



# *The Harmony Suite*

*By Nicholas Kelly in collaboration with Collective Encounters*

**DRAFT FOUR: August 05**

## **CAST**

### **Regulars**

LILLY  
MEGGAN  
FRANK  
ANDY  
RESEARCHER (PHILIP)

### **Ensemble Roles**

THE JAZZMAN  
THE HOODIE (DARREN)  
EXECUTIVE 1  
EXECUTIVE 2  
ACADEMIC  
CITIZEN 1  
CITIZEN 2  
BOOKISH TYPE  
ADMINISTRATOR 1  
ADMINISTRATOR 2  
A RANDOM STRANGER  
ANOTHER RANDOM STRANGER  
BUSY AMERICAN SHOPPER  
THE KINDLY WOMAN  
FLOYD  
NATHAN  
BARBARA  
THE COMMUNITY LEADER (BETTIE)  
MUSICIANS

### **Chorus**

HOUSEWIVES IN SUMMER DRESSES  
DANCING GIRLS  
AN ARMY OF HOODIES  
AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES  
A CHORUS OF BUREAUCRATS  
LOCAL RESIDENTS  
THE PUB CROWD

## PROLOGUE

*We're on a derelict street of terraced housing. Practically all the houses have been "finned up": abandoned, in severe disrepair.*

*A single house in the centre of the road is still clearly inhabited, however. Even from the outside, we can tell that whoever lives inside has taken great pride in their home, despite being surrounded by such deprivation. The front door is brightly painted, there are window baskets and hanging plants, a "Welcome" mat...the house should like an oasis of urban tranquillity amidst a ghetto.*

*Unusually, directly in front of the house, on the street, is a long dinner table, which is covered in a white table-cloth. The table is currently bare, except for an ornate looking gramophone player, which stands to one side. There are no chairs.*

*A man arrives carrying an overcoat and a bag. It is the RESEARCHER. We will meet him later. For the moment, however, he seems to have arrived too early. He looks about surprised that the street is empty. He looks at his watch.*

*And then, without warning, a number of video screens in the abandoned houses flicker into life. The Researcher sees them, but it is unsurprised. He walks away.*

*The screens continue to display images. What we see is some kind of montage of a "research process", eg. technicians preparing to interview their subjects, some cut-away material of streets on north Liverpool, perhaps the odd statistic or newspaper headline. The montage lasts maybe two minutes.*

1

*Suddenly without warning, the doors burst open. A chorus of HOUSEWIVES IN SUMMER DRESSES emerge. They sing the*

*Song of the Old Neighbourhood<sup>1</sup> as they clean up the street,  
scrubbing the steps, washing down the windows, etc...*

Do you remember the good old days  
When folk weren't quite so settled in their ways  
It was better before  
It was better before  
You could walk down the street without the fear of crime

Mary Ellen, old Dickey Sam  
No need for the vision or the masterplan  
It was better before  
It was better before  
Where's the Old Neighbourhood,  
They tore it all down

*Chorus*

Summer days, summer nights,  
We were poor but we were happy,  
And there goes Aunt Sallee,  
We poor but we were happy,  
Shifting the grime...

**2**

*As the song ends, an old woman, LILLY emerges from her house. She's about 75. Despite her advancing age, she's still very sharp. She has a quick wit and a charitable nature, but is nobody's fool either. She is carrying a duster. She watches the singers- she's aware of their presence but does not interact with them<sup>2</sup>.*

*The Housewives disappear into the houses – seemingly unnoticed to Lilly. Lilly walks out slowly and stands in the middle of the road and looks slowly up and down the street. She looks at her watch. She seems mildly vexed. Then she goes over to the gramophone player, wipes it down with the duster, and looks back into the house.*

LILLY. So, come on, what's keeping you?

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<sup>1</sup> The songs are still very much in development. The lyrics here should be only taken as an indication of the tone and theme of the numbers, and none of the words should be viewed as definitive.

<sup>2</sup> The idea here is that the songs are largely the construct of a character's imagination – they represent the characters' 'preoccupations': eg. an image of the past, a hope for the future, etc. All the regular characters in the play have a 'song', and the script will specify whom the song 'belongs' to.

A FEMALE VOICE OFF. We're on our way, Nan.

LILLY. I hope that the pair of you, you're not canoodling in there. In the privacy of your own home, you can do what you want to. But not under my roof. *(a little frustrated, approaching her front door)* Well, come on, then, would you: we're already running late. What's *keeping* you, girl?

*Enter MEGGAN from the front-door. She's about twenty. She would consider herself to be quite glamorous, but like many girls her age is quite sensitive about her appearance. She seems a little flushed. She is carrying a chair. She is followed by ANDY, her boyfriend, who's in his early twenties. Andy is carrying two chairs.*

MEGGAN. Sorry about that, Nan.

LILLY. Put those round the table. Then, there's the folding chairs, they're in the shed. Betty, from the Centre, she dropped them over the other night...

*Meggan and Andy place the chairs. They seem a little half-hearted.*

LILLY. Come on, then, put your back into it! We didn't win a war like that, you know.

*Andy begins to return to the house.*

ANDY. Why don't you sit down, Lilly? Take the weight off your feet.

LILLY. And give my chilli a stir while you're in there, you hear?

*Andy shrugs. He re-enters the house. Meggan remains. She appears distinctly unimpressed by the proceedings. Lilly watches her, with mounting disapproval.*

MEGGAN. What?

LILLY. That look on your face, girl.

MEGGAN. What look on my face? *(regarding the gramophone player)* Where'd this thing come from anyway? I've never seen it before.

LILLY. Well, we just brought it out a minute ago. While you were doing your make-up. Andrew very kindly, he did all the grunt work. *(noticing Meggan's interest in the gramophone player)* Frank came over the other evening. Shifted it down from the attic for me. There are still

people, you see, who look out for each other. I didn't even ask him to do it. No, no, I simply mentioned somebody would have to get into the attic, and there he was, Meggan, quick as a flash! My old records are inside, in the press by the armchair. Frank is of the opinion he can hook it up to a speaker. (*amused*) You know, Frank, of course. The poor lad's been out of work so long, he'll jump at any opportunity to get out of the house...

*Enter Andy, with a stack of folding chairs.*

ANDY. Your chilli's bubbling in there, Lilly.

LILLY. Did you stir it?

ANDY. I had my hands full.

LILLY. You've got to keep stirring it. Otherwise, it reduces too quickly and it loses all the flavour. I'm sure some of them will be hungry. They'll be here any minute now. There's a pot of scouse in there, too, Meggan. That'll bring tears to their eyes. Of course, that will need stirring, also.

MEGGAN(*a little irritated*) I'll go stir it!

*Exit Meggan. Lilly folds her arms, and watches as Andy begins to place the remaining chairs around the table. She goes to the centre of the road again, looks both ways. She returns to the table*

LILLY. That grand-daughter of mine...

ANDY(*at a loss*). I'm happy to help, Lilly. Always happy to help.

LILLY. You're looking after her, are you? You're treating her right?

ANDY. Doing my best, Lilly.

*Pause*

LILLY. I hear that you've got yourselves a little flat.

*Andy looks at her a moment, uncertain how to respond*

LILLY(*amused*) Now, there's no need for that, Andrew. You don't have to be cagey with me. If two consenting adults who have declared their love for one another chose to reside under the same roof, well, that sounds perfectly reasonable by me. It were different in my day, of course..

ANDY. Of course, we're saving and that. I mean, I'm sure that she's told you. The flat is just temporary. We're saving. For the wedding. And after that, we'll get a house...

*Andy finishes with the chairs.*

ANDY. That'll seat eight now. How many are you expecting?

LILLY. I suppose, of an evening, she'd rather be down the pub. (*laughs, a little nervously*) Who can blame her, really? The last thing she'd want to hear is me telling my old war stories. (*laughs*) How many I am expecting? Well, we'll have plenty at table, and the rest of them can stand. They can...mingle or something; it's going to be cheap and cheerful. (*she thinks a moment*) And I suppose I should give the girl a little credit. She's here at least, isn't she? She's made an appearance, that's more than you can say for our Barbara...

*Enter Meggan. She is carrying a couple of bottles of spirits.*

MEGGAN(*sighs*) Is she talking about Mam again?

LILLY. Did you stir it?

MEGGAN. Yes, I stirred it!

LILLY. It's just a simple request, girl. (*looking up and down the street again*) Of course that mother of yours, she'll be far too busy. I mean, what she does in that office is a mystery to me. As for that husband. (*almost amused*) He's afraid of parking the car. He's afraid the kids, they might 'roll' him. Now, that's a sorry state of affairs. I mean, what's the world coming to...when the street you were born on...you're afraid to come back to it? (*sighs*) I suppose they're just excuses...

MEGGAN(*well used to this*) Mam said she'd do her best, Nan.

LILLY. Oh, that's what they all say. It's apathy. Apathy.

*Lilly's now a little concerned that time is marching on. She goes back to the centre of the road. Meggan shoots Andy a hopeless look. She twists the lid off the bottle. She pours herself and Andy a stiff drink.*

LILLY(*still looking down the street*) Frank should be here soon. He'll bring the pub crowd.

ANDY. Drink, Lilly?

LILLY. Oh, it's too early for me, lad. A gin and tonic inside of me and off I go. Another couple on top of that, and then it's time for the waterworks. You see, apathy, Meggan, that's the disease. Apathy and the NIMBYs...

MEGGAN. Look, I was around the house the other night, Nan, and I told Mam and Dad, didn't I? And then today, I texted her twice... (*beat, a little shocked*) You've gone to all this effort. You've bent over backwards, organising this...

LILLY. Street party, girl. It's an English tradition.

*Meggan sits down. She watches Lilly, who still seems undaunted. Meggan sighs. Meggan picks up her handbag. She produces a mobile phone. She dials a number.*

LILLY(*still looking down the street*). I'll have you know my name still has some clout around here. Whether you're aware of it or not, these communities, they've seen their fair share of hardship over the years. We've been bombed, shunted out, we've been battered and bruised... (*beat*) I have some clout, you know. Frank will bring the pub crowd. And Betty, from the Centre promised she'd have a ring around. Vera and Derek, they've promised me personally. This is an important occasion, we're drawing a curtain...

MEGGAN(*exasperated*). I'm calling Mam, give it up!

*Lilly folds her arms.*

MEGGAN. It's gone to voicemail.

LILLY. No surprises there, then.

*Pause*

LILLY. Anyhow, now, I think I'll leave you lovebirds a minute. I'll sort out my records. Keep an eye out for Frank, would you?

*Exit Lilly. She goes back into her house.*

MEGGAN(*frustrated*). God, why can't she just go to bingo like everyone else?

ANDY. I don't really think she's the bingo type, Meggan.

MEGGAN. I mean, she says it's a street party. The street's a complete tip. Nobody's lived here...for nearly two year now. Except for my Nan, of course...

ANDY. Well, it's a big thing, you know.

MEGGAN(*a little irritated*) I know it's a big thing.

*Pause*

MEGGAN. I know it's a big thing. She's been here forever. And now she's got to leave.

*Silence. The point seems to finally register a little with Meggan. She sighs and begins to play with her hair.*

ANDY(*cautiously*) She knows about the flat then.

MEGGAN. Of course, she knows Andy. We've been moved in a week now. (*shrugs*) She seemed happy enough about us getting *married*. (*she looks at him, amused*) You're scared of her.

ANDY(*defensive*) Not at all.

MEGGAN(*laughs*) You're scared of her! I'd be scared of her. Oh, I'd be dead scared, if she weren't my Nan, of course. She can have a fierce temper when she doesn't get her way. (*beat*) You didn't happen to mention our...other big decision, did you?

ANDY(*awkwardly*). You told me not to. Anyway, that's just...

MEGGAN. I guess I'll break it to her gently. I'll do it...sometime. I mean, she might take it a little hard, but...(smiles) A year from now, we'll be in sunny Spain.

*Andy smiles awkwardly. He doesn't appear entirely convinced.*

*FRANK appears on the street. He's about 40. He's a local man, with a cheery disposition. His jokes and easy banter are often a defence mechanism, however. He's been unemployed for a very long time. He's carrying an audio speaker under one arm and a large bag of tortilla chips under the other.*

*Meggan and Andy don't notice him at first.*

FRANK.(*cheerfully*) Looks like it's hopping, then.

MEGGAN. Frank!

FRANK. That I am.

ANDY. Hiya mate.

MEGGAN(*a little awkwardly*) Where's the pub crowd?

FRANK. In the pub. They'll be along later, I'm sure. (*regarding the speaker in his hand*) Thought I'd get here pronto, she's got me on a secret mission...

*He looks at the back of the gramophone player and scowls.*

FRANK. Oh. Oh, I see. I should have thought of that before, really...

*Enter Lilly, with a stack of 78 records.*

LILLY(*pleased*) Francis.

FRANK. Found your records, then, Lilly!

LILLY(*looking about*) Where's the pub crowd?

MEGGAN(*feeling a little sorry for her*) Look, they'll be here, later, let me help you with those.

*Meggan takes the records from Lilly. She leads her to the table.*

LILLY. They'll miss my speech, you know. There's a lecture. And, of course, I've got my records...the big bands...the old tunes...

*Frank looks at her a moment. He laughs.*

FRANK. Oh, come here to me, Lilly. Give me a kiss.

*Frank embraces her*

LILLY. I think that this fella, he must be on the happy pills or something.

FRANK. A wet one! On the lips!

*The screens crackle into life a moment. An image perhaps of the street we're on.*

*Enter the RESEARCHER, whom we saw at the opening. He's in his mid-twenties. Earnest, efficient, a little anxious. He's not from Liverpool.*

RESEARCHER. Err. Am I late?

*They all turn to him.*

RESEARCHER(*embarrassed*) I'm sorry if I'm a bit late, but...(*laughs*) Well, actually, you see, I was a little bit early. I arrived half an hour ago, there was nobody about. I took a stroll...(*beat*) Hello, Lilly You're looking very well.

MEGGAN. Looks like you've got a rival there, Frank. Another recruit...

RESEARCHER. Uh, my name's Philip Quayle. I'm from an arts organisation. I met you last week at that meeting downtown about the housing situation...

FRANK(*amused, to self*) An arts organisation. I was in one of them once.

LILLY(*turning to him*). Oh, I remember you, lad! (*amused*) He was very quiet the poor bugger, he seemed a bit lost.

FRANK. Well, no surprises there, huh? The *housing* situation....

LILLY(*to the Researcher*) Now, you come over here, you sit yourself down. There'll be more along soon. Have a drink, have a drink...That's my grand-daughter, Meggan. Her fella, Andy. And that's Frank, our technician. Go on, then, don't be shy.

RESEARCHER. (*noticing the gramophone player*) So, there'll be some music tonight, then? That's exciting....

LILLY. Exciting, it may be. But time's pushing on. What's *keeping* them all?

*She goes to the centre of the street. Her patience has worn thin.*

FRANK. So. An arts organisation? What's that about?

RESEARCHER(*avoiding the question*). That's your house, is it, Lilly? You've kept it immaculate. (*beat*) Yes, we're doing some research, actually. Liverpool, as you know, is at a crossroads. Well, the research is about...regeneration....social inclusion...

LILLY(*returning to the table*) Alright. Enough.

RESEARCHER(*concerned that he may have offended her*) Did I...?

LILLY. You can save the speech for later, lad. I think it's time for mine now.

*Lilly takes a final look down the street. She sighs. She returns to the head of the table..*

LILLY. This is not exactly the turnout I'd expected it. But I told them half past. I told them half past, so they'll just have to miss it. (*laughs*) That's probably their intention. Arrive fashionably late... (*beat*) Oh, what the hell, let's get it over with...

*She produces a pair of spectacles, and a number of hand-written record cards. She consults the cards, and then reads from one..*

LILLY. In my day, we'd stroll down the old Scottie Road. They were tailor-shops, bread shops...(*frowns, moves on*) I think, we can just skip over that bit. (*rummaging through cards*) And that. (*to the table*) That's all for the older folk, really, they like the reminiscence. (*laughs*) Not that we'll be short of the old stories. Not when Derek gets a drink in him...

*Lilly finds another record card. She reads from it a moment*

LILLY. Seriously, now. I've lived on this street for forty odd years. Forty years is a long time, many things come and go. (*laughs*) Now, you're probably thinking "What on earth is she doing, a woman of her age, living alone, in such complete isolation...?" Well, this was my home, wasn't it? This street has its memories, they're like ghosts, just like ghosts...(*laughs*) Some of the folk lately, they're more like ghouls. But that's beside the point. Stanley and I – and for those that don't know, that's my departed husband – we lived in that little house, number 24 there. We reared our children in that house. Our whole lives.

*She looks at the house. She returns to her record cards.*

LILLY(*a comically stern tone*) Now, I don't want anyone getting sentimental on me, hear? I don't want anyone getting teary-eyed, I'm made of sterner stuff than that. Don't fear the reaper, that's what I say. (*a little strident*) And we've lived through it all, the wash-houses, the Blitz... we have lived through *history*, many of us here...

*Lilly looks at her record cards. She selects another...*

LILLY. Some of you may be surprised to hear that I'm going quietly... *(laughs)* Some of you, those that know me, you might think I'd take it hard, packing up for good, going to a retirement community...well, my time is my time, and that, friends, is that. This a renewal area. There are streets going up, streets going down.... The rising tide, they all say, it raises all boats. Now, I'm not too sure precisely what that really means, and I'm a little bit sad, but...

FRANK*(cheerfully)* We hear you, Lilly. Don't give up now!

LILLY. And, now as I stand and look over this sea of faces...*(she looks about)* It's not as much as a sea, as a very small pond. When I look and stand over ...

LILLY. It's a street party, isn't it? It's an English tradition. And when that lot, you know, in Buckingham Palace, they got themselves married or had a birthday party, we'd come onto the streets, wouldn't we? We'd come on to the streets to...to mark time, you see. *(looking about)* I'm the last one to go. It's all change from herein. So, when the rest of them come, we'll have a few drinks, some dinner, and we can give this old place the send-off it deserves, won't we? There's no need for glum faces. Drink up. Drink up.

FRANK*(sincerely)* I second that. *(raising a glass)* Cheers.

LILLY. Anyway, that's the lecture done with. I'll check on the dinner. Frank, work your magic, and get the speaker hooked up, will you?

FRANK. Right away!

*Exit Lilly. Silence*

FRANK*(matter of factly)* Oh, by the way...

MEGGAN*(still distracted by Lilly's speech)* Sorry?

FRANK. I'm doing a marketing course.

*The screens explode into colour. Music begins.*

*A door opens. A snazzy-looking JAZZMAN, in a white suit and top hat, emerges. He is followed by a CHORUS OF DANCING GIRLS. He sings the Song of the Utopian Ideal. It's a spectacular show tune, with lots of razzmatazz. Only Frank sees the song.*

2.1 billion in structural investment,  
The Mersey's a river of gold,  
14,000 new jobs, can't you feel the commitment?  
Another chapter in the world's greatest story/ is about to unfold.

Party's just short for participation,  
A cruise liner facility, it's the state of the art,  
It's the rocket fuel, mate, for regeneration,  
The excitement is building, we can all play our part

2 million square feet of retail development,  
1 million rich tourists, it's the halo effect,  
A shopping revolution, can't you sense the excitement?  
It's dynamic, it's vibrant, it's inclusive, respect it!

Liverpool's story is the world's glory,  
Liverpool's story is the world's glory,  
Liverpool's story is the world's glory,  
The world in one city, the one city in the world!

Cosmopolitan!  
Metropolitan!  
Neapolitan!  
Liverpolitan!

We're gonna make it happen!

*As the song continues, a HOODIE begins to traverse up the street. As the song reaches its climax, the Hoodie throws a punch at the Jazzman. The Jazzman falls the ground.*

#### 4

*We return to the street party. No one has noticed the presence of the Hoodie. The Hoodie remains with his back turned, lurking near the door to one of the houses.*

*The Researcher has now produced some kind of tape-recorder, with a microphone attached. He has a notebook in front of him.*

*He is interviewing Frank, who is in the process of removing the back panel of the gramophone player.*

FRANK. Of course, don't take me wrong, I'm nobody's fool. Don't think for a minute, I'm buying the package. You can have your big song and dance, I'll raise a glass to the razzmatazz, but unless the work's there, you see? *(he slowly removes a back panel of the gramophone player)* It's a... mystery, isn't it?

RESEARCHER. What's a mystery?

FRANK. How wonderland, mate becomes a reality. *(laughs, considers an option)* Marketing manager for... Vauxhall, I'm thinking. Not in Vauxhall, *the car..* The tobacco warehouse becomes an... Interpretative Centre. T-shirts, for example, "Scouse as FCUK". *(laughs)* The course-director gave us an induction. The untapped attractions. *(with a nod to Lilly)* The rising tide, as she said... I guess we'll just have to see.

*Frank scowls, he's not entirely taken in by his own sales-pitch. He looks inside the gramophone player. The Researcher, expecting more, keeps the microphone pointed at Frank.*

FRANK *(a little embarrassed now)* I mean, I'll be honest with you a minute. I'd kind of got to thinking I'd been left on the scrap heap.... Now, that's probably not something a person like you can really understand, I mean no disrespect to you. You look like a professional man. But a fella like me... I'd drive furniture, that, and the work just ran out, you know? *(beat)* I had my dignity. I have a wife. a child. You've got to bring home the burgers, come rain or shine...

*Frank holds up the speaker cable. He has no idea how to hook it up.*

RESEARCHER. You've been out of work a while, then?

FRANK *(awkwardly)* In and out.

RESEARCHER. And are we talking mainly the last year or so, or something... more substantial?

*Frank looks at him a moment. He breaks into laughter.*

FRANK. Why should it matter now, anyway? There's work in marketing.

*The Researcher tries to look positive. Realising this conversation is over, he takes the microphone away from Frank.*

*There's a pause. The Researcher turns to Lilly.*

RESEARCHER. What about you, Lilly? You must have lots of memories of this neighbourhood.

*Frank looks at the cable in his hand. He bends down and tries to connect it to the gramophone player*

LILLY (*to the Researcher*). My first memory is of my mother, scrubbing the step.

RESEARCHER. Go on.

LILLY. She did it religiously, every morning at ten. Oh, every day, rain or shine, she'd be out there, on her knees, rubbing the step with a bit of sandstone. Or a lime preparation, she'd get it from the rag-man...

FRANK (*unseen, bent down*). Of course, I'm *fully aware* that it's all just propaganda.

LILLY. Scrubbing the step? That were our civic duty, lad.

FRANK (*standing up again*) Regeneration. The Cultural...Capital. I mean, that's your main area interest, am I right to presume that? You ask me, we're being moulded. I mean, mould by all means, I am putty in your fingers. (*shrugs*) All that matters is work. (*cheerily*) I'm like Yozzer Hughes, mate. Just a lot more polite.

LILLY. *Comedian.*

*Frank puts a record on the turntable. He puts the needle on the record. No sound emerges.*

FRANK. Hmmm.

*His back still turned on the audience, the Hoodie unzips his pants. He begins to take a piss against the wall.*

MEGGAN. Oh, God, would you look, Andy! (*outraged, rising*) Oi, lad!

ANDY (*rising*) Meggan? (*alert now*) Hey, Meggan!

MEGGAN (*approaching the HOODIE, who is zipping up his pants*) You think you can do what you like, mate? You think you've just got carte blanche? (*taking his arm*) Oi, do you hear me, you little mutt? I'm talking to you, mate—

*The Hoodie spins around. His hood falls off. We see him clearly for the first time. He's about sixteen. He instinctively raises his fist to strike Meggan, but Andy shouts just in time:*

ANDY. Just try it, lad!

*The Hoodie withdraws his fist. He turns and looks at the assembled guests. He shrugs. He spits on the ground. He begins to shuffle away.*

LILLY(*in reference to the absent guests*). I suppose, they are people, they're afraid to come around here.

MEGGAN(*to the Hoodie*). Not such the big man now, are you? Not so much of a swagger on you, now that you're outnumbered. Where's all your mates, then? They kick you out of the gang?

HOODIE. You got a pain in your crack?

LILLY. I suppose in a way, they feel that we're under siege. (*irritated by this thought, rising, pointing at the Hoodie*) Clear off, now, lad, would you? Shift on your way...

HOODIE(*to Meggan*). Twat!

MEGGAN. Come 'ere!

*Meggan tries to follow the Hoodie, but Andy takes her by the arm.*

ANDY. Meggan.

MEGGAN(*shouting after him*) And you can tell those shifty-eyed, chicken-shit, shell-suit wearing little rat-boys that you scurry around with that we've had enough of the intimidation, do you hear me, lad? We've had enough, frightening the elderly, breaking into our shops. (*losing confidence*) You tell them! You tell them! And...no more weed on the buses!

*Meggan takes a deep sigh, shrugs against a lamppost/a wall. The confrontation has knocked the wind out of her. Andy folds his arms. He seems vaguely proud.*

FRANK(*to the Researcher*) Write that in your notebook. The girls around here, they're completely fearless.

LILLY(*to Frank*) Well, they have to be, don't they? What with the hooligans around.

ANDY. Calm down, Meggan.

MEGGAN. You don't do that on the street. Not when you're having a party. You don't do it that at any time...I mean, it's disgusting. (*sotto voce, to Andy*) Sunny Spain here we come, lad: I'll be marking the calendar.

FRANK(*casually*). It's all to do with the drugs, of course. Drugs, and no discipline. (*frustrated, looking at the gramophone player*) You try to say something, they shoot your pets with an air pistol; ransack your home...

MEGGAN(*to Andy*). Is he gone?

ANDY. He's lurking. (*to the Hoodie, who is now lurking away*) You heard her, lad! Get a move on!

LILLY(*the Hoodie*) Off with you lad, before I call the police!

*Lilly turns to Meggan.*

LILLY. Anyhow, that's the drama over, come back an sit down. (*to the Researcher*) Do you have any kids, lad?

RESEARCHER. Me? (*laughs*) No. Not that I'm aware of, in any case...

LILLY. Well, I raised five of the buggers to have some common courtesy. They've all moved away now. Scattered all about. The only I have left is my daughter, Barbara. She has her career. (*sotto voce*) Between you and me, I have great hopes for our Meggan. Is it possible, perhaps. it skips a generation? That sense of... (*laughs, proudly*) I mean, did you see how she dealt with that ruffian there?

*They all look down the street. The Hoodie has approached a little further.*

ANDY. Let me handle this.

*Andy leaves. He goes and speaks to the Hoodie.*

MEGGAN(*a little nervous about Andy*) No music, then, Frank?

FRANK(*increasingly frustrated*) I can't connect the speaker. I just can't, it won't work. Look, I'll give Derek a ring. He does them student discos, maybe he can sort us out...with a PA or something. Of course, there's no possible way we can play them records...

*Andy comes back*

ANDY(*very satisfied*) No problem. He said he's going.

*The Hoodie picks up some litter – perhaps it's an apple or something. He flings it in the direction of the table. They all jump.*

MEGGAN(*enraged*) Little...scumbag!

LILLY(*disapproving*) Lilly.

*The Hoodie throws another object. Perhaps this time, it's a rock.*

MEGGAN(*distressed, to Andy*) He's going!? What did you say to him?

ANDY. I just asked him to leave, Meggan. (*frustrated*) How about we just go inside, Lilly? I mean, just for a while...

LILLY. Absolutely not.

ANDY. It's just I'm saying that's all, that this might be dangerous...

LILLY(*firmly*). He's a child, Andrew.

*Andy seems a little 'put in his place' by this. He looks awkwardly to Frank.*

ANDY(*regarding Hoodie*). You want to deal with this with me?

FRANK. I've got your back, mate.

*Andy and Frank and turn to confront the Hoodie. The Researcher chimes in—*

RESEARCHER. Uh, can't we call the police?

ANDY. And we call the police, and what would they do, eh? By the time, they arrive, he'll have done a runner. (*to Frank*) No, come on.

RESEARCHER(*a little frantically*) Now, now, hold on a second! Let's just think about this, can we?

*Another missile is thrown*

RESEARCHER. What's your plan then, precisely? You're going to reason with him?

FRANK. Do you want to?

*Pause*

RESEARCHER(*put on the spot*) Fine.

*The Researcher goes down the street, in pursuit of the Hoodie.*

FRANK(*frustrated*) I didn't actually mean it as an invitation.

*The Researcher begins to speak to the Hoodie*

LILLY. What's happening?

MEGGAN(*regarding the Researcher*) Looks like he's... talking to him, Nan.

FRANK. Of course, it's masochism, really.

ANDY(*interested*) Masochism? What is?

FRANK. Well, who's doing the moulding? The government, naturally. And then there's these arts organisations... (*laughs*) I mean, I may not know much about art, but... (*beat*) Art shouldn't be about telling a few people how to behave themselves properly.

ANDY(*regarding the Researcher*). I think he's got his wallet out.

FRANK. That's a solution, of course. We've all been guilty of that.

*They all look at Frank. They have no response...*

*The Hoodie and The Researcher return to the table.*

RESEARCHER(*heavily*) So. This is...Darren.

FRANK. You've got some nerve, mate! Throwing rocks at old women!

DARREN. So?

FRANK. So!

DARREN. You can't hit me. You'd be up in front of the judge, mate.

FRANK. That's your word against ours!

RESEARCHER(*intervening*) Now, hang on a second, one minute please. This is not the intention here. How about we all calm down? Now, look. The kid claims he thought—(*pointing to Andy*)

LILLY(*to the Hoodie*) I've had to live here, you know. While you lot have your fun!

RESEARCHER. – He claims he thought Andy was somebody else.

ANDY. What? Me?

RESEARCHER. Yes.

ANDY. Who did he think it was?

RESEARCHER. That's not important. What I'm trying to say is the rock incident...that was some form of reprisal. But as it appears it's a case of mistaken identity, let's try to be rational here. This is Lilly and Meggan and Andy and Frank. I've explained to Darren here what you're trying to do today. Now, I've asked him, you know, to put a few words on tape. After that, he said he'll leave us be. Does that sound reasonable, does it? (*picking up the microphone*) Whenever you're ready.

*The Researcher holds the microphone in front of the Hoodie.*

FRANK. Wait till you see now. Bet he does a runner with it.

RESEARCHER. How about you give us some space, huh? I've made a compromise here.

FRANK. Masochists, I told you. Colouring pencils!

*Frank, Lilly, Meggan and Andy sidle away. They watch from a distance, talking amongst themselves.*

DARREN. It's true, mate, I swear. That kid is the spitting image of my mate, George. (*beat*) That twat had have hit me, he'd be up in front of the judge.

RESEARCHER. How about you tell me what it's like living around here, Darren?

DARREN. Me?

RESEARCHER. Yes.

DARREN. Why?

*The Researcher just shrugs. He puts the microphone to the Hoodie's face.*

HOODIE. Wait a minute. Wait a minute. You're a busy!

RESEARCHER. No, Darren, no. As I think I already mentioned...

HOODIE (*regarding the gramophone player*) Fuck is that?

RESEARCHER. Just a few words, that's all.

*The Hoodie looks the Researcher a moment. He steps closer to the microphone.*

HOODIE(a few "words"). Spunk-drinker. Twat. Arse-bandit. Ho.

*The Hoodie cracks into laughter.*

RESEARCHER. Alright, very funny, the joke is on me.

HOODIE. Where you from then, Speake?

RESEARCHER. Your side of the fence. That's what we're interested in... I mean, here is a social phenomenon going on your doorstep... here is a moment of history....*(the Hoodie's getting rowdy again)* Remember that tenner I mentioned?

HOODIE. Could have had that wallet, mate. Could have snatched the fuckin' thing right out of your hands...

RESEARCHER. Oh, you think so?

*They look at one another. The Hoodie sighs. He speaks into the microphone.*

HOODIE(as if it's very well-rehearsed) We like to go down on our bikes and hang around Stanley Park there. We don't cause any trouble. My hobbies include football and going to the flicks... *(beat, briskly)* Pay up.

RESEARCHER(*defeated*) Fine. Fine. Have it your way, I'm only trying to... *(putting down the microphone, rummaging through his pockets)* I mean, ethically speaking, this is probably a little suspect. Ethically speaking. But then, if the government does it, why shouldn't I?

HOODIE. A deal is a deal, mate.

RESEARCHER. A deal is a deal.. But all the same, you were throwing rocks at us, weren't you? And that kind of behaviour's in very stark contrast...In my book, Darren, I think we'd call that harass—

*Darren touches the gramophone player.*

RESEARCHER(*irritated*) Look, I already asked you not to do that, please.

HOODIE. Only fucking looking at it!

*The Researcher produces the money. He holds it front of Darren. Darren snaps the money out of his hand.*

RESEARCHER(*one last effort*) So, you've got nothing to say, then? Nothing to tell the world? (*laughs*) I mean, these streets are yours, as much as they're anybody's. And at your age, of course, I was ranting and railing...

HOODIE(*amused*) Oh, yeah?

RESEARCHER. Of course I was. Teenagers are supposed to be angry. Let's not forget that.

*The Hoodie picks up the microphone.*

HOODIE. Filthy gyppo scum and their stinking crap caravans. The Busies down ours, selling scag on the side...

RESEARCHER. That's your experience? What about your family?

HOODIE. What?

RESEARCHER(*realizing he's on dangerous ground*) Not that I wish to pry, that is not my intention. I'm well aware that these things can be sensitive. But you've read the stories, I'm sure. The neighbourhoods around here, they're some of the most deprived in Britain. We've all read the stories: mass unemployment, poor health statistics, the drugs...the crime...

*They look at one another. The Hoodie puts the microphone down.*

HOODIE. Look, I'm off, mate.

RESEARCHER. Of course I'm not trying to label you. I'm not making a judgment, I'd just like a response...

*The Hoodie turns to go. He turns back. He is much more threatening now. The scene should no longer be played as an "interview" until indicated.*

HOODIE. Seriously, lad, you're dead brave and all, disrespecting me like that....

RESEARCHER(*more urgent*). It's just I've heard a lot of stories about what goes on here. Houses being burgled for a start. Cars getting

torched. I've heard the taxis won't stop, and the traffic lights getting meddled with so kids can rob stuff out of the back of lorries. I've heard the kids lay in wait, and attack the taxi-drivers. I hear they nails along Lassam Street, they pounce on these people...and, well, you were throwing *rocks*, do you see what I'm saying? (*looking to Lilly*) Women like that, they're almost under siege.

*They look at one another again. The Hoodie is brimming with rage.*

HOODIE. We like to go down on our bikes and hang around Stanley Park. We don't cause any trouble. My mam is Michelle. My mates are George and Petie... (*beat*) You don't even know the people I know! You don't know who you're talking to. You're a lanky twit, aren't you? You a student?

RESEARCHER. Not any more, no.

HOODIE(*regarding microphone*) Well, go on, then, pick it up.

*The Researcher picks up the microphone. He holds it in front of the Hoodie.*

HOODIE. Lots of thing happen everywhere that aren't very nice.

*The Hoodie produces a Stanley knife from his pocket. He holds it aloft. He does not threaten the Researcher with it directly.*

HOODIE. See this?

RESEARCHER. Yes, I see it.

*They look at one another again.*

HOODIE. I meet Georgie, I'll cut him. That's all that I'm saying.

*Pause*

HOODIE. Here endeth the lesson.

*The Hoodie walks off.*

HOODIE(*as passing aside, as he leaves the street*) They don't want us around, more! They don't want us around 'cause we're... Scousers!

*The screens flicker into life*

RESEARCHER(*to the audience*) Another day, another dollar.

*Exit Hoodie*

*An ARMY of HOODIES began to assemble, as the Researcher addresses the audience...<sup>3</sup>*

RESEARCHER(*to audience*) I feel at this juncture, I should intervene here. Radical problems require radical solutions, so, if you'll forgive me a minute, we'll press the pause button a while...

*The Researcher looks about. Everybody freezes. The Researcher is pleased.*

RESEARCHER. You've probably noticed, they have their... preoccupations. You've probably noticed, they have things on their mind. It's natural, we all do. These are unusual times...I like to call it a sea-change. (*laughs*) Which is kind of clever, you know, since it's the Year of The Sea. (*embarrassed*) Anyway. What's on my mind? What's on my mind is every damn thing. Every damn thing that seems to be on their minds. And I can tell you for nothing, it's been bloody hard work.

*The Researcher looks at the screens as they fade into life.*

RESEARCHER. Statistically, of course, this neighbourhood's entrenched. It's been on the decline ever since...(*thinks*) Well, I'm sure you all know the story. It's been a working-class city. It's been a working class city, there's no secret in that. And while in the late nineteenth century, there were those who proudly celebrated Liverpool's status as the 'second city of Europe', defending its supremacy as an unrivalled industrial wonder of the world, there were others, of course, who had a different opinion. Liverpool it appears, has always been stuck with a bad reputation.

*Beat*

Liverpool's on the up again or so they say. One thing is for sure; there's more *building* going on and if you accept the equation that prosperity plus culture equals good times for all, well, then, in that case, the rising tide should help raise all the boats. But it's more complex than that. To be honest with you, it's astonishingly complex. (*regarding Lilly*) No one's turned up for her party, they'll be along soon enough, we hope. But is

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<sup>3</sup> This is an important transition. It's the first time that we acknowledge to the audience the fact that what we're presenting is a little more ambitious than a naturalistic play. It also offers a concrete justification as to why we're using both the songs and the screens.

there, perhaps, a wider malaise... a chronic disaffection, disengagement from politics, even from civic society? What I'm talking about is people feeling cut off...

### *The images change*

RESEARCHER(*briskly*) After the war, the docks began to decline. The satellite factories like English Electric and Dunlop and Lucas, all began cutting back in the late 1960s, and by the time the 1980s shuffled in, unemployment in north Liverpool sky-rocketed. It didn't help, of course, that up to 70% of the city's manufacturing firms weren't locally controlled, and Liverpool at this stage had earned a pretty bad reputation for itself. The independent workforce found it difficult to adjust to factory discipline and managerial prerogatives. The housing market collapsed. People moved out and as a result, so did the local shops, local industry...(*sighs, he's overwhelmed by it all*) In the 1982, things had gotten so bad that the Daily Mirror suggested building a ring around the city and charging admission. Liverpool, they said, was "a showcase for everything that was wrong with Britain's major cities". (*laughs*) I mean, what do you do in the face of that? What else can you do but try to re-build the image and that's the *first priority* of any regeneration campaign. (*laughs*) Frank calls it the razzmatazz, and I suppose he's right. You paint a whole new picture, that's bring people back. But while you're selecting the palette, re-designing the vision, is it possible maybe that certain realities just get airbrushed out?

*The army remove their hoods. We now see them as individuals... people from many different walks of life.*

## 5

*The Hoodie Chorus. The Actors on the street should work in tandem with verbatim footage on-screen.*<sup>4</sup>

ON-SCREEN(*Margaret*) The area is run-down. I mean, if you go along you see all the shops boarded up, houses boarded up, and lot of it is good housing as well, it only needs doing up, it only needs refurbishing, they don't need to be pulled down...

ANN. You know what...I used to love it around here. I used to love it the community spirit and I'm dead serious. I mean, the streets, you know, they had that... street corner jangle...

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<sup>4</sup> This has only been partially thought-out. The timing and rhythm of it will have to be tweaked in rehearsal. However, the overall journey of it seems coherent.

PAULA. Yeah, the chit-chat, the banter

JANE. You'd go down the corner shop, you'd meet Betty, you'd say, "hi Betty", or well, maybe, you'd be putting the washing out...

PAUL. And the pubs around here, mate, now, they were cracking.

ALEX. He was never out of the pub.

PAUL. You'd run into Charlie. You'd have one in the Eagle. Then another in Myrtle's. (*thinks*) The North Star. The Parrot. A few scoops in the Wellington, in the Throstle's Nest...

*The Chorus all look shocked*

PAULA. Yeah, but it's not like that anymore.

[text slide 1: *The population of Liverpool has halved over the last 50 years*]

LAURA. It's gone horrible, you know. There's nowhere clean, there's big skips everywhere, and broken pavements...

ON-SCREEN (*Irene*) We all voted for regeneration. We all want shops, we all want nicer houses but don't knock them down, give them, you know, refurbish them, make them look nicer, make the streets look nicer, give us shops on the road, years ago there was shops on the road.

[text slide 2: *it is estimated that there are ??? derelict properties in north Liverpool*]

KELLY. It's all stop, go. Stop go.

*Pause*

ANN. Stop go, stop, go.

ON-SCREEN (*Bob*) we're on the edge of the galaxy here

[text slide 3: *almost 200,000 Liverpool jobs were lost between 1977 and 1990*]

RON. *This is such a complex situation.*

KELLY. *It was an area of market collapse, you know. Let's not beat around the bush...*

RON. Were talking year, years... [text slide 4: Development plans for north Liverpool include....] It might be 5, 7 years till it's all finished. For the majority of people, what they will see is they will see infill housing going on in various areas, they will see the development of major projects, they will see some work on the main corridors that we have running through, so those will be improved, improved shopping facilities at the same time, the economic regeneration that we're bringing in...

PAUL.(*hugely angry*) It's all lies, you know! They're selling us out!

*The Chorus look shocked.*

PAUL. What we're seeing here is bordering on fascism. What we're seeing here is the complete decimation of the working class communities that have always stood proudly defiant of the imperialist dictatorship. What we're seeing here is intimidation by middle management fat-cats doing underhand deals with the City Council. It's area clearance. It's slum clearance, mate, they want us all out.

*The Chorus seem exhausted by the tirade*

ANN. Oh, I don't know. This happened to me 30 years ago, nothing's changed, still the old red tape and big words we don't understand. We used to pick each others kids up from school, organise events in the summer holidays.

ON-SCREEN (Joe Sweeny) People are better off financially, but they're not better off community wise.

JAYNE. There's places you know, run for the community, by the community, they really look after the kids. They're well used and well loved.

JANE There's the Community Justice Centre. That'll help with the vandalism, the anti-social behaviour...

RON There has been consultation.

PAUL, PAULA, LAURA. Death by consultation!

ON SCREEN (*Gwen*) I think more information needs to be given out. If more information is given out to residents, because what I find is, if I'm going shopping or anything, people say to me, 'have you heard anything', this is what seems to be happening with people now. People are coming up and saying, 'have you heard anything', you say no, 'is

there any meetings', I don't know, oh and try to find out. People are interested and they are concerned.

KELLY. Well, I'm not.

[text slide 5: Liverpool ranked ??? in voter turn out in the last General Election]

LAURA Well, I am.

KELLY. Well, I'm not.

ALEX. Well I am.

ANN. There's always cars flying past, flying past our road.

JAYNE. We've got the worst health statistics—

[text slides 6-9 q in on 'worst' then loop under following cutting out on final statistics]

LAURA. The worst unemployment statistics.

JANE. The child poverty statistics—

JAYNE 5. Low income statistics.

ALEX. Statistics!

KELLY. Statistics!

PAUL. Statistics!

JAYNE. Statistics!

*All sigh in exhaustion*

ON SCREEN(*Ron Formby*) Now, over the last, say, 10 or 15 years, we've had a lot of outside agencies, quango-esque organisations coming back into the area, who were looking to support positive change. Now, it doesn't take much discouragement if five years down the road, 10 years down the road, there hasn't been in that much, and in many ways it's gone a lot worse...

LAURA. They treated us like dum-dums. They think we haven't got any sense. I mean, it's unbelievable. They didn't know there was a school in the community. Now, this is an organisation that's been given 26 million

pound to do a road, and they didn't know there was a school in the community. They didn't know there was a doctor's surgery there.

ON SCREEN(*John Oakley*) This is not a quick fix. This is about fundamentally changing the situation in north Liverpool which has left people poor, poorly educated, poor employment records and unhealthy, and we need to change that. You know, that's what our job is.

[text slide 10: Over the past decade around £2.5 billion has been spent on regeneration projects in Liverpool]

JANE. It'll take years, you know.

PAUL. Then I'm off to the pub.

*Hoodie 4 and 5 walk off.*

[text slide 11: it has been estimated that 39,000 jobs have been created here in the last 5 years.]

ANN. That's the biggest problem, is just disinterest... maybe if you could capture their imaginations a little bit more, just get people involved. If you don't shout loud they won't listen.

PAULA. Well, I own my own property. It's my home, you see, down here in Anfield. This is the here and now, isn't it? I want to stay in this neighbourhood, all of my friends live round here. (*increasingly distressed*) So, I wake up one morning, I hear that these houses are going. They don't tell me why. They don't tell me when. My home is decent. But I have to ship out, see? I don't have a choice. But more important than that, I just don't know *when*. I could be waiting, maybe five or six years here. I can't make renovations. There's no point doing nothing, because we'll have to jump ship, see? I can't even sell because the street is flagged: it's a Renewal Area.

They tell us, of course, that we'll get market value. Market value, they say, and plus ten percent. I've heard a rumour from next door there'll be "disturbance payments". But as far as I can see, they keep shifting the goalposts. They tell us, of course, there'll be affordable homes. In this area, they say: you won't have to move far. But with the house prices rising, the developers coming in... I've got a lovely three bedroom, it's an Edwardian home. This was my mother's house: now, it's mine and my husband's. I have it just how I like, I've been here twenty years. I don't want to move to West Derby or Skem. Don't send me to Huyton or Newton-Le-Willows. I don't want this shared ownership. I don't want part-exchange...

*She is overwhelmed*

RESEARCHER. I think they all feel in...in limbo. I think they all really feel there's decisions being made...but they're behind closed doors. Just a little more honesty... that's all they want.

6

*The Hoodies disperse. The Researcher looks at the table and then the audience.*

*Lilly looks around the table. She senses the group's growing feeling of hopelessness.*

LILLY. Alright. Time enough. How about I bring us something to eat?

*A series of image appear on the screen. Slow motion video images of "elegant ruin"...warehouses lying empty, the docks abandoned, etc. Should be beautiful, but elegiac, nonetheless.. The images should progress from light to darkness; the final shot being the cityscape at night...*

7

*The street party continues. All a little drunk, but especially Frank, who also seems to have lost much of his former enthusiasm.*

MEGGAN(*her eyes closed*). My dream? My dream? (*laughs*) My dream, since you asked is of a tropical island.

FRANK. A tropical island! Whose isn't?

MEGGAN. Ah, but the difference there, Frank, is that this dream will come true, see? (*hastily*) Don't mention it to Nan. I'll get around to that later. (*evidently a little drunk*) In a few months, I mean, when she's settled in nicely. Of course, Mother dearest, she doesn't believe a word of it. She just goes "yes, Meggan". I'm getting married, "yes, Meggan", "I'm going to Spain, Mam", "yes Meggan"...(*beat*) "I'm going to Afghanistan to join Al Quaedia"...

FRANK. Hah!

MEGGAN(*amused*) What's eating you, anyway, lad? You ask me, you're bevvied.

FRANK(*rising*) What's eating me? What's eating me? Well, it's hopeless, isn't it?

ANDY(*quietly amused*) The gramophone player. More trouble than it's worth.

FRANK(*frustrated*) I'm not talking about the gramophone! (*leaving the table*) She's probably gutted in there, you know. I'm embarrassed...by extension.

*Pause*

ANDY. Jamaica. Now, that's tropical.

MEGGAN. Jamaica, yeah, right. So you can smoke the weed all day, la.

FRANK. – I mean, would you look at this turn-out! It's piss-poor, isn't it? And, but of course, I said it to the pub crowd...but they're all having a ball down there. Some lad got a promotion, he's flashing his money around. *Some* people spend it like there's no tomorrow. While the rest of us peasants, we barely survive...

*The Researcher considers interjecting. Andy intervenes.*

ANDY. Best to leave him alone, I think.

*Pause*

RESEARCHER. Anyway, you were saying. You're really planning to emigrate?

ANDY(*shrugs*) Well...

MEGGAN. People make plans. That's what people do, isn't it?

ANDY. We're looking at...options. I've put my name down for a shared ownership scheme. In Fazakerley.

MEGGAN. And after that, Andrew. In a year or two, obviously...

ANDY. Let's not talk about this now, alright?

MEGGAN. (*clutching at straws*) I mean, I saw this thing on the telly...S-A-D, it's called.

RESEARCHER. Seasonally Adjusted Depression.

MEGGAN. There's your answer, then!

RESEARCHER. My answer? What my question?

MEGGAN. Oh, you know what I mean. *Negativity*.

RESEARCHER. You're suggesting all of the city's problems are down to...the weather?

MEGGAN(*with a look to the empty table*) Isn't it obvious?

RESEARCHER. Would that mean, for example, that weather's better down south?

MEGGAN. How should I know? At least they have a Harvey Nicks!

RESEARCHER. Down south?

MEGGAN(*exasperated*) Yes!

ANDY(*bored now*) You'll get a Harvey Nicks. There'll be one in Paradise Street.

RESEARCHER(*lost*) Why are we talking about Harvey Nicks?

MEGGAN(*frustrated*) We're not! I don't care about Harvey Nicks. You're just trying to confuse me now. (*sighs*) Somewhere, I mean, where there's no rain and no...grey! Somewhere, alright, where those shifty-eyed rat-boys don't rule the roost. We can buy a nice apartment, overlooking the beach. Andy'll get a job. I'll work on my tan. I mean, don't get me wrong, I'll get a proper job, too...

ANDY(*exasperated*) And can't you work on your tan in Sunny Deelite? I mean, let's face it, girl: you've never out of the place!

FRANK(*dramatically*) Ladies and gentlemen. Hate to spoil the party, but...

*All turn to look at Frank.*

MEGGAN(*alarmed*). You're not leaving, are you?

FRANK(*unsure*). Well, it's embarrassing, isn't it? It's a shame to bear witness...(sighs) Look, I apologise. It's been a difficult week. On the bright side, of course, there's the marketing course, but on the other, it's.... (*sighs, he looks about*) Tracey, my daughter, she's been... excluded from school. It's embarrassing. (*laughs, to self*) The halo

effect. I'm certainly no saint. *(beat)* Look, I'll just slip away quietly, you can pass my regards on.

MEGGAN*(rising, picking up her handbag)* Well, if he's going, I'm going; this wine tastes of chemicals. I want a Bacardi Breezer.

*Enter Lilly, with a tray with five bowls of food. She stands at the doorway.*

LILLY. Did I hear someone's hopping it?

FRANK. Just stretching my legs, ma'am. Rheumatism setting in.

MEGGAN. You see? That's from the rain.

*Frank doesn't move. Meggan sighs. She sits down again. She puts her head on the table. Lilly remains at the door, with the tray in her hand. She looks about, sensing some dissent in the ranks...*

RESEARCHER. So. So, we were just talking....about Harvey Nicks actually.

LILLY. Well, come on, then, someone, show an old lady some charity.

ANDY*(rising rapidly)* Sorry, Lilly.

*Lilly looks about. She is clearly disappointed that nobody else has arrived in her absence. Andy takes the tray. Lilly tries to smile.*

LILLY. Thank you.

*Lilly goes slowly to the table. All watch her, evidently embarrassed that the party has been a wash-out.*

LILLY. I think I'll eat now, if that's alright. You should all eat, you've been drinking.

*Andy nods dutifully, and begins to eat. Meggan sighs and does the same. Frank remains standing.*

*They eat in silence a moment. Eventually, Meggan, in exasperation, puts her fork down—*

MEGGAN*(pleading)* Look, Nan...

LILLY. I don't want to hear it.

MEGGAN. I'm only—

LILLY. I said, I don't want to hear it, now eat up, would you girl? (*concealing disappointment*) Hungry or no, you should put something solid inside of you. I'm not having your mother chewing my ear off... reprimanding me, as if I'm the bad influence. I'm trying to pass something on, whether they care or not. I'm trying to teach you a lesson....

MEGGAN(*frustrated*) Nobody's here, Nan!

LILLY. That isn't quite true, Meggan. There are five of us here. Now clean your plate.

*They eat again.*

FRANK(*singing, oddly introspective*) Baby, you're a rich man! Baby, you're a rich man! Baby, you're a rich man, too! You keep all your money in an old brown bag inside a zoo...

*They continue to eat. Lilly looks at Frank, concerned.*

LILLY. (*regarding food*) I'm afraid we're only serving chicken con carne. The scouse stuck to the pan, Frank.

ANDY. Well, it'll taste better tomorrow, won't it? Actually, Lilly, I had an idea...(*nervously, looking to Meggan a moment*) I had an idea. I mean, to liven things up around here...

*Meggan sighs. She pushes her food aside. She puts her head on the table.*

ANDY. It just I have some mates in a band, see? I have some mates in a band, they rehearse not too far from here. I could give them a call, maybe...see if they'd like to drop by...

FRANK(*trying for a joke, but failing*) Let me say one thing for certain. Let me say, in all sincerity, that if any individual should take it upon themselves this evening to sing "All You Need Is Love, and this is coming from a man who actually *does* like the Beatles..." I will personally take it upon myself to chin them senseless with Maxwell's Silver Hammer...

LILLY. Meggan?

MEGGAN(*lifting her head suddenly*) Maxwell? From Big Brother?

LILLY. If you'd rather not stay, Meggan, you're free to go...

FRANK(*a shout*). I've got blisters on my fingers!

*Lilly looks at Frank, irritated. She looks back to Meggan...*

LILLY. I was hoping at least there'd be thirty at table. Thirty at least, I thought that were reasonable...

MEGGAN(*frustrated*). Oh, let's just call it a day, alright?

LILLY. I'm going to sit this one through, child. If you'd prefer to go—

MEGGAN. And what's the point of that, well? Nobody's *here*, get it? There's just Frank and he's drunk, and Inspector Morse there...

LILLY. I had to bend over backwards. The Council almost put a stop to it. They said that this structure (*i.e. the table*), it might be a...liability—

MEGGAN(*astonished by Lilly's refusal to bend*). What's *wrong* with you?

*They look at one another. Andy interjects...*

ANDY. Alright, Meggan, look. Just leave it be.

LILLY. What's wrong with me, child? What do you think is wrong with me? You think I'm not disappointed that no-one's bothered to show? You think I'm too proud...too proud to admit it? Of course I am. Of course I'm disappointed. But this what we set out to do, so we'll give this street its send-off, people or no people, does that answer your question?

*Meggan sighs. She begins eating again.*

LILLY. Oh, don't be angry with me, please. When you're a little bit older, you'll understand. When you have your own home, with kids running round. There'll come a time when you need your community...

MEGGAN(*sighs*) Nan, we're...

ANDY(*cautiously*) Meggan.

MEGGAN. I mean, I'm fully aware, this is not the time or the place, but... Andy and I we're planning to...

ANDY(*rising, to Frank*) Look, have you got a phone on you, mate? Call up the pub crowd, alright? Get them down here.

FRANK(*shrugs*) I tried that already. I can try again if you like.

MEGGAN(*pained*) Andy and I, Nan, I mean, I might as well tell you now..

*They look at one another*

LILLY. Well, if you have something to say, Meggan, you don't have to be shy.

*They look at one another again. Meggan can't tell her – it will hurt her too much.*

*Frank has produced a phone*

FRANK(*to phone*) Eh, Derek? Derek, can you hear me?

*Meggan's parents arrive. Their names are NATHAN and BARBARA. Both are sharply dressed – and completely in black. Nathan is carrying a bottle of wine. They look about, in a quietly dismissive manner.*

NATHAN. Bunting...the full monty.

*Meggan turns around in shock*

MEGGAN. Mam! Dad!

LILLY(*to self*) And then, graced with royalty.

MEGGAN. What the hell are you....doing here?

BARBARA(*to Nathan*) There? Now, do you see? This is precisely the point I was making in the car. Now, she asks us point-blank what the hell that we're doing here, even though she begged us to promise that we'd say we'd come... (*wiping dirt from her hands, looking about*) It's very dusty.

LILLY. Hello Barbara.

BARBARA(*excessively sweet*) Alright! (*inspecting the table-cloth*) You get your best linen out, then? (*regarding the gramophone*) And that ancient contraption...it's very quaint, very quaint.

NATHAN(*looking about, concerned*) You think it's alright to park here?

BARBARA. Your father, as we know, is one of life's great worriers. Not that I'm complaining, of course. As us women know, in these uncertain times, with the whole relationship drama is being played out like some grotesquely extravagant game of chess, the sensible choice, when faced with two extremes – the prudent, the feckless – is to side with the former. There's a lesson there, Meggan, should you be inclined to listen. (*sighs*) Not that she ever...(*sighs, looks about, pointing to some of the abandoned houses*) Sweet Marie, would you look: this is a total disgrace.

NATHAN. It's a renewal area, Barbara.

BARBARA. Then, they better get on with the renewal then, hadn't they? (*sighs with exasperation, the absurdity of it all...*) Nothing's ever on time.

*Pause*

NATHAN(*cheerfully*) Anyhow. Not to worry. Thank you ever so much for inviting us down here. (*laughs nervously, to Lilly*) How are you, Lilly? Radiant, fearsome...

BARBARA. Oh, for heaven's sake, Nathan, the woman's not far off eighty.

NATHAN. But agile.

LILLY(*irritated*) I'm standing right here, you know!

FRANK(*to the Researcher*) He's afraid of her, too.

*Pause*

ANDY. Mr and Mrs. Bannister. Can I get you something to drink?

*Barbara looks disapprovingly at Andy. She turns away, she laughs.*

NATHAN(*presently his bottle of wine*) There's our contribution. For the festivities.

ANDY. That's very kind of you, Mr. Bannister. Would you like some of this...? We've got one open. You want something stronger, there's Lilly's gin.

NATHAN(*picking up an opened wine bottle*) May I see?

*Nathan picks up the bottle of wine. He eyes it with suspicion.*

ANDY(*nervously*). I mean, don't ask me to vouch for it, I know squat about wine.

*Barbara looks coolly at Meggan, her evident disapproval of Andy becoming all the more apparent. Lilly refuses to meet Barbara's eye.*

*Nathan still hasn't made a decision on the wine...*

ANDY. Look, Mr. Bannister, how about I open yours, then?

NATHAN. Oh, not to worry. In for a penny, huh? Just the one, though, I'm driving.

ANDY. Drink? Mrs. Bannister?

BARBARA. *No*, thank you.

*Nathan sips his wine. He is pleasantly surprised.*

NATHAN. Mmmm. A hint of rosehip.

BARBARA. Anyhow, Mother, as much as we'd love to, we can't stay long here. Naturally, of course, we wouldn't have missed this extravaganza for the world. You've really outdone yourself this time, now, haven't you? (*laughs*) Did you have to get the road closed? (*laughs*) So, we'll salute the flag, have a twirl round the maypole, there was a speech, I suppose. We would have got here earlier, but Lost was repeated on Channel 4 and our VCR hasn't been working properly since Nathan dropped the television on it... We could have just watched it on Wednesday., Thankfully, the television's still operational. (*sighs*) Oh, I'm withering, withering. (*looking about*) It's not exactly what you'd call a Mardi Gras, is it?

NATHAN(*to Frank, approaching him*) Nice to see you again, matey.

FRANK. I'm doing a marketing course.

NATHAN. Good on you, man. Bully for you. Of course, I've always said it. The latent skills in the north Liverpool area can be practically realized. It's simply a matter, simple re-training—

BARBARA(*to Lilly*) Don't you think it's a little chilly, Mother? For a woman of your age?

NATHAN(*to Frank*) How, may I ask, are you with getting up in the morning?

BARBARA(*to Lilly, who seems to be ignoring her*) Mother...?

NATHAN(*to Frank*). Did I come off a bit short? I suppose it was a bit forthright.

FRANK. No, that's quite alright, Nathan.

BARBARA(*to Lilly*) It's just the doctor, you know, he said you should wrap up well.

NATHAN(*to Frank*) Let me tell you a story, Frank. When I first unveiled my very first outlet...oh, we're going back now to the mid-1990s. Glory days, weren't they? At least for those of us who... (*embarrassed*) Anyhow. I was certainly keen to employ people from the north Liverpool area, what with my darling wife and beautiful daughter having such close affinities with 'the old neighbourhood', as some as I've heard, so euphemistically put it. It's also been my experience that people who are... (*laughs*) Well, let's not call them under-privileged. "Financially conscious", I think that's nicely put. Let me give you an example, I have some Polish chaps now. And they're the nicest trainees you could meet, they're stacking the shelves with verve and aplomb... (*beat*) Anyhow, matey, getting back to the point. We put out the call...

FRANK. You've told me this story about 15 times, mate. You put out a call for north Liverpool workers. But you had to let them all go because none of them could ever get up in the morning...

NATHAN(*a little embarrassed, turning to her*) Punctuality, Barbara. We can all something to learn there. (*to the Researcher*) And you are?

RESEARCHER. Oh. My name is Philip. I'm not from around here.

BARBARA(*to Lilly*) I mean, one of these days, Mother, you're just going to have to accept you're not...young anymore.

LILLY (*hugely irritated*) And what has my age got to do with anything, Barbara? I suppose you're taking this as some kind of victory.

BARBARA. What? Taking what...?

LILLY. That there's not a huge crowd here. That I've been put in my place. And, then, to twist the knife further, you come dressed for my funeral...

BARBARA (*sincerely amused*) Your funeral? What on earth do you mean?

LILLY. (*scowls*) Oh, don't tax my patience, because I've had a drink. (*sighs*) Look at the pair of you, you're like a couple of ghouls...

BARBARA (*a little shocked*). You're...paranoid!

NATHAN (*drinking wine, feigning amusement*) And they call them the Harmons.

RESEARCHER (*trying to laugh*) Yeah.

NATHAN. The three of them get together, it's like the Harmony Suite.

*Barbara scowls at Nathan. She resumes attacking Lilly.*

BARBARA. First of all, mother, calling me a 'ghoul' is a pretty cheap shot, don't you think? You're either plain-being cruel, or else it's... dementia. For your information, black is officially back in. Now, if you had the slightest awareness... (*realizing this is absurd*) Alright, alright, a woman, no doubt, of your clear seniority has no business reading *Hello* magazine. As do any of the rest of us for that matter, but... (*sighs*) Black is back. (*laughs*) It'll be a bizarre sight, now, won't it, watching all those orange-skinned angels of a Saturday night parading about like The New Northern Coven, but that's beside the point, beside the point... Secondly. If you're trying to infer that Nathan and I would somehow be *happy* should the day arrive when you finally...bite the dust, Mother, or whatever you'd prefer to call it, well, that's simply...cruel. (*sighs*) We pleaded with you, didn't we, Nathan? You were *more than welcome* to come live with us—

LILLY (*irritated*) Oh, bugger off!

MEGGAN (*shocked*) Nan!

BARBARA. It's just so...hurtful.

MEGGAN(*sincerely, a little hurt*) Will you two stop just...fighting? Will you just stop it, please. You're as bad as each other, I swear to God. One of you never stops about this whole 'community' thing. The other one wants me to get a good education, get a sensible boyfriend, a job with a future...

BARBARA. This isn't about you, Meggan.

MEGGAN. Oh, it's not? You don't think so? I have to try and please everyone. What about what I want?

BARBARA(*sighs*). Yes, Meggan.

MEGGAN. At least Nan's nice to Andy. (*turning to Nathan*) And least, she's not a complete snob.

NATHAN(*awkwardly*) I...hardly know the man, Meggan.

MEGGAN(*exasperated*) For God's sake, dad, you know we're getting married! We've been going out for years!

*Barbara sighs...*

BARBARA. Very well, then, mother, you want me to bugger off, I'll bugger off. Meggan, darling dearest, look after your grand-ma—

LILLY. At least the girl has some respect for where she were born and reared—

BARBARA(*surprised*) Meggan? Really?

LILLY. Yes!

*Barbara's a little amused by this. She looks to Meggan a moment. She thinks.*

BARBARA. Oh, so is this about *me*, is it? (*sighs*) Look, whatever I do, or how I bring up my children, is my business, isn't it? You always disapproved of the choices I made. Now, if my daughter, she wants to make choices, then she's completely free to do as she pleases... (*realizing she's boxing herself in*) You could have come and lived with us, mother. (*sighs*) I mean, let's just face it, what with the one-woman crusade. The past two years, you've been such a ...worry...

*Silence*

BARBARA(*a little haughty, but also a little proud*) Always standing your ground, mother. Always taking a stand.

ANDY. Look, nobody's taking a stand here. She's leaving next week.

*All look at Andy moment. Barbara softens a little. She turns to Meggan.*

BARBARA. Meggan, look. I know that perhaps I've been a little short with you lately. But you come up with these ideas out of the clear blue sky, and what's a mother to think of that, anyway? I mean, I have enough on my plate with the work/life/balance.. (*trying to get Lilly back on side*) First, they're getting married. The next second you blink, they've got a little flat; I mean, the poor girl's barely past her twenty-first birthday. (*to Meggan*) Have we made trouble for you, girl? Have we stood in your way?

MEGGAN(*mutely*) No.

*Pause*

LILLY. They'll be raising a family. They'll have their kids, on these streets.

NATHAN. They will?

*All turn to Nathan.*

NATHAN. No, no, I'm sorry for interrupting. It's not the imminent prospect of me being a grandfather that has me a little...(*laughs*) I mean, let's just face it, I'm always the last one to know. (*turning to Andy*) I thought you were moving to Spain, though.

MEGGAN(*appalled*) Dad!!!

*Meggan turns to Lilly. Lilly is devastated.*

LILLY(*a little embarrassed*) Oh. Oh, well, I see. Well, I must have got it wrong, then.

BARBARA(*concerned*) Mother?

LILLY(*turning away*). You can top up my glass, Andrew. I think I'll have another.

BARBARA. And you know all too well mother, you're not supposed to drink alcohol. Not with your medication... *(looking to Nathan)* Oh, what have you said? Let's...exit stage left, alright?

*Nathan sighs. He agrees to go with her. Barbara turns to go. She hesitates.*

BARBARA*(hopelessly)*. Mother...

*Barbara sighs.*

BARBARA. Look, take care of yourself. If you ever change your mind...

LILLY. My mind was made up. I made it up a long time ago. And all I wanted to do was have a bit of send-off. Oh, you wouldn't be interested, you never were...

MEGGAN*(to Lilly)* Look, Nan, I'm sorry. I didn't know you thought you thought we'd...

*Lilly and Barbara look at one another*

LILLY. Well, go on, then! Off with the lot of you!

BARBARA. Oh, I hate this, forgive me. *(Nathan seems to have changed his mind about leaving)* I'll go sit in the car.

*Barbara goes off*

*Silence*

*Nathan looks about.*

NATHAN*(awkwardly)*. Okay. Here's a plan. How about you all join us at the Mongolian Barbeque?

MEGGAN. Just stop it, Dad.

NATHAN. What? It's good food. *(shrugs)* Oh, it's a buffet admittedly, all you can eat... We can't leave things hanging like this. I honestly thought there was concrete progress...there were tangible steps. And today of all days. I mean, why no? *(producing a mobile phone)* Seating another... five in the party. Frank, you'll meet Jonathan. John's a new partner. See, we're expanding the outlets, moving from pure DIY into interior ready-mades, and Jonathan's come on board, he's from that background... *(phone to ear)* To be honest with you, I'm astonished it

never dawned on me before. A man can clear up selling affordable furniture. For, in this day and age, we much prefer to stay in.

FRANK. You have any marketing vacancies coming up in the next six months, I'd definitely be interested.

NATHAN(*a little thrown*). Why. Why, of course! Drop us in a CV...

LILLY(*rising*). Waste of bloody time.

*Lilly begins to walk to her house.*

MEGGAN. Nan? (*going after her, a little frantic*) Look, I'm sorry that I didn't tell you about us moving to Spain, but....

*Lilly turns to Meggan*

LILLY. You do as you please, child. Don't you fret about me.

NATHAN(*to phone*) Yes. Yes, hello, is that the Mongolians?

*Exit Lilly. She slams the front door behind her.*

MEGGAN. Nan!

## 8

*Nathan goes off. The Researcher gets up from the table. He turns to the audience...*

RESEARCHER(*heavily*). Well...(*brightly*) Allow me to introduce myself. My name's Dickey Sam. (*laughs*) Dickey Sam, mate, you get it? (*sighs*) Alright, you don't. You need to brush up on your history, mate, if you want to keep ahead of the game. 'Dickey Sam's' the alter-ego for a Liverpool man. You see, "he's a right Dickey Sam, he's a Liverpool..." (*sighs*) Anyway. Just a bit of humour. Just some light relief at this difficult moment...

*He turns back to the table.*

RESEARCHER. It seems that we're stuck again. This is limbo again, is it? A state of neglect. An intermediate state. (*he looks about*) No, this is something far deeper, more troubling than that. All the lights are extinguished. All hopes defeated. No, this here, my friends, is undiluted despair. A place we'll call the netherworld...

*The lighting changes. Dark and broody. More Kafka, less Film Noir. The Researcher finds a long coat and he puts it on as a saxophone wails...*

RESEARCHER. Let me take you back eighteen months ago. There's a context, of course, this whole situation – this woman we've seen, fighting her corner, and *failing*, it seems...that strikes a chord, doesn't it? That rings a bell, somewhere inside of us. To see streets abandoned, your friends apathetic...well, that might lead one to think the sum of your life... (*beat*) That's speculation, of course. We'll return to it later.

*The Researcher looks about. He lets the concept settle.*

RESEARCHER(*briskly*) The issue, it seems, rests with participation. (*a joke*) Party's just short for participation...that's what Frank might say, isn't it? But, to let ourselves off the hook a moment, political issues aren't as black and white as they used to be, are they? That generation were on the Left or Right. I mean, nowadays, right, even trying to *form an opinion* can make you clinically depressed. For every argument presented, there is a direct opposite, which would naturally appear to be equally valid. All subjects are relative within the netherworld. (*losing confidence*) Sometimes the best lack conviction, sometimes the worst are...(*briskly, returning to the point*) Anyhow. You shall see.

*The scene further assembles itself...*

RESEARCHER(*briskly*) Eighteen months prior I was working in Manchester, earning a living by day working for the Department of Work and Pensions and writing astoundingly bad poetry by night. Now, in my fantasy world – and we've seen plenty of those tonight – I had always kind of fancied myself as a private eye. I suppose in the more Woodward and Bernstein style of things, you know, following the paper trail, that kind of business... (*laughs nervously*) Dickey Sam, he's your man. Anyhow, an opening came up. A part-time research position with an arts-organisation in Liverpool, investigating the effects that regeneration policies were having on communities north of the city. It wasn't what you'd call Watergate, but, what with the skills shortage, I got the job...

*Images on screen; library footage.*

RESEARCHER. I was set to work on my own. "Regeneration", they said, that was the buzzword. Now, between you and I, the amount that I knew about 'regeneration' you could easily write on the back of an

undoubtedly mysterious pocket book of matches. Like any good ... dick... I went to the library. I knuckled right down to it. (*knocks on a door, turns to the audience*) I guess, first of all, I looked in the wrong place.

*The first door opens. It is the Jazzman. He raises his arms, as if to sing...*

JAZZMAN. Two point one billion in structural investment—

RESEARCHER. Returning to reality—

*The Researcher swiftly closes the door. He moves on.*

BOOKISH TYPE. (*addressing the audience*). In 1974, the Labour government chooses three prototype areas for Inner Area Deprivation Studies. Liverpool, Birmingham and the Lambeth borough of London were selected. The first City “Partnerships” were formed, creating an often uneasy relationship with the government and local authority...

RESEARCHER. Partnerships, James, but not as we know it.

BOOKISH TYPE. ...for the government also establishes, what are known as Urban Development Corporations—

*The Researcher reaches for the door. But someone opens it before he can: it is a sharply-dressed female EXECUTIVE. Not far from the femme fatale.*

EXECUTIVE 1. UDCS, as we call them, are quasi-autonomous urban development bodies, with considerable powers, such as compulsory purchase orders. Working in partnership with Whitehall and local government, it is our job to assemble quality sites of brownfield land, and re-focus the market in the territories designated.

RESEARCHER. That's what you do?

EXECUTIVE 1. It's my life, sir.

RESEARCHER. And what does it mean exactly?

*Another senior, but similarly attired, EXECUTIVE steps out.*

EXECUTIVE 2. We build, Mr. Quayle. (*positively aquiver*) We build towers in the sky, those great... big... momentous erections. In a thousand years' time, historians will look at our stadia, our circular

wheels, the great...conference centres of this brave new millennium, and slack-jawed, in awe, they'll salute the flagships—

*Another door swiftly opens. It is CITIZEN 1. Working-class, definitely male.*

CITIZEN 1. That's doggerel, missus.

EXECUTIVE 2(*bored*) Oh, the folly...

CITIZEN 1. Flagship developments do nothing for our poor old cities. I mean, we've been round the houses... All the flagships do is attract a very small number of "producer services", who bring their own highly-skilled, highly specialised workforce right with them, and they squeeze the rest of us out – the local shops, the local trade – because small businesses can't afford the rates any more. These... "producer services": the banks, the insurance companies, they distort the market. And, well, what's more, they're only there 'cause of tax breaks—

EXECUTIVE 1.(*flirtatiously, to the researcher*) He's neglected to mention the... (*breathlessly*) ...trickle-down effect.

RESEARCHER(*a little overwhelmed by the seduction*) The trickle-down effect? (*to Executive 1*) That's the same as the halo effect, is it?

*...Executive 2 becomes the Sanctified Angel. Executive 1 as the Devil's Minx...*

EXECUTIVE 1.(*running a finger down the Researcher's chest*) That's right...Dickey.

*The Citizen throws his hands up in despair. He turns and shuts the door behind him. The Researcher is now flummoxed. The Good Angel/Bad Angel image has become a little more lurid...*

RESEARCHER(*to the audience*) I mean, it's pretty seductive. I mean, you have to admit it.

*Another door opens. The Academic emerges...(a judge? God?)*

ACADEMIC. The trickle-down effect has been fiercely contested. It makes the seemingly logical, but rather naïve assumption that large-scale flagship developments will attract new business to the area, hence boosting employment in ancillary services. However, the globalised economy has ushered in many fundamental changes in the ownership, structure and profitability of economic activities. This means,

in short, that the skills of the local workforce and the new jobs created are often mis-matched... *(increasingly irritated by the Executive's flirtation with the researcher)* Excuse me? Excuse me, miss?

EXECUTIVE 1 *(highly offended)* And you are?

ACADEMIC. I think everybody here would prefer it, young lady, if you confined your...recreational activities to outside of my seminars...

EXECUTIVE 2. *(even more offended)* The excitement is...*building!*

*Both Executives flounce off. They slam the door behind them.*

RESEARCHER *(turning to the audience)* And that, now my friend, is where reading will get you. I was left none the wiser. "Stomp, the pavements", they said. I bought sensible shoes.

*All the doors open. We see a series of tableaux of office life – people with phones in their hands, clipboards, etc. All the doors close except one.*

RESEARCHER. I spent a few days in Anfield talking the talk. For the first time in weeks, I felt like I was on the road somewhere. *Local* initiatives, grassroots development: that was the missing link. The community centres. The youth clubs and training schemes. Here was something beyond the purely economic. Here, there was *precedent*.

BUSY AMERICAN SHOPPER. Here comes the science bit.

RESEARCHER. In 1997, the newly-established Labour government set up the Social Exclusion Unit, which aimed to explore ways of promoting equality of opportunity, via job creation, training and education. "Joined up solutions, to joined up problems", that's what they called it. Community involvement: the bottom-up approach!

*The Researcher arrives at another door. CITIZEN NUMBER TWO is waiting outside.*

RESEARCHER. Are you next? Should I knock?

CITIZEN 2. Oh, you can knock if you want to. Doesn't mean that they'll answer, though.

RESEARCHER. Would you mind if I ask? What has you here?

CITIZEN 2(*amused at absurdity of the question*). What has me here! My lovely new house, kid! It's infested with...vermin!

*The Researcher looks at the Citizen a moment. He seems uncertain how to respond.*

RESEARCHER. Anyone smell a rat?

*ADMINISTRATOR NUMBER ONE emerges, a phone in his hand. The Citizen rises expectantly.*

ADMINISTRATOR 1. Philip. Hi.

RESEARCHER. (*he turns to the audience*) Watch the labyrinth now, as it takes shape before you. This is the nether-world...overlay. These are the high-ways and the by-ways of our present bureaucracy. (*indicating the doors*) In there, there's all life, there are snakes, there are ladders... (*beat*) The names that thus follow have all been omitted. It's a necessary imposition. That's all I need say.

ADMINISTRATOR 1(*amused*) *Who are you talking to?*

RESEARCHER. Thank you for meeting me, Fee. The reason I'm here... (*not too sure*) This is the Liverpool BLEEP!, right<sup>5</sup>?

ADMINISTRATOR 1. Tickety-boo. We're the Liverpool BLEEP. Often confused with the *Liverpool* BLEEP.

*She laughs; he doesn't.*

RESEARCHER. I'm here to see, Martha BLEEP!

ADMINISTRATOR. Oh, you are? I think she's still on her dinner. Let me go and touch base...

*Exit the Administrator. The Researcher sighs. He turns back to the audience. He picks up his coat.*

RESEARCHER. It turned out the woman was on leave for exhaustion.

SOME RANDOM STRANGER. Here comes the science bit? We're on the edge of the galaxy!

RESEARCHER(*forcing a smile*) Quite.

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<sup>5</sup> The Bleeps should be actual "bleeps, like in a censored tv show.

ANOTHER RANDOM STRANGER. It were the wrong woman, anyway. Martha BLEEP dealt with Central, and your turf's strictly north, lad!

*The Researcher speaks into a mobile phone.*

RESEARCHER(*to phone*) Well, if you don't mind, I've been on hold for twenty minutes... Maybe you can help me then. As far as I'm aware, the Liverpool BLEEP is an umbrella organisation... (*perhaps consulting a notebook*) It's social and economic programmes... the repair of the housing stock, transfer of the housing stock... Well, I'm based up in north Liverpool and I was hoping to speak to someone who... (*sighs*) Yes. Yes, I'll hold.

*The names of various agencies, eg. The NWDA, Capital of Culture, Liverpool Partnership group are projected over the doorways...*

*All the doors open. REPRESENTATIVES from various agencies stand in doorways. Each Representative offers the Researcher a stack of printed material as he progresses from door to door.*

RESEARCHER(*turns to the audience*) Just so we're clear as mud. The names do not matter. It's the maze that's important. (*laughs, awkwardly*) To the powers-that-be, this is called a strategy...

REP 1. Now, this is the action plan—

REP 2. It's called Living Through Change.

REP 1(*summoning him back*) These are the Priority Neighbourhood Action Plans. They're a little out of date, I'm afraid. However, here's the Development Plan, the ADP Programme, and the Scoping Report—

REP 2. There's the Jigsaw Initiative. Neighbourhood Management.

*The Researcher moves on*

REP 3. Project 7. Project Jennifer.

REP 4. The NRF Assessment. Objective One, the SRB 6. The HMRI pathfinders—

RESEARCHER(*laughs*) Path? There's a path?

REP 5. There's the EDT, mate. The EAZ. Information on the TOPS Centre, the Academies, Youth Service – and that big one there – that's

the Splash Provision. There's something or other from Arena Housing. There's Maritime, Riverside, most of the RSLs. Here's a report from the Liverpool Community Network. Here's the recommendations from the Strategic Partnership...

*The Researcher approaches REP 6, who surprisingly, isn't carrying any literature. REP 6 folds his arms and adopts a tone of seniority.*

REP 6. Well, our specific organisation is all about innovation. This specific partnership seeks a bottom-up approach, representing a select group of like-minded individuals from the public and private and voluntary sectors. Now, I'd like to make one thing explicit. We're not the Liverpool Partnership. Nor are we the Liverpool Partnership Group. Nor are we, for that matter, the Mersey Partnership, English Partnerships, the Local Strategic Partnership or the Liverpool Community Partnership either. No, in fact who we are is—

REP 7(*pulling the Researcher away*) – a bunch of middle-aged men who like to sit on committees! Come here to me, string-bean, I've got the motherlode. (*piling more documents on*) Liverpool JET Atlantic. The Steering Committee. Creative Communities. New Deal for the Communities. OFSTED. The Health Centres. The Eldonian Village. The Neighbourhood Councils. The Neighbourhood Breakthrough Projects. Liverpool HAT. Liverpool FC. The big Better Breckfield Action Research Plan—

*The Researcher is on the verge of collapsing under the weight of all the literature.*

RESEARCHER. Hold on a second, please, I think I feel a bit... daunted...

*The Researcher sinks to his knees...*

*All the REPS disappear.*

RESEARCHER. And I mean, for BLEEP sake, we're talking about a square area of maybe three or four miles ...

*A door opens. A KINDLY WOMAN emerges*

KINDLY WOMAN. You alright, la'?

RESEARCHER(*to the audience*). On the road to Damascus...(*to the Kindly Woman*) Would you have a cigarette?

KINDLY WOMAN. Why don't you have a banana?

*The Kindly Woman offers him a banana.*

RESEARCHER. Have a...?

KINDLY WOMAN. Five fruit and veg, lad. You've got to keep your strength up.

*The Researcher looks at her in wonder. He takes the banana.*

RESEARCHER(*to the audience*) But that was all just a dream, of course. I'd fallen asleep, on the bus into town. I had an appointment with Floyd. Floyd BLEEP. Floyd had a...reputation and had been recently appointed Chief Executive with...(sighs) I can't remember any more. The Liverpool Partnership to Promote Liverpool Partnerships. Let's call it that, anyway. Floyd, as I said, had a...reputation. For giving it to you straight. Watch now, as we tremble.

*The scene assembles itself...the inner sanctum:.*

RESEARCHER(*to the audience*). The community activists I had spoken to had raised the issue that city centre regeneration would have little or no impact on their desiccated inner city communities. I'd been wandering the maze too long. What I needed was...(doubtful) What I simply needed....(irritated) Well, you know what I mean. Someone to spell it all out for me. The bigger picture. And the scoop...

*FLOYD appears along with ADMINISTRATOR 2: Satan incarnate and his obedient gopher. Hell is a bright, smiling place – obviously, enough.*

FLOYD. Mr Quayle.

RESEARCHER. I guess that's my name. (*laughs*) I'm starting to feel like Dickey Sam.

FLOYD. Dickey who?

RESEARCHER(*despairing*) Dickey Sam. It's kind of the alter-ego for the native Liver—

FLOYD. And isn't it fantastic? I mean, it's fantastic, isn't it? The Cultural...capital. World Heritage Status. It's like Paul McCartney, Sir Paul McCartney, it's just as he said: "Liverpool... fab...we're the centre

of the universe.” (*vehement*) Now, I’m not from here myself. I’m Welsh, if you must know, but I’ve been fantastically supportive... (*proud, accent becomes Welsh*) Ten pretty streets all named after the Welsh. (*increasingly surreal*) You see, we’re plucky we are, lad, it’s in our bones. The Welsh and the Irish. My grandmother, actually, she was from County Clare. (*accent becomes Irish*) She heard the blind banshee wail. Oh, the keening, the keening! (*beat*) You’ll excuse me, of course, I’m on crack.

RESEARCHER(*to the audience*). Frankly, I was losing it. Abandon ye, all hope...

FLOYD(*official again, as if in mid-stream*). ...the indices of deprivation focus on smaller neighbourhoods, which are known as Super Output Areas, rather than the Wards, which were used in 2000. There are 291 Super Output Areas in Liverpool and 42 of these are in north Liverpool. Nationally, there are 32, 482. Now, while you look at the national rank, it is, I’m afraid, an unfortunate reality that 92% of the north Liverpool SOAs are in the worst 10% nationally...all the same, though, however, what sterling progress we’ve made!

RESEARCHER. Look, to be honest with you, I’m kind of looking for...an overall vision here...

FLOYD. An overall...?

RESEARCHER. Well, it’s just I’ve been reading and reading and talking and meeting people... And, while doubtless, of course, there’s a lot going on, it seems, if you’ll forgive me for saying so, but these regeneration policies, they seem a bit...random. I’m looking for some sense.. that there’s a strategy at work here....

*Floyd looks to the Administrator. They both burst into laughter.*

ADMINISTRATOR 2. You want the overall vision?

*Floyd thumps the table in hilarity.*

RESEARCHER(*awkwardly*). Is that so unreasonable?

FLOYD(*tears streaming from his eyes*) The overall vision!

ADMINISTRATOR 2. With bells on as well, boss!

RESEARCHER(*lost*) What? What’s the matter? Am I in the wrong place?

FLOYD(*to Administrator, amused*). It's like the BBC, Bob. Mister...  
Jeremy Paxman.

*The Researcher is bewildered. Floyd leans forward, putting the weight of his body across the table. He suddenly becomes very earnest.*

FLOYD. Look. (*sighs*) Look, Mr...Sam, whoever you are. The overall vision...(*laughs*) The overall vision, very well, very well. I am speaking, of course, in a personal capacity. I may seem somewhat vexed, I've had a very long day. (*thinks*) Urban renewal is a complex business, son. Urban renewal might very well be the most significant post-war challenge this country has faced, and if we fail in this challenge, well, who knows? You still happen to live in the fourth richest country on the entire planet. Now, if you think this little... backwater to which I've been unhappily assigned has had very much to do with that ranking of late, you're very much mistaken, sir. You people come into my office, with your high moral-ground and your relentless tub-thumping – “people come first, people come first – and you beat your breast, you complain: “what about the little people”? There are six billion people on this teeming blue planet, sir. What do you think sustains them? Money, Mr. Sam, the generation of capital—

RESEARCHER. Actually, sir, my name is—

FLOYD(*hugely*) The *generation of capital*, must we always spell it out for you? And they rail against homelessness, crime, poverty, inequality...the drug-crazed marauders who have laid siege to our streets. The single most influential factor in lifting these people out of entrenched deprivation is prosperity, young man. Money, and more of it. It's the dollar, the Euro, it's the Yen, Mr. Sam. (*beat*) We have clung to our position as a global economy. We have consolidated this position, and in the age of post-Fordist, post-Industrial, free-market capitalism; Britain, it seems has learnt to adapt. But we're slipping, you see. We are slipping, Mr, Sam, ever so slowly, and you want to know why? Because there's something known as a skills shortage. (*the matter seems very personal to him*) We are farming out school leavers who can barely read, write, or count, sir. We are breeding an army of irrelevant, incompetent, *unprofessional*... amateurs! This is the digital age. This is the age of bio-technology, bio-mechanics. (*hugely*) And you come into my office and you *ask* me about Liverpool.

*Floyd gives up. He is weary. The Researcher looks to the Administrator.*

ADMINISTRATOR 2(*gentler, embarrassed*). There are as many strategies as there issues around here. There are issues in conflict, cross-cutting issues. There is funding provision from a myriad of sources. There's housing. There's health. There's crime and there's transport. There's mass unemployment, you want it with bells on?

FLOYD(*to Researcher*). And what's your suggestion? Shall we blow the place up?

ADMINISTRATOR 2(*mutters*). Mightn't be a bad idea.

FLOYD. Look at me, sir. Look! It's simply... oil. It's...gas. It's about the dwindling supplies of fossil fuels and keeping cars on the road, sir. A spherical... never-ending... *hymn* to world trade, sir. (*he gestures with his hands*) Liverpool. Britain. Europe. The World.

*Music begins. All seven doors open. A CHORUS OF BUREAUCRATS emerge, all in sharp suits. They sing the Song of the Statistical Reality. The Researcher watches.*

You want the information?  
We've got the information!  
The future of this country? The issue is globalisation.

It's a desperate situation,  
It might feel like micturation,  
The economy's is all-shook-up, it's bigger than one nation.

The work's gone to China,  
We hate to remind ya,  
We really don't want to seem rude or crass,  
Downsize it, outsource it, to where labour's the cheapest,  
There's no work anymore for the working class.

We need radical intercession,  
There's a threat of real depression,  
The labour market's changing fast: manufacturing's in recession.

So, you want the information?  
We've got the information!  
It's time to find a new career: call it 'regeneration'.

Learn to use a computer,  
Get your new image right,  
The past is the past but the future is now  
Market your city as a tourist destination,  
The government, of course, they all feel your plight.

There's Glasgow, you know, Birmingham, Teeside,  
Newcastle, Scunthorpe, they all have their pride,  
Merseyside see, it's just a speck on the horizon,  
You think it really matters how much you've cried?

This is the song of the *Statistical Reality!*

*The song stops suddenly.*

RESEARCHER(*to the audience*) Sooner or later, we are all crushed to nothing. It's just business, I guess. (*turning to Lilly's door*) Which, I believe, roughly, is where we left off.

## 9

*The street party. Lilly is still absent. The COMMUNITY LEADER has arrived, as have a handful of LOCAL RESIDENTS, who seem distinctly uncomfortable.*

*Meggan is standing at Lilly's front door. Frank is seated again.*

*The Community Leader is addressing the Local Residents.*

COMMUNITY LEADER. Okay, now, folks, what we have here is quite an odd situation. Essentially, you see, what's happening, as some of you may be aware, our host, Lilly Harmon seems indisposed at present. Now, I bear full responsibility for bringing you down here. (*laughs*) Some of you might say that I bullied you into it! (*beat*) But if I have a dream... (*laughs*) Oh, oh, excuse me. I'm getting all emotional.

FRANK. Go on there, big Betty! Can you play the spoons?

COMMUNITY LEADER. (*to the Residents*) He's a good man, really. He has emotional problems. That's what it's all about, of course, capacity-building. Lending a hand, right across... the sea. (*laughs*) And, *no-one*, I assure you, *ever* calls me big Betty. (*beat*) Returning now, swiftly, to the subject at hand. What we've seen is an out-pouring... (*laughs*) Well. Well, no. An outpouring, no, that would be a teechy bit disingenuous. But I am heartened...truly heartened, that we've had – what – five, six, seven, and there's more that couldn't be here, sign up to our Community Charter, and I thought I'd take it upon myself to bus you all down here and meet Lilly Harmon, whom it appears has... (*laughs*) I have to admit. I'm a small bit embarrassed.

*The Community Leader looks to Meggan...*

MEGGAN. Oh, come out now, Nan: this is getting very embarrassing...

LILLY(*off*) I'm not coming out!

MEGGAN. Look, Nan, we won't...(sighs) We won't be going to Malagna for years yet, alright?

LILLY(*off*) I don't care about Malagna. Bugger off, the lot of you!

MEGGAN(*to Andy, shocked*) She told me to bugger off!

ANDY. Well, if you want my opinion, you could have handled that better, you know.

MEGGAN. I didn't tell her! Mother told her, didn't she!

ANDY. Actually, no, I think it were your Dad. (*irritated*) Well, what did you tell your folks for anyway, it's just an idea, you know.

MEGGAN. (*looks at him a moment, appalled, and then*) Let's not fight.

ANDY. Now, she's upset, Meggan. She had all this... faith in you somehow, and I think she must feel...

MEGGAN(*well aware of all this, hissing*) Andy!

ANDY. Sorry, Meggan.

*Meggan and Andy look at one another. Meggan sighs, she goes back to Lilly's door and knocks on it again.*

COMMUNITY LEADER(*to the Residents*) As far as I can ascertain, there's been some kind of...fracas. A family squabble, most likely. But you've got to talk about things, get them out in the open... Now, my first inclination would be to bring you all to the pub. But, I'm trusting my better instincts here, because I happen to know Lilly well, and I sincerely believe she would be thrilled to meet you ... (*beat*) Just to bring any latecomers up to speed, folks. Lilly's the last resident still living on this street. She's moving out next week, yeah? But before she shipped out, Lilly felt it was important to mark the occasion. Lilly's been one of the pillars of the community for as long as I can remember. What we have here is a living legend...

LOCAL RESIDENT 1. So, where is she?

*A crash from inside the house*

MEGGAN(*who's still behind the door*) Now. That's just great. You heard that?

ANDY. I heard something. (*to the Residents*) She's a bit upset is our Lilly.

LILLY(*off*). Upset? Oh, I'm more than upset.

ANDY. More than upset.

COMMUNITY LEADER(*at a loss, looking around the table*) ...what exactly is wrong with her?

FRANK(*folding his arms, to dispense wisdom*). Well, now, you know: these are very complex emotions. Community, loyalty...the next generation....

*Another crash*

LILLY(*off*) You come live with us, they said. As if I'd even consider it. As if I'd be a burden, I can fend for myself... (*angry*) Thirty at table, and not one of them were bothered...

MEGGAN(*hammering on the door*) Nan, I need to use the toilet! Let me in quick...

FRANK. That's street-smart.

MEGGAN(*urgent*). Nan!

*All look to the door, as if expecting it to open. Silence a moment, then—*

LILLY(*off*) How many children do you think were born in these houses? (*Meggan sighs, and abandons the 'toilet offensive'*) And if a woman, you know, she had to go out to *work*, or let's say that she'd fallen ill, well, that child would be cared for, because we looked out for one another. All that's left is the grave-robbers! Grave-robbers! Ghouls!

*Another crash*

ANDY(*very concerned, going to the door*) Okay, alright. I definitely heard it that time. What's she doing in there, Meggan, tearing the house down?

LILLY(*off*) I'm going to shift this old dresser, barricade myself in... Oh, I said I'd go quietly! But not like this, I won't!

*Meggan looks to Andy, in despair.*

ANDY(*grimly*). Meggan.

MEGGAN. Yes

ANDY. I don't think things can get any worse here; seriously, I don't.

*Enter the Hoodie. All turn to him, appalled.*

HOODIE. Alright, alright. I'm free to walk down the street...

*The Hoodie walks off, all breathe a sigh of relief.*

COMMUNITY LEADER (*knowledgeably, to the Local Residents*)  
Darren's his name...he's a good kid...

HOODIE(*as he disappears*) And you can tell that heifer, big Betty, I quit the drama, you hear me?

*Exit Hoodie*

COMMUNITY LEADER(*struggling to keep it together*). That's nice. Very nice. You win some... (*back in control, to the Residents*) Disillusionment is pernicious, folks. It's a work-related hazard. And, yes, at times, we can all feel pretty powerless. One begins, of course, very eager, full of the fire of belief that here, on the ground, you can make a big difference. You can shape your community, get projects off the ground. And, of course, yes, you can. But you work all the hours God gave you, but still, you're aware that it's not enough, and that little park or the new youth club ...well, it's just a drop in the sea. (*shrugs*) We all get disillusioned. It's perfectly natural. (*laughs, making a light of it*) That's generally the time I take two weeks in Malagna—

LILLY(*off*) Nobody gives a twopenny fig!

COMMUNITY LEADER. That's debatable.

LILLY(*off*) Then, it's apathy!

COMMUNITY LEADER. Apathy, yes. Also pernicious.

LILLY(*off*) Well, they've got another thing coming if they think I'll just be....shunted!

*The Local Residents look shook. They look to the Community Leader.*

RESEARCHER(*awkwardly, to help*) There's a context, of course...a certain...militant attitude.

COMMUNITY LEADER(*losing patience*) Yes, well, I think it's about time we put all that behind us, don't you?

*The Community Leader approaches Meggan. Meggan is very distressed and doesn't notice her...*

COMMUNITY LEADER. Meggan, you seem put upon. How can I be of assistance?

*Meggan looks very distressed. The Community Leader puts a hand on her shoulder. Silence a moment*

*Frank claps his hands.*

FRANK(*to the Local Residents*). Well. Since we have an audience. (*warming up for a joke*) There's an Englishman, an Irishman and a Liverpool scallie, right?

MEGGAN(*embarrassed, to the Community Leader*) I mean, I can't help but think this is all my fault.

FRANK. So, the three of them, right, they're...they're on an aeroplane, yes? They're on Virgin Airlines, the plane is going down. There's only three parachutes....(*they all look at him*) So, the Englishman, he... (*sighs*) I can't remember the rest of it.

*Meggan turns back to Lilly's door.*

MEGGAN. (*distressed*) She could put her back out, you know, moving that dresser. She could do herself damage, she's an old woman, you know.

COMMUNITY LEADER. Lilly!

*No response*

ANDY. Lilly!

*No response*

FRANK. Lilly!

COMMUNITY LEADER. Lilly!

ONE OR TWO LOCAL RESIDENTS. Lilly!

*The Local Residents look on, bemused.*

COMMUNITY LEADER. Look, Lilly, let's just be reasonable. (*she goes to the door*) Just give us a sign that you're alright in there, okay? (*peering through the letter-box*) Just give us a sign, we're all worried out here. Plus, I've some new blood here that are all keen to meet you...

MEGGAN. *Nan!*

LILLY(*off*) Bugger off!

MEGGAN(*laughs, relieved*) Well, she's alive at least, isn't she? I was dead scared for a minute. (*sighs, at a loss*) So?

COMMUNITY LEADER. You tell me, Meggan.

*Meggan sighs. She looks about*

MEGGAN. Okay, well, if it's a party she wanted, well, then she'll bloody well have one. Did you call the pub crowd or not, Frank?

FRANK. I couldn't get the pub-crowd! It kept going to voicemail.

MEGGAN(*to Frank*). Well, then...go down there, alright? Get Derek up here and, and Vivian. Get Sandra and that lot. Get your finger out, mate: go knock on doors...

FRANK. Gladly.

MEGGAN. And make sure you come back, Frank! I'm counting on you. (*hurriedly going to the gramophone player*) I mean, like, oh my God, this is just too depressing...!

*Meggan fiddles with the gramophone player. It suddenly bursts into life.*

FRANK(*shocked*) How the hell did you do that?

MEGGAN. Pressed a switch, didn't I? (*returning to the door*) Nan, nan, hey Nan: I got your record player working!

FRANK. Unbelievable....

*Frank goes off.*

MEGGAN(*in a bit of a fluster*) Okay, that was easy. Now, what the hell do I do next?

*The music from the gramophone player segues into the next song...*

## 10

*The Chorus emerge as the HOUSEWIVES in SUMMER DRESSES.*

*They sing The Song of Despondency. Meggan and Andy see it. Perhaps we see a shadow of Lilly at the window...but nothing naturalistic...*

Let's call it a day  
Let's call it day,  
Let's pack up all our things  
And move away

Let's call it a day,  
Let's call it a day,  
We've been swimming 'gainst the tide too long,  
Let's move away

And despite the propaganda,  
The population just keeps on falling  
And despite the government,  
The rain, it keeps falling

Let's call it a day

*The music stops. Some time has passed. The street party. Lilly is still absent. Most of the Local Residents seem to be enjoying themselves, regardless...*

*Meggan is looking through Lilly's records. Andy is at Lilly's front door. The Researcher and the Community Leader are having a chat.*

COMMUNITY LEADER(*in mid-stream, greatly enjoying the story*) ...And then Floyd, you see, and Floyd's a very big man, he launches himself practically over the table. He makes this peculiar...gesture by cupping his hands.

RESEARCHER(*making the gesture*) Liverpool. Britain. Europe. The World.

COMMUNITY LEADER. Yes, it's exactly. (*laughs*) I mean, talk about the glass being half-empty or what!

RESEARCHER. There are six billion people on this teeming blue planet.

COMMUNITY LEADER. And 70,000 of them live around here, don't they? Floyd's organisation, I don't think it exists any more. Or if it does, they've changed the name again. I mean, it's a full time job keeping up with those people. You grasp the big picture, you miss out on the details. But if you limit your horizon to your own little patch, well...

RESEARCHER. Then, you're equally lost.

COMMUNITY LEADER(*considers this*) Maybe. Maybe not. (*laughs*) I don't let it bother me too much, I'm what you'd call a...pragmatist. A *practical* pragmatist, if that's not too much of a mouthful. There *have* been improvements...there's more co-operation between the City Council and the voluntary sector, and that's a step at least. You can pick holes, it's true. But it's still progress. (*turning to the Local Residents*) Everyone alright for a drink, then? (*cheerfully, to the Researcher*) This is my modus-operandi. At a time of crisis, step into the breach...

ANDY(*to Meggan, slowly*) We take things one step at a time, Meggan. We consider our options. We get some money together, we see what's feasible... we don't make any *sudden decisions*, do you hear me, Meggan? We think things sensibly through. We don't *leap* on ideas because they sound cosmopolitan...or something from a magazine....

we tread softly, alright? *(pained)* We tread softly, Meggan, I mean, is that too much to ask?

*Meggan looks at him a moment. She is impressed by this tone.*

MEGGAN. Yeah.

*They look one another. They are at peace.*

COMMUNITY LEADER *(to the Researcher)* I mean, what else is there to say, really? You try to give people a purpose... build awareness and that. But not all change is bad, is it? I mean, I think we all know, things can't stay as they are. You'll see the jobs coming back, you'll see people moving in—

MEGGAN *(to Andy, holding up a record)* What about this one?

ANDY. It's kind of hard to be sure if she's laughing or crying, Meggan.

MEGGAN. *(looking through the records again)* Well, all the same, I better find something cheerful... *(frowns)* I thought the last one had potential.

COMMUNITY LEADER *(to the Researcher)* Communication, of course, is a serious issue...

*Andy knocks on Lilly's door. There is no response.*

*Three MUSICIANS arrive.*

MUSICIAN. Andy around is he?

ANDY. Oh, God, hello mate. It went clean out of my head that I asked you to—

MUSICIAN. Where d'you want us to set up, then?

ANDY. You want to set up? I mean, it's getting late, don't you think— *(to the Community Leader)* I gave these lads a call. Asked them to drop over.

COMMUNITY LEADER. Well, they're here now, aren't they? Let's see what you're made of!

*The Musicians look around.*

MUSICIAN 2(*shrugs*). We've played to a lot less.

*Meggan goes to Lilly's door. She knocks on it.*

MEGGAN. Nan, nan, come out, there's lads with guitars and everything!  
Oh, come out, would you, nan: they were just late, that's all!

RESEARCHER(*to self*) On the Road to Damascus...

COMMUNITY LEADER. Excuse me?

RESEARCHER. Oh. Oh, don't mind me. I have no idea what I'm talking about.

COMMUNITY LEADER. If you say so.

RESEARCHER. I mean, it's just all about who you meet on the road.  
It's personalities, isn't it? It's a long road...

*They look at one another a moment.*

RESEARCHER(*awkwardly*) Well, I've got a job to do, haven't I? I guess I better finish it.

MUSICIAN 1. Alright, then, we're sorted.

MUSICIAN 2. Somebody want to sing?

MEGGAN(*awkwardly, regarding Musician 3*) What about him?

MUSICIAN 1. Lost his voice, mate.

MEGGAN. Brilliant!

ANDY. Go on, there, Meggan. Belt something out.

MEGGAN. Now, hang on a minute—

ANDY. You should hear her, lads. She's a fiend for karaoke.

MEGGAN(*embarrassed*) Yes, but that's different...I mean, I'm usually twisted...

COMMUNITY LEADER. Go on, Meggan!

LILLY(*off*) Go on!

*Meggan looks to Lilly's door. She laughs and agrees to it.*

MEGGAN. Don't say I didn't warn you and you better not laugh, right?

*She closes her eyes. She thinks of a song. She begins to sing "All You Need is Love" by the Beatles.*

MEGGAN. Love, love, love...

*The Musicians cringe...*

MEGGAN. That was just a joke, alright, lads! God, that's so obvious.

RESEARCHER(*to the Community Leader*) The Everyman Playhouse. They'd give her a job.

*They all watch Meggan. She makes a decision.*

MEGGAN. Okay, then. Fine. I know what we'll do.

*Meggan goes over to Musician 1. She whispers in his ear.*

MUSICIAN 1. Could do that in my sleep, mate.

*Frank arrives with the PUB CROWD.*

*The Musicians consult briefly...*

MEGGAN. Okay, then, you lucky sods. (*laughs*) And don't look for hidden meanings, because there aren't any, right... (*doubtful*) At least none that I'm aware of, but I'm just the singer, right? (*to the musicians*) Seven A!

*A piano starts up. Meggan sings..."Daydream Believer" by the Monkees. The performance is self-consciously ironic at first, but as the song progresses it begins to approach something resembling sincerity.*

MEGGAN. Oh, I could hide 'neath the wings  
Of the bluebird as she sings,  
The six o'clock alarm would never ring.  
But it rings and I rise,  
Wash the sleep out of my eyes,  
Me shaven razor's cold and it stings.

*Chorus*  
Cheer up sleepy Jean,  
Oh, what can it mean?  
To be a daydream believer  
And a homecoming queen

*Lilly comes out of her house. She looks about. Her dream appears to have come true...*

FRANK. Never could stand the Monkees.

*Frank goes into Lilly's house.*

MEGGAN. You once thought of me  
As a white knight on his steed  
Now you know how happy I can be  
And our good times start and end  
Without dollar one to spend  
But how much, baby, do we really need?

*Chorus X 2*

*Instrumental break. Images of cautious optimism on screen, incorporating verbatim footage. The Researcher remains fixated by the images – but they are unseen to the rest of the cast.*

*Nathan and Barbara arrive.*

BARBARA(*in wonder, the crowd*) Sweet... Marie.

NATHAN(*embarrassed*). The Mongolian Barbeque. It was stuffed to the gills.

*Chorus again*

*The Researcher remains standing in the position we saw him at in the opening of the play, still staring up at the screens.*

*The screens flash: THE PLAY IS OVER. COME DOWN AND HAVE A DRINK. The band play on... perhaps there's no need for a curtain call. Perhaps, there is.*

**...end...**