

'Consequences'

One-Act Play

By Paul Howard Surridge

(Cast in order of appearance)

(The cast comprises two male and two female characters)

Ray Bradshaw

Age range: 30-50 – A senior writer on the Hampshire Argos

Kate Brown

Age range: 23-30 – PA to the Editor-In-Chief

Jill Turner

Age range: 30-50- Journalist on the paper

Richard Robbins

Age range: 25-35 – Sub-Editor on the newspaper

Synopsis

The action takes place in the staff rest room of the Hampshire Argos a struggling weekly rag not well known for its editorial or sporting prose.

Ray Bradshaw is a senior journalist whose life was turned upside down nine years ago when his wife left him for another woman. The other woman – Jill Turner – is also a writer and colleague of Ray's on the newspaper. Since Ray split up with his wife, Jill has moved into the family home and Ray has gone to live with his mother. Needless to say Ray and Jill are not exactly the best of friends. Jill has asked Ray to meet her at 6.00pm in the staff room to discuss 'an opportunity of a lifetime' she has identified for him. Intrigued, he agrees to meet.

A bizarre exchange of dialogue ensues between Jill, Ray, Kate and Richard where Jill tries without effort to confuse everyone in the hope that her problems will go away.

A One-Act Play

The room is fairly dingy comprising well-worn easy chairs, a sofa, two office swivel chairs, a coffee table with newspapers and magazines visible. There are pictures on the walls including a picture of the Queen. It has one entrance, a door USSR with a light switch within reach.

*As the lights come up **RAY BRADSHAW**, a long standing writer of the paper enters and turns the light on. He has had several jobs on the paper and is now lead sports writer. He's dressed in a cheap, ill fitting -suit. His shirt has seen better days. His tie barely reaches his collar and the top button is undone. He appears somewhat tired as he waits impatiently, checking his watch several times. After a few moments he flops into one of the easy chairs facing the audience. He stares at the ceiling twiddling his thumbs. Eventually he is joined by **KATE BROWN** an ambitious but not very bright young woman who carries a fairly large brief case the contents of which contain a dictionary and some papers. She has been recently hired as PA to the Editor in Chief Mr. Kempston. She is smartly dressed but in a frantic state of mind. After entering the room in a hurry she slams the door behind her, she stops momentarily when she sees **RAY**. He remains unmoved at her arrival.*

RAY: *(without looking up):* Almost gave up on you.

KATE: Where is she?

RAY: *(Turns as he hears her voice)* Oh, it's you.

KATE: We're in such trouble!

RAY: Trouble. What do you mean?

KATE: Can you believe it; she was actually summoned to his office. I was asked to leave but I know he'll want to see me later. Oh my word!

RAY: You've lost me.

KATE: I knew this was a bad idea from the start. She talked me into it. I should have said nothing.

RAY: Who talked you into it?

KATE: For god's sake where have you been?

RAY: Wait. Let me guess. We're talking about Jill.

KATE: Yes. Jill. Who else would I be talking about?

RAY: Oh dear... Jill. (*He sits back smugly before realising*): She had to explain herself to whom?

KATE: Don't play the innocent with me, Ray. I know you're in on this. You think you're so clever. Well, I've got news for you. Just because I'm the *new* one around here doesn't mean I don't know how things work. We could easily lose our jobs for something like this. Both of us!

RAY: What? What on earth...

KATE: I'm such an idiot! Why couldn't I keep my big mouth shut!

RAY: Just hold on. Who's losing their job?

KATE: Ray.

RAY: Yes.

KATE: You really have no idea what I'm talking about, do you?

RAY: Should I?

KATE: Oh never mind.

RAY: Never mind!

KATE: Forget I said anything.

RAY: No. No! You can't just do that. 'We could easily lose our jobs' and 'never mind' are two statements that don't sit comfortably one after the other.

KATE: (*checks her watch*): It doesn't matter!

RAY: Have you heard a word I've said?

KATE: Look, just forget it okay?

RAY: Please, you must tell me, I can't bear the intrigue?

KATE: No.

RAY: Then why are we here, Kate?

KATE: I have no idea, not really.

RAY: I'm sure you don't. Let me tell you why I'm here. I got a phone call this morning from a *certain person* no names mentioned, telling me an opportunity of a lifetime would be waiting for me right here at 6.00pm sharp. It is now 6.06, and unless that certain person arrives soon I'm off.

KATE: Jill called you then?

RAY: You're brighter than you look. Not by much I admit, but we have to be grateful for small mercies...

KATE: I knew she would.

RAY: Now, from what's been said we've deduced the common denominator of our friendly little chat is Jill. Could it possibly be anyone else! In the history of civilisation, as far as I'm aware, there's never been another woman with the innate ability to wreck the lives of so many people without really trying. To be honest, I should have known better than to be persuaded to come here this evening, *but* here I am.

KATE: What do you mean *wreck the lives*?

RAY: Doesn't matter.

KATE: You can't say that and not explain what you mean.

RAY: Oh really! So now the shoe's on the other foot! Let me ask you something. How long have you been working here now?

KATE: What does that have to do with anything?

RAY: Come on, how long?

KATE: Just over three months.

RAY: And that's not enough time for you to work out that Jill wrecks lives? Surely you know why Jill and I are not exactly bosom buddies? Perhaps not, but then I don't suppose you're paid to be intuitive. What does the *secretary* of the Editor In Chief do anyway?

KATE: PA! I'm his personal assistant.

RAY: Get you!

KATE: There is a difference you know.

RAY: Difference?

KATE: Difference between a secretary and a PA.

RAY: Oh I'm sure there is. One word as opposed to two, but then that's only if you don't abbreviate to PA; which of course isn't a word it's an acronym, but you wouldn't know that.

KATE: Oh really. You for one should be lucky that I haven't taken your job already.

RAY: Sorry?

KATE: I only took this job to get my foot in the door. As soon as everyone sees what I can do, I know I'll be promoted to reporter.

RAY: Really. A reporter on the Hampshire Argos! Wow wee.

KATE: Two years and I'll be covering the Premier League.

RAY: So you won't be around for very long then, you'll be off to one of the nationals or maybe TV?

KATE: You'll see.

RAY: (*Looks at his watch again*): I wish you well my darling, but I'm still somewhat curious as to what the hell we're doing here.

KATE: You don't believe me do you?

RAY: Do you want me to be brutally honest?

KATE: (*handing him papers*): Here.

RAY: What's this?

KATE: Oh, just some of your past articles. I highlighted a few mistakes, as you can see.

RAY: What mistakes? (*Reads the copy silently to himself*): So you think that's clever do you, spotting minor typos. That, for your information, is a subs job. Not my fault if they've cocked up.

KATE: Read on.

RAY: (*Reads out loud*): 'Not even the bed-stricken state of illness plagued him as he ploughed his way through the back row to score for the second time'. Poetic! What's wrong with that?

KATE: Bed-Stricken?

RAY: He was practically dying out there that afternoon. I doubt you even saw the game.

KATE: I remember it well. What I don't seem to remember at any point during the match was a bed on the pitch. Nowhere did I see a bed!

RAY: Bed? What on earth are you talking about?

KATE: Come to think of it, I'm sure I've never seen a bed-stricken footballer during any match I've ever seen.

RAY: You don't understand do you? It's just an expression. We have to write in a style that paints pictures in their minds. They're not very bright you see, especially the football lot. That's why comics like the Dandy and Beano have stood the test of time, gone now of course.

KATE: Dandy and Beano? You need help. Do you know what the word 'stricken' means?

RAY: Stricken?

KATE: (*pulls out a dictionary from her briefcase*): Let's just look it up then shall we?

RAY: Good god. You carry a dictionary with you?

KATE: Everywhere I go.

RAY: (*Laughs*): That's pathetic!

KATE: You'd benefit from carrying one yourself.

RAY: What? Do I have to remind you that I've been this newspapers senior writer since...well since this highly regarded, no, esteemed publication, was launched nine years ago?

KATE: Ah. Here we are (*Reads aloud*): 'Stricken. Adjective! Definition one: 'struck or wounded, as a projectile' Interesting. You made it seem as though he were ill, but according to the dictionary his real problem was an injury from a bed striking him.

RAY: (*Gets up in frustration*): I really don't have time for this mindless, pointless crap right now.

KATE: Or maybe it's this (*Reading*): Definition two. 'Afflicted with something overwhelming, as strong emotion or trouble', Now that's more like it. But it still doesn't explain the *bed* that was supposedly on the pitch during the entire game.

RAY: Pointless. Bloody pointless! Right I'm off.

(He is about to leave when Jill Turner makes her entrance. She is smartly dressed and openly lesbian. She can be very manipulative)

JILL: Ray. Kate. You look lovely Kate, nice briefcase.

RAY: Jill Turner. How nice of you to finally join us. One thing I can always count on with you is an intriguing entrance.

KATE: Why what happened?

RAY: (*mockingly apathetic*): What happened? What happened when? What is she talking about?

JILL: Ray, can you sit down for a moment. I'd like a word.

RAY: Just one?

JILL: Can you try, just for once not to be difficult?

RAY: Unlikely, why?

KATE: Oh dear. We're in trouble aren't we? He's found out!

JILL: Kate. Do I look like a woman in trouble to you? Now, before anything is discussed I'd like you to go and lock the doors on this and the floor below.

KATE: Do I have to? But Mr Kempston?

JILL: He's gone. Everyone's gone, and yes you do.

KATE: I'm going to lose my job I know I am. (*She exits*)

RAY: All right Jill. What are you up to?

JILL: (*With a deep breath*): Where shall I start...

KATE: (*Re-entering*): Jill, sorry. But are you sure we're not in trouble?

JILL: Would I lie to you? We're *not* in trouble. (*Waiting for her to leave again, which she does*): Ray, I'm in trouble!

RAY: Oh dear. Oh dear. That's really too bad. Why, and with whom?

JILL: Plagiarism.

RAY: (*With a burst of laughter*): Plagiarism. Oh, that's funny. All these years I've bloody well known that you've lacked the ability to write a single word of original material and I was right.

JILL: Look, this is serious.

RAY: You're not serious?

JILL: Unfortunately, yes.

RAY: Well why are you telling me, of all people, and what's this terrific opportunity that you dangled before me to get me here?

JILL: Ray, I really need your help.

RAY: Oh, do you now!

JILL: I really do. Look, someone called the boss yesterday evening and told him that paragraph two of my last article looked very similar to a piece from 'Sports Anthology' from September 2010.

RAY: And by 'very similar', you mean...

JILL: Identical.

RAY: I see.

JILL: I used a few sentences from it because I was trying to meet a deadline on a story I was writing about Andy Murray and just couldn't come up with the right angle.

RAY: September 2010 is a pretty recent article to be plagiarising. What were you thinking?

JILL: I know it's awful. But then I thought who on earth reads tennis articles anyway?

RAY: Especially ones written by you.

JILL: I'll tell you who. John Reece.

RAY: John Reece!

JILL: And he wasn't very happy about it either, he's planning to sue the paper.

RAY: You plagiarised material from John Reece? He's one of the country's top tennis writers, isn't he?

JILL: And you, someone who claims to be an expert on the subject had to ask me that question.

RAY: Well, frankly I don't see any possible way I could help you to save your job, less any reason why I should attempt to try.

JILL: Look. I know we've had our differences in the past, but...

RAY: Differences? You single-handedly and quite deliberately lured my loving, loyal, faithful wife away from me and into a life-long state of lesbianism. And you have the nerve to say '*we've had our differences?!*'

JILL: I think you're exaggerating somewhat. She said she couldn't bear to be with you anymore. Selfish, inconsiderate, arrogant, mean, rude, and apparently not very good in...

RAY: Oh really. And of course you are. Has this world gone mad? How does that make sense?

JILL: It doesn't to bigots Ray. It doesn't! Sorry, I didn't mean to say all that.

RAY: Of course you did. Look, forget it! I can't believe I agreed to meet here in the first place. (*Getting up to leave*): Well, I can't say I'm unhappy about the plagiarism thing, I think you should be sacked.

JILL: Look Ray I'm sorry I didn't mean to say what I did. But I really do need your help and in return I've lined up a fabulous opportunity for you.

RAY: Fabulous opportunity. Oh dear I doubt it somehow.

JILL: No. Seriously! That's why I asked you here. The Tour de France.

RAY: The Tour de France. What about the Tour de France?

JILL: You know the cycling event...

RAY: I bloody well know what the Tour de France is, but what about it?

JILL: How would you like to cover it next month? This would be a new opportunity, more money and a new future.

RAY: What?

JILL: It's a long story. All I need is *ten minutes* and what I have to tell you will change your life forever. I promise.

RAY: I think you achieved that objective when you ran off with my wife.

JILL: Look, I'll get straight to it. The boss received a phone call yesterday, well, a call came in for him but he wasn't at his desk so he couldn't take it, but she did.

RAY: A phone call came in for the boss, he wasn't at his desk and she took it...and? What bloody phone call. Are you all right in the head? Clearly not! Otherwise you wouldn't be living with my wife.

JILL: *Not now Ray.* Kate will be back in a minute and I must discuss this with you. You see, fortunately for me I think, he didn't take the call, however, she took a message for him but importantly didn't say anything.

RAY: What bloody phone call and who took the message instead. Bloody riddles! Why do I have to keep asking the same question; you're not making any sense! Who took the message but didn't tell him.

JILL: She told me.

RAY: She told *you* instead of him! Bloody hell! Is he...she, whoever she is, as deluded as you are?

JILL: Ray please! She told me the caller asked for Mr. Kempston but when he discovered he wasn't there he asked for his email address. But he explained everything to her. He was fuming. And that's when she told me.

RAY: Let me untangle this finely knitted web of words. Ah plagiarism! John Reece phoned the boss but got to speak to Kate the airhead. Am I right?

JILL: Yes. That's what I said.

RAY: That is *not* what you said. So let me get this clear. You plagiarise an article written by the very eminent John Reece, he calls

the Editor in Chief about it and threatens to sue the paper but he doesn't get to speak to the big wig...

JILL: Oh that's another subject I'll come to that.

RAY: Hang on before I go crazy! So he doesn't get to speak to the big wig himself, instead he discusses the issue with his secretary - the brain of Britain - and he asks her for Kempston's email address so he can send a message as an alternative to speaking to him directly. She gives him the email address, and instead of keeping the matter confidential she tells you. You; knowing the seriousness of what you did, now fear getting fired. How's that?

JILL: He already has.

RAY: Got you fired?

JILL: No. He's already sent the email.

RAY: Oh dear my head hurts. Did Kempston read it?

JILL: Actually, no.

RAY: So he didn't read it?

JILL: I had it deleted before he could.

RAY: You did what? How on earth did you manage that?

JILL: Richard Slater knows his password.

RAY: Slater knows the old man's password, how, and why would Slater give it to you?

JILL: He didn't. He deleted the email himself.

RAY: What the hell did he do that for?

JILL: Two thousand pounds!

RAY: Two thousand pounds! Hang on a minute; you paid him two thousand...thousand pounds! Your salary is less than mine. Where did you get that kind of money, you're always claiming you're broke.

JILL: My grandmother just died. I get a quarter of her estate.

RAY: My condolences. How convenient. Okay, so the message is gone. What's the problem?

JILL: I don't have two thousand pounds. It transpires that her entire estate is only worth three hundred.

RAY: So you only ended up with seventy five quid?

JILL: About that but you see I haven't got the balance ...

RAY: There are a lot of things you haven't got. Not much of an estate though is it. Hope I leave more than that when I pass on.

JILL: I swear; I had no idea that's all I'd be getting.

RAY: So?

JILL: So I can't pay him.

RAY: Dare I say....so?

JILL: I know it's complicated, but that's why I need your help.

RAY: Bloody ridiculous offering him that kind of money. You should have thought this through before making grand gestures to cover your tracks. Anyway, as fascinating as all this is I think it's time for me to go, unless there's anything else of national importance you want to ask me? (*Suddenly dawns on him*) Surely, you are not looking

to me for the money? If you are, I'm very sorry but an unequivocal NO, and apart from that I'm broke.

JILL: No. I'm not asking you for the money. Look, Richard Slater is raging because I haven't paid him and insisted that I meet him here at 7.00 prompt to settle up. All I need is for you to help me convince him that Kempston *did* get the email. That way, he can't expect me to pay him... can he?

RAY: I'm not sure I follow the logic of that, but then I haven't really understood anything you've said since you breezed in.

JILL: I just need you to cover up for me. To nod and agree with what I have to say to him that's all.

RAY: So you want me to cover up for you; in other words to lie?

JILL: No. I don't want you to lie. I just want you to do whatever it takes to make him believe that Kempston knows all about it, that's all.

RAY: But he doesn't.

JILL: I know that and, thanks to me, you know that, but no one else has to.

RAY: (*Grabs Kate's dictionary*) Kate left her dictionary here. I could look up the word 'lie' for you. Maybe that would clear things up.

JILL: Please Ray put the dictionary down. Look, there's more I want to tell you.

RAY: More, or god no... well go on.

JILL: Well, when Kate told me about John Reece and the email I thought I could nip all this in the bud so to speak so I called him.

RAY: You called John Reece?

JILL: Yes.

RAY: And said what?

JILL: Well, it's a bit tricky.

RAY: Tricky. Why doesn't that surprise me!

JILL: Well I apologised of course and explained that I was under pressure to finish the Murray article and thought he might, just might take pity on me and agree to forget all about it; but none of it. He went berserk, went on and on about his reputation and how dare an upstart on a crass local newspaper have the audacity to plagiarise his work etc etc.

RAY: Fair enough.

JILL: Yes but...

RAY: But...what.

JILL: Well. When I realised that I wasn't winning him over I told him that I'd cleared it with you first, being as you're the papers Lead Writer...

RAY: (*aghast*) Cleared it with me!

JILL: I had to say something, don't you see.

RAY: You had the nerve to implicate me! What did he say to that?

JILL: He said if it was the last thing he did he would ensure that neither of us ever worked in publishing again. He would destroy us both, and to add to that we'd be hearing from his lawyers within days.

RAY: (*Said in a cool, calm and deliberate way before he lets rip*): That's super! Spiffing! Excellent! Thanks! I'm delighted I've been of some help. Terrific; really terrific!

JILL: Oh, what a relief! I thought you'd go berserk too.

RAY: (*Goes berserk*): Are you absolutely off your head! You had the bloody nerve to involve me in all this to save your hide and now both our reputations are destroyed; not that you had a reputation to destroy in the first place! Not content with wrecking my marriage and perverting my wife's mind, you now want to wreck my career, my livelihood, the only part of my being where I have any dignity.

JILL: And there's more I'm afraid...

RAY: More!

JILL: It's about the wig.

RAY: God help me please. I can't take any more of this. Wig? What bloody wig?

JILL: The wig Richard found in the old man's drawer along with the photos.

RAY: Wig. Old man's drawer, photos?

JILL: After Richard deleted the email, curiosity took over and he started to rummage in the old man's drawer and found a wig with a number of weird photos of him dressed up as a woman.

RAY: (*He looks at her incredulously*): Wig and weird photos...

JILL: They were really explicit, and of course just as he's looking at the photos the old man walks into his office and finds him.

RAY: I'm speechless. Lost for words!

JILL: So you see that's why I asked you to meet me here so that I could explain and make it up to you...and of course persuade Richard that the old man did see the email.

RAY: Make it up to me. Are you insane?

JILL: You know my cousin Rob?

RAY: You have a cousin called Rob. How fascinating but...

JILL: Apparently you don't! Well he works for DRDM one the largest publishing houses in the UK.

RAY: I bloody well know who DRDM are. But please what's that got to do with Reece, the tennis article, the old man and his email. Enlighten me before I go completely doolally.

JILL: They're looking for an experienced writer to join their coverage of the Tour de France next month. And a permanent job thereafter.

RAY: Ah, yes. The Tour de France. I was wondering when we'd return to that subject.

JILL: Well. I can get you on that team.

RAY: Get me on that team?

JILL: You don't believe me?

RAY: No. Yes. I mean I don't know what I mean?

JILL: He made it quite clear they wanted someone fresh on their team, someone who would fit in with their style of creative writing. A skilled writer; with a true understanding of what readers want.

RAY: And...

JILL: And someone with integrity....

RAY: Integrity as well?

JILL: It's yours if you want it, as a thank you.

RAY: As a thank you...

JILL: Look all I need you to do is convince Richard that the old man *did* receive the email...Is that okay?

RAY: (*Sarcastically*): Of course, why not, I've got nothing else to do with my time other than wait for the writ and P45 to arrive.

JILL: You've always moaned about working here. You don't get on with anyone. You're miserable most of the time, up to your eyes in debt. It would be a new start. A new move...

RAY: If this is a legitimate offer, why didn't you take the job yourself? Fetching coffee for DRDM *must* be a step up from any writing job here, not that you'll have one for very long.

JILL: I'm not going to lie to you. I tried for it. Don't think for a minute I didn't. But Rob knows me too well. He knows that I know absolutely nothing about cycling and my style of writing just didn't fit with what they were looking for.

RAY: And mine does? What do I know about cycling other than the fact that Chris Hoy won three gold medals at the Olympics?

JILL: Look. Rob doesn't need to know right now that you don't know anything about the subject, you can swot up. What I do know is that DRDM is the chance of a lifetime, the kind of opportunity that could put you on the map.

RAY: On the map! The only place I'm destined for on the map is Alcatraz. What's in it for you?

JILL: Where's the trust?

RAY: Trust? How on earth can you of all people use that word after you what you've perpetrated.

JILL: I'm really sorry!

RAY: No. I'm sorry. It's not for me.

JILL: If you get the job, and I know you will, we would never have to see each other again as long as we live.

RAY: That is *very* tempting!

JILL: Once this has blown over and I'm sure it will, I'll get to move up to head writer here and you'll get a career move miles away. It's a win-win situation.

RAY: Win, win? Hang on a minute! I have to move?

JILL: Of course. The job would demand it.

RAY: So where are they based?

JILL: In the heart of the Metropolis.

RAY: Metropolis?

JILL: The smoke! London.

RAY: What makes you think I want to move away from this sleepy, semi-rural, picturesque landscape bathed in fresh air for a life in the smog?

JILL: Because you go *on and on* about how dull it is living and working here!

RAY: Do I?

JILL: Only *all* the time!

RAY: Perhaps I ought to appreciate what I've got. Or at least what I had until you destroyed my life for a second time.

JILL: But what have you got? I've said it before, you're divorced, broke, have a mutual dislike for virtually all of the staff here, you currently live with your mother, drive a wreck of a car, have no friends, drink too much...you're over weight, your hair is falling out...

RAY: That makes me feel really good about myself. Thanks for that.

JILL: Additionally...

RAY: Do we need *additionally*?

JILL: This really is an opportunity of a lifetime. It could set you up for a new future. Who knows what it might lead to?

RAY: (*Getting up to leave*) I have to admit you almost won me over, but an emphatic No! If nothing else though, this debacle has put my life in perspective! I now know who I am, what I am, and how pathetic my life really is, and for that I thank you...

JILL: Wait! Okay. I was hoping I wouldn't have to do this, but there is one more reason I set the job up for you.

RAY: Oh god. It gets worse. How can it get worse?

JILL: Look. It's not the easiest of things for me to talk about. Especially with you!

RAY: Does this have anything to do with my lovely ex-wife by any chance?

JILL: More than you think.

RAY: Having a little trouble in paradise?

JILL: (*With a deep breath*): Ray, it's over.

RAY: Really. Well, look on the bright side. My marriage to her only lasted four years. You've almost doubled that. You should feel lucky.

JILL: Lucky for the time we had together, or lucky for the fact that it's over?

RAY: I'd sayyou were...

JILL: (*Emotionally*): She's left me for another woman.

RAY: Well, these things *do* happen. I know from experience.

JILL: (*Hands him a picture*): That's not the worst of it. This is how I found out.

RAY: Ooh! She gets more vindictive and brutal as the years pass. I only received a scribbled note. Hang on; who is that in the background?

JILL: Kempston.

RAY: Kempston! Bloody hell I don't believe it. My wife, my ex wife is embroiled in some kind of bondage thing? I had no idea how far she'd gone.

JILL: It's nothing to do with me, really. I just want to get back at her; and him for that matter.

RAY: Look, if you've fallen out with my ex wife that's for you to sort out, don't embroil me. I have enough on my plate to cope with thank you very much.

JILL: I want her to realise what she's done and come to regret it. I thought if she saw you, her ex husband get a fabulous job in London, and me, her ex wife get promotion here she'd...

RAY: Do I detect a hint of bitterness; a woman scorned?

JILL: Do you blame me? After this I'd do anything to get back at her.

RAY: How the worm has turned.

(They are interrupted by the re-entry of KATE who is panting with exhaustion as she comes through the door)

KATE: Okay. All the doors are locked. I had a terrible job trying to find all the right keys. We're all alone. I didn't miss anything did I?

RAY: Not a thing, *not a* thing.

JILL: You were so quick; I hardly had a chance to...

KATE: *(Slightly out of breath she says the following dialogue almost without breathing):* Well since you mention the word *quick*, I was one of the quickest runners at secondary school, and when I was at University I ran the four hundred and the eight hundred metres in the fastest time on record, and as far as I know those records stand today.

RAY: Well. Get her!

KATE: In fact it was that achievement that gave me the idea that I could be a leading sportswoman, but then I started dating this boy and missed out on the physical exercise I needed...

RAY: Doesn't say much for him.

KATE: Having got sidetracked, I decided the next best thing was to be a sports journalist, after graduating that is. I mean the thrill of physical exercise is one thing, but the sheer unadulterated adrenaline rush of being able to write words that mean something in people's lives is indescribable...

RAY: Good god!

JILL: I'm sorry Kate, but are you sure, *really sure* you locked the door at the farthest end of the first floor by the window?

KATE: You mean leading to the stairwell?

JILL: No. The one next to it!

KATE: I think that's the cleaner's room.

JILL: Better check it anyway, just to be safe.

KATE: You're right. Can't be too careful! I *love* secret meetings!
(*She exits*)

RAY: That girl is absolutely not right in the head.

JILL: I've never seen her so passionate before...

KATE: (*re-enters, again*) Sorry, but why am I locking all these doors?

JILL: We can't afford to run the risk of being overheard can we? Someone could walk in on us.

KATE: Oh, right. (*She exits again*)

RAY: Not right at all!

JILL: I'm worried Richard will be here at any time. We can't have Kate...

RAY: Why is she here anyway?

JILL: You mean she's not with you?

RAY: Why would she have come with me?

JILL: How odd. I just hope Richard takes the stairwell that she won't have locked otherwise he'll think I didn't turn up.

RAY: Look. I'm not bloody happy about any of this, but if you promise to stop wrecking my life, I'll agree to this last request to lie to Richard about the email. Okay? That's if he can break into Fort Knox.

JILL: Oh Ray. I really appreciate your help.

(Goes to hug him but he backs off)

RAY: Spare me your kindness and physicality. Let's do this my way. Right, let's get rid of Kate first shall we, she'll be a liability if she's here when he arrives.

JILL: Yes you're right.

RAY: I know exactly what we can tell her. Just let me do the talking when she gets back okay?

JILL: Whatever you say, and thanks!

(Kate enters)

KATE: I remembered, I had checked it, so what's happening? Where do we stand Jill?

RAY: Look Kate.

KATE: Oh no it sounds really bad.

RAY: Not really bad.

KATE: But pretty bad, like losing our jobs.

RAY: No. Well, possibly, I mean...

JILL: I'll take it from here, Ray. Kate?

KATE: Yes?

JILL: How would you like to help us cover The Tour de France?

KATE: What?

JILL: Look, my meeting with Mr Kempston that you overheard had nothing to do with the email you told me about. He never received it. He knows nothing about it. He did however offer Ray and me the opportunity to spend three weeks in Paris and then the South of France covering The Tour de France.

KATE: You mean we are not about to lose our jobs?

RAY: Try and keep up there's a good girl.

JILL: He knows absolutely nothing. Now, we've talked it over and we'd like you to join us in Paris.

KATE: So *that's* what the opportunity of a lifetime was.

RAY: Exactly.

KATE: (*Somewhat stunned*): And you want me to go with you?

JILL: It will be the three of us, a sort of team coverage.

KATE: (*Still stunned*): And you want me to go with you?

RAY: (*Somewhat sarcastically*): You know why we chose you don't you?

JILL: Of course she knows! (*Glares at him*)

KATE: Do I?

JILL: We don't just want you to go; we want you to write.

RAY: Yes. Write real words, words that flow like silk! It would be an opportunity for you to really show your mettle.

KATE: (*Once more to make sure she understands clearly*): And you want me to go with you?

RAY: Of course. Couldn't do without you! We chose you because of your creative and expressive mind. Your ability to explain simple things in a complex way... I mean complex things in a simplistic way...

KATE: Ray. I never know when you're serious. If it's true, I'm very flattered and yes! But I'm puzzled.

JILL: Why is that?

KATE: Why did you ask me to lock up the entire building?

JILL: (*Thinking quickly*): Well you see Mr Kempston didn't want us to tell anyone yet, but I was so excited at the prospect of the three of us working together I just had to spill the beans, and, to make sure that no one could hear us I thought it sensible to lock the doors.

KATE: Oh my god. This is so exciting, so exciting!

JILL: Yes I know. Oh, there is just one more thing. We could only persuade Mr Kempston to allow three of us on the assignment which means Richard is going to be pretty upset.

KATE: You mean you chose *me* over your own sub editor?

JILL: Paris *is* the romance capital of the world you know. I need at least one female to keep me company.

KATE: Sorry...what do you mean '*one female to keep me company*'? I'm not, well...

RAY: It doesn't matter.

KATE: It does to me I've got a boyfriend.

RAY: No I mean it's of no consequence.

KATE: No consequence. You don't think my sexuality is of any consequence.

RAY: Your sexuality? What the hell are you talking about? What has your sexuality got to do with anything?

KATE: It means a lot to me. I've never had tendencies in that...

JILL: No I think you've got confused.

RAY: I'm confused!

JILL: No. Kate's got confused. Look Kate, the fact is that Richard might not be best pleased about our decision to take you instead of him, especially as you've only been with the paper for three months as a secretary, and never worked on the editorial team.

KATE: PA. I'm a PA.

JILL: Of course you are dear. So you see, we can't let him know about all this can we?

KATE: No...I suppose not. But I still don't understand why neither of you think my sexuality would be important to me.

RAY: Oh someone save me please! Let me explain. Your sexual preferences have absolutely nothing to do with all this. It is of no consequence which side of the bread you like buttered. I only wish my wife shared your straightforward and simplistic attitude to such matters. The fact is, Richard thinks that Jill's meeting with the Editor was about the email, remember the email? Well, we're thinking it would probably be better to just let him continue to think along those lines for a while rather than explain everything. That's all.

KATE: I'm not sure I...

JILL: Thank you, Ray. Let me make some sense of that for you (*To Kate*): So, Richard is coming here and is due any second and about as worried as you were up until a few minutes ago and even more guilty...

KATE: Guiltier!

JILL: What?

KATE: Guiltier. It's guiltier, not 'more guilty'

JILL: Sorry?

KATE: It's guiltier. Not...

JILL: (*Getting slightly cross*): I'm not stupid or hard of hearing. I fully understand the point you were making...

RAY: Are you sure about 'guiltier'?

KATE: Positive! I could look it up if you want.

JILL: That won't be necessary. The *guiltier* he feels about his part in the email thing the easier it will be to break the news about Paris. Does that make sense?

RAY: (*Almost under his breath*): Not to me!

KATE: (*Definitely not grasping it but not wanting to appear stupid*) Oh, okay. But can you clarify...

JILL: (*Not allowing her time to express her point*): Kate, please we must bring this conversation to a halt in case Richard suddenly appears. I think its best you're not here.

KATE: I see.

JILL: Just trust us! Richard has a large, a *very large* ego as you know, and he will be hugely disappointed when he discovers that you will be going with us and not him. Now we don't want any bad feeling around the office do we?

KATE: Of course not. No.

RAY: Well there you are then. We all stay (*He zips his lips*)

KATE: But...

JILL: (*Snaps at her*): Do you want to be a part of this assignment to Paris or not?

RAY: Go. Go!

KATE: You're right! This *is* my big chance. I'm going to show you both what I can do! (*Fumbles around for her dictionary and starts to browse*)

RAY: What are you doing?

KATE: I need to learn some new words, of course.

(RICHARD, A sub editor for the paper enters. He's wearing a smart, trendy suit and tie. He's clearly not in a good mood)

RICHARD: Great, bloody great. Sacked! Because I found out he's a pervert. That can't be fair or legal, can it?

JILL: Oh dear Richard I'm so...

RAY: Sorry?

RICHARD: Hell's bells.

KATE: Sacked! Pervert! I don't understand?

JILL: Don't be late Kate.

RAY: Oh, that rhymes.

KATE: Late?

RAY: *(Looks at her in the hope the penny will drop):* For your meeting.

KATE: What meeting?

RAY: You know the meeting you said you *had* to rush off to.

KATE: No. You must be confusing me with someone else.

JILL: *(Said in a deliberate way):* No, I distinctly remember you saying you had to dash off...

KATE: (*The penny eventually drops*): Oh that meeting. Oh yes I must dash otherwise I'll be late. Bye everyone see you later (*She exits*)

JILL: Richard, I'm not going to lie to you. We're in trouble. Deep trouble!

RICHARD: Oh. And you didn't think I knew that! I've been sacked remember.

JILL: Yes I know, but it's worse than that.

RICHARD: (*Extremely angry*): What! What could be worse than that? (*Suddenly realises the email he deleted*): He didn't find out did he? He couldn't possibly have found out that I deleted the email. I'm absolutely sure I left no tracks. Just tell me he didn't. There's no possible way...

RAY: It never rains but it pours. Let me explain...

JILL: Thank you Ray, but I think it's best that Richard hears this from me.

RICHARD: Hear what for god's sake! Talk to me Jill I just can't take any more.

JILL: Richard...

RICHARD: I can't, I really can't.

JILL: Richard...

RICHARD: For the love of god what's happened?

JILL: Richard...

RAY: If you'd let her get a word in edge ways we'd all hear what Jill has to say . Personally I can't wait.

JILL: Thank you again Ray... It's a complicated story Richard. Now if you'll just take a seat and calm down I'll explain the whole thing okay? (*He flops down on a chair*) Well it's like this...

RAY: Kempston knows everything!

RICHARD: (*Frantically jumps up*): Shit, shit, bugger; bugger I knew it! Not only my job, now my total livelihood, my bloody mortgage, credit card bills, car, girlfriend, my whole bloody life in ruins, gone up in a puff of smoke...I'll never get a reference ever again.

RAY: Poof of smoke! Familiar ground this.

JILL: Just hold on. Just listen for a minute.

RICHARD: But how could he have found out?

JILL: Let's just say that you made a few errors...

RAY: A bloody sloppy job by all accounts.

RICHARD: What do you mean a sloppy job?

JILL: It was Ray. He told him.

RICHARD: What?

RAY: What!

JILL: (*Prompting Ray*): You had no option did you?

RAY: Didn't I? Oh no, I had absolutely no option.

RICHARD: No option but why? How did you know anyway?

RAY: That is a very long and boring story.

RICHARD: But Jill, you promised if I deleted the email only you and I would know, and you would give me the money immediately.

JILL: You see. Ray overheard Kate and I speaking, you know, I told you that Kate told me that John Reece would be emailing the old man and I panicked I couldn't help it. Of course Ray didn't mean to tell him, it just came out in conversation. He said that there had been a problem with the computer system and you needed to resolve it by accessing the servers to delete some emails. Of course he asked *which* emails and Ray blurted out '*The one from John Reece threatening to sue the paper over plagiarism*'.

RAY: Yes, just blurted it out you see, very unfortunate!

RICHARD: But...what, but what, why did...

RAY: I know; it's bloody complicated.

JILL: And of course now the old man knows it defeats the original objective of having to remove it. Complete waste of time that the email was deleted in the first place. Whether it was deleted by you or not, or whether it remained in his inbox for him to see it doesn't matter now.

RAY: Absolutely! Absolutely, doesn't matter!

(There is a stunned silence as Richard tries to get his head around what's been said and Jill and Ray attempt to come up with anything they can to fend off any further questions)

RICHARD: So let me get this clear...

JILL: There's no point pouring over it any more. What's done is done.

RAY: Spilt milk, if only I could turn the clock back.

RICHARD: I was just hoping the old man would get over the wig and photo thing and he'd re-instate me. I'm sure he couldn't sack me for being in his office and discovering the photos, but tampering with his computer that's a different matter. I should never have agreed to do it despite the two grand. Just about wrecks my life that does...

RAY: Mine too. Mine too!

RICHARD: Why is your life wrecked? By all accounts you're sitting bloody pretty.

RAY: No not at all. Who knows what may happen?

JILL: Right. Well I'm glad we've got all that out of the way. I really wasn't looking forward to being the bearer of bad tidings...

RICHARD: Absolutely buggered, buggered absolutely, that's me! Okay I've no option. I'll go home and break the news to Mandy the girlfriend. She won't be pleased I can tell you. Right then, let's just sort the cash out shall we Jill, and I'll be off.

JILL: The cash?

RICHARD: The two grand.

JILL: Oh, but I thought I explained that.

RICHARD: Explained what?

RAY: I can see your point.

RICHARD: You said you'd give me the two grand, that's why I'm here.

JILL: But he knows all about it. It's all out in the open.

RICHARD: Who knows all about it, and what the hell is out in the open? I'm not following this.

RAY: Complicated, very complicated.

JILL: (*Fed up with trying to conceal her motive*): Richard. It's not that complicated. You are not going to get the money!

RAY: I'm the first to admit that's not complicated at all.

RICHARD: Not going to get the money...

JILL: No.

RICHARD: Why? Why bloody not!

JILL: Because I don't have the money.

RICHARD: Why?

JILL: Because Ray had to borrow it off me for an emergency and said he'd pay you directly as soon as he could.

RAY: Did I? Oh that's good...I mean that's right. That's right! As soon as I can rustle it up.

RICHARD: So when will you have it?

RAY: As soon as...soon I'm sure. I can phone you.

RICHARD: (*Deflated*): Bloody hells bells. It gets worse. Ray you must give it to me today, I really need it?

RAY: Wish I could, but I've only just borrowed it from Jill you see...

RICHARD: What? I'm not following all this! So you'll call me tomorrow? I've no job, no income, a bloody huge mortgage; bills to pay. I'm going to need that two grand as soon as bloody possible.

JILL: He's very reliable.

RICHARD: Right. I'm off then. Give me a call Ray!

RAY: Sure. Yes, see you.

(Richard exits)

RAY: You are unbelievable! Unbelievable! Have you ever stopped to think how much mayhem you cause wandering through your pathetic life? Why on earth I went along with the 'emergency' loan I'll never know. I sincerely hope you've a plan to pay him off. I'm not having him breathing down my neck...

JILL: Of course I'll sort it out. It's not what I planned you must see that.

RAY: Frankly no, I don't see that. How will you pay him, another relative about to cough it....hopefully this time with a bigger wad to part with

(Jill's mobile phone rings she answers it)

JILL: How are you? Oh you *are* joking. Sacked! No. Not a word, nothing. When did all this happen? Oh I see. No warning? Often the way I know. When? Goodness me that soon. Look, call me when the dust has settled.

RAY: It must be contagious! Everyone's getting sacked. Who now?

JILL: Dreadful. Rob's lost his job at DRDM.

RAY: Rob? Who's Rob? Oh that Rob. Hang on, what about the job, The Tour de France?

JILL: I know.

RAY: Know what?

JILL: They've canned the project. The whole department has gone. Cut backs apparently.

RAY: You are joking.

JILL: No. Everyone's lost their job.

RAY: Unbelievable!

JILL: Tragic.

RAY: So let me get this straight. First, and we go back in time of course, you steal my wife and convert her to lesbianism. More recently, I mean yesterday, you call me here under the pretext of a 'great opportunity'.

JILL: Look Ray...

RAY: Like an idiot I come. You tell me about your act of plagiarism and seek my help, then, if that's not cheek enough, you implicate me in the affair by telling Reece I gave you approval to plagiarise his material; to get you off the hook. He threatens not just to sue the paper but me too.

JILL: Look, do we need to...

RAY: Hang on a minute! The least you can do is indulge me!

JILL: Sorry.

RAY: So, without any effort on my part, I'm about to lose my job and, I'm about to be sued, and will probably never get another job in journalism again, then, and let us not forget, we have a desperate Sub-editor who thinks I owe him two grand and will no doubt hound me day and night until he's paid. Added to that, there's a wacky secretary, who thank god has an understanding of her own sexuality, who believes that I've offered her a fantastic job as a journalist covering the Tour de France.

JILL: I know Ray I'm sorry. I just...

RAY: Its better you say nothing; nothing more to say. Well. I'm off home, if I've still got a home to go to...Of course I haven't have I. You live in my home with my wife, I live with my mother.

JILL: Ray. This is a complete mess and I'm truly sorry. I'll make it up to you I promise.

RAY: I'd prefer it if you didn't thanks.

(Kate enters)

KATE: How did he take it?

RAY: Who?

KATE: Richard. I saw him leaving.

RAY: Thrilled, absolutely elated as we all are.

JILL: It's off I'm afraid.

KATE: Off. What's off?

JILL: Tour de France.

KATE: I don't understand.

RAY: No surprise there then.

JILL: Kate. This has all been a complete mess. If only you hadn't told me about the 'phone call from John Reece to the old man we wouldn't be where we are now, but I forgive you.

Black out.

Curtain