Acting Edition

The Whisky Taster

by James Graham

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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THE WHISKY TASTER was first performed at the Bush Theatre, London, on January 26, 2010. The production was directed by James Grieve, with design by Lucy Osborne, lighting design by James Farncombe, sound design by Emma Laxton, and assistant direction by Ant Stones. The company stage manager was Angela Riddell. The cast was as follows:

BARNEY . . . . . Samuel Barnett
NICOLA . . . . . Kate O'Flynn
THE WHISKY TASTER . . . . . John Stahl
MALCOLM . . . . . Simon Merrells
CHRIS . . . . . Chris Larkin

CHARACTERS

BARNEY – Male. Mid–late 20s. North Midlands.

NICOLA – Female. Mid–late 20s. South London.

THE WHISKY TASTER – Male. 70s. Scottish.

MALCOLM – Male. 40s. English.

CHRIS – Male. 40s.

SCOTT – Voice only.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

On the Text

A slash mark / indicates the character that speaks next should begin with their line.

An ellipsis … indicates hesitation.

A dash – indicates a change in thought or broken speech.

(Text in brackets) indicates a line spoken almost privately, to oneself, but still aloud.

On "Characters"

Both **NICOLA** and **BARNEY** sometimes speak through fictional characters or voices they have created, generally stereotypes, including "Charles and Timothy" – city bankers; or "Keith & Barry" – cockney geezers.

On Synaesthesia

A neurological condition where those afflicted can feel "sensations" towards colours, shapes and patterns, or project colours onto concepts such as days and emotions.

Scene One

(The rooftop terrace of an advertising agency, central London. Distant sound of traffic below. The only colours evident are black, white and grey.)

*(***BARNEY** *and* **NICOLA** *stand apart, facing each other.* **NICOLA** *smokes.* **BARNEY** *wears a thick coat, his hands tucked into his pockets.)*

BARNEY. Hope it does.

NICOLA. What?

BARNEY. Snow.

NICOLA. Do you? I don't, hate it.

BARNEY. Cold enough.

NICOLA. You'd die, left out in the cold, you. Nothing on you.

BARNEY. I like it. Don't like / being too hot.

NICOLA. Them little knees of yours, knocking together.

BARNEY. Thank you.

NICOLA. *(Giggles.)* Knobbliest knees I've ever seen, yours are.

BARNEY. Oy, don't.

NICOLA. What?

BARNEY. "What?" Having a go at me knees. I'm / sensitive about –

NICOLA. What? You have got skinny legs, Barn.

BARNEY. Why you telling me that?

NICOLA. Good thing, that. / For some people.

BARNEY. I know I've got skinny legs, I see 'em every day. What people?

NICOLA. Girls.

BARNEY. Well I'm not / a girl, am I.

NICOLA. Some girls'd kill for them legs. I'd kill for 'em. And your figure, pretty much.

BARNEY. I... It – I don't know how to respond to that. Nicola.

NICOLA. Compliment.

BARNEY. Bollocks was it.

NICOLA. Was. Oy.

BARNEY. "You've got legs like a little girl"?

NICOLA. I didn't say "little girl," you did. I said you've got 'little' legs, 'like' a girl, / so don't –

BARNEY. I can't believe we're still talking about it. I can't believe I'm up here listening to you bully me, freezing my tits off, while you have a fag.

NICOLA. What the fuck is wrong with you? Wrong side of the what's-it / or fucking what?

BARNEY. Nothing. Hate Mondays.

NICOLA. What?

BARNEY. Hate Mondays.

NICOLA. Uh, that's original.

BARNEY. Uh, not trying to be original. Just saying.

NICOLA. *(Smokes.)* All right then, Picasso. Do it. Remind me what Mondays are?

BARNEY. *(Beat. Shrugs.)* I don't…it's…well, which bit, morning, night, s'all different –

NICOLA. *(Mock big sigh.)* Oh. OK. Well, what is right now, Monday?

BARNEY. Dunno, it's… I can't… It might be a bit… dunno. / Lilac?

NICOLA. How long we got? – what? / Lilac.

BARNEY. Lilac. Yeah. But it…like, fades in and out. Tastes a bit… what was – shit, what were them awful purple, pink, sweets you used to get? Like 'Refreshers' but not. Taste like soap, or potpourri *(Pronounced as in "pot-puree.")* or –

NICOLA. Parma violets.

BARNEY. Parma violets! / Yurk, hate them.

NICOLA. What, what did you just say? "Pot" …Did you pronounce it "Pot-pourri"? / It's –

BARNEY. What?

NICOLA. It's potpourri, idiot. *(Laughs.)* How did…? / Potpourri?

BARNEY. That's how it's spelt.

NICOLA. I don't care how it's fucking spelt, that's not how it's fucking said; / "potpourri."

BARNEY. Well anyway.

NICOLA. Amazing. Not like you, / getting words wrong –

BARNEY. Whatever, I was talking, I thought we were / just talking –

NICOLA. We are talking, we are just talking; fine, lilac. Fine. Bit like my dress, / yes?

BARNEY. It's *kind of* lilac. Monday morning. Be something else by this afternoon. Normally turns yellow into green, or… *(Shrugs.)*

NICOLA. *(Referencing her white shirt.)* Actually it's more pink, this, isn't it? Oh I dunno, whatevs. Not sending you funny or nothing?

BARNEY. I have. Ways of. Controlling it. Sort of.

NICOLA. How?

BARNEY. By not… I just. Like I just try not to 'think' about it. About your dress being…the colour it is. I just kind of. Delete it. And instead there's just a…an empty space where colour should be. That way I don't start getting all the, erm…Feeling. Things. So…

NICOLA. I don't like lilac, actually, makes me feel old. Funny, innit? What's Fridays then, I like Fridays –

BARNEY. Nick, I… don't…

NICOLA. All right, all right. *(Smokes.)* God, feel like *I'm* going all funny now. Nervous.

BARNEY. We'll be fine. *(Checks his watch. Beat.)* Can't believe you had a go at my knees.

NICOLA. Jesus.

BARNEY. Don't hear me saying anything about…your…

NICOLA. What?

BARNEY. Your… I dunno, just –

NICOLA. No, "anything about my" what?

BARNEY. I can't think of anything.

NICOLA. Awwh. Liar.

BARNEY. Seriously.

NICOLA. So I'm perfect am I? Perfect in every single way.

*(***NICOLA** *spins playfully.* **BARNEY** *shifts and stamps his feet.* **NICOLA** *smokes.)*

You don't strike me as someone who does well in the cold, Barney, is all I'm saying. Is all I was Ob-Serv-Ing. OK?

BARNEY. Still like it when it snows, though. I like it when I'm inside and I'm looking outside And It Is Snowing.

NICOLA. Well it's cold enough. I bet it does.

BARNEY. I hope it does.

NICOLA. Nobody up here, this morning. Never happens.

BARNEY. *(Wrapping his jacket tighter.)* Not surprised, fucking hell.

NICOLA. See. You're going blue. I like your jacket, though. / Incidentally.

BARNEY. Oh. Really?

NICOLA. Yeah, where'd you get it from?

BARNEY. Dunno, don't remember.

NICOLA. *(Groans.)* Don't mean you're gay, Barney, just cause you remember where you get your clothes from.

BARNEY. I don't remember because I bought it last year. It's last year's winter coat.

NICOLA. That's a bit of a faux pas, innit? Gonna get a new one?

BARNEY. You just said you liked this one.

NICOLA. *(Smokes.)* We'd be about the first to know. I reckon. Up here. If it snowed. Bout the first to know in the whole of London, nearly. 'The first flakes.'

BARNEY. You about done with that? He's coming in at three, need to prepare.

NICOLA. We are prepared. Chillax.

BARNEY. Don't say that.

NICOLA. *(Mock-Northern.)* "Don't say that."

(Smokes. Looks behind his shoulder.)

You know Centre Point. If it fell over. Kind of. Would it hit us?

BARNEY. *(Glancing behind. Disinterested.)* I. Dunno.

NICOLA. If it tipped like that. *(Demonstrates.)* Straight.

BARNEY. I don't think so. / I don't think that's –

NICOLA. But if it did fall like that.

BARNEY. I don't think that's how buildings fall. If you look at –

NICOLA. I know, but (fuck), I know, but if it did, fall straight, would it hit us?

BARNEY. No.

NICOLA. *(Smokes.)* Heard Malcolm's gonna decide about Mumbai this week.

BARNEY. Really?

NICOLA. Can't believe *he's* not just taking it. Idiot. That job; why wouldn't you?

BARNEY. Wish he was, Jesus Christ, imagine that. Him a thousand miles away, leaving / us to just…

NICOLA. S'cause he's worried about not being here, I'll bet. The Execs fucking him over, getting rid.

BARNEY. Just gossip, it's all bollocks.

NICOLA. *(As Barry.)* "Someone's gonna be jumpin' into his shoes, know what I'm mean, you get what I'm saying, kiddo?"

BARNEY. *(As Keith.)* "Jump in his grave as quick, would cha, fuckin' 'ell, love, blimey."

NICOLA. *(Smiles. Smokes.)* Well. People talk. About you. One day. You know they do.

BARNEY. No they…as if I'd, as if I'd ever wanna be stuck in his…like some…

NICOLA. Well. Whoever he picks for Mumbai, fuck me. What a dream. Just 'imaj.' *(Imagine.)*

BARNEY. Could be you, never know.

NICOLA. Oh OK Barney, yeah, they'd give me my own team, my own fucking…brand new –

BARNEY. Should just pick two, shouldn't they; why would they want to split a pair up?

NICOLA. Well I don't wanna think about it, no point. Beside, if it's either of us then it'd be bloody you, wouldn't it. So…there you go.

What if it is? Drive you nuts out there, wouldn't it?

BARNEY. I don't… it's… I'm not even / sure I'd…

NICOLA. Have you seen *Slumdog Millionaire*? You'd have an eppy.

BARNEY. *(Checking his watch.)* Are you nearly done?

NICOLA. Chillax. / "Don't say that!"

BARNEY. Don't say that. (Fucking Nora…)

NICOLA. *(Smokes.)* Had my second fitting at the weekend, Barney-boy. Looking good. You still bringing Joanne?

*(***BARNEY** *looks at his feet as he stamps them.)*

Barn, you –?

BARNEY. I thought the silence might be enough to imply that I wasn't.

NICOLA. Oh. What happened?

BARNEY. Nothing.

NICOLA. When?

BARNEY. Friday night.

NICOLA. What was it?

BARNEY. Well, technically Saturday morning. But it was, uh…you know. Set in motion. Friday night.

NICOLA. Mutual?

BARNEY. Yes. No. More me. But…

NICOLA. She was a lovely girl, Barney. Really pretty.

BARNEY. I didn't love her.

NICOLA. You didn't try.

BARNEY. You shouldn't have to try.

NICOLA. You never try.

BARNEY. You shouldn't have to. Nick. (You shouldn't have to.)

*(**NICOLA** singes the end of her fag with her lighter flame whilst she speaks, even though it doesn't need relighting [a common trait].)*

NICOLA. Parma Frickin' Violets. Yeah man. Would always have a couple rattling round the pockets of my blazer at school. Along with all sorts of shit. *Lacky* bands. Ahuh. You know at home, after school, did you watch CBBC or CITV?

BARNEY. CITV. Always. Better.

NICOLA. Nah. CBBC. *Grange Hill*. *Blue Peter*.

BARNEY. CITV to start with, then flick over for *Byker Grove*.

NICOLA. No way, José. CITV was a bag of wank.

BARNEY. Er, *Fun House*?

NICOLA. Only one, though. Jesus, *Fun House*!

BARNEY. Saw him at uni, Pat Sharp. Came and did a night or something.

NICOLA. "Ooh I'm Barney, I went to Uni."

*(**BARNEY** mock-sighs, and **NICOLA** imitates him with an even louder mock-sigh as **BARNEY** does a louder one back. They smile. They do this a lot.)*

*(***NICOLA** *smokes.)*

Megadrive or *SNES*?

BARNEY. *SNES*.

NICOLA. Knew you'd say that.

BARNEY. So. Knew you'd be *SEGA*, so…

NICOLA. Yeah. Better.

BARNEY. Except that it wasn't, though.

NICOLA. Well, was, though, so…

BARNEY. Sonic was shit.

NICOLA. What?!

BARNEY. You could never see where you…just tap some, some buttons really hard and somehow you bounce your way to the end of the level. / What the –?

NICOLA. "Oh. I'm Mario. I go about one mile an hour. Hop. Walk. Hop. Walk. Oh no, a mushroom. Because I'm a plumber with a mushroom deficiency, for no reason…"

BARNEY. Not defic– …it's an allergy. Deficiency means you need more, not less.

NICOLA. *(Mock-Northern.)* "Eeh, deficiency means you need more not less."

BARNEY. Why does your impression always sound so… *exhausted*?

NICOLA. 'Cause that's what Northerners sound like. "After a day down't pit."

BARNEY. Well. I'm not Northern. I'm… Mansfield's midlands. Technically. North midlands.

NICOLA. Potato patarto. Where does the North start, then?

BARNEY. It – I dunno. Yorkshire, maybe.

NICOLA. How far's that from you?

BARNEY. Like…twenty minutes, or –

NICOLA. There you go. Good as. *(Checks her watch.)* Fuck, better get down.

BARNEY. I told you.

NICOLA. *(Mock-Northern.)* "I told yer." *(Beat.)* Oy. Don't be weird.

BARNEY. Don't be…what? Don't be –

NICOLA. You know. Don't be the 'you' that's weird. Be the 'you' that's *gifted*. Just today.

Scene Two

(Meeting Room. Black, white and grey.)

(A table. A pot plant in the corner. **BARNEY**, **NICOLA** *and* **MALCOLM**.*)*

*(***MALCOLM** *fiddles with his phone a lot, so his level of distraction varies while talking.)*

*(***NICOLA** *occasionally rearranges a bottle of vodka and some glasses on the table.)*

MALCOLM. Brown?

NICOLA. Yeah, isn't he, Barn? On your face.

MALCOLM. Really? God that's funny; rained the whole time.

NICOLA. Oh did it? Oh no.

MALCOLM. That's the… haha, that's the thing, what I kept trying to tell everyone when they… everyone's all like, "uh ner ner, India over Christmas, lucky you," and I was just a bit like, "erm, what? Sorry, no, it's cold, and, basically the same as here," and, I'm looking… *(Laughs.)* you know, wandering around office blocks and fucking…

NICOLA. But good, though?

MALCOLM. Yeah, no, no, no, yeah, good. Really good. Really great place.

God, he would be late, wouldn't he? Typical. But, uh. You two all set, though?

NICOLA. Yeah, we're good to go, aren't we Barney.

MALCOLM. Big one, this one. Be really… not to be all *(Mock screams.)* "aargh, pressure." Huh. But, uh. But yes. If we get this, really great. Great for all of us, the company, you know, good for me, huh, my contact, certainly good for you. You pair. So…

NICOLA. No, we know, don't worry, Malcolm. We're on it. I'm leading the spiel this time.

MALCOLM. Y– …right. *(Slight beat.)* Oh, right, you are?

NICOLA. Yeah, my turn.

MALCOLM. OK.

NICOLA. *(Pause.)* What's the place again? Me and Barn tried to Google Earth it, but –

MALCOLM. Chakala, it's called. / "C-h-a…"

NICOLA. Chakala.

MALCOLM. Yeah, like North West Mumbai, it's…a lot of IT companies and, erm…

(Phone starts to ring.) Those call centres, you know.

(Oh God, what do you want?)

(Answers.) Hello? *(Waits.)* Hel–?

(Hangs up.) Fuck it. Erm. So yeah. Lucky boy or girl, whoever gets to run the show over there.

NICOLA. Exciting.

MALCOLM. Yeah, no, it is. And, Jesus, you know, what with advertising here having been so…the past year, whereas over there, it's just the, the pace it's moving at, it's gonna –

NICOLA. Really? Is it?

MALCOLM. – be brilliant. Yeah. And you know, look, new decade now, and all that, plan for the future of the company. With you guys. *(Gestures them 'grandly.')* 'The future.'

Huh.

(Looks at his watch. Sighs.)

Come on, getting silly now.

NICOLA. *(Rearranging the table.)* So there's nothing else we need to know? About Chris? Christopher?

MALCOLM. Uh, Chris. Actually, no Christopher. Oh I don't fucking know. But no, he's all right. Can be a little bit, erm…but he's all right. Honestly didn't really know him that well, thought he was a bit of a Hoorah to be honest. Always felt like he thought he belonged at Oxford or…had a thing up his…about red bricks; I mean it was fucking Manchester for God's… hardly erm…

What do we even call this one? Decade. The teens? Or what? The…? 'The Noughties' never really took off, did it, as a name?

NICOLA. I completely didn't realise we were in a new decade, for ages.

MALCOLM. I know. / Strange, wasn't it?

NICOLA. Think it was Barney / that told me.

MALCOLM. Remember, like, '89 – well, you two probably… and '99, everyone looking back, defining everything, that, that kind of distinction between…but no, this one, no one really talked about it. It's like we're too old now. Haha. Can't be doing with celebrating. Or something. Or maybe we just didn't feel like it. This time. Maybe we just –

*(***CHRIS** *enters, offering his hand.)*

CHRIS. Malcolm.

MALCOLM. *(Shaking.)* Hey, Chris, you old devil / how you doing?

BARNEY & NICOLA. / Hello.

CHRIS. Oh, God, I'm so sorry, bloody…taxis / round here just –

MALCOLM. No that's all right. D'you get offered a tea or coffee / on your way up?

CHRIS. No, I'm fine. Fine.

MALCOLM. Uh, this is Nicola. / 'One half.'

NICOLA. *(Shaking his hand.)* Hello, all right?

CHRIS. Yes.

MALCOLM. And Barney. Other half of the dream team.

BARNEY. Hello.

CHRIS. I'm very sorry. Everything just / overrunning, you know.

NICOLA. Oh God, no, / don't be silly.

CHRIS. The first one goes over and then it / ...you know. Knock on effect.

NICOLA. It happens. Please. *(Offering the seat.)* Where have you just come from? Not far.

CHRIS. Well. I... well, you know, I can't really say, can I, so...

NICOLA. Oh.

CHRIS. Well let me put it this way. Today is our...uh, you know, what would you – our 'assault' on marketing, and –

NICOLA. Right.

CHRIS. And I'm looking to invite three of the agencies we meet to pitch a campaign, so unless, huh...well, unless you want me to give you the name of your competitors, the people competing with you for this contract –

NICOLA. God, no no no. I –

CHRIS. Well it wouldn't be very discreet would it? If I told you where I'd been.

NICOLA. Of course not, no. Absolutely. *(Pause.)* They reckon it might snow later.

CHRIS. Really? Well, I'm just back from Minsk, so...

NICOLA. *(Laughs.)* Right. Well.

CHRIS. You know. The snow there is…

NICOLA. I can imagine.

CHRIS. …exactly. So…

NICOLA. Well. Um. Well. First off, we love it. *(Chuckles.)*

BARNEY. *(Chuckles.)* Yes.

CHRIS. Good.

NICOLA. I mean we would say that, of course. We want the job, but…

CHRIS. And they're young, too.

NICOLA. Ha.

CHRIS. Beer out of an ashtray and all that. Ahuh. / But, um…

MALCOLM. *(Knowingly playful.)* Well we were there once, Chris, need I remind.

CHRIS. I've no idea what's he's talking about, I was a model student. Malcolm, shush.

NICOLA. Ahah, OK. Erm, so but yeah, we really do love this. We, both of us, after tasting it, just thought, "wow," / so much different to –

BARNEY. So fresh and clean and –

NICOLA. Yeah, exactly, fresh and crisp, we said, and clean, and so… Our thoughts are…we wondered about pitching this to a slightly higher demographic than you kind of indicated at in your brief. For the reason being, erm, we think, the problem with vodka over here, the way it's marketed and –

BARNEY. And the way it's consumed –

NICOLA. And the way it's consumed, particularly the way it's consumed. If you go into any off-licence you'll see literally a whole shelf of very cheap-looking, cheap-tasting,

uh, um, "I'm not-buying-it-for-the-taste-it's-just-to-get-me-fucked" kind of vodkas. All branded in those same colours, conjuring up all those images of…of…

BARNEY. Of wrong side of the wall, communist, / hammer and sickle –

NICOLA. Yeah, Russia. Cold, industrial, really cold Russia. So what we're actually… I suppose what we're saying is that we don't just want to rebrand your vodka, we want to rebrand 'Vodka' using yours as the, as the spearhead. Or –

BARNEY. A lot of young people, young 'British' people, don't buy expensive vodka; why? Because they don't think of vodka as something you buy for the 'taste.' Necessarily. It isn't wine or, or, or brandy, there's no culture of sampling it, enjoying different brands.

NICOLA. It's a social thing.

BARNEY. It's stigma. It's –

NICOLA. You mix it with coke, lemonade. Or make it taste like vanilla. Chocolate. It's a shot before you hit the town. For depressed tramps, for…for Bridget Jones in between the bits with the men. But this? It's just…it's really fucking good. Sorry. But it is.

BARNEY. It's too good. We think. For that. This is vodka… at, like, a dinner party vodka.

NICOLA. Sat out in the garden kind of vodka, or while reading a book. Opera vodka.

BARNEY. And that's how we would identify our campaign. Creeping into the public consciousness gradually.

NICOLA. So no huge full-page ads, bus banners, magazine inserts, nothing above urinals.

BARNEY. Spend a fortune on a TFL package? Get on every tube, every line? It's a waste. Domination packages, brand an entire station?

NICOLA. No. Truly classy things don't shout at people. They whisper. Sorry to sound all Hoxton Square wanky, but…

BARNEY. Nothing generic. Specific. Targeted. / Direct.

NICOLA. Direct. Exactly. And our analytics department is…well, it's what really puts us ahead of other agencies.

BARNEY. So for example, once we pin our demographic down, we could tell you instantly that for, say, London transport we'd be best spending more on Victoria and Jubilee.

NICOLA. Just sheer statistics. Just, it's, you know, / it's facts, just facts.

BARNEY. Maybe Piccadilly. I wouldn't think on the Northern Line –

CHRIS. People…sorry. People don't drink vodka on the Northern line?

BARNEY. Well, no they do, and that's the problem. / Actually *on* –

NICOLA. Actually *on* the fucking Northern Line.

BARNEY. Phase Two, we can start thinking about banner ads in newspapers –

NICOLA. Like *Guardian*, / maybe *Telegraph* –

BARNEY. Further down the line, TV, say *Sky Arts*, say uh –

NICOLA. *Film Four* –

BARNEY. But for now, forget it. Better a, a, like a guerrilla viral campaign, plant a few 'agent provocateurs' on Twitter, setting up Facebook fan groups, begin to whip up a buzz without having to spend barely a penny, reducing your budget and also, over time, if we're brave enough, see an increase in integrity *and* sales. Win win.

CHRIS. *(Beat.)* OK. Well. Obviously, you know, Malcolm's portfolio speaks for itself and it's an…an interesting idea. *(Thinks.)* I have to say, though…hmm…

NICOLA. Go on, it's all right.

CHRIS. A 'luxury'…a luxury item? I just think, you know, in these times of, of, huh, downturn and depression, isn't making yourself seem luxurious and / sort of –

NICOLA. No, OK, I do see / your point, but –

CHRIS. I mean, ha, I'm glad you like it so much but –

MALCOLM. We all like it, Chris. I think / that's what Nicola –

CHRIS. But to make it *exclusive*, you know. That seems to be / risking potential –

NICOLA. It is a slightly, yeah, nerve-wracking proposition, sure, but it's what we do, and, and with us, our digital and print production, that's all done in house / so there's no –

CHRIS. We-ell, so are nearly all the agencies / I've been to –

NICOLA. And the colours! Barney.

CHRIS. The…what, sorry?

NICOLA. The campaign colours. As an example. Barn?

(She holds a glass of vodka out.)

CHRIS. Oh. Well. We kind of already have our colours from the Baltic launch –

NICOLA. No, trust me. He is brilliant at this.

CHRIS. Well as I –

NICOLA. Barney?

*(***BARNEY***, unsure, takes the glass. Sips. Beat.)*

BARNEY. (*Solemnly…)* Blue…

Silver…

…and gold.

(Long pause. **CHRIS** *studies* **BARNEY**.*)*

CHRIS. That…that's *perfect*… *(Pause.)* Ho– …How did you – …

NICOLA. Told you.

CHRIS. …thank you.

Well. Erm. Yes, I mean, yes, of course, no question that we'll be wanting you to present to us a campaign. Uh –

NICOLA. Awh brilliant, / cool. Thank you.

MALCOLM. Thank you, Chris, that's great, / we'd be delighted.

CHRIS. Yeah, well, why don't you guys collect your ideas and things together and, let's say, what, week today, give us the lowdown?

MALCOLM. No problem at all, look / forward to it.

CHRIS. Sorry it all feels a little quick, / it's just that –

MALCOLM. Oh God, not at all, no. Barney? Could you… show Chris –

BARNEY. *(Going.)* Oh, yes, of…uh, it, this way. Please.

MALCOLM. Bloody good to see you again.

CHRIS. You too. *(To* **NICOLA**.*)* Bye.

NICOLA. Bye.

*(*__BARNEY__ *and* __CHRIS__ *exit.)*

MALCOLM. So. Well done you.

NICOLA. Oh. Well. Well done you. And Barney.

MALCOLM. *(Beat.)* So you reckon you'll lead on the campaign then, or…?

NICOLA. Uh, dunno, me and Barney'll talk about it. Doesn't really matter, we say 'lead,' but, you know, with us two, like all the teams, / it's always –

MALCOLM. Yeah. Yeah, sure.

How does… it is incredible, isn't it? Barney. Every time. How does he do it?

NICOLA. I don't know.

MALCOLM. Because it's clearly a thing, isn't it? It's clearly a real thing that…you know.

NICOLA. Oh yeah, it's a proper what's-it. He had a scan and everything. That's why I don't like asking, do you know what I mean; don't like asking him to do it. Reckon it hurts him a bit or something.

MALCOLM. What, like… *(Beat.)* What, do you mean this isn't hi– …this isn't even him going at full speed, kind of thing?

NICOLA. Oh no, no, he tries to keep a lid on it. That's why I don't like asking.

MALCOLM. So…so he could potentially be even *more*…?

NICOLA. I dunno.

MALCOLM. Because… huh, you know, like I say, Nick, this one…we could really do with getting this one. Ahuh. And if there's anything that we could do. Anything *you* could do. As team leader. You know. Be good opportunity, actually, for you. What with Mumbai coming up and everything. Nice little chance, well deserved. At last. If you…

NICOLA. …r-right. *(Beat. Laughs, but tries not to.)* Erm. Right. OK.

MALCOLM. Yeah?

NICOLA. Yeah.

MALCOLM. *(Kind of mock-'go-getting.')* So we gonna win this one?

NICOLA. Fuck a duck, yeah.

MALCOLM. Great. That's fucking awesome.

*(***BARNEY** *returns.)*

Whey, and speak of the devil.

NICOLA. All right?

BARNEY. Yeah.

MALCOLM. Nice work, Barney, good on you. Both of you. Excellent. So. Debrief. Thoughts? Thoughts on what seemed to land, what didn't? Let's really push this idea, yeah? Really ask questions of it, no surprises on the day, OK? I had some...*thoughts*, if –

NICOLA. *OK*.

MALCOLM. *(Beat. Thinks.)* I mean. *You*. What...what makes you drink? Do you think?

NICOLA. *(Pause.)* Erm...

MALCOLM. Because you do, don't you. Don't you? Sorry, this isn't a, a, a... huh, I suppose I'm just saying, just asking...because you do. People your age. More than nearly anyone ever, and...I just wonder whether it would be helpful to...*ask* that.

NICOLA. Yeah. Yeah. Erm... OK.

MALCOLM. Let's, OK, let's go back a step. The demographic, this idea of it being, uh, top end, of...this luxury thing, some of which he seemed to get, other times...mmm – less so. I just wonder whether we're missing a trick.

NICOLA. OK.

MALCOLM. I just wonder whether…because it's the one thing, in this age of, in this time of economic…it's the one thing that is sustain– …not only sustaining itself, flourishing, amongst you lot, because…well. You're still rich, aren't you. By the standards of…and your disposable income, it ain't going on houses, is it, because you can't. Or savings, because… so, you know, fuck, you just *(Mimes necking a glass.)* Huh. So I just wonder whether a 'nice' – and it is – a 'nice' vodka couldn't benefit you lot. Dare I say, benefit you a lot more. Instead of it being out of your reach. If that…

NICOLA. OK. OK, I do see what you're saying.

BARNEY. I think instead of being something you *need*, something to, erm… 'down' in order to distract you from… I think we thought of it as more –

NICOLA. Aspirational.

BARNEY. In a way, yeah. It –

NICOLA. So less that it's… "us lot, we're fucked," which I'm not sure we… / …Barn?

MALCOLM. No, no, no, OK, I'm just, I'm just chucking it in. You know. / Seeing if –

NICOLA. Instead more…more like, "It can be better. We can be better. Than this."

MALCOLM. *(Thinks.)* Maybe. OK. I have some doubts, but if you think so then…then of course go for it. Let me see it.

NICOLA. Yeah? Coolio. All right. Well in that case, I'm gonna go and check on something.

BARNEY. What?

NICOLA. Little surprise for you, Barn. Something I've been thinking about. Or some*one*. For tomorrow. Or not, depending. If I've got time. Catch you in a sec.

*(**NICOLA** hops off, checking her watch. **BARNEY** smiles at **MALCOLM** and makes to go too.)*

MALCOLM. Yeah, actually Barney, I couldn't just…for a minute? Could I?

BARNEY. Uh, yeah. 'Course.

MALCOLM. *(Pause.)* How are you?

BARNEY. *(Pause.)* Fine, thanks.

MALCOLM. Yeah? I've been thinking. I know everyone's… I know the rumour mill is in full swing, if that's not… mixing metaphors. But anyway, you know what I mean. About Mumbai. So I just thought I should say… well I want to send you.

BARNEY. *(Pause.)* Oh.

MALCOLM. I'm giving you Mumbai, basically. Barney.

BARNEY. …Right. *(Beat.)* But I don't want it.

MALCOLM. You don't wa– …? Hmm. What?

BARNEY. I don't want it. Malcolm. I've never wanted it.

MALCOLM. *(Pause.)* Oh.

BARNEY. I. I didn't think you'd be… I didn't think you'd want to split me and…up.

MALCOLM. OK. Erm…well, it's your… obviously, but / I guess I thought –

BARNEY. I just think there are other people. Other more… you know, great people, Jenny, Josie, I –

MALCOLM. OK. Yeah. I mean, I've got other people in mind, I've been speaking to, so…

BARNEY. I just… I don't want to go there. Malcolm. I'm sorry.

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