CHART THROB

Episode 1: Let's Meet the Judges

Ву

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Adapted from the novel by Ben Elton

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A BLACK SCREEN

The sound of a screaming, frenzied STUDIO AUDIENCE. Names, chants, all are mixed into one deafening mass of noise. The voice of KEELY, a female television presenter, speaks out over the din.

KEELY

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great honour to announce that the winner of this year's Chart Throb...is...

The audience crescendos, waiting for the next, all-important words. The pause grows, becoming more and more intense.

Then the sounds fade away.

FADE IN:

INT. NEWS STUDIO - MORNING

SUPER: Four months earlier

A news broadcast is in process. A ROYAL CORRESPONDENT is finishing an item. A large picture of HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF WALES (HRH) is projected onto the wall behind him.

ROYAL CORRESPONDENT

...His Royal Highness has denied the allegations, but some commentators have suggested that public perception of him will be further damaged by this latest embarrassing incident. Simon.

The NEWSREADER, Simon, sits at the desk.

NEWSREADER

Thanks, Peter.

He shuffles his notes, turns to face a different camera.

NEWSREADER

In other news, the TV and music producer Calvin Simms is today returning from his honeymoon in Venice ahead of filming for the new series of his hit TV show Chart Throb, scheduled to start in the next few weeks.

CONTINUED: 2.

He turns to face the large screen at the side of the studio, where SUSAN, a pretty television reporter, is shown at Heathrow, microphone in hand.

NEWSREADER

We can now cross over live to London's Heathrow airport, where our Entertainment Correspondent Susan Andrews is waiting. Susan.

INT. HEATHROW ARRIVALS GATE

The atmosphere is heavy with anticipation, all eyes on the arrivals gate. DOZENS OF PHOTOGRAPHERS stand behind the barriers, waiting for someone to come through.

Susan talks to the television camera.

SUSAN

Thanks, Simon. I'm standing here at London Heathrow airport, where any minute now we're expecting the arrival of Calvin Simms, whose private jet touched down moments ago. Simms, the multi-millionaire media mogul best known for being the creator of and judge on the hit TV talent show Chart Throb, has been on honeymoon in Venice with his new wife, Dakota. But with filming for the new series of Chart Throb scheduled to begin soon, it's back to business for the man many call 'The Nastiest Person on Television'.

There's a stirring amongst the photographers, who ready their cameras. The correspondent turns to look at the gate.

SUSAN

I think he's about to come through...

Right on cue, the two people everyone has been waiting for appear: CALVIN and DAKOTA SIMMS, holding hands, dressed in holiday clothes.

Calvin, 42, is handsome and as assured as only a man that successful and powerful can be. Dakota, 34, is tall and stunning, a member of the American Deep South aristocracy.

CONTINUED: 3.

SUSAN (V.O.)

And there they are, Calvin Simms and the beautiful Dakota, who were wed at Westminster Abbey in a lavish ceremony two weeks ago.

The cameras go crazy, a blinding display of flashes accompanied by the endless clicking of shutters. The couple walk towards the barriers.

SUSAN (V.O.)

The couple have been together for just over three years now, and have established themselves as one of the most famous celebrity couples in the world. Rumours continue to circulate that they plan to start a family straight away, although Simms has said he's not yet ready to scale back his business commitments.

Calvin stops, raises a hand and waves, smiling. Dakota looks strangely subdued.

The photographers shout to the couple, asking them to look this way, that way. After posing for a few seconds, Calvin leads Dakota away.

SUSAN (V.O.)

There they go, off to the cars waiting for them outside the terminal, ready to take them to Simms' mansion on The Bishop's Avenue, Hampstead, which he has said he intends to make their marital home. This is Susan Andrews, at London Heathrow airport. Simon, back to you.

EXT. MOTORWAY - MORNING

A black limousine cruises down the outside lane, carrying the Simms away from the airport.

INT. LIMOUSINE

Calvin relaxes in his seat, talking on a mobile. A newspaper lies next to him.

Dakota sits close-by, looking out the tinted window.

CONTINUED: 4.

CALVIN

(into phone)

Trent? Trent. It's me. Yeah, we got back about half an hour ago. Yes, the flight was fine. No, we - look, can you stop arse-licking and just listen to me? How's the vetting coming along? Uh-uh. Uh-uh. Right, fine. I have a good feeling about this series, Trent. A very good feeling. Alright, keep going.

He hangs up, smiles at Dakota.

CALVIN

Sorry about that, darling. A mogul's work is never done, you know?

Dakota smiles back, but it seems strangely strained.

Calvin picks up the newspaper, looks at the front page. A picture of HRH smiles back, accompanied by a scandalous headline. Calvin laughs.

CALVIN

God, the Prince of Wales, on the front page again. What a bloody disaster. Someone needs to give that man a proper talking to.

He throws the newspaper aside, reaches for the minibar.

EXT. THE BISHOP'S AVENUE - MORNING

Huge, stunning houses protected by gates and walls line both sides of The Bishop's Avenue, London's most exclusive residential street.

The limousine pulls off the road and passes through the gates of Calvin Simms' magnificent mansion.

SUPER: Calvin Simms' home, London

INT. CALVIN SIMMS' MANSION - HALLWAY - MORNING

The large front door opens, and Calvin carries Dakota over the threshold.

CONTINUED: 5.

CALVIN

Home sweet home, darling!

He sets her down. She walks away as Calvin oversees the drivers and porters carrying in the luggage. He turns to Dakota, who is looking around the hallway.

CALVIN

What do you think? Not bad, eh? Cost me a fortune, this place, but I think it was worth it!

The luggage has been brought in. The porters wait to be dismissed.

PORTER

Will that be all, Mr. Simms?

CALVIN

Yes, thanks guys.

They file out, shutting the door behind them.

CALVIN

So, what do you want to do now, baby? Shall I give you the tour, or do you want to go straight up to the master bedroom and pick up where we left off in Venice? Oh, hang on, first I need to call -

Dakota interrupts, her head held high. She speaks in a thick Deep South accent.

DAKOTA

Calvin, I want a divorce.

Calvin just stands where he is, mouth agape.

BERYL (O.S.)

(in a Swindon accent)
What do you mean, the pig won't shit?

INT. BERYL BLENHEIM'S MANSION - HALLWAY - MORNING

SUPER: Beryl Blenheim's home, Los Angeles

The hallway of a big, sunny mansion in Beverley Hills, LA.

CONTINUED: 6.

BERYL BLENHEIM, 40, ex-druggie, ex-alchie, ex-food addict, ex-sex addict, ex-rock star and, most importantly, EX-MAN, stands in an evening gown and gold stilettos, her marigold glove-clad hands on her hips.

A television crew stands around in the hallway. The man who replies to Beryl is the director, ARNOLD, 34.

A black, pot-bellied pig sniffs at a nearby plant pot.

ARNOLD

The pig won't shit, Beryl, what can I tell you?

BERYL

I told you we should have used one of my own pigs.

ARNOLD

We thought we had a chance of a decent shit this way. The people at the animal acting agency said they fed it up big.

Beryl sighs, taps her foot, looks at her watch.

BERYL

Give it something to make it shit.

ARNOLD

We did. It didn't.

BERYL

I have a life, Arnold!

ARNOLD

And I have a crew and if this pig takes much longer to take a dump we're gonna be running some serious overtime here.

BERYL

You said this would only take an hour.

ARNOLD

I said I'd scheduled an hour. It's a great idea, okay?

He paces across the hall, showing what the scene was supposed to look like.

CONTINUED: 7.

ARNOLD

You're on your way to the Recoverers' Ball, Serenity and the kids are waiting in the car, but then you see the pig's crapped on the carpet! So you have to get down on your hands and knees, in your gown and jewellery, to clean it up. Fucking gold.

BERYL

Yes, thank you Spielberg, I know the fucking plot. But it's been two and half fucking hours now! I've already had cancel my bum lift, and Priscilla's doing an album signing at the record store...you'll have to use some stock footage, then shoot me cleaning up the pudding separately.

Arnold looks dubious.

ARNOLD

The whole point of you being here in your evening gown, Beryl, is to tie you to the turd.

BERYL

What turd?! There is no turd, that's the problem!

ARNOLD

Stock footage is a high-risk strategy. I mean, every shitting shot we have is out there. They're TV classics. We have them featured on a special bonus DVD. I just don't think we could get away with using them again.

BERYL

I knew when we started this we should have gone with shitting dogs like the fucking Osbournes did.

ARNOLD

Please Beryl, as if. The whole pig thing has given you the edge. They're much more rock 'n' roll and their DNA is really close to humans', which helps you with the whole 'Mom' thing. CONTINUED: 8.

A female CREW MEMBER puts her hand up, tries to get the pair's attention.

CREW MEMBER

Err...excuse me...

But Arnold has raised a touchy subject. Beryl rounds on him.

BERYL

I don't need help with the 'mum' thing, okay? I'm a fantastic mother. I've won awards.

ARNOLD

We know, Beryl. We all know what a great mom you are. You couldn't do a better job even if you were an actual woman -

BERYL

I AM a fucking woman!

In the background, the crew member tries again.

CREW MEMBER

Hello, excuse me...

ARNOLD

(pushing on)

- but the viewers love the pigs. They love the pigs, and they love to see them shit. We all agreed that this was a great way to end the season.

Beryl looks at her watch again.

BERYL

Look, forget the pig. Put some chocolate pudding down and I'll discover it. Then stick the pig outside in a hedge and shoot her like she's trying to hide.

ARNOLD

Please, Beryl. That is just so lame. This our final programme of the season. If this is gonna look good then we have to see the pig crap with you in shot!

CONTINUED: 9.

BERYL

Don't you talk to me like that. I sold forty million albums when I was man! I'm the star, you're just the fucking director. Now get the pudding!

ARNOLD

I just think that this is the most horrendous artistic compromise.

The crew member just shouts this time.

CREW MEMBER

Arnold!

He turns around, thoroughly annoyed.

ARNOLD

What?!

CREW MEMBER

(pointing)

The pig crapped.

Everyone turns and looks. The pig is proudly sniffing a fresh, steaming turd.

BERYL

Shit.

ARNOLD

Everybody get into position!

There's a mad scramble as everyone complies.

INT. CALVIN SIMMS' MANSION - HALLWAY - MORNING

Calvin stands near the door, staring at Dakota his mouth still hanging open.

CALVIN

A divorce?

DAKOTA

Yes, Calvin, I want a divorce.

Calvin is struggling to understand quite what's going on. He raises a hand to his head.

CONTINUED: 10.

CALVIN

We've only been married a fortnight!

DAKOTA

Well believe me, darlin', it felt like a year.

CALVIN

Why bother with the sodding honeymoon, then? Why not just dump me outside the church, if that's how you felt?!

Dakota shakes her head, wags a finger.

DAKOTA

Gotta consummate, pussycat. Can't have you claimin' I withheld ma favours an' gettin' a judge to declare our nuptials null an' void.

In Calvin's head, the pennies are beginning to tumble down.

CALVIN

That was why you made such a racket in Venice! Jesus, and to think I went to all the trouble of booking the surrounding rooms, compensating that bloody whingeing couple who claimed they'd got no sleep at all...when all you wanted were bloody witnesses!

Dakota nods, sighs dramatically.

DAKOTA

I do believe everybody in the whole of Venice knows how insatiably you used ma poh, weak body, Calvin. I was lil' more than a sweet young virgin child and you done just about furked me into a coma.

Calvin snorts in disbelief.

CALVIN

'Sweet virgin child'? A 'sweet virgin...'? I don't believe this. I can't actually believe this is happening.

CONTINUED: 11.

DAKOTA

I am divorcin' you, honey, and I'm filin' in the City of Angels, which means o'course I get half.

CALVIN

Half? After a two week marriage?! No sodding way. On what grounds?

DAKOTA

(with pride)

Mental cruelty.

CALVIN

Mental cruelty?!

DAKOTA

Uh-uh.

CALVIN

When was I ever cruel to you?

DAKOTA

You ain't been, honey, except for borin' me half to death about how clever you are an' all. We both know that. But fortunately for me, since you have so carefully cultivated an image as the nastiest, most brutal man in television, I don't imagine that a divorce court will need much persuasion to believe that you treated yo' sweet virginal bride the same as you treat yo' dumb contestants.

Calvin takes a deep breath, tries to calm down.

CALVIN

Look, this is ridiculous. Can't we just go through to the living room, sit down, and talk about this?

DAKOTA

Nu-uh. I'm leavin'. I got a car waitin' a lil' way down the street.

CALVIN

What? Immediately?

CONTINUED: 12.

DAKOTA

Sooner if possible.

CALVIN

Have you been planning this from the start?

DAKOTA

Of course.

CALVIN

The very start? Three years ago?

DAKOTA

Uh-uh.

CALVIN

You mean you never loved me at all?

DAKOTA

Duh!

Calvin sinks into a chair near the door, head in his hands.

CALVIN

This has to be the most cold-hearted, cynical act in the history of...

Dakota interrupts, sounding almost bored.

DAKOTA

Please, Calvin, don't look so downhearted. After all, sweetheart, you never loved me, neither. All you wanted was to get something you didn't have: a wife. For kids, for promotions, to make yo' parents happy. To finally get rid of those gay rumours once and for all.

Calvin raises his head and opens his mouth, about to respond.

But the look on his face shows that he realises she's right, although he didn't know that until this moment.

CALVIN

(to himself)

Christ...

CONTINUED: 13.

DAKOTA

See, Calvin? You ain't the ultimate manipulator, after all. You mighta fooled the whole world into thinkin' you're the cleverest, most insightful man there ever was, but you ain't got the better of me. I will see you in California!

She marches towards the door. Calvin springs up, blocking her path.

CALVIN

This is outrageous! It's theft, pure and simple. You're trying to steal from me.

Dakota sighs.

DAKOTA

Oh, come on, Calvin, yo' a thief yo'self. Why, everybody in the whole world knows that *Chart Throb* is just *X Factor* with different judges. You stole the whole thing! And now I'm stealin' from you.

Dakota has touched a nerve.

CALVIN

I've told you before, there's more to it than that! It's not just a sodding X Factor rip-off, it's so much more. The reason my show's so successful is that I'm the best! I have the touch, I understand the process. When it comes to manipulating the public, I'm fucking Goebbels, mate. I make the fiction real. No-one gets it like I get it.

DAKOTA

Goebbels?

CALVIN

Yes, Goebbels.

DAKOTA

Yo' mother must be very proud.

She pushes past Calvin, throws open the door.

But Calvin has had an idea. He shouts after her.

CONTINUED: 14.

CALVIN

All right darling! You win.

Dakota stops, turns round.

CALVIN

You want half of everything I've earned? How about I give you the chance to get all of it?

Dakota leans against the door-frame.

DAKOTA

I'm listenin'...

CALVIN

You say Chart Throb is just a rip-off. That I'm just another rude English guy who got lucky. I say I bring a unique talent to my show, that's it what I do behind the cameras that matters -

DAKOTA

I know, Calvin. You never tire of tellin' me.

CALVIN

Well, we're currently doing the preliminary vetting for the new series. I challenge you to name a ringer. Put up anyone you like and I will ensure that they win the competition. If I succeed, you walk away with nothing. If I lose, you get it all.

There's a moment's silence as this sinks in. Dakota is taken by surprise, but clearly intrigued.

DAKOTA

I can choose anybody?

CALVIN

Well, they have to be British or Irish...and not a paedophile. Even I couldn't swing a Gary Glitter.

DAKOTA

That's yo' only stipulation?

CONTINUED: 15.

CALVIN

Yep. Put up anybody you like, except a paedophile, and I will turn them into this year's Chart Throb.

DAKOTA

Well. Ah must say, this does appeal to ma gamin' instincts.

CALVIN

I thought it might.

DAKOTA

O' course, I couldn't allow you to weight the other candidates.

CALVIN

You mean pick eleven other people with even less chance of winning than the one you nominate? I could to do that, I suppose, but it would make a pretty shitty show. Let's see...last year, Chart Throb averaged eight and a half million viewers. If we drop below eight this time, even once, I lose by default.

Dakota can't keep herself from smiling.

DAKOTA

You'd risk everything on this?

CALVIN

I'm risking nothing. I know I can win. I'll give you a day to pick your ringer. Do we have a bet?

He offers his hand. Dakota's smile widens.

DAKOTA

Well, ok then. We have a bet.

She reaches forward, and they shake.

DAKOTA

And I don't need a day to choose, neither. I've already decided.

INT. RODNEY ROOT'S OFFICE - MORNING

SUPER: Rodney Root's office, London

A fairly modest office in Berwick Street, London. RODNEY ROOT, 50, ex-80's-pop-group-member and once a vaguely-successful band manager, enters his office.

RODNEY

Morning, Maureen!

MAUREEN

Good morning, Mr. Root.

MAUREEN, 55, Rodney's long-suffering, maternal receptionist, sits behind a desk. Rodney hangs his coat on a hook.

RODNEY

Any messages?

MAUREEN

Your dress suit is ready at the dry cleaner's.

RODNEY

Right. Good. That's very good.

Both speak as if this innocuous piece of information is of vital importance.

MAUREEN

And Mr. Simms arrived back today. Did you want me to call him about that lunch you wanted?

RODNEY

No, that's alright, I'll call him. He's more likely to say yes if I'm the one asking.

(pause)

Not that, of course, he needs persuading to have lunch with me...

MAUREEN

Of course.

RODNEY

We're close friends you know, not just colleagues...

MAUREEN

Very close friends.

It's a lie, and they both know it.

CONTINUED: 17.

RODNEY

Anything else?

MAUREEN

Well...Iona rang.

Rodney shudders.

RODNEY

I'm not in. You know that, Maureen. Whenever Iona rings, I'm not in.

He walks towards the door to his office.

MAUREEN

(mumbled)

And Tesco called.

Rodney stops, comes back.

RODNEY

Sorry?

MAUREEN

I said Tesco called. Well, emailed, actually. Well, their marketing agency.

Rodney lights up like he's swallowed a lightbulb.

RODNEY

Tesco? The supermarket?

MAUREEN

Yes, but -

RODNEY

The biggest supermarket chain in Britain? Thirty percent market share?

MAUREEN

Yes, them, but -

Rodney paces around the room, excited now.

RODNEY

Well why didn't you say before, woman? I would love to work with Tesco. I'm exactly what they need: I'm loved, trusted, down to earth, instantly recognisable. Tesco and I would be a terrific combination!

CONTINUED: 18.

MAUREEN

Rodney, it isn't just you they want.

The light inside Rodney instantly dims.

RODNEY

They want the three of us?

MAUREEN

Well, that's certainly their base-line position...

RODNEY

They want me to approach Calvin and Beryl?

MAUREEN

They've written to them separately, but...

RODNEY

...they've received no response and so they've decided to try going through me.

MAUREEN

Reading between the lines I think that's...it. Yes.

Rodney looks hurt and offended. He raises his head high.

RODNEY

Do not dignify them with a reply. I will be in my office.

He turns and marches to the door. He opens it, then glances round. He looks more sad than angry.

RODNEY

Get me a tea, would you, Maureen?

MAUREEN

Yes, Mr. Root.

Rodney enters his office and shuts the door behind him.

EXT. LOS ANGELES RECORD STORE - MORNING

A black Hummer pulls into the parking lot of a big record store. There's a LARGE, ROWDY CROWD outside, mostly teenagers, all booing and shouting.

INT. HUMMER

Beryl looks out the window at the crowd. She sighs.

BERYL

Oh Christ.

EXT. RECORD STORE

As the Hummer pulls up, two large SECURITY GUARDS appear from the store entrance and push through the crowd. Between them is PRISCILLA BLENHEIM, 17, a Tinseltown princess.

They shepherd her through the crowd, the boos intensifying.

The Hummer pulls up. A door opens and Beryl climbs down. Priscilla sees her, leaps into her arms.

PRISCILLA

Dad!

BERYL

Don't call me Dad! I'm a mum, I've won awards.

PRISCILLA

Can we just go?

BERYL

Alright, alright, get in the car.

The two climb in, and the Hummer pulls away.

As it drives off one of the kids in the crowd hurls a takeaway Coke, which smashes against the side of the car, covering it in sticky liquid.

The Hummer swerves out of the parking lot, the crowd shouting after it.

INT. HUMMER

Priscilla sits with her head in her hands, sobbing her eyes out. Beryl has an arm around her.

PRISCILLA

It was horrible, Mom!

BERYL

There there, darling. Tell Mummy what happened.

PRISCILLA

It was fine at first. There were a loada people, maybe not all fans but at least they were pleased to see me, you know? But then the manager said I'd only be signing copies of my album, and then everyone started booing...and then he said I would sign anything, but that was even worse because one guy pulled down his pants, spread his ass and just yelled, "Then sign this!" It was...horrible!

BERYL

My poor baby...

PRISCILLA

And I didn't even sell any fucking albums!

BERYL

Now I'm sure that's not true, pumpkin. You must have sold some...

PRISCILLA

Eight, Mom! Eight! I was there for an hour and I sold eight albums, and two of those were to kids behind the checkout...

BERYL

Well a sale's a sale, sweetie...

This doesn't reassure Priscilla. She sobs even louder.

PRISCILLA

I'm a joke, Mom. A joke. Seventeen and I'm already washed up.

CONTINUED: 21.

BERYL

Rock 'n' roll's a tough game, darling.

PRISCILLA

I'm not in rock 'n' roll. To be in rock 'n' roll you have to sell albums, not just make one. You're supposed to be a fucking "rock tutor" on that show of yours in England, the Queen of Rock, a fucking mentor. How about mentoring your own daughter for a change?

Beryl withdraws her arm, irritated.

BERYL

Oh, get over yourself, Priscilla.

Priscilla lapses into silence. She wipes her eyes, and looks up at Beryl with wide eyes.

PRISCILLA

Mom?

BERYL

What?

PRISCILLA

Do you think kids don't buy my album because I'm a reality TV star, or because I'm shit?

BERYL

Hey, you wouldn't have got to make an album if you weren't a reality TV star.

PRISCILLA

That's not what I'm asking. Do you think I'm shit?

BERYL

What a stupid question, Priscilla. You're my daughter, of course I don't think you're shit.

PRISCILLA

I'm your step-daughter; I didn't get your talent, just your name. My real dad sold fried chicken.

CONTINUED: 22.

BERYL

Fucking good fried chicken.

PRISCILLA

Come on, what do you think of me, as a singer? I mean you're my manager, you must have an opinion. Can I sing?

Beryl sighs.

BERYL

Listen, babes. I do deals these days. That's my job. I got you a deal. What you do with it is your responsibility.

Priscilla doesn't reply. She looks miserable.

Beryl looks at her watch, then presses the intercom button to talk to the driver.

BERYL

Can we get a fucking move on, please? I have an appointment with my surgeon, and he's a very busy man!

PRISCILLA

God, you've always got a fucking appointment, Mom! What are you getting, another vagina?

BERYL

Don't you talk to your mother like that! I'm leaving for the UK tomorrow and I just want a little touching-up, that's all. Do you have any idea how much effort it takes to look this good?

She looks at her watch, stabs the button again.

BERYL

(into intercom)
Seriously, can you put your foot
down?

INT. LONDON TOWNHOUSE - DRAWING ROOM - MORNING

SUPER: The Prince of Wales' residence, London

A large drawing room on the ground floor of a London townhouse. HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF WALES (HRH), 60, a kind, gentle, softly-spoken man who just happens to be heir to the throne, sits in a chair by the window.

The door opens and KIRA, 16, a work-experience girl, shows Calvin into the room. HRH jumps up from his seat, comes over and warmly shakes Calvin's hand.

HRH

Hello, hello. Mr. Simms, isn't it? Have you come far? Was the traffic awful? I imagine it was. It always is, isn't it? I did a talk about it and how we need people-scale planning for our cities. Didn't do any good, of course. No-one listened. Just old buggerlugs banging on again. Heigh-ho. Who'd be a prince? Have you been offered some tea?

Kira comes over with a tray of tea and biscuits. She puts it down on a table as HRH gestures for Calvin to take a seat.

HRH

One of the youngsters from my charity, aren't you, Kira? Ex-offender. I just find you need to give young people a sense of purpose. Don't you agree? I'm sure you meet a lot of young people in your line of work, don't you? Thank you, Kira.

Kira curtsies, and leaves. HRH begins to pour the tea.

HRH

Now then, tea. Oh, would you like a biscuit? I bake them myself from stone-ground sunflower seeds and raw sugar. People say I'm mad, you know, but what's mad about a home-made biscuit?

He takes a biscuit and bites into it. Crumbs fall onto the lapels of his jacket.

CONTINUED: 24.

HRH

Oh, crumbs!

He laughs heartily at his own joke.

HRH

Ha ha ha! Good to laugh, don't you think? Sometimes I think if I didn't laugh I'd go stark raving bananas. Do you know they try to record my phone calls so they can publish the transcripts? Can you imagine anything more beastly or low? When I was at school, we called that eavesdropping. Sorry, I completely forgot about the biscuits. Do have one, they're awfully good.

He holds up the plate of biscuits. Calvin seems a little taken-aback by this verbal onslaught. He takes a biscuit, clears his throat.

CALVIN

Sir.

HRH

Yes, my dear fellow?

CALVIN

I wonder if I might explain why I've asked to see you, your Royal Highness.

HRH

Please, call me sir. Everybody does.

CALVIN

Yes, sir. Firstly, are you aware who I am and what I do?

HRH

Well, I had Kira explain to me about you and your show. I hear you're tremendously successful. I must say, well done.

He hands Calvin a cup of tea. Calvin takes it, sips.

CALVIN

Thank you, sir. Well, in that case, let's get down to business. I hope (MORE)

CONTINUED: 25.

CALVIN (cont'd)

you won't think me forward if I say that it strikes me you have a PR problem.

HRH sips his tea, nods.

HRH

Do you know, I rather think I do. I was saying so to my wife only this morning as I de-snailed the garden. Sometimes it seems as if every bugger in Britain's got it in for yours truly.

CALVIN

Yes it does, doesn't it? Let's face it, you are regularly ridiculed as a pampered dilettante who has a personal bum-wiper, consumes 90 percent of the nation's tax revenues, eats a raw fox for breakfast, smears the fresh blood on his children and then goes off to deliver a lecture about how all post-nineteenth century buildings are completely rubbish.

HRH

Yes, that's me. God knows where I'm supposed to find the time.

CALVIN

I think you're due for a change, sir.

HRH

Well, certainly. But what, if you'll forgive me for asking, Mr. Simms, has that to do with you?

Calvin puts down his teacup, leans forward.

CALVIN

I can make you popular again. Bigger and more loved than your mum is. I can make you a star.

HRH leans back a fraction, a suspicious look in his eyes.

HRH

Is this a set-up, Mr. Simms? Perhaps I am to be the subject of some hidden-camera prank? CONTINUED: 26.

CALVIN

Not at all, sir. The simple fact is I want you to win the next series of Chart Throb.

The words hang in the air. HRH looks taken-aback.

HRH

Goodness gracious. Why ever would you want that?

This is the part Calvin has been practising. He stands, walks towards the window and speaks with passion.

CALVIN

Because I'm a monarchist, sir.

HRH

No! Really?

CALVIN

Yes, sir. I have a deep and abiding loyalty and affection for the great historical institutions of this country and I despair to see how low they have fallen in public esteem.

HRH

Gosh, don't we all!

CALVIN

And what's more, I am in a unique position to do something about it. I produce a show that speaks directly to the public. There's no press or spin involved. I create stars. Real stars. Stars in the truest sense of the word, popular favourites, people with whom the public genuinely identify. I want to turn you into such a star.

HRH's eyes widen with excitement.

HRH

I say!

A thought occurs to him.

HRH

Hold on a tic, I may have spotted a problem. Isn't your show...

CONTINUED: 27.

CALVIN

Yes, sir?

HRH

...well, isn't it a talent show? A show on which people sing?

CALVIN

That's right, sir.

HRH

You want me to audition as a singer?

CALVIN

Exactly.

HRH looks dubious.

HRH

Oh, I don't know about that. I am to be a head of state, Mr. Simms. That is a high and serious office.

Calvin approaches HRH, prepared with an answer for that, too.

CALVIN

What's serious anymore, sir? This is the twenty-first century, the rules have changed! Politics isn't serious anymore, it's showbiz. Nothing but soundbites and razzmatazz. You're a man of convictions and it frustrates you that no-one listens to you -

HRH

They don't, it's maddening.

CALVIN

- well, sorry to have to tell you, sir, but people don't want convictions. They want personalities.

This is point Calvin has been building to. He speaks slowly, with emphasis.

CALVIN

Your problem, sir, is that nobody knows the *real you*.

HRH frowns for a moment. Then, he begins to smile.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 28.

HRH

Do you know, I think you may have something there.

Calvin sense victory. He presses on.

CALVIN

Yes, sir, I think I do. I am offering you a fresh chance, a chance to reach a regular audience of eight and a half million people, sir. Think of that, eight and a half million people every week. Predominantly young people, sir, don't forget that. Our demographic is a prince or politician's dream.

HRH

But I'd have to sing for it.

CALVIN

Well, yes, but what's wrong with singing? People like singing. Can you sing, by the way?

HRH hesitates. Calvin looks momentarily concerned.

CALVIN

Can you sing?

HRH smiles bashfully.

HRH

Well, I'm not one to boast, but I must confess I have been told I have pleasant light baritone. Nothing to shout about, you understand.

CALVIN

There you are, then. Come and sing on Chart Throb.

HRH still doesn't look entirely convinced. Calvin rushes to his seat, falls on his knees with overwhelming passion.

CALVIN

The monarchy is in crisis, sir!
Destroyed by the very people it
represents! It is time to reach out
to those people, to reach out and
save their treasured national
institutions from the ridicule they
have allowed them to descend into!

CONTINUED: 29.

HRH

By appearing on a nationwide talent show?

CALVIN

Yes! By appearing on the single most influential, ubiquitous and powerful cultural institution in the country. You, sir, with the help of your passionate commitment to organic farming, high-fibre diets and full youth employment, coupled with your pleasant light baritone, can save the monarchy as surely as Queen Bess did at Tilbury. This, sir, is your duty!

HRH

My duty?

CALVIN

Yes, sir! Your duty!

HRH

To appear on Chart Throb?

CALVIN

Yes, sir! It's Nineteen-Forty and the barbarians are at the gates. The nation is holding out for a hero, sir. One that's strong, one that's fast, one that's fresh from the fight! Will you be that hero? Will you answer the call? Say you will, sir, say you will! Your country needs you!

And now he reveals his trump card.

CALVIN

Plus...the people will love you again.

HRH raises his eyes. His lip quivers.

HRH

Do you...do you really think so?

There seems to be a wealth of weariness in HRH's sad eyes.

CALVIN

Sir, I quarantee it.

HRH considers for a moment. Then, he smiles.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: 30.

HRH

Oh, go on then.

Calvin looks relieved.

CALVIN

Really?

HRH

Yes, go on. Might as well give it a shot, eh?

Calvin springs to his feet, claps his hands.

CALVIN

Excellent. Let's get started, then.

FADE OUT

END OF EPISODE ONE