marlene That's very nice of you to think of paying your aunty a visit. There's not many nieces make that the first port of call. Would you like a cup of coffee?

Angie No thank you.

Marlene Tea, orange?

Angie No thank you.

Marlene Do you feel all right?

Angie Yes thank you.

Marlene Are you tired from the journey?

Angie Yes, I'm tired from the journey.

Marlene You sit there for a bit then. How's Joyce?

Angie She's all right.

Marlene Same as ever.

Angie Oh yes.

Marlene Unfortunately you've picked a day when I'm rather busy, if there's ever a day when I'm not, or I'd take you out to lunch and we'd go to Madame Tussaud's. We could go shopping. What time do you have to be back? Have you got a day return?

Angie No.

Marlene So what train are you going back on?

Angie I came on the bus.

Marlene So what bus are you going back on? Are you staying the night?

Angie Yes.

Marlene Who are you staying with? Do you want me to put you up for the night, is that it?

Angie Yes please.

Marlene I haven't got a spare bed.

Angie I can sleep on the floor.

Marlene You can sleep on the sofa.

Angie Yes please.

Marlene I do think Joyce might have phoned me. It's like her.

Angie This is where you work is it?

Marlene It's where I have been working the last two years but I'm going to move into another office.

Angie It's lovely.

Marlene My new office is nicer than this. There's just the one big desk in it for me.

Angie Can I see it?

Marlene Not now, no, there's someone else in it now. But he's leaving at the end of next week and I'm going to do his job.

Angie Is that good?

Marlene Yes, it's very good.

Angie Are you going to be in charge?

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Marlene Yes I am.

Angie I knew you would be.

Marlene How did you know?

Angie I knew you'd be in charge of everything.

Marlene Not quite everything.

Angie You will be.

Marlene Well we'll see.

Angie Can I see it next week then?

Marlene Will you still be here next week?

Angie Yes.

Marlene Don't you have to go home?

Angie No.

Marlene Why not?

Angie It's all right.

Marlene Is it all right?

Angie Yes, don't worry about it.

Marlene Does Joyce know where you are?

Angie Yes of course she does.

Marlene Well does she?

Angie Don't worry about it.

Marlene How long are you planning to stay with me then?

Angie You know when you came to see us last year?

Marlene Yes, that was nice wasn't it?

Angie That was the best day of my whole life.

Marlene So how long are you planning to stay?



Angie Don't you want me?

Marlene Yes yes, I just wondered.

Angie I won't stay if you don't want me.

Marlene No, of course you can stay.

Angie I'll sleep on the floor. I won't be any bother.

Marlene Don't get upset.

Angie I'm not, I'm not. Don't worry about it.

Mrs Kidd *comes in.*

Mrs Kidd Excuse me.

Marlene Yes.

Mrs Kidd Excuse me.

Marlene Can I help you?

Mrs Kidd Excuse me bursting in on you like this but I have to talk to you.

Marlene I am engaged at the moment. / If you could go to reception –

Mrs Kidd I'm Rosemary Kidd, Howard's wife, you don't recognise me but we did meet, I remember you of course / but you wouldn't –

Marlene Yes of course, Mrs Kidd, I'm sorry, we did meet. Howard's about somewhere I expect, have you looked in his office?

Mrs Kidd Howard's not about, no. I'm afraid it's you I've come to see if I could have a minute or two.

Marlene I do have an appointment in five minutes.

Mrs Kidd This won't take five minutes. I'm very sorry. It is a matter of some urgency.

Marlene Well of course. What can I do for you?

**Mrs Kidd** I just wanted a chat, an informal chat. It's not something I can simply – I'm sorry if I'm interrupting your work. I know office work isn't like housework / which is all interruptions.

**Marlene** No no, this is my niece, Angie. Mrs Kidd.

**Mrs Kidd** Very pleased to meet you.

**Angie** Very well thank you.

**Mrs Kidd** Howard's not in today.

**Marlene** Isn't he?

**Mrs Kidd** He's feeling poorly.

**Marlene** I didn't know. I'm sorry to hear that.

**Mrs Kidd** The fact is he's in a state of shock. About what's happened.

**Marlene** What has happened?

**Mrs Kidd** You should know if anyone. I'm referring to you being appointed managing director instead of Howard. He hasn't been at all well all weekend. He hasn't slept for three nights. I haven't slept.

**Marlene** I'm sorry to hear that, Mrs Kidd. Has he thought of taking sleeping pills?

**Mrs Kidd** It's very hard when someone has worked all these years.

**Marlene** Business life is full of little setbacks. I'm sure Howard knows that. He'll bounce back in a day or two. We all bounce back.

**Mrs Kidd** If you could see him you'd know what I'm talking about. What's it going to do to him working for a woman? I think if it was a man he'd get over it as something normal.

**Marlene** I think he's going to have to get over it.

**Mrs Kidd** It's me that bears the brunt. I'm not the one that's been promoted. I put him first every inch of the way. And now what do I get? You women this, you women that. It's not my fault. You're going to have to be very careful how you handle him. He's very hurt.

**Marlene** Naturally I'll be tactful and pleasant to him, you don't start pushing someone round. I'll consult him over any decisions affecting his department. But that's no different, Mrs Kidd, from any of my other colleagues.

**Mrs Kidd** I think it is different, because he's a man.

**Marlene** I'm not quite sure why you came to see me.

**Mrs Kidd** I had to do something.

**Marlene** Well you've done it, you've seen me. I think that's probably all we've time for. I'm sorry he's been taking it out on you. He really is a shit, Howard.

**Mrs Kidd** But he's got a family to support. He's got three children. It's only fair.

**Marlene** Are you suggesting I give up the job to him then?

**Mrs Kidd** It had crossed my mind if you were unavailable after all for some reason, he would be the natural second choice I think, don't you? I'm not asking.

**Marlene** Good.

**Mrs Kidd** You mustn't tell him I came. He's very proud.

**Marlene** If he doesn't like what's happening here he can go and work somewhere else.

**Mrs Kidd** Is that a threat?

**Marlene** I'm sorry but I do have some work to do.

**Mrs Kidd** It's not that easy, a man of Howard's age. You don't care. I thought he was going too far but he's right. You're one of these ballbreakers / that's what you are. You'll end up

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Marlene I'm sorry but I do have some work to do.

Mrs Kidd miserable and lonely. You're not natural.

Marlene Could you please piss off?

Mrs Kidd I thought if I saw you at least I'd be doing something.

Mrs Kidd *goes.*

Marlene I've got to go and do some work now. Will you come back later?

Angie I think you were wonderful.

Marlene I've got to go and do some work now.

Angie You told her to piss off.

Marlene Will you come back later?

Angie Can't I stay here?

Marlene Don't you want to go sightseeing?

Angie I'd rather stay here.

Marlene You can stay here I suppose, if it's not boring.

Angie It's where I most want to be in the world.

Marlene I'll see you later then.

Marlene *goes.*

Angie *sits at Win's desk.*

Interview

Nell *and Shona.*

Nell Is this right? You are Shona?

Shona Yeh.

Nell It says here you're twenty-nine.

Shona Yeh.

Nell Too many late nights, me. So you've been where you are for four years, Shona, you're earning six basic and three commission. So what's the problem?

Shona No problem.

Nell Why do you want a change?

Shona Just a change.

Nell Change of product, change of area?

Shona Both.

Nell But you're happy on the road?

Shona I like driving.

Nell You're not after management status?

Shona I would like management status.

Nell You'd be interested in titular management status but not come off the road?

Shona I want to be on the road, yeh.

Nell So how many calls have you been making a day?

Shona Six.

Nell And what proportion of those are successful?

Shona Six.

Nell That's hard to believe.

Shona Four.

Nell You find it easy to get the initial interest do you?

Shona Oh yeh, I get plenty of initial interest.

Nell And what about closing?

Shona I close, don't I?

**Nell** Because that's what an employer is going to have doubts about with a lady as I needn't tell you, whether she's got the guts to push through to a closing situation. They think we're too nice. They think we listen to the buyer's doubts. They think we consider his needs and his feelings.

**Shona** I never consider people's feelings.

**Nell** I was selling for six years, I can sell anything, I've sold in three continents, and I'm jolly as they come but I'm not very nice.

**Shona** I'm not very nice.

**Nell** What sort of time do you have on the road with the other reps? Get on all right? Handle the chat?

**Shona** I get on. Keep myself to myself.

**Nell** Fairly much of a loner are you?

**Shona** Sometimes.

**Nell** So what field are you interested in?

**Shona** Computers.

**Nell** That's a top field as you know and you'll be up against some very slick fellas there, there's some very pretty boys in computers, it's an American-style field.

**Shona** That's why I want to do it.

**Nell** Video systems appeal? That's a high-flying situation.

**Shona** Video systems appeal OK.

**Nell** Because Prestel have half a dozen vacancies I'm looking to fill at the moment. We're talking in the area of ten to fifteen thousand here and upwards.

**Shona** Sounds OK.

**Nell** I've half a mind to go for it myself. But it's good money here if you've got the top clients. Could you fancy it do you think?

Shona Work here?

Nell I'm not in a position to offer, there's nothing officially going just now, but we're always on the lookout. There's not that many of us. We could keep in touch.

Shona I like driving.

Nell So the Prestel appeals?

Shona Yeh.

Nell What about ties?

Shona No ties.

Nell So relocation wouldn't be a problem.

Shona No problem.

Nell So just fill me in a bit more could you about what you've been doing.

Shona What I've been doing. It's all down there.

Nell The bare facts are down here but I've got to present you to an employer.

Shona I'm twenty-nine years old.

Nell So it says here.

Shona We look young. Youngness runs in the family in our family.

Nell So just describe your present job for me.

Shona My present job at present. I have a car. I have a Porsche. I go up the M1 a lot. Burn up the M1 a lot. Straight up the M1 in the fast lane to where the clients are, Staffordshire, Yorkshire, I do a lot in Yorkshire. I'm selling electric things. Like dishwashers, washing machines, stainless steel tubs are a feature and the reliability of the programme. After sales service, we offer a very good after sales service, spare parts, plenty of spare parts. And fridges, I sell a lot of fridges specially in the summer. People want to buy fridges in

the summer because of the heat melting the butter and you get fed up standing the milk in a basin of cold water with a cloth over, stands to reason people don't want to do that in this day and age. So I sell a lot of them. Big ones with big freezers. Big freezers. And I stay in hotels at night when I'm away from home. On my expense account. I stay in various hotels. They know me, the ones I go to. I check in, have a bath, have a shower. Then I go down to the bar, have a gin and tonic, have a chat. Then I go into the dining room and have dinner. I usually have fillet steak and mushrooms, I like mushrooms. I like smoked salmon very much. I like having a salad on the side. Green salad. I don't like tomatoes.

Nell Christ what a waste of time.

Shona Beg your pardon?

Nell Not a word of this is true is it?

Shona How do you mean?

Nell You just filled in the form with a pack of lies.

Shona Not exactly.

Nell How old are you?

Shona Twenty-nine.

Nell Nineteen?

Shona Twenty-one.

Nell And what jobs have you done? Have you done any?

Shona I could though, I bet you.

Main office

Angie *sitting as before.*

Win *comes in.*

Win Who's sitting in my chair?

Angie What? Sorry.



Win Who's been eating my porridge?

Angie What?

Win It's all right, I saw Marlene. Angie isn't it? I'm Win. And I'm not going out for lunch because I'm knackered. I'm going to set me down here and have a yoghurt. Do you like yoghurt?

Angie No.

Win That's good because I've only got one. Are you hungry?

Angie No.

Win There's a cafe on the corner.

Angie No thank you. Do you work here?

Win How did you guess?

Angie Because you look as if you might work here and you're sitting at the desk. Have you always worked here?

Win No I was headhunted. That means I was working for another outfit like this and this lot came and offered me more money. I broke my contract, there was a hell of a stink. There's not many top ladies about. Your aunty's a smashing bird.

Angie Yes I know.

Marlene Fan are you? Fan of your aunty's?

Angie Do you think I could work here?

Win Not at the moment.

Angie How do I start?

Win What can you do?

Angie I don't know. Nothing.

Win Type?

Angie Not very well. The letters jump up when I do capitals. I was going to do a CSE in commerce but I didn't.

Win What have you got?

Angie What?

Win CSEs, Os.

Angie Nothing, none of that. Did you do all that?

Win Oh yes, all that, and a science degree funnily enough. I started out doing medical research but there's no money in it. I thought I'd go abroad. Did you know they sell Coca-Cola in Russia and Pepsi-cola in China? You don't have to be qualified as much as you might think. Men are awful bullshitters, they like to make out jobs are harder than they are. Any job I ever did I started doing it better than the rest of the crowd and they didn't like it. So I'd get unpopular and I'd have a drink to cheer myself up. I lived with a fella and supported him for four years, he couldn't get work. After that I went to California. I like the sunshine. Americans know how to live. This country's too slow. Then I went to Mexico, still in sales, but it's no country for a single lady. I came home, went bonkers for a bit, thought I was five different people, got over that all right, the psychiatrist said I was perfectly sane and highly intelligent. Got married in a moment of weakness and he's inside now, he's been inside four years, and I've not been to see him too much this last year. I like this better than sales, I'm not really that aggressive. I started thinking sales was a good job if you want to meet people, but you're meeting people that don't want to meet you. It's no good if you like being liked. Here your clients want to meet you because you're the one doing them some good. They hope.

*Angie has fallen asleep. Nell comes in.*

Nell You're talking to yourself, sunshine.

Win So what's new?

Nell Who is this?

Win Marlene's little niece.

Nell What's she got, brother, sister? She never talks about her family.

Win I was telling her my life story.

Nell Violins?

Win No, success story.

Nell You've heard Howard's had a heart attack?

Win No, when?

Nell I heard just now. He hadn't come in, he was at home, he's gone to hospital. He's not dead. His wife was here, she rushed off in a cab.

Win Too much butter, too much smoke. We must send him some flowers.

Marlene *comes in.*

You've heard about Howard?

Marlene Poor sod.

Nell Lucky he didn't get the job if that's what his health's like.

Marlene Is she asleep?

Win She wants to work here.

Marlene Packer in Tesco more like.

Win She's a nice kid. Isn't she?

Marlene She's a bit thick. She's a bit funny.

Win She thinks you're wonderful.

Marlene She's not going to make it.

## *Act Three*

*A year earlier. Sunday evening. Joyce's kitchen. Joyce, Angie, Marlene. Marlene is taking presents out of a bright carrier bag. Angie has already opened a box of chocolates.*

Marlene Just a few little things. / I've no memory for

Joyce There's no need.

Marlene Birthdays have I, and Christmas seems to slip by. So I think I owe Angie a few presents.

Joyce What do you say?

Angie Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Auntie Marlene.

*She opens a present. It is the dress from Act One, new.*

Angie Oh look, Mum, isn't it lovely?

Marlene I don't know if it's the right size. She's grown up since I saw her. / I knew she was always tall for her age.

Angie Isn't it lovely?

Joyce She's a big lump.

Marlene Hold it up, Angie, let's see.

Angie I'll put it on, shall I?

Marlene Yes, try it on.

Joyce Go on to your room then, we don't want / a strip show thank you.

Angie Of course I'm going to my room, what do you think? Look Mum, here's something for you. Open it, go on. What is it? Can I open it for you?

Joyce Yes, you open it, pet.

Angie Don't you want to open it yourself? / Go on.

Joyce I don't mind, you can do it.

Angie It's something hard. It's – what is it? A bottle. Drink is it? No, it's what? Perfume, look. What a lot. Open it, look, let's smell it. Oh it's strong. It's lovely. Put it on me. How do you do it? Put it on me.

Joyce You're too young.

Angie I can play wearing it like dressing up.

Joyce And you're too old for that. Here, give it here, I'll do it, you'll tip the whole bottle over yourself / and we'll have you smelling all summer.

Angie Put it on you. Do I smell? Put it on Aunty too. Put it on Aunty too. Let's all smell.

Marlene I didn't know what you'd like.

Joyce There's no danger I'd have it already, / that's one thing.

Angie Now we all smell the same.

Marlene It's a bit of nonsense.

Joyce It's very kind of you Marlene, you shouldn't.

Angie Now. I'll put on the dress and then we'll see.

Angie goes.

Joyce You've caught me on the hop with the place in a mess.  
/ If you'd let me know you was coming I'd have got

Marlene That doesn't matter.

Joyce something in to eat. We had our dinner dinnertime.  
We're just going to have a cup of tea. You could have an egg.

Marlene No, I'm not hungry. Tea's fine.

Joyce I don't expect you take sugar.

Marlene Why not?

Joyce You take care of yourself.

Marlene How do you mean you didn't know I was coming?

Joyce You could have written. I know we're not on the phone but we're not completely in the dark ages, / we do have a postman.

Marlene But you asked me to come.

Joyce How did I ask you to come?

Marlene Angie said when she phoned up.

Joyce Angie phoned up, did she?

Marlene Was it just Angie's idea?

Joyce What did she say?

Marlene She said you wanted me to come and see you. / It was a couple of weeks ago. How was I to know that's a

Joyce Ha.

Marlene ridiculous idea? My diary's always full a couple of weeks ahead so we fixed it for this weekend. I was meant to get here earlier but I was held up. She gave me messages from you.

Joyce Didn't you wonder why I didn't phone you myself?

Marlene She said you didn't like using the phone. You're shy on the phone and can't use it. I don't know what you're like, do I.

Joyce Are there people who can't use the phone?

Marlene I expect so.

Joyce I haven't met any.

Marlene Why should I think she was lying?

Joyce Because she's like what she's like.

Marlene How do I know / what she's like?

Joyce It's not my fault you don't know what she's like. You never come and see her.

Marlene Well I have now / and you don't seem over the moon.\*

Joyce Good.

\*Well I'd have got a cake if she'd told me.

*Pause.*

Marlene I did wonder why you wanted to see me.

Joyce I didn't want to see you.

Marlene Yes, I know. Shall I go?

Joyce I don't mind seeing you.

Marlene Great, I feel really welcome.

Joyce You can come and see Angie any time you like, I'm not stopping you. / You know where we are. You're the

Marlene Ta ever so.

Joyce one went away, not me. I'm right here where I was.

And will be a few years yet I shouldn't wonder.

Marlene All right. All right.

Joyce *gives Marlene a cup of tea.*

Joyce Tea.

Marlene Sugar?

Joyce *passes Marlene the sugar.*

It's very quiet down here.

Joyce I expect you'd notice it.

Marlene The air smells different too.

Joyce That's the scent.

Marlene No, I mean walking down the lane.

Joyce What sort of air you get in London then?

Angie *comes in, wearing the dress. It fits.*

Marlene Oh, very pretty. You do look pretty, Angie.

Joyce That fits all right.

Marlene Do you like the colour?

Angie Beautiful. Beautiful.

Joyce You better take it off, you'll get it dirty.

Angie I want to wear it. I want to wear it.

Marlene It is for wearing after all. You can't just hang it up and look at it.

Angie I love it.

Joyce Well if you must you must.

Angie If someone asks me what's my favourite colour I'll tell them it's this. Thank you very much, Aunty Marlene.

Marlene You didn't tell your mum you asked me down.

Angie I wanted it to be a surprise.

Joyce I'll give you a surprise / one of these days.

Angie I thought you'd like to see her. She hasn't been here since I was nine. People do see their aunts.

Marlene Is it that long? Doesn't time fly?

Angie I wanted to.

Joyce I'm not cross.

Angie Are you glad?

Joyce I smell nicer anyhow, don't I?

*Kit comes in without saying anything, as if she lived there.*



**Marlene** I think it was a good idea, Angie, about time. We are sisters after all. It's a pity to let that go.

**Joyce** This is Kitty, / who lives up the road. This is Angie's Aunty Marlene.

**Kit** What's that?

**Angie** It's a present. Do you like it?

**Kit** It's all right. / Are you coming out?

**Marlene** Hello, Kitty.

**Angie** \*No.

**Kit** What's that smell?

**Angie** It's a present.

**Kit** It's horrible. Come on.

**Marlene** Have a chocolate.

**Angie** \*No, I'm busy.

**Kit** Coming out later?

**Angie** No.

**Kit** (to Marlene) Hello.

**Kit** *goes without a chocolate.*

**Joyce** She's a little girl Angie sometimes plays with because she's the only child lives really close. She's like a little sister to her really. Angie's good with little children.

**Marlene** Do you want to work with children, Angie? / Be a teacher or a nursery nurse?

**Joyce** I don't think she's ever thought of it.

**Marlene** What do you want to do?

**Joyce** She hasn't an idea in her head what she wants to do. / Lucky to get anything.

80 TOP GIRLS

Marlene Angie?

Joyce She's not clever like you.

*Pause.*

Marlene I'm not clever, just pushy.

Joyce True enough.

Marlene *takes a bottle of whisky out of the bag.*

I don't drink spirits.

Angie You do at Christmas.

Joyce It's not Christmas, is it?

Angie It's better than Christmas.

Marlene Glasses?

Joyce Just a small one then.

Marlene Do you want some, Angie?

Angie I can't, can I?

Joyce Taste it if you want. You won't like it.

Marlene We got drunk together the night your grandfather died.

Joyce We did not get drunk.

Marlene I got drunk. You were just overcome with grief.

Joyce I still keep up the grave with flowers.

Marlene Do you really?

Joyce Why wouldn't I?

Marlene Have you seen Mother?

Joyce Of course I've seen Mother.

Marlene I mean lately.

Joyce Of course I've seen her lately, I go every Thursday.

Marlene (*to Angie*) Do you remember your grandfather?

Angie He got me out of the bath one night in a towel.

Marlene Did he? I don't think he ever gave me a bath. Did he give you a bath, Joyce? He probably got soft in his old age. Did you like him?

Angie Yes of course.

Marlene Why?

Angie What?

Marlene So what's the news? How's Mrs Paisley? Still going crazily? / And Dorothy. What happened to Dorothy?\*

Angie Who's Mrs Paisley?

Joyce \*She went to Canada.

Marlene Did she? What to do?

Joyce I don't know. She just went to Canada.

Marlene Well / good for her.

Angie Mr Connolly killed his wife.

Marlene What, Connolly at Whitegates?

Angie They found her body in the garden. / Under the cabbages.

Marlene He was always so proper.

Joyce Stuck up git. Connolly. Best lawyer money could buy but he couldn't get out of it. She was carrying on with Matthew.

Marlene How old's Matthew then?

Joyce Twenty-one. / He's got a motorbike.

Marlene I think he's about six.

Angie How can he be six? He's six years older than me. / If he was six I'd be nothing, I'd be just born this minute.

Joyce Your aunty knows that, she's just being silly. She means it's so long since she's been here she's forgotten about Matthew.

Angie You were here for my birthday when I was nine. I had a pink cake. Kit was only five then, she was four, she hadn't started school yet. She could read already when she went to school. You remember my birthday? / You remember me?

Marlene Yes, I remember the cake.

Angie You remember me?

Marlene Yes, I remember you.

Angie And Mum and Dad was there, and Kit was.

Marlene Yes, how is your dad? Where is he tonight? Up the pub?

Joyce No, he's not here.

Marlene I can see he's not here.

Joyce He moved out.

Marlene What? When did he? /Just recently?\*

Angie Didn't you know that? You don't know much.

Joyce \*No, it must be three years ago. Don't be rude, Angie.

Angie I'm not, am I Aunty? What else don't you know?

Joyce You was in America or somewhere. You sent a postcard.

Angie I've got that in my room. It's the Grand Canyon. Do you want to see it? Shall I get it? I can get it for you.

Marlene Yes, all right.

Angie goes.

Joyce You could be married with twins for all I know. You must have affairs and break up and I don't need to know about any of that so I don't see what the fuss is about.

Marlene What fuss?

*Angie comes back with the postcard.*

Angie 'Driving across the states for a new job in L.A. It's a long way but the car goes very fast. It's very hot. Wish you were here. Love from Aunty Marlene.'

Joyce Did you make a lot of money?

Marlene I spent a lot.

Angie I want to go to America. Will you take me?

Joyce She's not going to America, she's been to America, stupid.

Angie She might go again, stupid. It's not something you do once. People who go keep going all the time, back and forth on jets. They go on Concorde and Laker and get jet lag. Will you take me?

Marlene I'm not planning a trip.

Angie Will you let me know?

Joyce Angie, / you're getting silly.

Angie I want to be American.

Joyce It's time you were in bed.

Angie No it's not. / I don't have to go to bed at all tonight.

Joyce School in the morning.

Angie I'll wake up.

Joyce Come on now, you know how you get.

Angie How do I get? / I don't get anyhow.

Joyce Angie. Are you staying the night?

Marlene Yes, if that's all right. / I'll see you in the morning.

Angie You can have my bed. I'll sleep on the sofa.

Joyce You will not, you'll sleep in your bed. / Think I can't

Angie Mum.

Joyce see through that? I can just see you going to sleep /  
with us talking.

Angie I would, I would go to sleep, I'd love that.

Joyce I'm going to get cross, Angie.

Angie I want to show her something.

Joyce Then bed.

Angie It's a secret.

Joyce Then I expect it's in your room so off you go. Give us a  
shout when you're ready for bed and your aunty'll be up and  
see you.

Angie Will you?

Marlene Yes of course.

Angie goes.

*Silence.*

It's cold tonight.

Joyce Will you be all right on the sofa? You can / have  
my bed.

Marlene The sofa's fine.

Joyce Yes the forecast said rain tonight but it's held off.

Marlene I was going to walk down to the estuary but I've left  
it a bit late. Is it just the same?

Joyce They cut down the hedges a few years back. Is that  
since you were here?

Marlene But it's not changed down the end, all the mud?  
And the reeds? We used to pick them when they were bigger  
than us. Are there still lapwings?

Joyce You get strangers walking there on a Sunday. I expect they're looking at the mud and the lapwings, yes.

Marlene You could have left.

Joyce Who says I wanted to leave?

Marlene Stop getting at me then, you're really boring.

Joyce How could I have left?

Marlene Did you want to?

Joyce I said how, / how could I?

Marlene If you'd wanted to you'd have done it.

Joyce Christ.

Marlene Are we getting drunk?

Joyce Do you want something to eat?

Marlene No, I'm getting drunk.

Joyce Funny time to visit, Sunday evening.

Marlene I came this morning. I spent the day.

Angie (*off*) Aunty! Aunty Marlene!

Marlene I'd better go.

Joyce Go on then.

Marlene All right.

Angie (*off*) Aunty! Can you hear me? I'm ready.

Marlene *goes.*

Joyce *goes on sitting.*

Marlene *comes back.*

Joyce So what's the secret?

Marlene It's a secret.

Joyce I know what it is anyway.

Marlene I bet you don't. You always said that.

Joyce It's her exercise book.

Marlene Yes, but you don't know what's in it.

Joyce It's some game, some secret society she has with Kit.

Marlene You don't know the password. You don't know the code.

Joyce You're really in it, aren't you. Can you do the handshake?

Marlene She didn't mention a handshake.

Joyce I thought they'd have a special handshake. She spends hours writing that but she's useless at school. She copies things out of books about black magic, and politicians out of the paper. It's a bit childish.

Marlene I think it's a plot to take over the world.

Joyce She's been in the remedial class the last two years.

Marlene I came up this morning and spent the day in Ipswich. I went to see Mother.

Joyce Did she recognise you?

Marlene Are you trying to be funny?

Joyce No, she does wander.

Marlene She wasn't wandering at all, she was very lucid thank you.

Joyce You were very lucky then.

Marlene Fucking awful life she's had.

Joyce Don't tell me.

Marlene Fucking waste.

Joyce Don't talk to me.



Marlene Why shouldn't I talk? Why shouldn't I talk to you? / Isn't she my mother too?

Joyce Look, you've left, you've gone away, / we can do without you.

Marlene I left home, so what, I left home. People do leave home / it is normal.

Joyce We understand that, we can do without you.

Marlene We weren't happy. Were you happy?

Joyce Don't come back.

Marlene So it's just your mother is it, your child, you never wanted me round, / you were jealous of me because I was the

Joyce Here we go.

Marlene little one and I was clever.

Joyce I'm not clever enough for all this psychology / if that's what it is.

Marlene Why can't I visit my own family / without all this?\*

Joyce Aah.

\*Just don't go on about Mum's life when you haven't been to see her for how many years. / I go and see her every week.\*

Marlene It's up to me.

\*Then don't go and see her every week.

Joyce Somebody has to.

Marlene No they don't. / Why do they?

Joyce How would I feel if I didn't go?

Marlene A lot better.

Joyce I hope you feel better.

Marlene It's up to me.

Joyce You couldn't get out of here fast enough.

Marlene Of course I couldn't get out of here fast enough.  
What was I going to do? Marry a dairyman who'd come home  
pissed? / Don't you fucking this fucking that fucking bitch

Joyce Christ.

Marlene fucking tell me what to fucking do fucking.

Joyce I don't know how you could leave your own child.

Marlene You were quick enough to take her.

Joyce What does that mean?

Marlene You were quick enough to take her.

Joyce Or what? Have her put in a home? Have some stranger  
/ take her would you rather?

Marlene You couldn't have one so you took mine.

Joyce I didn't know that then.

Marlene Like hell, / married three years.

Joyce I didn't know that. Plenty of people / take that long.

Marlene Well it turned out lucky for you, didn't it?

Joyce Turned out all right for you by the look of you. You'd  
be getting a few less thousand a year.

Marlene Not necessarily.

Joyce You'd be stuck here / like you said.

Marlene I could have taken her with me.

Joyce You didn't want to take her with you. It's no good  
coming back now, Marlene, / and saying –

Marlene I know a managing director who's got two children,  
she breast feeds in the board room, she pays a hundred pounds  
a week on domestic help alone and she can afford that because

she's an extremely high-powered lady earning a great deal of money.

Joyce So what's that got to do with you at the age of seventeen?

Marlene Just because you were married and had somewhere to live –

Joyce You could have lived at home. / Or live with me

Marlene Don't be stupid.

Joyce and Frank. / You said you weren't keeping it. You

Marlene You never suggested.

Joyce shouldn't have had it / if you wasn't going to keep it.

Marlene Here we go.

Joyce You was the most stupid, / for someone so clever you was the most stupid, get yourself pregnant, not go to the doctor, not tell.

Marlene You wanted it, you said you were glad, I remember the day, you said I'm glad you never got rid of it, I'll look after it, you said that down by the river. So what are you saying, sunshine, you don't want her?

Joyce Course I'm not saying that.

Marlene Because I'll take her, / wake her up and pack now.

Joyce You wouldn't know how to begin to look after her.

Marlene Don't you want her?

Joyce Course I do, she's my child.

Marlene Then what are you going on about / why did I have her?

Joyce You said I got her off you / when you didn't –

Marlene I said you were lucky / the way it –

Joyce Have a child now if you want one. You're not old.

Marlene I might do.

Joyce Good.

*Pause.*

Marlene I've been on the pill so long / I'm probably sterile.

Joyce Listen when Angie was six months I did get pregnant and I lost it because I was so tired looking after your fucking baby / because she cried so much – yes I did tell

Marlene You never told me.

Joyce you – / and the doctor said if I'd sat down all day with

Marlene Well I forgot.

Joyce my feet up I'd've kept it / and that's the only chance I ever had because after that –

Marlene I've had two abortions, are you interested? Shall I tell you about them? Well I won't, it's boring, it wasn't a problem. I don't like messy talk about blood / and what a bad

Joyce If I hadn't had your baby. The doctor said.

Marlene time we all had. I don't want a baby. I don't want to talk about gynaecology.

Joyce Then stop trying to get Angie off of me.

Marlene I come down here after six years. All night you've been saying I don't come often enough. If I don't come for another six years she'll be twenty-one, will that be OK?

Joyce That'll be fine, yes, six years would suit me fine.

*Pause.*

Marlene I was afraid of this.

I only came because I thought you wanted . . .

I just want . . .

Marlene *cries.*

Joyce Don't grizzle, Marlene, for God's sake.

Marly? Come on, pet. Love you really.

Fucking stop it, will you?

Marlene No, let me cry. I like it.

*They laugh, Marlene begins to stop crying.*

I knew I'd cry if I wasn't careful.

Joyce Everyone's always crying in this house. Nobody takes any notice.

Marlene You've been wonderful looking after Angie.

Joyce Don't get carried away.

Marlene I can't write letters but I do think of you.

Joyce You're getting drunk. I'm going to make some tea.

Marlene Love you.

Joyce *gets up to make tea.*

Joyce I can see why you'd want to leave. It's a dump here.

Marlene So what's this about you and Frank?

Joyce He was always carrying on, wasn't he? And if I wanted to go out in the evening he'd go mad, even if it was nothing, a class, I was going to go to an evening class. So he had this girlfriend, only twenty-two poor cow, and I said go on, off you go, hoppit. I don't think he even likes her.

Marlene So what about money?

Joyce I've always said I don't want your money.

Marlene No, does he send you money?

Joyce I've got four different cleaning jobs. Adds up. There's not a lot round here.

Marlene Does Angie miss him?

Joyce She doesn't say.

Marlene Does she see him?

Joyce He was never that fond of her to be honest.

Marlene He tried to kiss me once. When you were engaged.

Joyce Did you fancy him?

Marlene No, he looked like a fish.

Joyce He was lovely then.

Marlene Ugh.

Joyce Well I fancied him. For about three years.

Marlene Have you got someone else?

Joyce There's not a lot round here. Mind you, the minute you're on your own, you'd be amazed how your friends' husbands drop by. I'd sooner do without.

Marlene I don't see why you couldn't take my money.

Joyce I do, so don't bother about it.

Marlene Only got to ask.

Joyce So what about you? Good job?

Marlene Good for a laugh. / Got back from the US of A a bit

Joyce Good for more than a laugh I should think.

Marlene wiped out and slotted into this speedy employment agency and still there.

Joyce You can always find yourself work then.

Marlene That's right.

Joyce And men?

Marlene Oh there's always men.

Joyce No one special?

Marlene There's fellas who like to be seen with a high-flying lady. Shows they've got something really good in their pants. But they can't take the day to day. They're waiting for me to turn into the little woman. Or maybe I'm just horrible of course.

Joyce Who needs them?

Marlene Who needs them? Well I do. But I need adventures more. So on on into the sunset. I think the eighties are going to be stupendous.

Joyce Who for?

Marlene For me. / I think I'm going up up up.

Joyce Oh for you. Yes, I'm sure they will.

Marlene And for the country, come to that. Get the economy back on its feet and whoosh. She's a tough lady, Maggie. I'd give her a job. / She just needs to hang in there. This country

Joyce You voted for them, did you?

Marlene needs to stop whining. / Monetarism is not stupid.

Joyce Drink your tea and shut up, pet.

Marlene It takes time, determination. No more slop. / And

Joyce Well I think they're filthy bastards.

Marlene who's got to drive it on? First woman prime minister. Terrifico. Aces. Right on. / You must admit. Certainly gets my vote.

Joyce What good's first woman if it's her? I suppose you'd have liked Hitler if he was a woman. Ms Hitler. Got a lot done, Hitlerina. / Great adventures.

Marlene Bosses still walking on the workers' faces? Still Dadda's little parrot? Haven't you learned to think for yourself? I believe in the individual. Look at me.

Joyce I am looking at you.

Marlene Come on, Joyce, we're not going to quarrel over politics.

Joyce We are though.

Marlene Forget I mentioned it. Not a word about the slimy unions will cross my lips.

*Pause.*

Joyce You say Mother had a wasted life.

Marlene Yes I do. Married to that bastard.

Joyce What sort of life did he have? / Working in the fields like

Marlene Violent life?

Joyce an animal. / Why wouldn't he want a drink?

Marlene Come off it.

Joyce You want a drink. He couldn't afford whisky.

Marlene I don't want to talk about him.

Joyce You started, I was talking about her. She had a rotten life because she had nothing. She went hungry.

Marlene She was hungry because he drank the money. / He used to hit her.

Joyce It's not all down to him. / Their lives were rubbish. They

Marlene She didn't hit him.

Joyce were treated like rubbish. He's dead and she'll die soon and what sort of life / did they have?

Marlene I saw him one night. I came down.

Joyce Do you think I didn't? / They didn't get to America and

Marlene I still have dreams.



Joyce drive across it in a fast car. / Bad nights, they had bad days.

Marlene America, America, you're jealous. / I had to get out,

Joyce Jealous?

Marlene I knew when I was thirteen, out of their house, out of them, never let that happen to me, / never let him, make my own way, out.

Joyce Jealous of what you've done, you're ashamed of me if I came to your office, your smart friends, wouldn't you, I'm ashamed of you, think of nothing but yourself, you've got on, nothing's changed for most people / has it?

Marlene I hate the working class / which is what you're going

Joyce Yes you do.

Marlene to go on about now, it doesn't exist any more, it means lazy and stupid. / I don't like the way they talk. I don't

Joyce Come on, now we're getting it.

Marlene like beer guts and football vomit and saucy tits / and brothers and sisters –

Joyce I spit when I see a Rolls Royce, scratch it with my ring / Mercedes it was.

Marlene Oh very mature –

Joyce I hate the cows I work for / and their dirty dishes with blanquette of fucking veau.

Marlene and I will not be pulled down to their level by a flying picket and I won't be sent to Siberia / or a loony bin

Joyce No, you'll be on a yacht, you'll be head of Coca-Cola and you wait, the eighties is going to be stupendous all right because we'll get you lot off our backs –

Marlene just because I'm original. And I support Reagan even if he is a lousy movie star because the reds are swarming up his map and I want to be free in a free world -

Joyce What? / What?

Marlene I know what I mean / by that - not shut up here.

Joyce So don't be round here when it happens because if someone's kicking you I'll just laugh.

*Silence.*

Marlene I don't mean anything personal. I don't believe in class. Anyone can do anything if they've got what it takes.

Joyce And if they haven't?

Marlene If they're stupid or lazy or frightened, I'm not going to help them get a job, why should I?

Joyce What about Angie?

Marlene What about Angie?

Joyce She's stupid, lazy and frightened, so what about her?

Marlene You run her down too much. She'll be all right.

Joyce I don't expect so, no. I expect her children will say what a wasted life she had. If she has children. Because nothing's changed and it won't with them in.

Marlene Them, them. / Us and them?

Joyce And you're one of them.

Marlene And you're us, wonderful us, and Angie's us / and Mum and Dad's us.

Joyce Yes, that's right, and you're them.

Marlene Come on, Joyce, what a night. You've got what it takes.

Joyce I know I have.

Marlene I didn't really mean all that.

Joyce I did.

Marlene But we're friends anyway.

Joyce I don't think so, no.

Marlene Well it's lovely to be out in the country. I really must make the effort to come more often.

I want to go to sleep.

I want to go to sleep.

Joyce *gets blankets for the sofa.*

Joyce Goodnight then. I hope you'll be warm enough.

Marlene Goodnight. Joyce –

Joyce No, pet. Sorry.

Joyce *goes.*

Marlene *sits wrapped in a blanket and has another drink.*

Angie *comes in.*

Angie Mum?

Marlene Angie? What's the matter?

Angie Mum?

Marlene No, she's gone to bed. It's Aunty Marlene.

Angie Frightening.

Marlene Did you have a bad dream? What happened in it?  
Well you're awake now, aren't you pet?

Angie Frightening.

# Notes

## Act One

- 1 *Frascati*: popular Italian dry white wine.
- 1 *Hawaii*: a group of islands in the Pacific Ocean – the ‘ideal’ holiday destination – whose capital is Honolulu. Discovered by Captain Cook in 1778, they were originally named the Sandwich Islands. Annexed by the USA in 1898, they became that country’s fiftieth state in 1959.
- 1 *Tobermory*: a small Scottish burgh (i.e. borough) on the north coast of the island of Mull, Argyllshire.
- 1 *miss its face*: miss seeing her. The use of ‘its’ is patronising.
- 2 *sake*: (also saki, or sakki) Japan’s chief alcoholic drink, similar to beer but clearer in texture and made from fermented rice.
- 2 *Let the wild goose come to me this spring*: metaphorical allusion meaning bring her (Nijo) to my bed.
- 3 *metaphysical poets*: school of English poets of the early seventeenth century whose work is characterised by concision, ingenious, often highly intricate word-play (known as ‘conceits’) and striking imagery. The best-known exponent was John Donne (1571–1631) whose early love poetry gave way to the writing of religious sonnets when he took holy orders and, later, became Dean of St Paul’s in London.
- 3 *hymnology*: study of the history and composition of religious hymns.
- 4 *without matter*: without physical substance.
- 5 *Waldorf salad*: a salad of apple, celery and walnuts.
- 5 *John the Scot*: John Duns ‘Scotus’, thirteenth-century philosopher and theologian. His date indicates the extent of Churchill’s inventiveness with regard to Pope Joan, who didn’t really exist.

- 5 *Canelloni*: Italian pasta dish.
- 5 *Avocado vinaigrette*: large pear-shaped fruit, usually served in half with a dressing of oil and vinegar.
- 6 *Buddhism . . . in Japan*: the Buddhist religion originated in India around 500 BC and derives from the teachings of Buddha, whose most important doctrine is that of *karma* – good or evil deeds reaping an appropriate reward in this life or (through reincarnation) a succession of lives. The main divisions are *Theravada* in South-East Asia and *Mahayana* in North Asia. *Lamaism* in Tibet and Zen in Japan are among the many *Mahayana* sects.
- 6 *Mahayana sutras*: Buddhist textbooks.
- 7 *brace*: refresh, stimulate.
- 8 *acacias*: one of a large group of shrubs and trees belonging to the pea family. Acacias include the thorn trees of the African savannah and the gum Arabic tree of North Africa.
- 8 *the Sandwich Isles*: see note on *Hawaii* (p. 98). When Captain Cook named the Pacific islands it was in honour of Lord Sandwich, who also lent his name to the common snack.
- 9 *Lady Betto*: court lady, contemporary of Nijo.
- 11 *one of the three lower realms*: the lowest of six realms into which the human spirit can be reborn according to Buddhist thought.
- 11 *St Augustine*: St Augustine of Hippo (354–430) (not to be confused with St Augustine, Archbishop of Canterbury, who died in 604). Among his many writings are his *Confessions*, a spiritual autobiography, and *The City of God*, which sets out, in twenty-two books, to vindicate the Christian Church and Divine Providence.
- 11 *Neo-Platonic Ideas*: ‘Ideal Forms’ derived from the Greek philosopher Plato (426–347 BC), a pupil of Socrates and teacher of Aristotle. He was the author of philosophical dialogues on such topics as metaphysics, ethics and politics. Central to his teaching is the notion of ‘Ideal Forms’ which he located outside the everyday world and which, for him, constituted ‘ideal’ versions of reality. The

nature of these ideas subsequently lent themselves conveniently to religious modes of thought. In Neoplatonism, after death all life returns to its original source where it is stripped of individual identity, a process called *henosis*. In Orthodox Christianity, on the other hand, *theosis* gives the individual the possibility of uniting with God in divine eternal union.

- 11 *Denys the Areopagite . . . the pseudo-Denys:*  
pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (also known as the pseudo-Denys) was an anonymous theologian and philosopher of the late fifth century. One of his most important works, *Corpus Areopagiticus*, was mistakenly attributed to someone of the same name who was known as Dionysius the Areopagite, a convert to Christianity mentioned in the Bible by St Paul (Acts 17:34). The real Denys's works are mystical and show a strong Neoplatonic influence. Although the validity of his thinking has now been accepted by Catholic theologians, many of his claims are known to have been false, such as his having witnessed the solar eclipse at Christ's crucifixion and of having seen Christ's mother, when he obviously wasn't around at the time! An areopagite was a member of the Areopagus, an open-air court situated on a hill in Athens in Greece, the highest court in the land. It was a site of public rhetorical declamation and has become associated, historically, with the idea of free speech. The English poet John Milton's *Areopagitica*, written in 1644, is an impassioned plea for freedom of the press.
- 12 *carbuncles:* malignant boils on the skin.
- 12 *erysipelas:* inflammation of the skin.
- 12 *anaemia:* lack of blood, or of red corpuscles in the blood.
- 13 *bathchair:* invalid chair on wheels.
- 13 *gout:* disease characterised by painful inflammation of the smaller joints.
- 13 *Jaeger flannel:* a woven patterned tweed. The trade name carries associations of aristocratic taste and expense.
- 14 *muleteers:* mule-drivers.

- 15 *offer a horse to Buddha*: a sacrifice, in the hope of a miracle.
- 15 *chamberlain*: steward.
- 16 *Theodora of Alexandria*: St Theodora of Alexandria (474–91) committed adultery, then, overcome with remorse, disguised herself as a man and took holy orders. She was accepted into a monastery where she took the name of Theodore. A woman who subsequently visited the monastery accused ‘him’ of impregnating her but, instead of defending herself, Theodora adopted the child as her own. Her son later became an abbot. Theodore’s true sex was not discovered until her death. Her husband attended her funeral before himself taking holy orders and taking up residence in the monastic cell formerly occupied by his late wife.
- 18 *Rogation Day*: one of the three days before Ascension Day when litanies of the saints were chanted in procession.
- 18 *St Peter’s to go to St John’s*: San Pietro in Vaticano is St Peter’s cathedral in the Vatican City, Rome. Considered the mother church of the Catholic community, it is a Renaissance and Baroque edifice built over an earlier structure erected by the Emperor Constantine in 319, over the supposed grave of the apostle Peter. San Giovanni in Laterano (St John’s) is the papal bishop’s church and is the earliest Roman church building, dating from 313. The only other St John’s church in Rome is the Santo Giovanni in Fonte, which stands at the southern end of the Lateran basilica and was also built by Emperor Constantine, who was responsible for bringing Rome within the orbit of the Christian Church.
- 18 *St Clement’s and the Colosseum*: the church of Santo Clemente is known to have existed as early as the third century, although the present building dates from the early twelfth century. The Colosseum (Colosseo) is, as its name suggests, huge – a massive amphitheatre dating from Roman times, much of which remains standing despite fires, earthquakes and looting. It could accommodate over

70,000 spectators to watch gladiatorial contests, animal hunts and even mock naval battles.

- 19 *Antichrist*: diabolical being opposed to the true Messiah.
- 19 *bay*: reddish brown.
- 19 *Rocky Mountains*: a vast mountain range in western Canada and the USA extending from the Yukon to New Mexico.
- 20 *bronco*: untamed horse.
- 21 *anorexic*: suffering from an eating disorder that reduces appetite.
- 22 *Brueghel*: one of a family of Flemish painters, Pieter Brueghel (1515–69) was known as the ‘Elder’ and is now recognised as one of the greatest artists of his time. Noted for his satirical depiction of everyday life among the peasantry, he was also a wonderful landscape painter, evident in a series of paintings based on the months of the year of which the most famous is perhaps *Hunters in the Snow*. Some of his last works are considered among his finest, for instance, *Dulle Griet*, a satanic landscape peopled by all the devils of medieval folklore, and *The Triumph of Death*, with its depiction of the almost mechanical destruction of human life, which confirms the permanent influence on his work of Hieronymous Bosch.
- 22 *Boccaccio*: Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–75) was an Italian poet whose best-known work is *The Decameron*, a hundred tales told by ten young people seeking refuge in the countryside during time of plague. Their bawdiness and exuberance, as well as narrative skill and characterisation, made this work both popular and influential, inspiring, among others, the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer.
- 22 *Petrarch*: Francesco Petrarca (1304–74) was an Italian poet who, in composing love poems to his divine Laura, popularised the fourteen-line sonnet whose strict form was imported into England by the sixteenth-century poets, the Earl of Surrey and Sir Thomas Wyatt. The form was imitated with great success by Sir Philip Sidney and then further modified and anglicised by William Shakespeare in



his great cycle of sonnets dedicated to 'Mr W.H. and the Dark Lady'.

- 22 *Chaucer*: Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340–1400) was an English poet and author of *The Canterbury Tales*, a collection of stories told by a group of pilgrims during the course of a journey to visit the shrine of St Thomas a Becket in Canterbury. He writes in Middle English, the transitional form of the language, which developed from Anglo-Saxon and was close to modern English. Literature at that time was usually written in French, understood by the nobility. By writing in the demotic, Chaucer opened his work to a much wider audience. His other work includes the French-influenced *Romance of the Rose* and an adaptation of Boccaccio's *Troilus and Criseyde*.
- 22 *profiteroles*: Italian dessert, cream-filled balls of choux pastry covered with chocolate.
- 22 *Zabaglione*: Italian dessert, egg yolks, sugar and marsala wine whipped together.
- 29 *Suave, mari magno . . .* (Joan's Latin): taken from Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, II, lines 1–18, 45–7, 52, 55–9. Greg Giesekam translates as follows:

It's pleasing, when over a swollen sea winds are stirring up the waters, to watch from the shore another's peril: not because his troubles are a cause of delight or joy, but because it's pleasing to recognise what troubles you are free from yourself. It's just as pleasing to witness battle being waged across a plain, when you're out of danger yourself. But nothing is more delightful than to occupy the calm of an ivory tower built on the teachings of wise men; from here you can look down on others as they wander about seeking some path through life, as they strive to be clever, to out-do each other in reputation, battling night and day to get to the top of the pile with their power and wealth. What miserable minds men have! How blind their hearts are! To waste their brief span of life in darkness, in peril! Don't they see all nature needs is for life to be lived without physical pain,

while the mind, freed from cares, enjoys a sense of delight?

- 30 *We come into hell through a big mouth*: this remark contains a reference to the medieval mystery plays of fourteenth-century Europe, some of which were acted out on extended stages built in front of cathedral buildings, on which the biblical version of Man's origins and eventual 'fall', his death and resurrection were enacted against the background of a number of 'mansions' or permanent settings. The setting for Paradise was always at the furthest point stage-right while 'Hell's Mouth' was always placed furthest stage-left and was usually represented by the gaping maw of some monster which served as both the entry point for those who were permanently damned as well as an exit point for those saved at the Day of Judgment.
- 31 *the Spanish*: Spanish armies invaded and occupied the Netherlands during the sixteenth century. Their ports were attacked by Sir Francis Drake. He later commanded the English forces who defeated the Spanish Armada, which attempted an invasion of Britain in 1588.
- 31 *die on a wheel*: a reference to the medieval practice of torturing people to death tied to a wheel.
- 32 *Berber sheikhs*: the Berbers are a people of North Africa who, since prehistoric times, have inhabited the Mediterranean coastlands between Egypt and the Atlantic. Their language is spoken by about one-third of Algerians and nearly two-thirds of Moroccans. A 'sheikh' would have been a Berber leader.

## Act Two

- 33 *The Exterminator*: the first of two violent films made in 1980 (the other being *Exterminator 2*), both starring Robert Ginty as an avenging veteran of the Vietnam War on the trail of a murderous gang and, in Part 2, a mysterious master criminal who uses brutal combat skills, learned in the army, to achieve his goals.

- 33 *It's X, innit*: at the time, an 'X' certificate given to a film meant that you had to be over eighteen to be allowed in to the cinema to see it. The expression 'innit' (a contraction of 'isn't it?') is an attempt to convey popular vernacular speech.
- 38 *Your skin's burned right off*: this was an effect of napalm, used by the American forces fighting the North Vietnamese during the 1960s and 1970s. However, what Kit's reference to finding out where they were going 'to drop it' seems to infer is the effect of a nuclear attack and the consequences of the fireball which occurred when the atomic bomb was first used against the civilian population of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1946. The possible recurrence of an event like this haunted people of Caryl Churchill's generation, especially during the years of the so-called 'Cold War', with the invention of powerful hydrogen weapons and ever more sophisticated means of delivering them.
- 43 *Third year? Second year*: classes in secondary school covering twelve- to fourteen-year-olds, now termed Year 9 and Year 8.
- 46 *West Sussex*: affluent area of the Home Counties, close to London.
- 45 *Marilyn. Esther's Baby. They're all called after birds*: 'birds', a sexist reference to young women, in this case the Hollywood film-star icon, Marilyn Monroe, whose name was synonymous with sexual allure, and, because of the reference to swimming pools, another Hollywood star who was invariably clad in a swimsuit, Esther Williams, who appeared in films with titles such as *Dangerous When Wet* (1953).
- 47 *Elvis*: Elvis Presley, American singer.
- 47 *John Conteh*: a Liverpudlian boxer born in 1951 to an Irish mother and Sierra Leonean father. In October 1974, he became the first British boxer for a quarter of a century to win the World Light Heavyweight Championship – a title which he held for four years before quitting the ring in 1980.

- 47 *pirate*: person or company tempting Nell away from the 'Top Girls' agency with an offer of either more money or better prospects or both.
- 48 *Prestel*: computerised information service: a large business extension of British Telecom.
- 48 *IBM*: International Business Machines, a large corporation.
- 49 *Dymchurch*: a small town in Kent on the edge of Romney Marsh, famous for its light railway which ran via New Romney and Hythe to the lighthouses at Dungeness.
- 49 *the change*: menopause.
- 49 *Ovaltine*: bedtime malt-flavoured milky drink.
- 50 *Ascot*: a small town in Berkshire, near Windsor Great Park, famous for its racecourse, especially the annual Ascot Week patronised by race-going members of the British upper class, where the men traditionally wear morning dress of grey top hat and tails while the ladies wear large, expensive hats and extremely smart dresses. The race is traditionally patronised by the royal family who are driven down the course in an open carriage.
- 51 *Pam's ladies*: clients of 'Pam', a colleague of the office women who does not appear onstage.
- 52 *Os and As*: 'Ordinary' and 'Advanced' level subject passes in the General Certificate of Education taken in British schools until 1987, at sixteen and eighteen years of age.
- 52 *Speeds*: clerical skills, typing and shorthand speeds.
- 53 *Secretary or typist*: Marlene distinguishes. A secretary usually has more responsibility than a typist.
- 53 *Hundred*: one hundred pounds per week. A decent wage in 1982 for a twenty-year-old.
- 55 *a multinational*: a company whose financial interests and activities extend beyond the country where it is ostensibly based to embrace the globe, with outposts and manufacturing sites in several countries often chosen because labour costs are cheaper and, therefore, profits greater.
- 55 *Madame Tussaud's*: a waxwork museum located in central London. Madame Tussaud (born Anne-Marie Grosholtz, 1760–1850) was a French wax modeller who, in 1802,

established an exhibition of wax models of famous people on the Strand thoroughfare in London. This transferred to Baker Street and thence, in 1884, to the Marylebone Road where it remains to this day. Its 'Chamber of Horrors' with wax effigies of famous murderers is especially notorious.

- 67 *six basic and three commission*: six thousand pounds per year as salary, with three thousand added as a reward for successful selling.
- 67 *closing*: clinching the deal, completing the sale.
- 69 *Youngness*: Shona's lack of education is here suggested by her using the wrong word – it should be 'youthfulness' – as well as her redundant repetition of the phrase 'in our family'.
- 69 *My present job at present*: another example of Shona's use of repetitive phrases. This speech shows the influence of Harold Pinter on Churchill's writing at this stage in her career. Compare, for example, some of Mick's speeches in *The Caretaker* or Lenny's speeches in *The Homecoming*, which contain a similar blend of fantasy and comic pretentiousness.
- 70–1 *Who's sitting in my chair? Who's been eating my porridge?*: a reference to the children's story of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears', in which these questions are asked by Father, Mother and Baby Bear, who return from the forest to find their home occupied by Goldilocks. She has not only been sitting in each of their chairs in turn but has also sampled their porridge and eaten all of Baby Bear's helping. She is then discovered sleeping in Baby Bear's bed but, happily, manages to make good her escape.
- 71 *I was headhunted*: a reference to the tendency of unscrupulous firms to poach successful, usually commercially aggressive personnel from their business rivals by offering them inducements, financial and other, in order to recruit them. The term derives from warfare among primitive tribes of cannibals.

- 71 CSE: Certificate of Secondary Education (less prestigious than O level in 1982).
- 72 *Coca-Cola in Russia and Pepsi-cola in China*: one would expect both brands to be competing in both markets. However, the suggestion here is that, like the oil companies and other large multinationals, capitalist enterprises which are supposed to represent free-market competition in actual fact enter into agreements with each other not to compete but to share, or divide, world markets between themselves, thus maximising the selling price for their particular product.
- 73 *Violins?*: refers to the musical accompaniment to sad moments in silent films.
- 73 *Packer in Tesco*: Tesco's the supermarket chain. A packer fills the shelves – a menial task.

### Act Three

- 82 *Grand Canyon*: a vast gorge in Arizona, USA, containing the Colorado River. It is 217 miles long, more than a mile deep in places and between four to eighteen miles wide.
- 83 *L.A.*: Los Angeles (literally City of the Angels), a port in California famous for its Long Beach and its suburb, Hollywood, the headquarters of the American film industry.
- 83 *Concorde*: the only successful supersonic airliner, it was capable of flying at twice the speed of sound. The result of Anglo-French cooperation, it made its maiden flight in 1969 before entering commercial service seven years later. However, despite halving the time between Europe and America, the aircraft proved to be uncommercial and, following a serious crash in the year 2000 resulting from design flaws, the aircraft was eventually withdrawn from service in 2003.
- 83 *Laker*: Sir Freddie Laker (1922–2006) was the founder of Laker Airways in 1966, the first budget airline to offer 'no frills' flights at low cost – a model which has been successfully imitated by other budget airlines since. His company went spectacularly bust in 1982.

- 83 *jet lag*: a condition of exhaustion and confusion experienced by long-distance jet travellers as a result of crossing different time zones.
- 84 *lapwings*: birds of the plover family known both as the green plover and as the peewit (because of its call). It inhabits moorland in Europe and Asia and scratches its nest in the ground.
- 93 *Maggie*: Margaret Thatcher (see p. xxxvii).
- 93 *Monetarism*: economic policy distinguished by control of the money supply (see p. xxxvii).
- 93 *Hitler*: Adolf Hitler (real name Shicklgrueber, 1889–1945), the German dictator of Austrian origin who became Fuhrer (leader) of the German National Socialist (Nazi) Party in 1921 and was elected Chancellor of Germany in 1933. His ideology, based on German Nationalism and anti-Semitism, was set out in his book *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) written between 1925 and 1927.
- 94 *the slimy unions*: a contemptuous reference to the Trade Union Movement – organisations of employed workers first formed during the nineteenth century to undertake collective bargaining with employers to try to achieve improved working conditions for their members. The British Labour Party grew out of the Trade Union Movement but the failed General Strike of 1926 showed the extent to which the Labour Party and the trade unions had diverged. Their comparative power and influence after the Second World War increased and strike action brought down the Conservative government of Edward Heath in the early 1970s. The Thatcher administration after 1979 set out to curb their power through government legislation aimed, in particular, at the powerful Miners' Union. The failure of the Miners' Strike in 1984 led to a subsequent decline in trade union influence in Britain's political affairs.
- 95 *blanquette of fucking veau*: in the language of French haute cuisine, a *blanquette de veau* is a dish of white veal

in a white sauce, derived from the French word *blanc*, meaning white.

- 95 *a flying picket*: trade unionists who support strikes at places of work other than their own. This action was made illegal by the Thatcher administration and contributed to the further weakening of the trade unions. The legislation confined strike action to a particular workplace, banned 'sympathy' strikes and prohibited other workers from rallying at the site of the strike (known as 'secondary picketing'). It also made the particular strike action subject to a secret ballot of members of the local workforce.
- 95 *sent to Siberia*: sent into exile. In Russia, from the nineteenth century, convicts and political prisoners were often sentenced to hard labour in this remote eastern area of the continent where living conditions were extreme, especially in winter, when temperatures could drop to as low as minus 40 degrees centigrade.
- 96 *Reagan . . . free world*: Ronald Reagan (1911–2004) was a Hollywood film actor of the 1940s and 1950s who became Governor of California (1967–75), before being elected fortieth President of the United States and serving two terms (1981–89). After surviving an assassination attempt early in his presidency, he espoused a form of unfettered free-market politics, colloquially known as 'Reaganomics', which found an enthusiastic ally in the person of the then British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher.
- 96 *reds*: communists. Ronald Reagan was a staunch anti-communist and even labelled the Soviet Union an 'evil empire'.