

# **LOCKDOWN IN LITTLE GRIMLEY**

**By David Tristram**

**GORDON**

**MARGARET**

**JOYCE**

**BERNARD**

This play contains the occasional naughty word. In context and played properly, my view is that it simply serves to heighten the comedy. But I also realise that not everyone is comfortable with certain degrees of swearing, so feel free to soften the odd word here and there to find the right balance for you. No permission needed for script amends on that basis.

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**by DAVID TRISTRAM**

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## LOCKDOWN IN LITTLE GRIMLEY

*The scene is a simple bare stage, except for a small table at the back near a waste-paper basket, and an easel or flipchart stand. We hear a creaky old door open, then shut. Bernard flicks a switch and the lights come on. He wanders in, carrying a workman's bag. He looks around, as if taking in memories of the old place.*

*He puts the bag down, and grabs four chairs from the wings and starts placing them across the stage, separating them with two paces. Not quite satisfied, he grabs a tape measure from his bag, and starts measuring a precise two metres gap between the chairs, fussily adjusting the spacing between them accordingly.*

*He finally glances at his watch, and exits. We hear a toilet flush and he returns and briefly sits waiting on one of the chairs, checking his watch, until a furtive thought flashes across his mind. He darts back off-stage for a moment, and returns with four toilet rolls, which he stuffs into his bag. As he's doing this he hears the door open, and hastily shuts the bag and shunts it with his foot towards the front stage-right corner, out of the way.*

*Margaret enters. She is wearing a leopard-skin face-mask.*

**Bernard:** Margaret.

**Margaret:** Bernard.

**Bernard:** It's good to see you. Well, some of you.

**Margaret:** (*asking more for her own sake*) Are you well, Bernard?

**Bernard:** Yes...

**Margaret:** (*quickly*) Good.

**Bernard:** Yes, thank you. You?

**Margaret:** As can be expected.

**Bernard:** Good. Though, I'd still advise staying two metres away from me.

**Margaret:** That won't be a problem, Bernard. It never was in the past.

**Bernard:** No. I've er...I've spaced the chairs accordingly.

**Margaret:** So I see.

**Bernard:** Strictly by the book. I used a tape measure.

**Margaret:** That's very comforting.

**Bernard:** You're early.

**Margaret:** Am I? (*Glances at watch*) No I'm not. I'm ten minutes late.

**Bernard:** Well, that's early for you. You're normally twenty minutes late.

**Margaret:** (*taking her seat stage-left*) Well, the way I saw it, the quicker I get this over with, the quicker we all get home.

**Bernard:** (*a depressed sigh*) Yes. (*He sits next to her*) Well...it's nice to see you again, Margaret.

**Margaret:** Yes. Would you mind using the end chair, Bernard. Just in case.

*Bernard reluctantly goes to the chair stage-right and sits.*

**Bernard:** Better?

**Margaret:** Much.

**Bernard:** It's been a long time.

**Margaret:** It has.

**Bernard:** Too long.

**Margaret:** I wouldn't go that far. I take it we're it?

**Bernard:** At the moment.

**Margaret:** I do wish they'd hurry up. It's very rude of people to be late when I've made a special effort not to be as late as normal.

**Bernard:** You're probably right. Not like Joyce to be late though. I hope she's okay.

**Margaret:** Should be. I believe Gordon spoke to her yesterday.

**Bernard:** So, I wonder what the maestro has in store for us tonight. (*We hear the door creak and shut*) Ah. Talk of the devil. Evening, Gordon.

*Enter Gordon. He's carrying presentation boards or a flipchart, which he leaves at the back of the room.*

**Gordon:** Hello, Bernard...Margaret. (*She turns her head to acknowledge him with a gentle nod*) It is Margaret, isn't it?

**Margaret:** I can see you haven't lost your razor wit, Gordon.

**Gordon:** Is that some sort of trendy designer face-mask, or have you recently actually consumed a leopard?

**Margaret:** It's Armani.

**Gordon:** Course it is. Take it off.

**Margaret:** I beg your pardon?

**Gordon:** I am not spending the night conversing with Dick Turpin, Margaret. Take it off, please. As a social courtesy. I like to see who I'm arguing with. You'll be perfectly safe – we'll all stay in our little zones.

**Bernard:** Yeah, I've read that those things can sometimes be worse for you. Especially if you sneeze.

**Margaret:** (*tugging the mask down*) I do hope you have a valid reason to call this meeting, Gordon. I had things to do tonight.

**Gordon:** (*sitting next to Margaret*) Such as?

**Margaret:** Well if you must know, Ryan and I were supposed to be doing an online quiz at eight.

**Gordon:** Well I'm sorry, Margaret – you should have said.

**Margaret:** Oh, it doesn't matter. They're starting to get on my tits now anyway. I think it's the seventeenth one we've done. Still haven't got a single question right.

**Gordon:** Well I hope you'll find our meeting far more rewarding, Margaret.

**Bernard:** Who organises them?

**Margaret:** The quizzes? Derek Maynard.

**Bernard:** No wonder. You know he's a member of Mensa don't you.

**Margaret:** So he keeps telling us.

**Gordon:** Talking of people with an extraordinary IQ – where's Joyce?

**Bernard:** No sign yet.

**Gordon:** This is most unlike her.

**Margaret:** We could start without her.

**Gordon:** We could. But then the debate just wouldn't have the same intellectual rigour and gravitas...(we hear the door again)...ah, here we go.

*Joyce enters. She is wearing a beekeeper's hat, with veil. She also has a bag.*

**Joyce:** Sorry I'm so late. Turns out that some little vandal had stolen all the green bulbs from the four-way traffic lights at the end of our street. Chaos it was. (*The others are just staring at her*) Something wrong?

**Gordon:** Joyce. What have you got on your head?

**Joyce:** It's my beekeeping hat, Gordon.

**Gordon:** I see. Are you expecting a particularly large representation of bees at the meeting tonight, Joyce?

**Joyce:** Don't be silly, Gordon. It's for the virus. Evening, Bernard.

**Bernard:** Evening, Joyce.

**Gordon:** The virus.

**Joyce:** (*she places her bag on the seat next to Bernard*) Yes. The chemist ran out of proper surgical masks. So I'm just ad-libbing.

**Gordon:** How erm...how large do you think a virus is, Joyce?

**Joyce:** Can we discuss this later, Gordon - I've been stuck in traffic for half an hour and I'm desperate for the loo.

**Gordon:** Yes, you toddle off, Joyce.

*Joyce exits.*

**Margaret:** Christ almighty. The woman's unbelievable.

**Bernard:** You should ask her to join your quiz team, Margaret.

**Gordon:** Or better still, your opponent's quiz team.

**Joyce:** (*initially shouting off-stage, then hurrying in*) Gordon! Gordon! Emergency, Gordon – emergency!

**Gordon:** Let me guess, Joyce. You spotted an aggressive-looking bee in the toilet, and found yourself totally unprepared.

**Joyce:** (*removing the beekeeper's hat*) There's no toilet roll.

**Gordon:** Yes there is, Joyce.

**Joyce:** No there isn't, Gordon.

**Gordon:** Yes there is, Joyce. Would you like me to have a man-look?

**Joyce:** Be my guest.

*Gordon struts out confidently. Bernard looks a bit uneasy.*

**Joyce:** But hurry up please, Gordon. I'm...bursting.

*Gordon struts back in.*

**Gordon:** There's no toilet roll.

**Joyce:** I told you.

**Bernard:** Why the big surprise? What did you all expect? Nobody's been near the place for five months.

**Gordon:** The big surprise, Bernard, is this. I popped in yesterday specially to prepare for tonight's meeting, and I brought with me...four toilet rolls.

**Margaret:** Four?

**Gordon:** Yes, Margaret. One each. I know how fussy you are about these things.

**Margaret:** I'm fussier than that, Gordon. I always carry my own traveller pack of moist wipes thank you, infused with Aloe Vera.

**Joyce:** Can I have one, Margaret, only I'm really...

**Margaret:** I'm sorry Joyce, I truly am. But, under the present crisis, sharing body wipes would just be plain reckless.

**Gordon:** So hang on, if Margaret has her own supply, and Joyce is bursting at the seams...forgive me, Bernard, but were you first here tonight?

**Bernard:** What are you implying?

*Gordon spots Bernard's bag on the floor and starts eyeing it up suspiciously. Bernard is slightly rattled.*

**Gordon:** Bernard...

**Bernard:** Gordon?

**Gordon:** Would you mind opening your bag?

**Bernard:** Opening my...what are you – some sort of border security guard?

**Gordon:** I have reason to believe that you may be harbouring the society's toilet rolls in there.

**Bernard:** This is outrageous.

**Gordon:** I hope I'm wrong, Bernard.

**Margaret:** No you don't.

**Joyce:** (*squirming desperately*) I hope he's not wrong either.

**Bernard:** I've never been so insulted in my life.

**Margaret:** Oh yes you have, Bernard. Daily.

**Gordon:** Step aside, Bernard.

**Bernard:** You're making a fool of yourself, Gordon.

**Gordon:** We'll see. Two metres from the bag please.

**Bernard:** (*stepping aside*) Fine. Do your worst. But before you do - ask yourself something.

**Gordon:** What?

**Bernard:** Are you prepared for the full consequences of this?

**Gordon:** The full consequences of what?

**Bernard:** Falsely accusing a comrade. Violating his human rights. Destroying the last vestige of trust between two old pals. Ripping open his private property without even a warrant. Setting yourself up for a mighty fall in front of your colleagues when, in the moment of truth, you're proven hopelessly wrong and branded as a malicious, vindictive liar. Ask yourself, Gordon - do you really want to do this?

**Gordon:** (*a moment's deadpan hesitation*) Yes.

*Gordon instantly rips open the bag and plucks out four toilet rolls. The ladies gasp.*

**Bernard:** I want to see my lawyer.

**Margaret:** Bernard! How could you!

**Bernard:** I was only borrowing them.

**Margaret:** Borrowing them?? What were you going to do? Bring them back used?

**Joyce:** Gordon...

**Bernard:** It's all right for you, Margaret! With your bloody Ocado-delivered packs of designer arse wipes. But out there, in the real world where I have to survive, it's a bloody jungle, Margaret – it's dog-eat-dog. And these...*(pointing to the toilet rolls)* these little buggers are gold-dust. Eighteen quid for a pack of two in the corner shop, and the Asda shelves are stripped bare...

**Margaret:** That's because knob-heads like you keep stockpiling them!

**Joyce:** *(still squirming)* Please, Gordon...

**Gordon:** All right, all right, let's keep this civilised...

**Margaret:** Civilised??

**Joyce:** *(desperately)* Gordon, please!

**Margaret:** A couple of weeks of gentle rationing and he reverts back to the feral animal we all knew he was...

**Bernard:** Says the leopard-skin cougar.

**Gordon:** *(screaming out – he shocks them into a second's silence)* Stop it!!!!!!!

**Joyce:** *(timidly putting up her hand)* Gordon...

**Gordon:** Shut up, Joyce!

**Joyce:** I think I'm pooing myself!

**Gordon:** Oh! Sorry, Joyce. Here you go.

*He tosses her a toilet roll and Joyce dashes off. A tense silence descends.*

**Gordon:** *(calmly, he tosses two of the toilet rolls to Bernard)* Right. Let's get back to some semblance of civilisation shall we? Bernard - first of all, would you mind returning those to the men's toilet area.

**Bernard:** *(showing contrition)* Sorry, Gordon.

**Gordon:** We'll hear no more of it.

**Bernard:** *(turning just before exiting)* It's erm...it's been tough out there.

**Gordon:** I know.

*Bernard exits. Gordon stares at the final toilet roll philosophically, and then quietly pops it back into Bernard's bag.*

**Margaret:** You're too soft on him.

**Gordon:** He's had a rough few months, Margaret. No work, and he's been in Lockdown.

**Margaret:** As have we all, Gordon.

**Gordon:** Yes, but Bernard's been in Lockdown with his wife.

**Margaret:** Ah. Yes. I see what you mean.

**Gordon:** Try and cut him some slack, Margaret. I have an important project in mind,

and we're going to need him.

**Margaret:** What important project?

**Gordon:** I don't want to be repeating myself - let's just wait for the other half of the society to return from the toilet.

*Joyce enters tentatively and takes her seat.*

**Joyce:** Sorry.

**Gordon:** Everything all right, Joyce?

**Joyce:** I don't wish to discuss it.

**Margaret:** That suits us nicely.

**Gordon:** Are you in a fit state to take the minutes?

**Joyce:** I'll try.

**Gordon:** Good.

*Enter Bernard.*

**Bernard:** If you need the ladies, Margaret, I'd give it five minutes.

**Margaret:** Thank you, Bernard.

**Joyce:** Yes thank you, Bernard.

*They are now all sat in tense silence.*

**Gordon:** Well. This wasn't the start I had planned for this evening.

**Margaret:** What did you have planned, Gordon?

**Gordon:** Some optimism, Margaret – some light at the end of the tunnel.

**Bernard:** Ooh, don't talk to me about a light at the end of the tunnel, I had to go for my colonoscopy last week.

**Joyce:** Oh yes – how was it, Bernard?

**Bernard:** Actually, getting the video camera up the bum wasn't too bad, Joyce – the worst bit was the tripod.

**Margaret:** Stop it.

**Joyce:** Tripod?

**Gordon:** He's joking, Joyce. Don't put it in the minutes.

**Margaret:** Yes, that's what Neanderthals call a sense of humour.

**Gordon:** Was everything in order, Bernard?

**Bernard:** Yes, thank you.

**Gordon:** Good. That's the important thing.

**Bernard:** Got to hand it to the NHS. They boldly go where no other organisation...

**Margaret:** Is the whole evening going to revolve around people's bottoms?

**Gordon:** I hope not, Margaret. But by sheer coincidence, Bernard here has given me the perfect introduction to my talk tonight.

**Bernard:** Have I?

**Gordon:** The hospital connection. Allow me to explain. *(He stands and drags his chair up-stage, encouraging the others to turn and face him)* Come on, angle your chairs in – at least pretend to show some interest. Right. As we all know, this has been a very difficult time for many people, not least theatres. But, lockdown rules are gradually



starting to ease, and we have to plan ahead. So now's the time to start turning our attention to Little Grimley's all-important come-back production.

**Joyce:** We're making a come-back?

**Gordon:** I believe we should, Joyce.

*The other three consider this for a moment in silence, then say in unison: "Why?"*

**Gordon:** (*walking off*) Thanks for your time.

**Bernard:** Hang on, Gordon. I'm not sure you can even make a come-back if you never went.

**Margaret:** We never went because we never arrived.

**Bernard:** So does that mean we're still here?

**Joyce:** I'm confused.

**Gordon:** Yes, we know, Joyce.

**Margaret:** Are you actually suggesting, Gordon, that we attempt to put on another production?

**Gordon:** I am. When the time is right.

**Joyce:** Have you written something, Gordon?

**Gordon:** No.

**Margaret:** Good.

**Gordon:** Not yet.

**Bernard:** Shit.

**Margaret:** This is madness. Why are we even discussing this? Even if you had written something, which apparently you haven't, and even if there was an audience, which there definitely isn't, we still couldn't even rehearse a play properly.

**Bernard:** She's right. How can we rehearse a play standing two metres apart?

**Gordon:** Easy. If the play is set in Lockdown, all the characters are obliged to stand two metres apart.

**Margaret:** Yes, but even if we did - what about the audiences?

**Gordon:** The theatre industry has been looking at all sorts of schemes to tackle this, Margaret. One idea was to also have a form of audience-based social distancing.

**Bernard:** How's that work?

**Gordon:** Well, for example, the Government may decide that we're allowed to do a show, provided that for every seat we fill, there'll be ten empty ones around it.

**Bernard:** I think we can manage that.

**Margaret:** That's all we've ever managed, Bernard.

**Joyce:** He's right. So what makes you think there'll even be an audience, Gordon?

**Gordon:** Oh, there'll be an audience, Joyce. They'll be clamouring for this.

**Margaret:** Gordon, in what deluded parallel universe do you imagine that an audience would ever be 'clamouring' for tickets to see us? And do not, Gordon - do **not** utter the words: "Because I intend to write another sex comedy."

**Gordon:** Well hang on, Margaret - my sex comedy did rather well if you recall.

**Margaret:** Last Tango may have been a minor financial success, Gordon, but it left us morally bankrupt.

**Bernard:** Yep. We only got away with it because Margaret lobbed her tits out.

**Margaret:** And that, I would like to clearly state for the record, was a one-off.

**Bernard:** Well, a two-off to be precise.

**Joyce:** Shall I put one or two?

**Margaret:** One pair. One occasion.

**Gordon:** (*correcting Joyce's minutes*) Occasion, Joyce. Two C's, one S. That's it. And pair, like shoes – not a piece of fruit.

**Margaret:** How did she ever get a job in a library?

**Joyce:** Don't try and make fun of my spelling, Margaret. You know I'm dyslexic in one eye.

**Gordon:** Now, where were we? Oh, yes. Don't worry, Margaret. I can absolutely guarantee that any form of sex is definitely off the agenda.

**Bernard:** You sound like my wife.

**Gordon:** But there will be an audience. I promise you. And it will be a large one, and an enthusiastic one.

**Joyce:** Come on, Gordon, stop teasing. Why?

**Gordon:** Because I am proposing that my new play...

**Margaret:** (*head in hands*) Oh, God...

**Gordon:** ...will be staged as a charitable event, and that all the profits will be donated...to the NHS.

*A moment's silence.*

**Joyce:** Well. That sounds like a very good idea.

**Margaret:** Difficult to argue with that.

**Gordon:** Well I'm sure you'll find a way, Margaret.

**Bernard:** Hang on, hang on a bit. You know my sister's a paramedic, right?

**Gordon:** Yes, Bernard. One of the nation's heroes.

**Bernard:** So why pick on her?

**Gordon:** What?

**Bernard:** Well, if all the profits go to the NHS, does it work the other way as well?

**Gordon:** I'm not with you, Bernard.

**Bernard:** Eight of our last ten shows have made a loss, right. So are you suggesting that if this one goes tits up as well, we just send the bill to the NHS?

**Gordon:** It won't go 'tits up', Bernard, trust me. There's only one way this play is going, and that's...you know...

**Bernard:** Tits down.

**Gordon:** Exactly.

**Joyce:** (*writing and murmuring frantically*) "...Tits...down."

**Gordon:** Whatever that means.

**Bernard:** How do you know?

**Gordon:** Because this time, people will want to support it.

**Margaret:** Support what?

**Gordon:** What?

**Margaret:** What is it we're expecting them to come and see?

**Bernard:** Good point, Margaret. After all, people can easily donate to the NHS without having to come and see us.

**Margaret:** Exactly. So why would they put themselves through the extra trauma of attending one of our shows?

**Gordon:** You know, I'd forgotten just what cynical bastards you lot are.

**Margaret:** No you hadn't.

**Gordon:** No I hadn't. So I've come prepared.

*He jumps up and starts putting some presentation boards on an easel.*

**Bernard:** What's this – the play you haven't written?

**Gordon:** Not the play, Bernard, no. But the idea.

**Margaret:** This play has an idea?

**Gordon:** Yes, Margaret.

**Margaret:** Well that's a first.

**Joyce:** Please tell me it's a musical.

**Gordon:** Ah, I'll come on to that shortly, Joyce.

**Margaret:** What?? Please tell me it's **not** a musical.

**Gordon:** All in good time, Margaret.

**Bernard:** Please tell me I'm not in it.

**Margaret:** Yes, please tell us Bernard's not in it.

**Gordon:** If you'll all just shut up! Thank you. Then I will explain all.

**Margaret:** The stage is yours, Gordon.

**Joyce:** That's true actually – he paid for it.

**Margaret:** What?

**Joyce:** Yes. You remember that time we had a leak and it all went rotten and Bernard had to replace the boarding? Well, Gordon donated the money.

**Margaret:** My goodness. What a quiet little philanthropic theatre angel you are, Gordon. How come I never knew that?

**Joyce:** Because he didn't want any fuss, Margaret, so he specifically asked me, as Treasurer, not to tell anybody...I think I might have just told somebody, Gordon.

**Gordon:** Yes, Joyce. Never mind.

**Bernard:** Well, I'd just like to say that Gordon's made a lot of personal sacrifices over the years to keep this place going.

**Joyce:** Here, here.

**Bernard:** So, he deserves a fair hearing.

**Gordon:** Thank you, Bernard. Very touching. So allow me to unveil my plan. (*He unveils his first presentation image – an NHS logo*) Right, as you know, I think this should be a charity production, with all proceeds going to the NHS. But I didn't just want it to have a random connection to the health service – I wanted it to be a play centred entirely around this fine British Institution. So, I came up with the idea of...(*he unveils the graphic of a large heart*)...a love story.

**Margaret:** A love story...

**Gordon:** Yes, Margaret, a love story, set in...a hospital. (*Unveils a hospital picture*)

**Joyce:** Ooh. Sounds exciting.

**Margaret:** (*guardedly*) Go on...

**Gordon:** In which I play the handsome consultant surgeon...

**Bernard:** How will you manage that?

**Gordon:** It's easy enough these days with the internet, to gen up on medical procedures and terminology.

**Bernard:** I meant the handsome bit.

**Gordon:** Bollocks, Bernard. So, I play the handsome consultant surgeon...

**Margaret:** That sounds like the lead.

**Gordon:** No, not really, Margaret – just the male lead. There's also a very strong female lead. And I needn't tell you who that's going to be, need I?

**Margaret:** Sorry, Joyce.

**Joyce:** Am I in it, Gordon?

**Gordon:** Oh, you're very much in it, Joyce. You play a nurse.

**Margaret:** So what am I, another doctor?

**Gordon:** No Margaret, a patient.

**Margaret:** What sort of patient?

**Gordon:** Just be patient, Margaret. Be a patient patient. I'm coming to that.

**Bernard:** Am I in it?

**Margaret:** Yes, is Bernard in it? And bear in mind this could be a deal-breaker.

**Gordon:** Well, yes and no.

**Margaret:** What's that? A multiple choice answer?

**Gordon:** He's just a porter.

**Margaret:** What's that mean?

**Gordon:** He just has to wheel you in.

**Margaret:** On a trolley?

**Gordon:** Yes.

**Bernard:** So I have to wheel in, on a trolley, a woman who's already off her trolley.

**Margaret:** Oh, bravo, Bernard. How long have you been working on that gag?

**Bernard:** Ever since he mentioned I was a porter. I reckon I had about 6 seconds. It's called natural wit, Margaret.

**Margaret:** Is that rhyming slang?

**Gordon:** Are you on board, Bernard?

**Bernard:** Sounds right up my alley.

**Margaret:** We've had quite enough talk about what's up your alley for one night, thank you, Bernard.

**Gordon:** Are you on board, Margaret?

**Margaret:** It depends.

**Gordon:** On what?

**Margaret:** If I'm to be a patient, I want to know what's wrong with me. I need to know about my character. Is she glamorous?

**Gordon:** All right. Remember it's a love story, set in a hospital.

**Margaret:** (*guardedly*) Yes...

**Gordon:** And you play a patient...

**Margaret:** Called?

**Gordon:** Called, erm...called Ophelia.

**Margaret:** Ophelia, good.

**Bernard:** Ophelia Tits.

**Margaret:** Shut it.

**Gordon:** So, here's the thing...

**Margaret:** Why are you nervous about telling me this, Gordon?

**Gordon:** I'm not.

**Margaret:** Yes you are. I know you.

**Gordon:** Okay. Remember, I'm a top surgeon.

**Margaret:** Yes you said that, Gordon.

**Gordon:** A top (*deliberately mumbled, hand in front of mouth*) plastic surgeon...

**Margaret:** What did you say?

**Gordon:** A top (*deliberately mumbled again*) plastic surgeon...

**Margaret:** Plastic surgeon?

**Gordon:** And your character...

**Margaret:** Did you just say plastic surgeon?

**Gordon:** ...and your character has been...badly disfigured from birth...

**Margaret:** Badly disfigured from birth??

**Gordon:** Just hear me out, Margaret...

**Margaret:** (*aghast*) Badly disf...

**Gordon:** Please...

**Margaret:** Just stop! Stop right there, Gordon. This plot-line is going precisely nowhere.

**Bernard:** I like it. Think of all the make-up we'll save on.

**Margaret:** And unless you want another emergency colonoscopy right here and now, Bernard, I'd advise you to shut it as well.

**Gordon:** Let me finish, Margaret.

**Joyce:** Yes, let's hear him out.

**Margaret:** Oh it's all right for you, Florence Nightingale – you won't have creep around the stage looking like Quasi-bloody-modo all night...

**Gordon:** It's not like that.

**Margaret:** It sounds just like that.

**Gordon:** There's a happy ending, Margaret.

**Margaret:** What happy ending?

**Gordon:** Well, you die, and...

**Margaret:** Oh, I die. That's your happy ending is it? The ugly one dies.

**Gordon:** You're not ugly! The brilliant plastic surgeon rescues your face...

**Margaret:** Rescues my face??

**Gordon:** Turns you into a beautiful woman, and then falls in love with you.

**Margaret:** Excellent, and then I die and you marry the plain-looking nurse.

**Gordon:** No!

**Joyce:** Plain?

**Margaret:** So I don't die.

**Gordon:** No...yes. Look, something goes wrong with the anaesthetic...

**Margaret:** That'll be down to the plain-looking nurse then.

**Gordon:** ...and yes, technically...you do die...

**Margaret:** Technically?

**Gordon:** ...but then you come back as a ghost.

**Margaret:** Oh, it just gets better!

**Gordon:** It does. You come back as a beautiful spirit and haunt the hospital.

**Joyce:** Phantom!

**Gordon:** Yes, Joyce! Exactly, Phantom of the Opera. That's where I got my inspiration. I've even done the poster!

*He immediately and dramatically unveils his poster. In white bold capitals across the top it says **PHANTOM OF THE OPERA**. Underneath, in a much smaller font, it apparently states the name of the production company: **TING THEATRE**. Below that is a picture of Margaret with face-mask, clearly suggestive of the famous Phantom image, and other small miscellaneous text, including Little Grimley ADS.*

**Joyce:** Wow! (*Clapping excitedly like a child*) I love it, Gordon. (*From this point onwards Joyce is in a world of her own, and starts quietly humming the haunting melody from her favourite musical, in the style of Music of the Night*)

**Margaret:** Course you love it, Joyce. It's Phantom of the Fucking Opera. You love musicals. It's one of the most famous musicals in the world. But what the hell's it got to do with Gordon's rancid play?

**Gordon:** This is my rancid play, Margaret!

**Margaret:** What?

**Bernard:** Hang on. You can't call it that.

**Gordon:** Why not?

**Bernard:** Because everybody will think we're doing Phantom of the Opera.

**Gordon:** Possibly.

**Margaret:** There's no possibly about it, Gordon. It's blasted across the top of the poster in huge letters.

**Gordon:** Well, that can't do any harm. It's all for a good cause.

**Margaret:** But...you seem to be missing the point here. You can't use that poster.

**Gordon:** Why can't I?

**Margaret:** Because that title is taken!

**Gordon:** Is it?

**Margaret:** What?? Are you mad? Course it is. It's fraud, Gordon. Deception.

**Gordon:** Not really.

**Bernard:** Gordon, this time I think you're the one who's off his trolley. I agree with Margaret.

**Margaret:** Shit – really? Now I’m beginning to doubt myself.

**Gordon:** Why, Bernard?

**Bernard:** Well, look at it. That poster’s just misleading gibberish. You’re not even saying this production’s by us.

**Gordon:** Yes I am. It says Little Grimley down here in very small letters, look.

**Bernard:** So who’s this TING THEATRE company then?

**Gordon:** Oh that. That’s just the final part of my play’s title. As it clearly states, it’s called: ‘Phantom of the Oper...a...ting Theatre.’

*A momentary stunned silence. Even Joyce stops humming.*

**Bernard:** Bloody hell. That’s...

**Margaret:** ...Genius.

**Bernard:** What?

**Margaret:** It’s genius. They’ll all come along thinking they’re seeing a production of Phantom of the Opera, by somebody called Ting Theatre.

**Gordon:** Who they’ll assume is a touring professional company.

**Joyce:** With all proceeds going to the NHS.

**Margaret:** So it’ll sell in bucket-loads.

**Bernard:** You’ve changed your tune, Margaret. Ten seconds ago you hated the idea. What happened?

**Margaret:** Well, for a start, you said you agreed with me, Bernard. Can’t have that. Besides, I’ve just realised that it could work if we tweaked the plot slightly.

**Gordon:** What sort of tweak?

**Margaret:** Perhaps I could be beautiful from the very beginning, and just come in for a minor operation instead. The handsome surgeon cocks up, so he’s no longer the hero. I pass away, but then I come back as a fascinating free spirit, forgive him for his sins, and save the day by offering to marry him before he gets struck off.

**Gordon:** It’s possible, I suppose. So, just a minor op.

**Margaret:** Exactly. No disfigurement.

**Gordon:** But something a plastic surgeon might conceivably do.

**Margaret:** Indeed.

**Bernard:** Brilliant! I’ve got it!

**Margaret:** Now we’re cooking.

**Bernard:** You could come in to the hospital just to have your cellulite removed.

**Margaret:** Oh, fuck off, Bernard.

*Margaret storms off.*

**Gordon:** I’ll erm...I’ll bring her round. Shall we meet back here next week? I’ll leave you to lock up, Bernard. *(Calling after her)* Margaret?

*Gordon exits.*

**Joyce:** Well, I’d better be off too.

**Bernard:** Yeah.

**Joyce:** Oh, almost forgot. I brought you some more banana cake, Bernard.

*A subtle piece of touching music underpins the end of the scene.*

**Bernard:** Oh, Joyce. That's brilliant, thank you.

**Joyce:** No problem. I know things haven't been...you know, easy for you lately.

**Bernard:** No.

**Joyce:** Goodnight, Bernard.

**Bernard:** Night, Joyce. (*Joyce starts to exit*) Joyce?

**Joyce:** Bernard?

**Bernard:** Great to see you again.

**Joyce:** You too.

*Joyce exits. Bernard looks gratefully at the banana cake, and goes to put it in his bag. That's when he notices the toilet roll is back in there. He pulls it out, and stares at it, clearly touched by Gordon's gesture. He shakes his head, and then apparently wanders off-stage to the toilet to put it back. He returns a few moments later with all four toilet rolls, stuffs them in his bag and exits. Music fades. Lights to black.*

*Scene Two. One week later. Lights up to reveal Gordon, Joyce and Bernard studying scripts. Margaret is not present.*

**Gordon:** Right, as soon Margaret graces us with her presence, we'll be trying it from the top of page 13.

**Bernard:** Are you sure she's coming?

**Gordon:** Yep. I spoke to her last night. She complained last time that we were late, so she's going to be even later tonight to make up for it.

**Bernard:** A true pro. So, I'm intrigued. How did you persuade Margaret to go with the original 'disfigured from birth' idea?

**Gordon:** Easy. I told her it was either that or the cellulite. So you did me a favour.

**Bernard:** Glad to be of service.

**Gordon:** I also said that we needn't see any disfigurement as such – she could just wear that stupid leopard-skin mask for the first bit, and then after the operation we would unveil her own natural beauty.

**Bernard:** Are you sure you were never in selling?

**Gordon:** Just good man-management, Bernard.

**Bernard:** Except it's a woman.

**Gordon:** Yes, that makes it much harder. What are you doing?

**Bernard:** Just trying to find my lines.

**Gordon:** You haven't got any.

**Bernard:** Excellent. That's the way I like it.

**Gordon:** Yes, I've noticed that's the way the audience likes it as well. And I always try to be a crowd-pleaser. Talking of which, how are you getting on with **your** sentence, Joyce?

**Joyce:** I think I've got it.

**Gordon:** Good. You've only been staring at it for twenty minutes.

**Joyce:** I was trying to decide where to put the emphasis.

**Gordon:** It's only two words, Joyce.



**Joyce:** Nevertheless. It could be either.

**Gordon:** Which version have you decided on?

**Joyce:** Erm...(a small cough) “Good morning.”

**Gordon:** Perfect - let’s go with that.

**Joyce:** Really?

**Gordon:** Yes, Joyce – you’re a natural.

**Joyce:** Is this my only speech?

**Gordon:** Speech?

**Joyce:** Sentence.

**Gordon:** Sadly no, Joyce. There’s more over the page. Which is why I was keen to move you along.

**Joyce:** (*turning the page*) Oh my goodness!

**Gordon:** Yes, it’s a really useful trick that, Joyce. Whenever you reach the bottom of a page, try flipping it over, like that...see what happens? It reveals more. We call it a book.

**Joyce:** Have I got to learn all this?

**Gordon:** Not necessarily. Margaret will no doubt leave out most of her dialogue, so you just have to answer the bits she remembers to ask you.

**Joyce:** But how do I know which bits she’ll forget to say on the night?

**Gordon:** Exactly, Joyce. A good actress has to prepare for all eventualities.

**Joyce:** Oh good grief – what’s this word here?

**Gordon:** Er...tachycardic.

**Joyce:** What on earth’s that?

**Gordon:** It’s a medical expression. It means...

**Bernard:** An abnormally fast heart rate.

**Gordon:** Very good, Bernard. How did you know that?

**Bernard:** Because my sister’s a paramedic.

**Gordon:** Yes, of course. You said.

**Bernard:** And because I have an abnormally fast heart rate.

**Gordon:** Oh.

**Joyce:** Is that bad?

**Gordon:** Well I suppose it depends, Joyce. In my play, the patient, Ophelia, played by Margaret, is severely tachycardic, not because she’s ill, but because she’s in love, and the handsome surgeon is making her heart beat faster.

**Joyce:** Ahhh. That’s sweet.

**Bernard:** Is it all right if I throw up now?

**Gordon:** Not on the script please.

**Joyce:** (*eyes shut*) Tachycardic, Tachycardic...

**Gordon:** Can you cope with that, Joyce?

**Joyce:** It’s playing havoc with my dyslexic eye, Gordon, so I’m trying to actually learn that word.

**Gordon:** Time well-spent, Joyce. Don’t forget, sooner or later you’ve got to try to

actually learn **all** the words, just like Margaret never does.

*Margaret enters.*

**Margaret:** What does Margaret never do?

**Gordon:** Forget her lines.

**Margaret:** Thank you.

**Bernard:** Because that would involve learning them first.

**Margaret:** I've decided to go with this mad scheme, Gordon. On one condition.

**Gordon:** Which is?

**Margaret:** That you convince me it's purely a love story.

**Gordon:** It is.

**Margaret:** No sex scenes whatsoever.

**Gordon:** Well, we have to stay two metres apart throughout, Margaret. That usually rules out sex for me, don't know about you. In fact, I doubt that any animal could copulate from that distance. Not even Bernard.

**Bernard:** Was that a compliment?

**Gordon:** I suppose it was in a way.

**Joyce:** A blue whale could.

**Gordon:** What?

**Joyce:** A blue whale has the longest penis of any animal in the world. Two and a half metres.

**Margaret:** Was that Joyce speaking?

**Gordon:** I do believe it was.

**Joyce:** It's true.

**Margaret:** How do you know that, Joyce? Hopefully not from personal experience.

**Joyce:** I saw it on a David Attenborough thing. Two and a half to three metres long. Twelve inch diameter.

**Bernard:** Bloody hell. I bet that'd even make **your** eyes water, Margaret.

**Margaret:** I'll make your bloody eyes water in a minute, Bernard, with a rusty pole.

**Joyce:** Which means that, technically, a blue whale could still have sex whilst in lockdown.

**Gordon:** Mmm. I think your blue whale theory has a few grey areas, Joyce.

**Joyce:** How do you mean?

**Gordon:** Well, I'm no expert, but I would imagine that a blue whale's...todger, has to be that sort of length to get to where it needs to go - ie, you know, deep into a lady blue whale's...lady bits.

**Joyce:** So?

**Gordon:** So, I would imagine that in order to achieve that, other parts of the whale would have to be much closer than that - probably touching.

**Joyce:** You reckon?

**Gordon:** I think so.

**Bernard:** *(on his phone)* I'll Google it.

**Gordon:** Which brings me back to my initial point. You'll be quite safe from

molestation, Margaret. Because even if the handsome surgeon were to be played, not by me, but by a passing blue whale, which I'd say is highly unlikely as it's not a land-based mammal, he still couldn't manage to shag you from two metres away. So shall we crack on?

**Margaret:** All right, Gordon, no need to go over the top. A simple 'No' would have sufficed.

**Bernard:** You're right about the blue whale. Stomach to stomach.

**Margaret:** Spare us the sordid details, Bernard.

**Gordon:** Right, let's read from page 13.

**Joyce:** What about a rhino?

**Gordon:** What about a rhino, Joyce?

**Joyce:** They're a land mammal.

**Gordon:** Yes....

**Joyce:** Well, I've heard they're also quite...impressive.

**Gordon:** Really.

**Margaret:** You're quite the little expert on this topic, aren't you, Joyce?

**Joyce:** I like nature programmes.

**Gordon:** Oh, we're not knocking it, Joyce. It's actually quite refreshing to finally discover something you're good at.

**Bernard:** You should go on Mastermind, Joyce. "And your specialised subject? Mammalian penis lengths."

**Joyce:** Shut up, Bernard.

**Margaret:** So, just how impressive **is** a rhino, Joyce...two metres impressive?

**Joyce:** Not quite. Two and a half feet.

**Gordon:** There you go then. Three and a half feet short. But let's play doubly safe, Joyce. Let me just check if I've written any horny rhinos into my NHS hospital love story script...nope. Now can we please get on? From the top of page 13. This is where I operate on Ophelia's face.

**Bernard:** Am I on?

**Gordon:** No, Bernard, you're off. You've just wheeled her on, and left.

**Bernard:** Great. I'll go and eat some of Joyce's banana cake then.

**Gordon:** You do that, Bernard.

*Bernard sits down and gets some banana cake from his bag.*

**Margaret:** Where do you want me?

**Bernard:** Oh, Margaret. I love it when you talk dirty.

**Gordon:** On the operating trolley.

**Margaret:** And am I supposed to mime that?

**Gordon:** Bernard, do you think you'll be able to get hold of a hospital trolley?

**Bernard:** Doubt it – not the real thing. Gold dust. What about a shopping trolley? We just need a pound coin.

**Margaret:** I am not being wheeled in on a shopping trolley.

**Gordon:** We'll have to use the chairs for now...Bernard, I need your chair as well. Put

them in a line.

*Bernard, munching cake, lines the four chairs up together.*

**Gordon:** Right, Margaret, go down.

**Margaret:** I beg your pardon?

**Gordon:** Lie on the chairs. (*Margaret reluctantly starts lying down across the four chairs, on her side, facing the audience*) So, everyone, top of page 13 - imagine the scene. Oh, hang on....nearly forgot - here you go, Bernard. (*He hands Bernard a portable music player*) When I cue you, hit play.

**Bernard:** Right.

**Gordon:** Okay, Listen up. I'm the master surgeon. I've been performing a delicate and miraculous transformation of this poor creature's face. It seemed to go well, so I've nipped out for a fag break. But suddenly, everything goes...

**Bernard:** Tits up.

**Gordon:** Exactly.

**Bernard:** No, I'm talking to Margaret – you need to lie on your back, Margaret.

**Margaret:** It's extremely uncomfortable.

**Bernard:** But he needs to see your face to operate.

**Gordon:** Bernard...Bernard...I'm the director here.

**Bernard:** Fair enough.

**Gordon:** Margaret, lie on your back, I need to see your face to operate. Right, now – we come to one of the most dramatic moments in the play.

**Margaret:** From a shortlist of none.

**Gordon:** Our patient is asleep, recovering from the operation. Shut your eyes, Margaret.

**Margaret:** So I don't need to be face up.

**Gordon:** And shut your mouth, Margaret. All seems well, but our delicate love story is about to turn ugly. There's disturbing music, bleepers are bleeping, klaxons are klaxoning, and the patient starts writhing in agony. Writhe in agony, Margaret.

**Margaret:** (*sitting up*) I can't!

**Gordon:** Why not?

**Margaret:** Cos I'm in bloody agony.

**Gordon:** Just lie back and pretend to writhe and groan.

**Bernard:** Should come second nature to you, Margaret.

**Margaret:** Any chance of sewing his mouth up, doctor?

**Gordon:** Ignore him. Right, something's clearly gone terribly wrong in the theatre.

**Bernard:** You can say that again...

**Gordon:** The bleepers are bleeping, etc., and the nurse runs in frantically and starts screaming for the doctor. You're on, Joyce.

**Joyce:** Oh. Where from, Gordon?

**Gordon:** From where you run in frantically and start screaming for the doctor, Joyce. (*She struggles to find it*) Would you like me to point to it on the page?

**Joyce:** Yes please.

*He prods at her script. She remains silent, concentrating, mouthing the words.*

**Gordon:** Out loud, Joyce.

**Joyce:** (*flatly*) Oh...er “Doctor, doctor.”

**Gordon:** Frantic, Joyce, frantic!

**Joyce:** Doctor! Doctor!

**Margaret:** Hurry up, my arse is going numb.

**Gordon:** Margaret – you can’t talk, you’re under general anaesthetic.

**Bernard:** What a great idea.

**Joyce:** How’s the cake by the way, Bernard?

**Bernard:** Lovely, ta.

**Gordon:** (*tetchily*) Nurse...Nurse Joyce...

**Joyce:** What?

**Gordon:** Who are you talking to?

**Joyce:** (*warily*) You Gordon.

**Gordon:** Not now, just. About cake.

**Joyce:** Oh, Bernard.

**Gordon:** Bernard doesn’t exist.

**Bernard:** Thanks.

**Gordon:** Bernard is a porter and he left the operating theatre ten minutes ago. What have I told you about method acting?

**Joyce:** Sorry, Gordon.

**Gordon:** I’m not Gordon. I’m a surgeon. And you’re a nurse. You need to be in the moment. You need to become the character. Got it? (*She nods*) Right, come on, it’s the bit with the big long words in next.

**Joyce:** Oh, no.

**Gordon:** Just do your best. Okay, Bernard, you can cue the music now.

**Margaret:** Who are you talking to, Gordon?

**Gordon:** Bernard.

**Margaret:** Bernard doesn’t exist, remember – he’s a porter and left the...

**Gordon:** Shut up, Margaret. Or I’ll use real anaesthetic. Right. Everybody ready?

**The Others:** No!

**Gordon:** Good - let’s go for it. Hit the tit, Bernard!

*Dramatic music.*

**Gordon:** Go, Joyce!

**Joyce:** Oh, sorry...(she starts walking off, disappointed)

**Gordon:** No! Come back, Joyce! I don’t mean go, Joyce - I mean “Go Joyce!” Action! Start!

**Joyce:** Oh. “Doctor! Come quick! She’s...she’s got a severely tacky cardigan.”

**Gordon:** Stop the music! (*Bernard does*) She’s got a severely tacky cardigan??

**Joyce:** Well it’s something like that.

**Gordon:** Severely tachycardic Joyce! You’re not commenting on her dress sense.

**Joyce:** I’ve told you, Gordon, I can’t cope with these long medical words – not with my dyslexic eye.

**Gordon:** All right, all right – let’s just...ditch the script. *(He snatches it from her and drops in on the floor)* Okay? We’ll improvise the scene.

**Joyce:** What??

**Gordon:** Trust me. Just become a nurse in a crisis and we’ll make it up. But whatever you do, I want you to keep the pace and the panic going, Joyce. Live the moment. We need the audience to be on the edge of their seats.

**Margaret:** And do it quick, ‘cos I’m also on the edge of their seats and it’s bloody painful.

**Gordon:** Hit the music, Mr Porter. *(No reaction)* Bernard! *(He reacts and starts the dramatic music)* Okay, so I come rushing in and say... “What’s her BP, nurse?”

**Joyce:** Eh?...

**Gordon:** Blood pressure, Joyce.

**Joyce:** Oh....er...right. *(Pause)* But I don’t know what it is, Gordon.

**Gordon:** Make it up, Joyce!

**Joyce:** Oh, er...“18 over 6 and dropping fast, doctor.”

**Gordon:** “My God! Set up a saline drip and give me 13 milligrams of hydroxy-poxy-ethylene”

**Joyce:** Oh, no Gordon...I can’t.

**Gordon:** I’m not Gordon! I’m a surgeon in a crisis, remember? Come on nurse! You can do it! Quickly! We’re under pressure. We’re going to lose her!

**Margaret:** You lost me ten minutes ago.

**Gordon:** Quickly nurse!

**Joyce:** Ooh, er...*(grabbing some banana cake from her bag)* There you go, doctor!

**Gordon:** What’s this?

**Joyce:** It’s what you asked for – 18...kilos of epoxy resin.

**Margaret:** 18 kilos of epoxy resin?? What are you going to do? Glue me to the bloody chairs?

**Gordon:** She’s hallucinating, nurse! We need oxygen, hydrogen, peroxide and... carbon dioxide, quickly!

*But Joyce has suddenly become distracted. For the past few moments, Bernard has looked increasingly and seriously unwell. Now he starts clutching his chest, obviously in pain. He then drops to his knees. Gordon, with all his attention now on Margaret, doesn’t notice, as he plays out the frantic scene by pounding on Margaret’s chest.*

**Joyce:** Bernard...

**Gordon:** Bernard doesn’t exist, nurse! I need painkillers here!

**Joyce:** There’s something wrong, Gordon.

**Gordon:** My name is not Gordon! I’m a surgeon in a crisis and I need your help.

**Joyce:** *(rushing over to Bernard, checking his pulse)* He’s severely tachycardic!

**Gordon:** Excellent, Joyce. That’s more like it. But I think you’ll find it’s a woman.

**Joyce:** *(screaming at the top of her voice)* Gordon! There’s something wrong with Bernard!!

*Gordon is shocked out of his ‘acting’ and turns to see them. A dishevelled and*

*pummelled Margaret drops onto the floor. Gordon rushes over to Bernard, realizes it's no joke, then grabs his phone in panic.*

**Gordon:** We need an ambulance. Little Grimley Village Hall. Quickly! I think one of my colleagues is having a heart attack...

*Joyce, Gordon and Margaret gather round Bernard, who is now lying on the floor. The music swells dramatically, mixed with the sound of swirling ambulance sirens. All is chaos and panic. The lights and disturbing noises slowly fade.*