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Gasping

A play

Ben Elton

Samuel French — London
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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GASPING

This revised edition of the play was agreed by the author, and first produced on national tour in the Spring of 2000. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

Philip	David Haig
Sir Chiffley Lockheart	Neil Stacy
Sandy	Stephen Mapes
Kirsten Carlton	Iona Grant

Directed by Paul Jepson

The original version was first presented by Phil McIntyre by arrangement with Proscenium Productions at the Theatre Royal Haymarket, London, on 1st June 1990, with the following cast:

Philip	Hugh Laurie
Sir Chiffley Lockheart	Bernard Hill
Sandy	Simon Mattacks
Miss Hodges	Catherine McQueen
Kirsten	Jaye Griffiths
Weather Woman/ Minister/Reporter	Catherine McQueen

With the voice of Stephen Fry

Directed by Bob Spiers
Designed by Terry Parsons
Lighting by Mark Henderson
Produced by Philip McIntyre

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(See also page ii)

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CHARACTERS

Philip, youngish
Chief, old
Sandy, young
Kirsten, young

And the taped voices of **Voice Over**, **DJ**, **Little Jenny's Voice**, **Mum's Voice**, **Weather Woman**, **Reporter**

The action of the play takes place in a variety of locations

Time—the present

Other plays by Ben Elton
published by Samuel French Ltd

Popcorn
Silly Cow

ACT I

SCENE 1

The executive boardroom of Lockheart Holdings

A power office with large panoramic windows. A strategy meeting is in progress, with graphs, charts and a champagne cart

Philip and Sandy, two top young execs are pitching to Sir Chiffley Lockheart, the Chief

Philip And so, Chief, as you can see, all divisions are way way ahead of seasonal predictions. Look, (*he takes a graph*) this is my biggest graph and Peter Profit is way way off the right hand corner... I've had to glue two together... (*He proudly folds it out*) Well, obviously, *I* didn't do it. I had some of my people do it. Anyway, whoever did it, the results, as I think you'll agree, are impressive. Our corporate hem-line is showing off plenty of stunning thigh. If this keeps up much longer we're going to have to move into a much bigger pair of corporate trousers. Possibly Switzerland.

Chief (*slightly confused by Philip's language*) Hmm, yes, can I just get this clear, Philip. We're making money? Is that what you're trying to say?

Philip Senior money, Chief. If God wanted to buy into Lockheart stock, he'd have to think twice *and* talk to his people.

Chief Good. Good, at least I think good. So taking a broad view, Philip, charts and presentation rubbish aside, what's your personal gut reaction?

Philip (*thoughtfully pacing*) Well, Chief, I would have to say, that I'm very excited. In fact I have said it, I said it to my people only this morning, "People," I said, "I am very excited," and they know I don't mince about the bush. But it isn't just me, Chief, the sales task force is very excited. The boys in corporate raiding are very excited. The market strike unit damage control spin doctors are very excited. Above all, Chief, *you* should be excited... Sir Chiffley Lockheart should feel like a twelve-year-old who's just discovered it's not only for pissing.

Chief And you, Sandy, how do you feel about our corporate erection? Are you as excited as Philip?

Sandy Well, Chief, I wouldn't want to commit myself fully until I'd talked to my people, but off the cuff, as a non-binding, ball park reaction, I'd say that if anything I was slightly more excited than Philip.

Chief *More* excited?

Sandy Slightly, Sir.

Chief I see. (*He pauses*) Unfortunately, I'm not.

Sandy Slightly more excited than Philip in one way, Sir ... but in twelve other ways, rather less so... (*He stifles a yawn*)

Philip (*after a surprised pause*) Chief, I'm just not in following mode here. I mean, look at the graph! We couldn't be making any more money if we were a lesbian couple with six test-tube kids living off the social security in an old Labour controlled borough while the Home Office tried to send us back to Sri Lanka.

Chief Please don't misunderstand me, Philip. I'm pleased, good lord yes, oh no question there. It's just that I'm not excited.

Philip You're not?

Chief I couldn't be less excited if you were both Swedish.

Philip (*pulling himself together*) Chief, you're absolutely right. OK, Peter Profit has opened up his dirty mac and said, "What about that for a whopper". But hell, there are bigger girls in the cat-house down the street and they can squat down and pick up ping-pong balls! We have to meet Terry Triumph and Derek Disaster and treat those two impostors just the same.

Sandy The Chief's right, Phil. Champagne? Forget it, mine's a cup of coffee, very black, and I'm on to my next video ledger heading for the right hand column with my decimal point in my hand.

Philip (*packing up visual aids*) Sorry to have wasted your time, Chief. We'll be back when this red line (*he points at the graph*) is wound round the room so often you'd think it was a Blue Peter Christmas appeal...

They are about to go

Chief (*stopping them*) Don't be absurd, our profits are quite magnificent. I'm delighted with them. But you have to face facts. There is nothing remotely *exciting* about our present success. We make our huge piles of money by *having* huge piles of money. We buy land, take over factories, invest in other people's labour and creative zeal.

Philip and Sandy are rather crushed

Gentlemen, I'm no longer a young man, but my life so far has been a full one. I've seen a great deal and I've bought almost all of it. I've hobbed with the rich and I've nobbed with the beautiful. Do you want to know what is exciting? (*After a pause*) The Pot Noodle. That's what's exciting. Find me a Pot Noodle, *then* you shall see your old Chief excited.

Brief pause

Philip (*pacing across the room, hitting the intercom*) Daphne, get your sweet

little ass in here pronto dammit, with some Norris Noodles, instant variety, assorted flavours and why the *hell* wasn't this anticipated. You're paid to *think* goddammit. (*He turns the intercom off*) All sorted, Chief, I can't imagine how it got overlooked.

Chief moves to the intercom

Chief (*into the intercom*) Cancel the last request, Miss Hodges. I should explain, Philip, that I am employing a metaphor...

Philip You won't find I have a problem with that, Chief; if a guy's good, I don't care where his parents were born.

Chief (*with an arm around Philip*) Philip, come over here, let me show you something.

Philip With you, Chief.

Chief It's a painting by Rembrandt, who as you may be aware, was a painter. It is a portrait.

They cross to the wall where a picture hangs

Philip Oh... Oh Sir, oh oh oh, *Chief*... it's exquisite, Sir, quite exquisite ... the uhm, colour ... and the ... light, yes, that's it, the light. Am I right, Sandy? Back me up.

Sandy No question, Philip, the guy had senior talent. The sort of rough-hewn, fierce-eyed, canvas-covering cowboy who'd get up in the morning and say to his shaving mirror, "I *can* paint. I *will* paint." By mid-afternoon he's holding a major retrospective and he's *bored*.

Philip Exactly! Chief, let me tell you a little about the way I see this guy. Come five thirty on the West bank of the Seine, when all the other smock-wearers are packing up their brushes ready for another evening of booze, whores, and trying to come to terms with being only three feet tall, friend Rembrandt power-packs another paletteful, e-mails the Louvre to clear a wall, and before you know it, the *Mona Lisa*'s winking that inscrutable wink at him while her ears dry.

Chief You're an admirer, then?

Philip Be a fool not to be, Chief. The fact that Rembrandt had access to real business-class ability is *not* negotiable. Christ, you only have to look at the guy's product. (*He indicates the canvas*)

Chief Well, you may be right, I'm sure you are, but as it happens, this isn't the picture. This is the picture of the bright Spanish girl in the nude that some clever so-and-so sells in millions every year. The Rembrandt's behind it. (*He pushes a button*)

The picture rises up, to reveal a second picture set in the wall

What do you think?

Philip ... And this one's the Rembrandt, is it?

Chief It is.

Philip Oh, oh, Chief, oh oh oh, *Chief*... it's exquisite, Sir, quite exquisite...

Chief The light and colour good?

Philip Terrific.

Chief Good, because this pretty Dutch girl cost me seventy-two million pounds. I think they saw me coming, what do you think?

Philip We-ell, I suppose it is a substantial *wad* to lay out for a piccy, but you're a "can do, must have" kind of guy, Sir. Sandy?

Sandy When Sir Chiffley Lockheart says "I want", the price tag does *not* have a seat at the negotiating table.

Chief The point I am trying to make, gentlemen, is that this (*he indicates the painting*) is a Pot Noodle. And this... (*he takes the Spanish picture*) by a matter of coincidence is also a Pot Noodle. Do you want to know what a Pot Noodle is?

Philip Uhm ... it's a painting?

Chief A Pot Noodle is the most beautiful thing on Earth. It is a new way of making money. A way of making money ... *where no money existed before*: the very definition of excitement.

Philip Look, I'm probably being thicker than an elephant dick sandwich here, Chief, but I'm just not in an "understanding you" mode at all. Uhm ... what *is* a Pot Noodle?

Chief It's a large plastic cup containing chemically-saturated dried spaghetti and peas to which the consumer is instructed to add boiling water.

Philip Ye-e-s ... and perhaps you could talk me through the significance factor on this one...

Chief The most unlikely food stuff in history. When they launched it nobody gave it a chance ... nonetheless, against all expectations the market not only absorbed it, but embraced it. There was no drop in sales of any form of food. Money had been generated where *no money existed before.*

Philip (*very impressed*) And all because of one bonkers, iron-willed troubleshooter who put his balls in a cup of spaghetti.

Chief Only the British could market Pot Noodle, because only the British would eat them. That unknown marketing hero had faith in the concrete, rat-like digestive system of the British consumer and he's been in profit since day one.

Philip My God, Chief, that's probably the most inspirational anecdote I've come across since I first leafed through Gideon in a *Holiday Inn*.

Chief Pot Noodles come in all shapes and sizes. This picture is worth seventy-two million because that's what I paid for it, nothing to do with its intrinsic value. There's probably more light and colour in a pack of fruit-flavoured Polos. What makes the thing so special is that when I sell it the bidding will *start* at seventy-two million. This (*he indicates the Spanish*

painting) is also a Pot Noodle... Who could possibly have predicted that anyone would want anything so ugly, and yet some brilliant fellow thought of printing them on hardboard and getting Woolworth's to stock them next to the Pick'n'Mix. Anyone worth their company BMW can carve a bigger share of an existing market, but show me the person who can make a pound where *no pound was to be made*. That's the fellow who's going to be sitting alongside me and the board in the executive jacuzzi whirlpool bath.

Philip The executive jacuzzi, Chief, that's a mighty big carrot!

Chief Find me a Pot Noodle and you're in it, Philip, what's more you can sit on one of the jets. Find me a pot noodle!! Bring the excitement back! Make me some money where no money existed. Make an old man happy!!

Black-out

Scene 2

Chief's office. A few months later

The Chief and Philip

Chief Sorry to keep you waiting, Philip, but I've been considering your memo and I must say it confused me slightly. You say here (*he refers to the memo*) you've grabbed the challenge by the balls and sunk your teeth into it. Does this mean you have an idea?

Philip Chief, my metaphorical balls are so lacerated you'd think I had a hypothetical crocodile up my trousers. I don't mind admitting that these last few months, since you outlined the Pot Noodle brief, have been about as fertile as a sperm bank after a power cut.

Chief But no longer.

Philip I think not, Sir. You're probably aware that we recently acquired the Associated London Press and Communications Group. Well, Sir, I was checking out the titles we'd acquired, looking for a decent male, adult-interest magazine... They have some bloody interesting articles about vintage sports cars in those male, adult-interest magazines, you know.

Chief Of course they do, and there's nothing dirty or shameful in that.

Philip I suppose I was trying to get my mind off noodles ... but no go, I'm afraid. (*He paces*) I was restless, fretful, I could feel it, I could smell it...

Chief (*slightly doubtful*) Now then, Philip, I'm confused, are we still talking about your idea here? Or have we moved on to male, adult-interest magazines?

Philip Still the idea, Chief ... I knew it was close ... I'd seen something in one of the papers, but I couldn't recall... The tiny Ericsson I keep at the

back of my head was trying to dial me, but I guess my brain must have been having a meeting... Then suddenly——

Chief Your brain took the call!

Philip Exactly! The paper I'd been trying to remember was a magazine for hay fever sufferers. (*He produces the magazine*) *The People's Hayfever Listener Examiner Gazette Magazine—Phlegm.* Or to put it another way: a Pot Noodle. It says here, Chief, and get this ... they have just invented a machine which is guaranteed to suck in pollen-infested air, extract the pollen and blow the air out again!!

Chief (*after a pause*) Well frankly, Philip, I'm a little disappointed. This is very junior stuff. Of course we can purchase the patent on this machine if you wish, put the price through the roof. I have no objection to milking a few snot noses.

Philip Hmm, yes, but——

Chief (*enthusiastically*) If I am under any obligation to offer a bunch of streamy-eyed sneeze merchants an easy ride, then I am unaware of it.

Philip I was——

Chief No dew-drop-hanging free-loader chewing on a mouthful of mucus need expect the feather-bed treatment from Lockheart Holdings.

Philip I should say not, but——

Chief Yes, certainly, go ahead, nail those phlegm-heads to the wall and empty their pockets. If they want pollen-free air, make 'em pay. But really, Philip, your secretary should be doing this sort of thing for you.

Philip Chief, hear me out! It says here that the machine takes the oxygen from the air, cleans it, and stores it ready for when Cyril Snotnose feels a tickle coming on, when he can give himself a blast of pure oxygen...

Chief Stores oxygen? What, like a scuba tank?

Philip (*very excited*) Yes, but more so ... the ad says it incorporates a revolutionary compression process which allows considerable quantities of oxygen to be extracted from the air, stored for when the sufferer needs to flood the environment with pure nose-fodder.

Chief (*still doubtful*) We-ell, interesting concept, I suppose ... could sell well to marine research, it might even perhaps have some applications in space, but I really don't see——

Philip (*very excited*) Chief, think bigger, think stunningly big, think first-class cabin baggage allowance. What I am talking about here is *designer air*!

Chief (*after a huge pause*) My God, it's enormous.

Philip I've done some research in sister fields, Sir. Water for instance, you can have no concept how big the ponce water market is, and after all, when you come down to it what *is* Perrier? A multi-million pound industry, selling people stuff that falls out of the sky. The French must be pissing themselves, that's probably what gives the stuff its acrid taste.

Chief (*beginning to get excited too*) My dear boy, I think you have stumbled on something colossal here, talk me through your thinking so far.

Philip Picture our target consumer, right? Millenium Man. He has a home gym that looks like an iron lung factory. His yoghurt is so alive it shuts the fridge door for him. His muesli is coarse enough to prize open the buttocks of a concrete elephant and his chickens are so free-range he meets them for drinks at his club. And what is he breathing? What is he breathing, Chief?

Chief You tell me, Philip, you've done the research.

Philip Bus drivers' farts! That's what he's breathing. He is breathing the same stuff that people in the North are burping their Vimto into. Have you any idea of the cocktail of natural fumes a dog emits when it's on heat...?

Chief Pretty gruesome I should imagine.

Philip There are guys out there pulling down six figure incomes being forced to breathe that stuff. Something has to be done!

Chief (*hitting the intercom*) Hold all calls, please, Miss Hodges, and alert security if you'd be so kind, we have a potential Pot Noodle in the building... Carry on, Philip.

Philip Picture it, Chief. You have two Fashion Cafés, OK? Both so crowded it takes three days to get a drink. Both have got girls slooshing the plonk with legs sufficiently frisky to revitalize the Conservative Party. Both have got a large blackboard that says something indecipherable about drizzled balsamic vinegar and a leaning tower of chargrilled organic vegetables... But get this, only *one* is offering pure, sparkling, guaranteed filtered, cleansed and mineral-enriched *designer* air. Now which hostelry do you think our GSM-free, Millennium Man who wants the *best* is going to patronize?

Chief Philip, this one, if I might be forgiven some exuberance, is a stallion's stiffy.

Philip It's a whale's whopper.

Chief It's an elephant's appendage.

Philip It's a dinosaur's dong.

Chief It's the giant's giblets. How do we go about acquiring the thing?

Philip Chief, I'm way, way ahead of you. You're still training for Sydney in the year 2000, I'm on my way to Manchester for 2008. I have bought the patent in perpetuity. I also took the liberty of indoctrinating one or two junior top-level executives into the project. (*He hits the intercom*) Sandy, bring in Suck and Blow.

Chief I like it.

Sandy enters with the machine

Philip I suggest that for this demonstration we implement a complete security shut down ... windows, doors, intercom ... this thing could be bigger than food.

Chief And food is very big. Activate the shut down, Philip.
Philip Sandy, get your butt on it, for Chrissakes.
Sandy (*not really enjoying being addressed in this manner*) You got it, Philip. (*He hits a button*)

Huge steel screens descend in front of each window and door

Philip (*bustling round the machine, turning on lights and moving bits*) Now then, the chemical reaction which extracts the oxygen is similar in many ways to photosynthesis; it creates gaseous carbon compounds which compensate for the loss of the oxygen in the atmos, so there shouldn't be a pressure drop. But watch out all the same.
Sandy Pressure doesn't worry me, Philip, I am a walking area of high pressure. When I go outside, the weather changes.
Chief I like this young fellow, Philip.
Philip My top man, Sir, believe me, he's being groomed.
Sandy If people get too close to me their ears start bleeding.
Philip Yes, all right, Sandy, let's hit Barry Button. (*He presses a button*)

The machine begins to whirr and hum and flash, steam comes out of it, and a small balloon begins to inflate

The oxygen is now being extracted, Chief, in a few minutes it will all be inside the machine.
Sandy Uhm, Philip...
Philip Later, Sandy.
Sandy No, really, Philip...
Philip Not now, Sandy.
Sandy It's just that, if the machine is extracting all the oxygen from the atmosphere, what are we going to breathe?
Chief Good point, young fellow.
Philip I encourage all our people to come up with good points, Chief.
Chief Good. Are you grooming him?
Sandy I'm not sure it's working actually, nothing very much seems to be happening. (*His knees buckle*)
Philip Get up, Sandy, stop playing the giddy ass. (*He collapses*) Sorry, Sir, ruck in the carpet.
Chief (*gripping the desk unsteadily*) What the devil is going on!
Sandy (*pulling himself up unsteadily*) I think it's the machine, Sir, we don't notice we're suffocating because the replacement elements fool the lungs into believing that they are breathing normally.
Philip (*crawling to his feet*) Sandy, are you trying to say we have stupid lungs because, if so, I take a pretty dim view——

Chief I'm getting dizzy, somebody open a window or I shall sack the lot of you!

All are very faint

Philip (*trying to pull up a metal screen*) They're all on the security timer, Sir...!
Sandy I'll call Miss Hodges... (*He moves to the intercom*) Hallo ... hallo... She can't hear me, the damn thing's on security shut-off too...!
Philip Techno let-down. Try upping the volume on your natural communication system.
Sandy What?
Philip Shout.
Sandy (*squeaking*) Help ... help ... I'm not sure I can, Philip.
Chief (*struggling to get the words out*) If anyone can think of something sensible they will be making a most advantageous career move...

The machine is now grunting and shaking. The bag is full

Sandy Well, it's just a thought, but we pressed the button marked "suck"; maybe we should press the one marked "blow"...
Philip (*lying prostrate on his back, staring upwards; faintly*) I was wondering how long it would take you to notice that, Sandy. Well done, memo me to intensify your grooming process...

Sandy staggers to the button, presses it, and the whirring changes. The balloon quickly deflates. Almost instantly they all go "AAAAAAAH" with relief

Obviously the instruction manual will have to be very clear on certain points.

Black-out

Scene 3

The office of Image Control, a top advertising agency

Total cool, designer work place, with big glossy blow-up photos taken from previous campaigns

Kirsten Carlton, a top ad lady

Kirsten (*into the phone*) No, dammit, Anton, I can't see you! This is a major pitch for me, Lockheart are launching an entirely new product and I want the bloody account... Listen, if you can't handle sleeping with someone in a higher income bracket I'll bike you round a bloody bimbo! (*She puts the phone down*) I didn't want to marry you anyway! ... OK, I'm sorted, I'm sexy, I'm cool! (*Into the intercom*) Graham darling, send in the gentlemen from Lockheart.

Philip and Sandy enter

Philip Kirsten, at long last; I'm Philip, this is my top man Sandy... I can call you Kirsten? You give such good fax I feel I almost know you, anyway formalities are totally inefficient. Whoever said "manners cost nothing" never had to play hard ball across eight time zones with the Tokyo stock exchange.

Sandy Those guys are tough.

Philip *Terry* tough! By the time you've said "greetings honourable colleagues", they've bought your company, miniaturized your lawn mower and eaten your goldfish.

Kirsten Phil, Sand, let me tell you something about me. People tend to address me in one of two ways—it's either "Kirsten" or "that tough bitch".

Philip (*laughing*) I think we're going to get along just fine, Kirsty.

Kirsten When you come to Image Control, you come to the best. The media is a minefield of no-talent, sad-act companies whose address is a portable fax machine on the back seat of a Ford Mondeo.

Philip Exactly.

Kirsten You do *not* require some member-munching mincer with a Design Centre security laminate on his tit...

Philip grunts with exasperated recognition

...a Marks and Spencer *crudités* dip in the saddle bag of his ten-speed racer...

Again Philip understands

...and an ad concept featuring a basking iguana, an enigmatic male model and no mention whatsoever of the actual product because that would be naff.

Philip God, you've met them too?

Kirsten You've come to us because we empty shelves.

Philip That's what the word is on the streets. I play squash with a guy from Imperial Biscuits who says you brought the Jammy Dodger back from the dead.

Kirsten I had a small, chemically produced biscuit with a blob of red sticky stuff in the middle of it and my cute little ass was on the *line*. Imperial had given me a donger of a budget to push the Jammy Dodger up-market, get it out of the tuck shop and into the executive dining-room.

Philip It was inspired, I'll never forget it, Penelope Keith pushing the wafer mints away... (*With a plummy voice*) "Pass a Dodger, Roger".

Sandy Brilliant casting, Nigel Havers as Roger was just so stylish.

Kirsten Disappointing in bed, surprisingly.

Philip Hmm, yes, well anyway... Sandy, I believe you've accessed Kirsty on the relevant base-line information and she's Suck and Blow compatible.

Kirsten Sandy's good, Phil, very good.

Philip Believe me, he's being groomed. Now then, Kirsty, I'm not going to pussyfoot around here, I respect you too much and know you have no time for feet in your pussy so tell me, how do you feel about Suck and Blow?

Kirsten Suck and Blow is the most exciting product I've encountered since the Pot Noodle.

Philip Did you hear that, Sandy? Rendezvous with destiny or what! This lady worked on the Pot Noodle!

Kirsten My first job... "Put on the kettle, Gretel."

Sandy "Fill my pot, Dot."

Kirsten (*touched*) You remember it.

Philip I feel *very* good about this project, let's have lunch!

Sandy Uhm, perhaps we should ask Kirsten if she's had any time to come up with some ideas yet?

Philip Oh come on, Sandy! You've only just accessed here.

Kirsten I like to work fast, Phil, I toyed for a while with "Share my air, Claire", but I think it's time to go radical... Let me run this byline past you... "Other people's air, it gets right up your nose".

Short pause, they are thrilled

Sandy It's ... brilliant! Quite brilliant!

Philip There's a rare and savage beauty to your copy, Kirsty.

Kirsten (*briskly assembling story boards, presentation portfolios, etc.*) I'd want to use the fellow who does the Creamy Churn Dairy Spread voice-overs, he turned round their whole campaign with that quiet, sinister way he has... (*She hits a button*)

We hear a tape: "Half *the calories of butter or margarine, but* all *the buttery taste...*"

Philip (*excited*) I buy the damn stuff myself!... (*Correcting himself*) I mean, it always seems to be in the fridge...

Kirsten (*handing over a designer folder*) You'll find the text on blue... We saturate local radio for a fortnight, classic rock and current affairs stations only, of course—not a lot of point at pitching to some twelve-year-old heavy metal fan whose testicles are somewhere in the region of his armpits.

Philip With you on that. What about the telly?

Kirsten I've been thinking hard about television... Let's try a little word association game, Philip, just for the fun of it, throw me back your instant reactions, OK... Class.

Philip (*instant list*) Bogart, Chivas Regal, Sergeant Pepper, Harley Davidson, Johann Amadeus Bach, mist on a moonlit lake, friendship.

Kirsten You missed something out, Philip.

Philip I did?

Kirsten Sandy?

Sandy Suck and Blow?

Kirsten Exactly.

Philip (*after a short pause, slightly miffed*) Hmm, yes, well, I rather thought that went without saying.

Kirsten Nothing goes without saying in advertising, Philip, think of Coca Cola. We all *know* it adds life and is the real thing, we don't need reminding that it unites the world, and you can't beat the feeling...

Sandy It really is an incredibly now beverage.

Kirsten Exactly, but if their agency had made the mistake of imagining those things went without saying we'd still be under the illusion that Coke was a sticky drink that can completely dissolve a tooth inside twenty-two hours.

Philip I hope you're listening to all this, Sandy. Because you're interjecting on a grade A marketing seminar.

Kirsten OK, let's move on to the actual TV time slots. I'm thinking of a sophisticated apartment scenario here, we're talking real...

Philip Class?

Kirsten Exactly ... close up on two young executive lovers having pre-sex dinner. (*She makes a lens of her fingers, as directors are wont to do*) It's his flat and the lady is hot, right? The coffee and Armagnac are all through and she's just about to climb aboard and rut her horny little ass off. She is one *heck* of a lady, essentially romantic, but romantic on *her* terms. She has a body that says "screw me", but watch out because in business hours she'll screw *you*, and screw you to the *wall*. We're looking at a sort of young Meryl Streep with shades of Sigourney Weaver, Jodie Foster, Cher and Sylvester Stallone.

Philip I like this lady. What about the guy?

Kirsten Let's just say that our high-class chick is thinking about giving up everything to have his children.

Philip I hope he realizes the kind of levels he's lucked out at.

Kirsten He does, he's one heck of a guy... Sandy, you read "man in appartment"; I'll read "sexy girl"... (*She gives him a designer folder*)

Philip Uhmm, hang on, uhm ... don't you think it would be better if I read "man in apartment"? Just a thought.

Kirsten OK, you get the part, try it very George Cooney. (*She begins to act*) "Mmm, lovely coffee ... I must say you have everything in your beautiful appartment ... the best food ... the best wine... Only the best of everything, I like that in a man."

Philip (*acting*) "There's a pool on the roof, I thought we might swim a little later..." (*Aside to Sandy*) This is *superb*!

Kirsten (*acting*) "As long as it's secluded ... I don't have a swimsuit. (*She sniffs*) Is something burning...? Apart from me that is."

Philip (*aside to Sandy*) I can't believe this stuff, it's just *so* believable... (*He acts*) "Ha ha, that's the caviar and truffle soufflé ruined."

Kirsten (*acting*) "Never mind, I'm not hungry—for food, and the Suck and Blow will soon clear the air."

Philip (*acting embarrassed*) "Uhm ... hmmm ... yes... I'll just open a window, shall I?"

Kirsten (*acting suddenly cold*) "Is that the time? I really must be going." (*She hits the tape recorder*)

The tape: "If you haven't got Suck and Blow, you haven't got anything at all."

Philip (*very excited*) Kirsten, I don't know what to say. It's quite simply utterly stunning, it could not be more utterly stunning if you'd written it on a sledge-hammer and bashed young Sandy here over the head with it. Class, you said? This campaign has more class than Fererro Rocher.

Kirsten If you can sell the product into the shops I anticipate commencing a saturation sweep within a matter of weeks. We should be picking up our first major advertising industry awards soon after that.

Sandy It's a magnificent campaign, we'll sweep the board.

Philip A campaign's no use to us at all without product outreach. Come along, Sandy, my son, we've production targets to reach. Check you later, Kirsty.

Kirsten You can always e-mail me.

Philip and Sandy exit

Kirsten begins to assemble her stuff

Philip enters

Philip (*sincere tone*) Kirsten, I am a busy man, I did not arrive at where I am today by beating myself with a bush, so I'll put it bluntly. I'm a plain and simple man with plain and simple tastes and I like to see a woman who is both. Can we do dinner?

Kirsten Why not, that would be lovely.
Philip That's OK, no hassle, forget it, I respect a woman who is busy... What!

Black-out. We hear a Capital Radio ad break with a fake Suck and Blow ad in the middle

DJ And we'll be back with Capital weather and news of the Help-a-London-Child appeal and of course lots more music, after this...
Mum's Voice Well, Jenny, that's the floor done, I've cleaned the house from top to bottom, everything's sparkling clean for your birthday party.
Little Jenny's Voice No, it isn't, Mummy.
Mum's Voice (*laughing indulgently*) All right, Jenny, what have I missed?
Little Jenny's Voice All the lead, the carbon, the nicotine, the dry skin cells, the human methane, oh, lots and lots of horrid poisonous muck.
Mum's Voice Well, I can't see any of that, dear.
Little Jenny's Voice You can't see it, Mummy, but it's there and I'm going to have the dirtiest, most unhealthy birthday party in my class.
Voice Over Doesn't your child deserve the benefits of Suck and Blow...? Other people's air: it gets right up your nose.

Scene 4

The executive massage room

There are a couple of benches for massage

Downstage, Philip and Chief wander on with towels wrapped round waists, dripping, wet and sudsy

Chief (*puffing on a huge cigar*) So, young fellow, your first dip in the top nobs' jacuzzi whirlpool bath. I'm sure your phone will be fine when it's dried out a bit.
Philip It's a legal problem now, Chief. When I purchase hardware purporting to be executive level equipment I simply presume that it's whirlpool bath compatible. Surely that has to be the bottom line.

Chief takes a robe from an imaginary servant

Chief (*to Philip*) Absolutely first-class steam-room attendant. Totally respectful. It's not often you get respected as well as that these days, is it, Philip? Respect like that is a rare and precious thing.

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