

Characters

- Mr Hope (M)** - A cheerful, middle-aged stockbroker.
- Mrs Right (F)** - A soberly dressed woman in her 40s/50s
- Mr Fathom (M)** - A rather weedy looking middle-aged man.
- Mr Trueman (M)** - A rather intemperate character, in his forties.
- Mrs Abigail Jollifant (F)** - A dowdy, frumpy looking woman.
- Mr Playfair (M)** - A large, burly confident chap in his forties.
- The Reverend Frank Faith (M)** - A rather clean cut and pious vicar.
- DI Lomax (M)** - A large, bluff, plain-clothed police officer.
- DS Rowena Rocker (F)** - A stern, police officer.
- Sergeant Frammer (M)** - A well-built, uniformed, police sergeant.

Scene 1 – Function room

(Tabs open. Lights up. A function room in a seaside hotel. Reverend Frank Faith is downstage, smiling whilst nursing a glass of orange juice. Centre stage, Mr Hope, a cheerful middle-aged man, is chatting with Mrs Right. Each has a glass of punch in hand. Stage left is Mr Trueman. He is eating a sandwich while holding a paper plate. Once eaten, Mr Trueman throws the plate into a nearby waste bin. He then picks up a glass of punch from a nearby wall table, then takes a sip. He is a shifty looking character and he stares with some suspicion at Mr Hope and Mrs Right. Stage right, near the window, Mr Fathom and Mrs Abigail Jollifant are stage-talking. They have drained glasses in their hands. Mr Fathom points to the punch bowl and raises his empty glass. Mrs Jollifant nods eagerly. Mr Fathom takes her empty glass, goes over to the buffet table, fills the two glasses from the punch bowl then goes back and hands a replenished glass to Mrs Jollifant. She nods her appreciation. They both raise their glasses and take drinks of punch, then continue to stage-talk.)

- Mrs Right:** Well, Mr Hope, how are you settling into our little community?
- Mr Hope:** Oh just fine, Mrs Right.
- Mrs Right:** Good.
- Mr Hope:** **(almost in a reverie)** Y’know, I’ve always wanted to live by the sea. I love to walk along the beach; weather permitting of course. And hear the sound of waves lapping against the shore. Yes, I like to taste the tang of salt in the air, to feel the soft breeze against my face, and listen to the cry of the gulls. It brings back some precious childhood memories.
- Mrs Right:** I’m glad to hear it.
- Mr Hope:** My mother ran a bed and breakfast business in Margate, when I was a youth. It’s as if I’m returning to my roots.
- Mrs Right:** Indeed.
- Mr Hope:** And the fresh, invigorating sea air does wonders for my sinuses.

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- Mrs Right:** And what was your occupation in London, Mr Hope?

Mr Hope: I was a stockbroker.

Mrs Right: I guess I'm in a similar line of business.

Mrs Hope: Is that so.

Mrs Right: I'm the manager of the local branch of the Royal Unicorn Bank.

Mr Hope: (**wryly**) Well, I know where to put my money now.

Mrs Right: Yes, you can rely on the Royal Unicorn. We won't go bust on you.

Mr Hope: I'm glad to hear it. (**Pauses**) So you haven't been adversely affected by this latest downturn?

Mrs Right: No. We've managed to keep our heads above water.

Mr Hope: Excellent.

Mrs Right: We're a typical, old fashioned, no frills, high street bank. We have a solid, tried and tested executive team. People who've worked their way up through the ranks and know the banking business inside out. And not a whiz kid in sight. Yes, we never took reckless gambles. And casino-banking was never our forte. Our risk assessors were never ignored or brushed aside. And we always took due diligence.

Mr Hope: It's just a pity that the other banks didn't act like that.

Mrs Right: Well they'll have to be more prudent now. If they want to survive.

(Pauses)

Mrs Right: (**with a more concerned and confidential tone**) But I'd better give you a word of warning from the outset, Mr Hope.

Mr Hope: Uh.

Mrs Right: I hate to be the bearer of bad news. But this place isn't quite as idyllic as it might appear at first sight.

Mr Hope: It isn't?

Mrs Right: They don't call this town Fakeham for nothing.

Mr Hope: What are you getting at?

Mrs Right: This place is Fakeham by name; and it's Fakeham by nature. Apart from one or two of us of course.

Mr Hope: Come again?

Mrs Right: This place is chock-full of fakes, phoneys, conmen, mickey takers, pranksters, double-talkers, deception artists, and pathological liars.

Mr Hope: Oh yeah.

Mrs Right: And I should know. I've lived here for fifteen years.

Mr Hope: Is this some kind of a joke?

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Mrs Right: Oh no. This is for real. Though you'll find out in due course.

Mr Hope: Well that's a bit of a shock, I must say. I was thinking of settling down here.

Mrs Right: You can hardly trust anyone in this town.

Mr Hope: No one's on the level?

Mrs Right: Oh, there are one or two exceptions of course.

(Mrs Right briefly turns about and looks at the Reverend, who seems quite oblivious of the fleeting attention he is receiving)

Mrs Right: The vicar over there, for instance; the Reverend Frank Faith.

Mr Hope: Yeah.

Mrs Right: Well he can be trusted; implicitly.

Mr Hope: Well that must be a relief for his parishioners.

Mrs Right: And as for myself; I was brought up by my parents to be a decent, hardworking citizen; and to always tell the truth.

Mr Hope: I'm glad to hear it. We could do with some of those old fashioned standards today.

Mrs Right: But apart from the vicar, myself and a handful of others, you can't rely on anyone here. They'll tell you anything. And it goes right to the top as well. Our previous member of parliament, who claimed to be a Born Again Christian and a man of absolute moral integrity, was discovered to be having affairs with two different women. Despite all the guff we

heard from him about being a happily married, family man. (**smiles wryly**) Yes, for him back to basics meant back to my place.

Mr Hope: It certainly looks that way.

Mrs Right: And then, if that wasn't enough, he was found to be fiddling his expenses left and right. And finagling tens of thousands of quid, from the hard pressed tax payer, that he wasn't entitled to. Though in his campaign literature he claimed he was going to clean up Parliament, and restore integrity to our public life. Of course, there wasn't a word of truth in any of it.

Mr Hope: Yes. I heard about that one. He was milking the system all right. Though of course he wasn't the only one at it.

Mrs Right: He had the whip withdrawn. Then he was deselected by his constituency association. And he eventually left the House in disgrace. There's even speculation that he may be prosecuted over those expenses scams.

Mr Hope: I should think so as well. (**Pauses**) By the way, what's he doing now?

Mrs Right: He's an estate agent. (**Pauses**) And as for our current MP. Well, a week after entering the Commons he crossed the floor of the House and joined the main Opposition party.

Mr Hope: So this lying business is contagious?

Mrs Right: It's endemic.

Mr Hope: How come they've all ended up here? In this town?

Mrs Right: I don't know. You'd need a psychiatrist or a sociologist to explain that. There is the old expression, thick as thieves. Perhaps they like each other's company.

Mr Hope: And what about the people here tonight?

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Mrs Right: They're a pack of liars. The whole lot of them. Apart that is for myself and the vicar. They'll come out with all sorts of bluff and bluster. You take my word for it.

Mr Hope: Well, I never bargained for all this before I came here.

Mrs Right: I'd better warn you, from the word go; take everything they say with a pinch of salt.

Mr Hope: I'll be on my guard.

Mrs Right: Being economical with the truth is the norm rather than the exception in Fakeham.

(In a rather surreptitious and sneaky manner Mrs Right points to Mr Trueman before turning back to Mr Hope)

Mrs Right: D'you see that bloke with the beard and check suit, stood over there in the corner?

Mr Hope: Yeah?

Mrs Right: Well he's an exceptionally bad case, even by our dismal local standards.

Mr Hope: Is that so.

Mrs Right: Truth isn't a word in his vocabulary.

Mr Hope: Now that is sobering thought.

Mrs Right: He's called Mr Trueman.

Mr Hope: Trueman!

(Mr Trueman is alerted by this and looks on at the pair with some suspicion)

Mrs Right: Yes. A singularly inappropriate name in his case.

Mr Hope: Indeed.

Mrs Right: I thought I'd better warn you. Though you'd find out for yourself in due course. That man is a bare faced liar. A blatant peddler of untruths.

Mr Hope: My word.

Mrs Right: Even though he can put on a convincing act of sincerity, and can tell you the biggest whopper with a straight face. Don't believe a word he says. You can't trust him at all. He's an habitual, incorrigible liar. A complete fake. Has been for years. You have my word on that, Mr Hope. And the Reverend Faith will back me up on this, one hundred per cent.

Mr Hope: My goodness.

Mrs Right: The Vicar and I try to avoid him like the plague. Even some of our other fellow Fakehamites try to give him a wide berth.

Mr Hope: Well thanks for warning me.

Mrs Right: The least I could do. **(Pauses)** Well, if you'll excuse me, Mr Hope, I'll just have a word or two with the vicar.

Mr Hope: By all means.

Mrs Right: I'm helping him to organise the Harvest Festival.

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Mr Hope: Excellent.

Mrs Right: But I'm sure we'll bump into each other again.

Mr Hope: Indeed.

(Mrs Right walks over to the Reverend. The Reverend smiles and nods at Mrs Right, who he clearly knows – and Mrs Right is equally effusive in manner. They stage-talk. Mr Trueman puts his glass down on the nearby wall table and walks gingerly over to Mr Hope. Mr Hope looks on at Mr Trueman with some alarm, then tries to hide his feelings with an unconvincing smile)

Mr Trueman: Good day, sir.

Mr Hope: **(Somewhat embarrassed)** good day.

Mr Trueman: I'm Mr Trueman. Clarence Marmaduke Trueman.

Mr Hope: And I'm Mr Hope. Reginald Bob Hope.

(Mr Trueman puts out his hand for Mr Hope to shake)

Mr Trueman: I'm glad to meet you, sir.

(The two men shake hands; though in Mr Hope's case, in a rather strained and tentative manner)

Mr Trueman: And what, pray, was that lady saying about me just now?

Mr Hope: Y'mean, Mrs Right?

Mr Trueman: Indeed. I couldn't help noticing y'know. She was obviously talking

about me. I saw her glancing in my direction, while conversing with you. She even pointed towards me, on the sly.

Mr Hope: (embarrassed) Well, er, she did mention your name, now that I recall it.

Mr Trueman: So she was talking about me?

Mr Hope: In a roundabout way.

Mr Trueman: I thought as much. I don't like people talking about me behind my back. It's unmannerly and ignorant. (Pauses) And what did she have to say about me, sir? I'd like to know the truth.

Mr Hope: (Tentatively) I'm afraid, Mr Trueman, that she said you're not entirely to be trusted when it comes to telling the truth.

Mr Trueman: (Irate) She had the nerve and temerity to say that?

Mr Hope: I'm afraid so.

Mr Trueman: Well let me tell you, sir, that things are just the reverse of what that lady claimed. I am the only one who tells the unvarnished truth in this town. All the rest are shameless liars and deceivers. You can't believe a single thing they say.

Mr Hope: Well that leaves me in something of a quandary doesn't it, Mr Trueman. Mrs Right says that you are an habitable liar. And you, by contrast, claim that Mrs Right and the rest of the townsfolk are all liars and aren't to be trusted.

Mr Trueman: Quite so.

Mr Hope: But that leaves a stranger like me in the dark.

Mr Trueman: (adamantly) I know what the score is.

Mr Hope: Well, only one of you can be telling the truth. So someone is lying.

Mr Trueman: You can trust me. Implicitly. I tell it like it is.

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Mr Hope: Would you mind, sir, if I tried to test you out on that claim, by asking you a few questions, to see if that assertion is true or not?

Mr Trueman: By all means, sir. I've nothing to hide. Fire away.

Mr Hope: Right then. What time is it?

(Mr Trueman makes a show of looking at his watch)

Mr Trueman: It's three o'clock.

(Mr Hope points to the clock on the wall)

Mr Hope: Then how come its six o'clock on that wall clock here?

Mr Trueman: Oh I wouldn't rely on that. That clock hasn't worked properly in years. I don't even think they wind it up these days.

(SFX. Six loud chimes, the sound is from the town hall clock. While that is taking place the Reverend and Mrs Right stop their stage-talking and look with some intrigue at Mr Hope and Mr Trueman and their disputatious conversation. Mr Fathom and Abigail Jollifant do the same.)

Mr Hope: If I'm not mistaken that's the Town Hall clock chiming the hours. Six o'clock.

Mr Trueman: Are you sure there were six chimes?

Mr Hope: I counted them. There were indeed six.

Mr Trueman: Well I'd have to take issue with you there, sir. I'd swear there were just three.

Mr Hope: What date is it then?

Mr Trueman: It's April the first

Mr Hope: April fool's day?

Mr Trueman: Indeed.

Mr Hope: I think you're trying to fool me, Mr Trueman. This is September the Eighteenth.

Mr Trueman: Have you checked that with your calendar?

Mr Hope: Yes, and with the daily newspaper.

Mr Trueman: Then you must be mistaken, sir.

Mr Hope: What day is it?

Mr Trueman: Monday.

Mr Hope: I thought it was Thursday. (**Smiles slyly**) but it seems we're not going to agree on that one.

Mr Trueman: (**pompously**) There can be no agreement between truth and falsity.

Mr Hope: What's the weather been like today?

Mr Trueman: It's been glorious sunshine since the first thing this morning. A positive heat wave.

Mr Hope: That's strange, I could have sworn it's rained most of the day. In fact it's only this last hour that we've seen sight of the Sun.

Mr Trueman: I don't know what you're talking about.

Mr Hope: How did the local team go on in the cup game last night?

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Mr Trueman: They lost on penalties.

Mr Hope: They won three nil.

Mr Trueman: You can't have been watching the same match.

Mr Hope: Clearly.

(The Reverend and Mrs Right slowly edge forward so as to listen in on that discussion)

Mr Hope: How many days are there in a week?

Mr Trueman: Eight.

Mr Hope: How many pints make up a gallon?

Mr Trueman: Fifteen.

Mr Hope: What's the colour of post boxes?

Mr Trueman: Yellow.

Mr Hope: How many sides has a triangle?

Mr Trueman: Four.

Mr Hope: I don't think that Pythagoras would agree with that.

Mr Trueman: I don't give a fig for what he thinks.

Mr Hope: Where does the Archbishop of Canterbury live?

Mr Trueman: In number ten Downing Street.

Mr Hope: In which country's mythology are there creatures known as leprechauns?

Mr Trueman: China.

Mr Hope: Which King had six wives?

Mr Trueman: Richard the third.

Mr Hope: When was the Battle of Hastings fought?

Mr Trueman: Fourteen twenty nine.

Mr Hope: What is the capital of Spain?

Mr Trueman: Lisbon.

Mr Hope: Who wrote The Wind in the Willows?

Mr Trueman: Thomas Hardy.

Mr Hope: Who sang, Blue Suede Shoes?

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Mr Trueman: Caruso.

(Pauses)

Mr Hope: Y'know, you're the most incorrigible, blatant, shameless liar that I've ever come across. I thought my brother in law was bad enough. But you take the prize.

Mr Trueman: **(with a show of indignation)** I won't stand here and have my good name and integrity impugned in this way.

Mr Hope: You wouldn't know the truth if it hit you in the face.

Mr Trueman: this is downright character assassination. It's outrageous. Y'know, I could sue you for defamation of character.

Mr Hope: You'll need a good lawyer.

Mr Trueman: Enough is enough. I won't remain here to be insulted. I won't stand for it a minute longer. I shall leave here at once. You won't see me again here today. My word no.

(In a state of high dudgeon Mr Trueman walks over to the exit door, opens it and leaves, slamming the door shut behind him. The Reverend and Mrs Right walk over to Mr Hope. Mr Hope turns towards them with a wry smile on his face)

Mr Hope: Well he said he'd leave. The only true thing he told me.

Mrs Right: We're best shut of him. He's a damn nuisance.

Reverend: A poor, benighted soul, alas, who has lost his way in the world. **(He shakes his head)** oh what a web we weave, when first we practice to deceive.

Mr Hope: Yes, he could do with a moral compass. You were quite right, Mrs Right, he is an infuriating fibber. A shameless purveyor of porkies.

Mrs Right: **(complacently)** well I did warn you in advance.

Mr Hope: I'll certainly give him a wide berth in the future.

Mrs Right: A wise decision.

Reverend: I'm afraid that Mr Trueman is more to be pitied than condemned.

Mr Hope: He's certainly a rum character, vicar.

Reverend: I frequently pray for his soul. No one is totally beyond redemption. The divine power of the Holy Spirit has saved many a sinner before now.

Mrs Right: It'll certainly have its work cut out with him, vicar.

Mr Hope: Well, with any luck we won't hear any more from him today.

Mrs Right: Let's hope so, Mr Hope.

(Pauses)

Mr Hope: **(with some curiosity)** By the way, what does that chap do round here?

Mrs Right: Haven't you heard?

Mr Hope: No.

Mrs Right: He's the head of tourist information.

(Mr Hope looks on with stupefaction. SFX. The song, *the great pretender* plays. Lights off. Tabs close.)

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Scene 2 – Function room

(Tabs open. Lights up. The same function room, ten minutes later. The Reverend is standing in the same position he was in when scene one opened, nursing an orange juice. Mr Fathom and Mrs Jollifant are also in their former positions, stage-talking. Mrs Right is stood in the centre of the stage, a punch glass in hand. Mr Hope is standing by the buffet table eating a vol-au-vent. He fills a drinking glass from the punch bowl, takes a sip, then walks back to Mrs Right)

Mr Hope: Yes, it's all quite new to my experience, Mrs Right. I've been to some out of the way places, and I've seen some odd characters knocking around, but I've never come across anything like this before. This is way off the radar screen as far as I'm concerned.

Mrs Right: Indeed, it often strikes outsiders that way. Yes, you have my every sympathy, Mr Hope.

(The exit door opens and Mr Trueman enters the room again. Mr Hope is flabbergasted; though the others hardly take any interest)

Mr Hope: What are you doing here?

Mr Trueman: Are you talking to me?

Mr Hope: You said you were leaving; and weren't coming back.

Mr Trueman: You must be hearing things, mate. I just went out for a smoke.

(Mr Trueman walks over to the buffet table, fills a glass from the punch bowl, takes a sip of it, then takes up his former position in the room)

Mrs Right: He told me he gave up smoking last year.

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Mr Hope: Did you believe him?

(Mrs Right shakes her head wearily)

Mr Hope: **(forlornly)** why did I ask? **(Pauses)** It's wonder this town hasn't been put in quarantine.

(Mrs Right points in the direction of Mr Fathom)

Mrs Right: D'you see that weedy little bloke, over by the window, talking to Abigail Jollifant?

Mr Hope: Yes.

Mrs Right: Another of our dodgy local characters, I'm afraid, Mr Hope.

Mr Hope: I don't know how anyone can keep their bearings in this place.

Mrs Right: Oh, some of us manage to keep to the straight and narrow.

Mr Hope: So he's another moonshine merchant?

Mrs Right: He's called Mr Fathom. He'll tell you anything.

Mr Hope: **(wearily)** Well, thanks for telling me, Mrs Right.

Mrs Right: The least I can do. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Mr Hope: I daresay.

(Mr Fathom breaks off from his conversation with Mrs Jollifant and turns to view, with some curiosity, Mr Hope and Mrs Right)

Mr Hope: Blimey, he's giving us the once over.

Mrs Right: Yes.

Mr Fathom: If you'll excuse me for a moment, Mrs Jollifant.

Mrs Jollifant: By all means.

(Mr Fathom slowly walks over towards Mrs Right and Mr Hope)

Mr Hope: **(Alarmed)** Hells bells, he's coming this way.

(Mr Fathom arrives and scrutinises the newcomer)

Mr Fathom: **(slyly)** Mrs Right; you haven't introduced me to our new guest.

Mrs Right: My apologies, Mr Fathom. I did intend to get round to it. Mr Fathom, this is Mr Hope. Reginald Bob Hope. He's a newcomer who intends to settle down in our pleasant little town.

Mr Fathom: Indeed.

Mrs Right: And Mr Hope, this is Mr Fathom. Wilfred Ferdinand Fathom. He's one of our most esteemed local citizens.

(Mr Hope and Mr Fathom shake hands)

Mr Hope: I'm pleased to meet you, sir.

Mr Fathom: And I'm pleased to meet you, Mr Hope. **(Pauses)** I trust you're having an agreeable stay in Fakeham?

Mr Hope: Oh yes. It's quite a change from the great metropolis.

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Mr Fathom: I'm sure it is. And how d'you find our local people?

Mr Hope: Everyone seems to be very friendly.

Mr Fathom: Excellent.

Mrs Right: And now, if you'll excuse me, gentlemen, I'll have to visit the ladies room. I'll see you later.

Mr Hope: Yes, be seeing you.

(Mrs Right walks over and leaves through the door marked 'ladies'. Pauses)

Mr Fathom: And what are your politics, Mr Hope? If I may be so bold as to enquire?

Mr Hope: Of course. Well, I'm not really committed to any political party.

Mr Fathom: You don't vote at all then?

Mr Hope: I wouldn't go that far. I believe in holding the executive to account. But I like to study things out before I put my cross on a ballot paper.

Mr Fathom: Indeed.

Mr Hope: You could call me a floating voter.

Mr Fathom: Well I'm a liberal democrat. Always have been; and always will be. That's my affiliation.

Mr Hope: Yes.

Mr Fathom: And I'm not just an armchair enthusiast. Oh no. I consider myself to be an activist. I knock on doors, post literature, deliver leaflets; and am always on hand to chauffeur voters around, come election time.
(Pauses) Yes, they're the people who are on my political wavelength. Moderate, sensible, middle of the road policies. Avoiding the extremes of left and right. Steering a prudent, middle course. Occupying the centre ground. A party of safe, level-headed, sensible ideas. Appealing to the common sense and intelligence of the discriminating voter.

Mr Hope: Blimey; you should be writing their propaganda material.

Mr Fathom: Well I did stand as a liberal candidate in a local ward, last year. Only lost by a whisker. After a recount.

Mr Hope: It must have been a disappointment for you?

Mr Fathom: Yes, but one must keep the faith, despite all setbacks.

Mr Hope: Of course.

(Mr Fathom looks at his watch)

Mr Fathom: Well, it's been good to meet you, Mr Hope.

Mr Hope: **(with a strained smile)** And it's been good to see you, Mr Fathom.

Mr Fathom: I trust that you'll continue to enjoy your stay in our little town.

Mr Hope: Oh, I'm sure I will.

Mr Fathom: There are far worse options than living here, y'know. Even if I might be a little biased in my assessment.

Mr Hope: I'm sure you're right.

Mr Fathom: And if you'll excuse me, I'll just have a word or two with Mrs Jollifant here. We're both in business together.

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Mr Hope: In that case, don't let me keep you back.

(Mr Fathom nods at Mr Hope, who nods back. Mr Fathom goes over to join Mrs Jollifant. They stage-talk. Mrs Right enters)

through the door marked 'ladies', and walks over to Mr Hope)

Mrs Right: Well, how did it go?

Mr Hope: I didn't half get the party line from that feller.

Mrs Right: Yeah.

Mr Hope: He wouldn't stop talking about the liberal democrats. I thought he was trying to sign me up.

Mrs Right: What! Mr Fathom; in the liberal democrats?

Mr Hope: I've hardly heard such praise for a political party. If they'd brainwashed you, you could hardly come out with more gush than that guy did.

Mrs Right: He's no more a liberal democrat than I'm a flat- earther. He's been a Tory all his life. And a raving right wing one at that. Liberal democrats! He thinks they're a bunch of tree hugging weirdoes.

Mr Hope: He's not the only one. **(Pauses)** Well why did I get all that spiel from him then?

Mrs Right: Like I said before, Mr Hope; he's a pathological liar. Every time he opens his mouth he comes out with a load of porkies.

(Mr Fathom and Mrs Jollifant, make their unhurried way from the window, to the front of the stage, nearby Mrs Right and Mr Hope)

Mr Fathom: I'll tell you something, Abigail; you couldn't go wrong with new labour. They were the people for me.

Mrs Jollifant: Is that so, Wilf?

Mr Fathom: Oh yes. The Third Way is the only way as far as I'm concerned. To my mind Blair was a political genius. In war and peace. You knew where you were with that guy. He played it straight, and told it like it is. He left spin to the other people. And the bloke who came after him did a grand job as well. I can't see how any sensible person could vote for any other party. The Tories and Lib Dems are just a bunch of political con artists who are out to gull the electorate.

Mr Hope: How come you were telling me that you always supported the liberal democrats, Mr Fathom?

Mr Fathom: Are you going doollally?

Mr Hope: Not two minutes again in this very room you were telling me that the

Liberal Democrats were the best thing since sliced bread.

Mr Fathom: You must be having hallucinations, mate. Why the very idea is utterly preposterous.

Mr Hope: You've got a brass neck, I must say.

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Mr Fathom: And you've got a tin ear.

Mr Hope: You told me you stood as a liberal candidate in a local ward.

Mr Fathom: Nonsense! I wouldn't touch that lot with a ten foot barge pole. And I wouldn't vote for that crowd if they were the only party on the ballot sheet. They're just a bunch of sandal wearing hippies, with a load of half-baked ideas, who'd sell this country down the river if they ever got into power.

Mr Hope: They have been in power.

Mr Fathom: Rubbish.

Mr Hope: As part of a coalition government.

Mr Fathom: What utter balderdash. A coalition government indeed. Such a thing isn't possible with our first past the post voting system.

Mr Hope: Listen mister, I can't believe a word that you say.

Mr Fathom: You better watch your language, matey. I could sue you for defamation of character.

Mr Hope: As far as I'm concerned you don't have any character. So how can I defame what doesn't exist?

(Mr Fathom turns to Mrs Jollifant)

Mr Fathom: Did you hear that, Abigail? This bloke's calling me a liar.

Mrs Jollifant: Well, really; there's no call for that sort of talk.

Mr Hope: You were a fanatical liberal when you spoke to me earlier.

Mr Fathom: He's off again.

Mrs Jollifant: I don't know what's got into him.

Mr Hope: Now you're talking about Tony Blair as if he was the messiah.

Mr Fathom: He was indeed a man of vision and inspiration. Who worked for peace, abroad, and prosperity, at home.

Mr Hope: It's not the way I saw it.

Mr Fathom: Then you need a pair of glasses.

Mr Hope: You're not an easy man to pin down, y'know.

Mr Fathom: I am allowed my political beliefs. It is a free country.

Mr Hope: And now you claim that you're a Labour supporter?

Mr Fathom: Of course.

Mr Hope: And yet Mrs Right assured me that you are really a right wing Tory.

Mr Fathom: What, as if I'd support a bunch of reactionary backwoodsmen like them! (**shakes his head**) The very idea.

Mr Hope: Though why any party'd want your support is beyond me.

Mr Fathom: You speak for yourself.

Mr Hope: Well I'm off to the loo. By the time I come back you'll probably be a Monster Raving Loony.

Mr Fathom: From the way you're talking they sound more like your kind of people.

(Mr Hope walks off and exits through the door marked 'gents'. Pauses)

Mr Fathom: He had a nerve I must say. Coming out with a load of cobblers like that. Impugning my reputation for honesty in that way.

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Mrs Jollifant: D'you know him, Wilf?

Mr Fathom: No. In fact I wish I'd never clapped eyes in him. It wouldn't surprise me if he had a screw loose somewhere. Now what was I saying,

Abigail, before I was so rudely interrupted?

Mrs Jollifant: You were on about new labour.

Mr Fathom: **(with effusive enthusiasm)** Oh yes; marvellous people. They did a fantastic job. Things did indeed get better, on their watch. There can be no doubt about that. Onwards and upwards. For the many and not the few. Prudence, with a purpose. The end of boom and bust. Joined up government. A new dawn had broken. They created a level playing field, and supported hard working families. And more power to their elbow; that's what I say.

(Tabs close. Lights off.)

Scene 3 – Function room

(Tabs open. Lights up. A few minutes later everyone is stood where they were at the end of the previous scene. The door marked 'gents' opens and Mr Hope enters. He shuts the door behind him and takes up his former position)

Mr Fathom: Maggie Thatcher. Now there was a leader with a capital L. She put the great back into Britain. We were the sick man of Europe until she took over. A strike ridden banana republic, run by a series of political non-entities, who were in hock to the unions. Now there was someone who had the courage of her convictions. There was no pussy-footing around when she was in charge. My word no. She sorted out the Argies down in the Falklands, then gave the heave-ho to Scargill and his merry men. She cracked down on those strike- happy militant activists, and cut those communist union barons down to size. She released the dynamic forces of the free market, and freed a stagnating nation from the dead hand of the state. She took on the vested interests, and gave us a share owning democracy. No wonder they called her the iron lady.

Mr Hope: Blimey, I see you're back to being a Tory again.

Mr Fathom: What! I've always been a conservative. And proud of it. I'm true blue; through and through. When you're on the right, you can't go wrong; that's what I always say.

Mr Hope: You were waxing lyrical about Tony Blair only a few minutes ago.

Mr Fathom: What! That unprincipled spin merchant. That self- serving warmonger.

Mr Hope: You were calling him a political genius.

Mr Fathom: You must be hearing voices, mister. As if I'd support that two-faced shyster! I don't vote for conmen.

Mr Hope: You sound like a bit of a conman yourself.

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Mr Fathom: You watch your tongue.

Mr Hope: The Vicar of Bray had more consistency than you have.

Mr Fathom: I'm not going to stand here and listen to this. **(turns to Mrs Jollifant)** What time is it, Abigail.

(Mrs Jollifant looks at her watch)

Mrs Jollifant: It's six o'clock, on the dot.

Mr Hope: Blimey, someone's told the truth at last.

Mr Fathom: It's a good job I asked. I've got a train to catch. The six thirty to Turnbury. I've got to see someone there on very important business. Can't be late for that one. My word no. Well, be seeing you, Abigail.

Mrs Jollifant: Yes, be seeing you, Wilf. And have a pleasant journey.

(Mr Fathom leaves through the door marked 'exit'. Pauses)

Mrs Right: Well, I'll just pop out for a breath of air. It's getting rather stuffy in here.

Mr Hope: Yeah. It does have a rather cloying atmosphere.

(Mrs Right leaves through the door marked 'exit'. Pause. Mrs Jollifant looks with some curiosity at Mr Hope. Hope is embarrassed at that scrutiny. Then Mrs Jollifant edges slowly towards Mr Hope)

Mrs Jollifant: I don't believe we've been introduced.

Mr Hope: I'm Mr Hope. Reginald Bob Hope.

Mrs Jollifant: And I'm Mrs Jollifant. Abigail Ariadne Jollifant. I'm the President of the Fakeham branch of the Women's Institute.

Mr Hope: Indeed.

(She puts out a hand for Mr Hope to shake)

Mrs Jollifant: Nice to see you, Mr Hope.

Mr Hope: **(uncertainly)** Nice to see you, Mrs Jollifant.

(They shake hands)

Mrs Jollifant: What do you think of our little town then?

(Mr Hope shrugs his shoulders)

Mr Hope: **(Searching for words)** Well

Mrs Jollifant: **(interrupting)** You can be quite open with me, y'know. I won't take any offence. Honestly.

Mr Hope: To be quite candid and frank, I think it's a very agreeable, charming, pleasant little place. And quite a marked change from London, I might add.

Mrs Jollifant: Indeed.

Mr Hope: It has a nice, quiet tempo. Quite a sedative for the nerves after the hectic pace of the big city.

Mrs Jollifant: I'm afraid it's not much to speak of, architecturally.

Mr Hope: Oh, I don't know; it has its odd gems, here and there.

Mrs Jollifant: You think so?

Mr Hope: I thought the town hall was a quite splendid work of Greek Revival architecture.

Mrs Jollifant: I can't say that I've noticed.

Mr Hope: And the Lido has a really impressive art deco design.

Mrs Jollifant: It has?

Mr Hope: And I was quite taken by the Regency-Gothic of St Osgood's church.

Mrs Jollifant: I suppose it takes an outsider to see these things?

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Mr Hope: I daresay.

Mrs Jollifant: We took a terrible pasting during the war, y'know.

Mr Hope: Is that so.

Mrs Jollifant: Oh yes. Week after week, night after night, there were huge bombing raids by the Luftwaffe. The town was torn to rubble. Half the front was obliterated. It was an awful mess. And of course the casualties were horrendous. Some people only survived those terrible attacks by skulking in cellars and basements; or going into Anderson Shelters.

Mr Hope: My word. You have been through it.

Mrs Jollifant: It was quite an experience.

Mr Hope: Yes, I can well imagine. It must have been a frightening ordeal.

Mrs Jollifant: Oh yes. You don't forget something like that. We were bombed out of our own house, on Concord Street.

Mr Hope: Really.

Mrs Jollifant: Had to live in temporary accommodation till the war was over.

Mr Hope: My goodness. You had quite a time of it.

Mrs Jollifant: Indeed. Those were grim days. But we all pulled together and helped each other out. There was comradeship and camaraderie. We wouldn't have survived otherwise.

Mr Hope: Yes, I suppose that good things can come, even from adversity?

Mrs Jollifant: We had a team spirit then, which you don't see in these more individualistic times. **(Abruptly)** Anyway, if you'll excuse me, I'd like a word with the Vicar.

Mr Hope: Of course. Don't let me detain you.

Mrs Jollifant: He gave us such an inspiring sermon last Sunday.

Mr Hope: Indeed.

Mrs Jollifant: About the need for hope and idealism. Especially in adverse times.

Mr Hope: I'm sad I missed it.

Mrs Jollifant: I'm sure we'll bump into each other again.

Mr Hope: Yes. I'm sure we will.

(Mrs Jollifant walks over and greets the Reverend. They stage-talk. Mr Trueman finishes off his drink, then places the drained glass down on the wall table. Pause. Mrs Right enters through the exit door and walks over to Mr Hope)

Mrs Right: Well that's blown the cobwebs away.

(Mr Hope nods his head)

Mr Trueman: **(Somewhat portentously)** Well, ladies and gentlemen, I'm just off for a smoke. I'll see you people again in a few minutes.

(He walks over and leaves through the exit door)

Mrs Right: We won't be seeing him again today.

Mr Hope: Well that's a relief. In fact it wouldn't bother me if I never saw him again.

(Pauses)

Mrs Right: By the way, I listened in through the window while you were having that little talk with Mrs Jollifant.

Mr Hope: **(wryly)** You don't miss a trick.

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Mrs Right: Oh I like to know what's going on.

Mr Hope: Well, what did you make of it then?

Mrs Right: Another bunch of porkies I'm afraid.

Mr Hope: Yeah.

Mrs Right: The Luftwaffe never touched this place during the war.

Mr Hope: They didn't?

Mrs Right: What would have been the point of bombing a dozy little backwater like this. All we had in the line of industry was a candy floss factory and a plant for making shoe polish. Hardly anything to set the war effort on fire.

Mr Hope: **(wearily)** More moonshine.

Mrs Right: 'Fraid so.

Mr Hope: She told me she was president of the local branch of the women's institute.

Mrs Right: More baloney. She left the WI three years ago, after arguing with the then President. She hasn't been back since.

(The exit door opens and Mr Fathom enters. Mr Hope is taken aback, though the others seem quite indifferent)

Mr Hope: What are you doing back here again?

Mr Fathom: Eh?

Mr Hope: Showing up like a bad penny after you said you were taking the six thirty train to Turnbury.

Mr Fathom: I don't know where you got that idea from, pal. I haven't been to Turnbury in years. I can't abide the place.

Mr Hope: You said you had to see someone there, on a matter of some importance.

Mr Fathom: Rubbish. I just went for a stroll on the front to get some fresh air.

Mr Hope: Or think up more lies.

Mr Fathom: And I wouldn't go around spreading malicious and misleading stories about other people. It could land you in some serious trouble, mister.

Mr Hope: Well it's a waste of time listening to you. That's one thing for sure.

(Mr Fathom walks over to the buffet table, fills a glass from a punch bowl and lazily sips it as he looks through the window)

Mrs Right: He couldn't have gone there anyway.

Mr Hope: Uh.

Mrs Right: The last train to Turnbury left at five thirty.

Mr Hope: So they can't even tell you when the trains run on time. **(Pauses)** These people are really insufferable. I don't know how you can stand to live here, Mrs Right; I really don't. It'd drive me up the wall. If it hasn't done already.

Mrs Right: **(wistfully)** If it wasn't for ties of family and business, I think I'd have left years ago.

Mr Hope: It's never too late to have a rethink.

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Mrs Right: I daresay. But, this is where my roots are. I'd be quite lost if I moved elsewhere.

(Mr Fathom walks to the front of the stage, near Mrs Right and Mr Hope. Mrs Jollifant leaves the Reverend and walks over to join Mr Fathom)

Mr Fathom: **(with grim conviction)** We've got to stand up to international terrorism, Abigail, and take on the fanatics and the extremists, wherever they are. We've got to fight them every inch of the way. There can be no compromise or half measures on this issue. You're either with us or against us. Yes, we have to take them on, and carry the fight to them, here, and in nations overseas. We've got to stand up for our values, not apologise for them.

Mr Hope: **(to Mrs Right)** He's on his soap box again.

Mr Fathom: **(continuing)** There can be no deals or accommodation with these people. They must be confronted. Indeed, anything else is downright appeasement. We're in this for the long haul. As far as I'm concerned this is the Third World War. A war for the future of civilization itself. If we lose this our entire Western culture, which we have nurtured and sustained for the last thousand years, goes down the pan, and a new, terrible dark age will take possession of the earth, with horrendous, unspeakable consequences for all of us.

Mr Hope: **(wearily)** He can certainly spin a yarn.

Mrs Right: Oh, there's no stopping that feller, when he gets in his stride.

Mr Hope: Y'know, I'm having some very serious doubts about taking up full time residence here. Not with this shower of double talking con artists hanging about.

Mrs Right: I can't say that I blame you.

(Lights off. Tabs closed.)

Scene 4 – Function Room

(Tabs open. Lights up. Ten minutes later. Everyone stood as they were before)

Mr Fathom: Communism. That's the thing, my friend. Marx and Lenin were absolutely right. Only a completely socialised economy, with fair dealings for all, and the destruction of the entire edifice of capitalism, will meet the needs of mankind. The acquisitive economy of greed and exploitation has had its day. We cannot allow speculators and stock exchanges to gamble with the future of mankind; just for private profit and accumulation. If you deregulate the economy, like Thatcher and Reagan did, you just put the spivs and sharks in control. After all, we gave the bankers free reign, and they almost brought the house down.

Mr Hope: **(to Mrs Right)** Well he's right on that one.

Mrs Right: **(tartly)** You can't tar us all of us with the same brush, Mr Hope.

Mr Fathom: **(continuing)** The workers must own the means of production and exchange. Power belongs to the people, and the toiling masses, not the exploiting classes. The Capitalist overlords and the share owning parasites must be done away with; once and for all. The needs of the many cannot be controlled by the desires of the few. And all those dark forces of reaction which stand in the way of the proletariat - from the landed Tory aristocrats to New Labour free- marketeers - must be eliminated with utmost ruthlessness and despatch.

Mr Hope: Blimey, you've gone from a Thatcher conservative to a Marxist Communist, in about fifteen minutes. You sure get around the political map, I'll say that for you.

Mr Fathom: I don't know what you're getting at. I've been a communist since I wore short trousers. Das Capital is my bible, I'd have you know. I'll be red till I'm dead.

Mr Hope: Mister, you're every colour in the rainbow.

(The exit door opens and a large, confident, burly chap in his forties enters. He is Mr Playfair. He goes over to the buffet table, scoffs a piece of pie. He turns to scrutinise the others)

Mr Playfair: **(in a genial tone)** They've certainly laid on a decent spread here. You're spoiled for choice.

Mr Fathom: You want to try the punch. It's spot on.

Mr Playfair: I'll take your word for it, Mr Fathom.

(Mr Playfair pours himself a drink of punch and takes a swig)

Mr Playfair: Not bad at all.

(He turns again to scrutinise the rest of the party)

Mrs Right: **(confidentially)** See that feller who's just come in?

Mr Hope: Aye.

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Mrs Right: He's the local know it all.

Mr Hope: Is he indeed.

Mrs Right: Or the guy who thinks he knows it all. Mr Playfair. A singularly ill choice of name in his case; seeing that no one plays it less fair than he does.

Mr Hope: Well he should be right at home here.

(Mr Playfair notices Mrs Right and Mr Hope, and slowly edges his way towards them)

Mrs Right: He's coming this way.

Mr Hope: That's all we need.

Mrs Right: So don't say you haven't been warned.

Mr Playfair: I see we have a newcomer in our midst.

Mr Hope: Yes, I'm Mr Hope. Reginald Bob Hope.

Mr Playfair: And I'm Mr Playfair. Charles Clarence Playfair.

(The two men shake hands)

Mr Playfair: And what d'you think of Fakeham?

Mr Hope: I quite like it. A very friendly little town. A nice stretch of beach as well. I'm sure there's some good fishing out there.

Mr Playfair: Oh yes. People come from miles around.

Mr Hope: I can well imagine.

Mr Playfair: And we have quite a history to look back on, Mr Hope.

Mr Hope: Indeed.

Mr Playfair: You might not think it to look at, but this town was mentioned in the doomsday book.

Mr Hope: Is that so.

Mr Playfair: It was a noted ecclesiastical centre during the middle- ages. People came here from all over Europe. It was indeed on the pilgrimage trail. We had a splendid monastery; till Henry the Eighth pulled it down.

Mr Hope: Yes. The old rogue did quite a bit of damage.

Mr Playfair: Fakeham was a significant royalist stronghold during the civil war.

Mr Hope: My word.

Mr Playfair: I'd have you know that King Charles himself sought sanctuary here at one point.

Mr Hope: How intriguing.

Mr Playfair: He called the people of Fakeham, the loyalist of the loyal. And the truest of the true.

Mr Hope: Yes.

Mr Playfair: It was small wonder the roundheads were so vicious when they eventually stormed the defences and took the town in the autumn of sixteen forty eight. Indeed Cromwell wanted to lay the town waste and pull it apart stone by stone; and had to be dissuaded from such a calamitous course by some of his more sober lieutenants.

Mr Hope: You've certainly been through the mill in this town.

Mr Playfair: Yes, people are quite amazed when we tell them about some of the things that have occurred here.

Mr Hope: I'm not surprised.

Mr Playfair: Though perhaps the most fascinating and consequential story took place here, during the last war.

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- Mr Hope:** Indeed.
- Mr Playfair:** Of course it was all hushed up at the time, for reasons of security and morale.
- Mr Hope:** Yeah.
- Mr Playfair:** During one nightly bombing raid, in the spring of forty two, the Germans clandestinely dropped a paratrooper onto Crispin hill, overlooking the town. The man, who could talk decent English, changed into civilian clothes he'd taken with him, and merged with the townsfolk the next day. The upshot is he came within a whisker of killing Winston Churchill while he was on a morale-boosting tour of the town.
- Mr Hope:** I say.
- Mr Playfair:** The man was wrestled to the ground and incapacitated by three quick witted locals, two of whom happened to be my uncle, Oswald, and his best friend, Mr Mosley. After the war the entire town was awarded the George Cross by the King.
- Mr Hope:** Like Malta.
- Mr Playfair:** Quite. Yes, unlikely as it sounds, the Second World War could have been lost on the promenade of Fakeham. Now that's a thought, isn't it?
- Mr Hope:** I'll say. Yes, you have quite a big history for such a little town.
- Mr Playfair:** Oh, there are other stories as well. I've just skimmed the surface. We've had murderers, traitors, highwaymen, witches, bigamists, and smugglers here.
- Mr Hope:** It could do with being written up.
- Mr Playfair:** Oh but it has been.
- Mr Hope:** Yes.
- Mr Playfair:** I myself have written the official history of this town. I do happen to be the history teacher at the local High School. I penned a five hundred page, illustrated account, from its Saxon origin, to the present day. It got quite good reviews as well. And not just in the local press, I might add.

Mr Hope: I'm glad to hear it.

Mr Playfair: I'll let you have a copy when we next meet.

Mr Hope: That's jolly decent of you. I can't wait to read it.

Mr Playfair: Anyway, I must have a word with the vicar. We're both members of the local antiquarian society.

Mr Hope: Yes; be seeing you.

(He walks over to the Reverend. They greet each other and stage-talk)

Mr Hope: More porky pies?

Mrs Right: Oh yes. There were some pearlers there.

Mr Hope: So it was all baloney?

Mrs Right: Total bull. Mentioned in the Doomsday Book! This town didn't exist until the late Eighteenth Century. So all that stuff about being an ecclesiastical centre in the middle ages, and a Royalist redoubt during the Civil War, is garbage.

Mr Hope: Blimey. The way they tell 'em.

Mrs Right: Churchill never visited Fakeham. So you can disregard that piece of fiction he told you.

Mr Hope: Another cock and bull story.

Mrs Right: That history book doesn't exist either.

Mr Hope: At least it'll spare me having to read it.

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Mrs Right: And Mr Playfair isn't, and never has been, a history teacher. Or a teacher of anything.

Mr Hope: More guff.

Mrs Right: He runs a used car business on Duffer Lane.

Mr Hope: Well he was certainly giving me the run-around.

(Pauses)

Mr Fathom: **(assertively)** Y'know, if we'd have done a deal with Hitler and Mussolini we could have avoided the horrors of the second world war, and kept our empire to boot. We could have been part of a new world order, rather than teaming up with Uncle Joe and the Reds.

Mr Hope: Blimey, he's a raving fascist now. **(he shakes his head)** I just can't fathom this bloke out.

(Lights off. Tabs closed.)

Scene 5 – Function Room

(Lights up. Tabs open. The same scene, ten minutes later. All stood as they were before, apart from Mr Playfair, who has left the Reverend and joined the group in the centre of the stage)

Mr Fathom: What the hell were we doing in Iraq? Why were we in Afghanistan? And what in blue blazes were we doing, meddling in Libya? I ask yer?

Mr Hope: **(to Mrs Right)** He's gone from a warmonger to a peacenik.

Mr Fathom: **(continuing)** Putting lives on the line. Throwing good money after bad. It was all a totally futile exercise. We were conned into it by a bunch of vainglorious politicians. It's okay for them. They can leave a mess, swan out of office, go on the lecture circuit, earn themselves a mint, and leave other people to pick up the pieces. If those countries want to go to the dogs, let 'em. It's no business of ours. We have enough problems on our own doorstep without trying to be the policeman to the world.

Mr Hope: This guy is the limit.

Mrs Right: You haven't heard the half of it.

Mr Hope: Your vicar has his work cut out, if this lot are his parishioners.

Mrs Right: He has his faith to comfort him.

Reverend: Amen.

Mr Hope: Blimey; he has good pair of ears as well.

Mr Fathom: Anarchism. That's only viable future for the human race.

Mr Playfair: Y'reckon?

Mr Fathom: Oh yes, there can be no question about it, Mr Playfair. A society free from the pressure of the state and the snares of the market. Communities and workers acting and planning in their own interests, setting their own goals, determining their own future. Not accepting other peoples standards, or obeying someone else's orders, or succumbing to the enticements of the commercial machine. Autonomous and self-determining. Seamlessly integrated with their environment. Without waste and over-production. In tune with the wider ecology. Neither capitalist nor state-capitalist.

Mrs Jollifant: **(admiringly)** You really have thought things out, Wilf.

Mr Fathom: Indeed so. I don't go in for half measures.

Mr Playfair: And how long are you staying Mrs Jollifant?

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Mrs Jollifant: Quite a while I should say. Wilf here has agreed to give me a lift home. And he won't be leaving for some time to come.

Mr Playfair: That's very decent of him.

Mr Fathom: Least I can do, old man. Seeing that we live on the same street.

Mrs Right: **(in a confidential tone)** They live on different sides of the town.

Mr Hope: Aye.

Mr Fathom: I've parked the Bentley out at the back.

Mrs Right: He drives an old Robin Reliant. And he left it at the front.

(Mr Hope nods his head)

Mr Playfair: Well, I won't be leaving any time soon.

Mr Fathom: I'm certainly going to make a night of it.

Mr Playfair: I can't say that I blame you. Seeing that there's free booze and food laid on.

Mr Fathom: Oh, it'll be well after midnight by the time we leave.

Mrs Jollifant: Why rush off, when we've only just come?

Mr Playfair: **(cheerily)** Let's make it a convivial evening.

Mrs Jollifant: By all means.

Mr Fathom: Yes, the more the merrier. The day's still young yet. And I've hardly started yet.

(Mr Fathom slakes his glass dry, walks over to the punch bowl and replenishes it. He takes a swig)

Mr Fathom: And there's plenty of booze left.

Mr Playfair: Yes. This should be quite a party.

(Lights off. Tabs closed.)

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Scene 6 – Function Room

(Tabs open. Lights up. The same room , ten minutes later. All have left, except for Mr Hope, Mrs Right, and the Reverend. The Reverend has left his glass of orange on a wall table. He is stood by the buffet table. He pours himself a glass of punch and takes a sip)

Mr Hope: So you're not teetotal, vicar?

Reverend: Oh I enjoy a drink, now and then, Mr Hope. But only in moderation of course.

(The Reverend walks over to join the other two at the front of the stage)

Mr Hope: So they've all left us.

Mrs Right: It was only to be expected. As soon as they said they were going to make a night of it, I knew they'd all clear off quite sharpish. If they say one thing they're sure to do another.

Mr Hope: They're certainly a weird set of people. It's enough to make your head spin round, just listening to them.

Mrs Right: Yes, this town is very much a one-off.

Reverend: The Lord be praised, in that regard.

Mr Hope: I'm only surprised that it hasn't driven you all crackers living here.

Mrs Right: So you're having second thoughts about staying in our community, Mr Hope?

Mr Hope: Yes. The fumes and traffic of London seem a little more attractive now. **(Pauses)** It's amazing how this town can function, with people like that hanging about.

Mrs Right: We manage to get by. Somehow.

Reverend: God does not abandon those who keep true to the faith. I, and my good friend, Mrs Right here, will keep soldiering on, in the cause of righteousness, and in the sure hope of better days to come.

Mrs Right: Indeed so.

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Mr Hope: Well, I admire your optimism.

Reverend: Faith can move mountains, Mr Hope.

Mr Hope: Yes, at least you two have kept to the straight and narrow. You haven't gone to the dogs like the rest of them.

Reverend: They can deceive and lie to their fellow men. But God sees all and knows all. He isn't fooled or taken in by bluff and bluster, however skilful the performance and cunning the deception. They may escape detection and justice in this life, but come the Day of Judgement, they must answer for their lies and falsehoods, their deceits and duplicities, before a higher and a greater court of justice.

(SFX. The sound of police sirens and screeching car tyres, as if a number of vehicles are coming to an abrupt halt just outside the hotel)

Mr Hope: I say, what's going on?

(Mrs Right rushes to the open window near the door and opens it even further to peer outside)

Reverend: **(urgently)** What's happening, Mrs Right?

Mrs Right: **(breathlessly)** About five or six cop cars have just drawn up outside the hotel.

Mr Hope: What's all this about?

Reverend: I've no idea. There've been no violent disturbances here tonight.

Mr Hope: No. Even if I did want to thump one or two of them.

Reverend: Maybe they've got the wrong address.

Mr Hope: Knowing this place, that's a distinct possibility.

Mrs Right: Well we'll find out. Some of them are heading this way.

(Mrs Right straightens up and looks at the entrance door. There is a violent pounding on the door)

Mrs Right: **(loudly)** All right, I'm coming. You don't have to knock the door down.

(Mrs Right opens the door. A large, bluff, burly man, in plain clothes, enters. He is detective inspector Lomax. He is followed by

a rather stern, unsmiling looking woman, with a neat grey, dress suit, who wears spectacles. She is detective sergeant Rowena Rocker. She is followed by a well built, uniformed male copper, sergeant framer)

Lomax: Shut the door, sergeant.

Framer: Sir.

(Framer shuts the door)

Mrs Right: **(confused)** What is all this?

Lomax: Lady and gentlemen, I think we'd better introduce ourselves.

(He takes his warrant card and shows it to the trio)

Lomax: Here's my warrant card. I'm Detective Inspector Lomax of the South West Police.

(He puts it back, then points towards Rowena Rocker)

Lomax: This is my assistant, Detective Sergeant Rowena Rocker.

(He points towards framer)

Lomax: And this is Sergeant Framer.

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Reverend: What is the meaning of this intrusion, inspector? This is a private party we're having here. With invited guests only. And we are, I can assure you, decent and law abiding citizens.

Lomax: I wouldn't be too sure about that, your reverend.

Mr Hope: What are you people doing here?

Lomax: I would remind you, sir, that the law has an automatic invitation to anywhere it suspects that felonious behaviour has been taking place.

Mrs Right: Criminal activity? Here? I'd have you know that we happen to be three upstanding members of the community.

Ms Rocker: That's what they all say.

Reverend: **(indignant)** You're not dealing with a bunch of yobbos here, y'know?

Mrs Right: The only thing the law has managed to pin on me is a parking fine.

Ms Rocker: You guys have got some front; I'll say that for you.

Mrs Right: We have our reputations to think of, officer. I'd have you know that I'm the manager of the Royal Unicorn Bank.

Reverend: I'm the Reverend Frank Faith; the vicar of saint Osgood's church.

Mr Hope: And I'm Mr Hope. Reginald Bob Hope. I'm a stockbroker from Hampstead.

Lomax: Very interesting. But before we proceed with our enquiries, I'd better give you something of a warning. We have this place surrounded. And we have some specialised armed units in position, as well. So don't think you can make a break for it.

Mrs Right: Armed units!

Mr Hope: Have you got the right address, Inspector?

Lomax: Of course.

Mrs Right: There are no members of the criminal fraternity here. I can assure you of that.

Lomax: We only have your word for that, madam.

Mrs Right: **(indignantly)** Really!

Lomax: Now all we're asking for is your cooperation, on some outstanding matters that need clearing up.

Reverend: This is intolerable. I've a good mind to write a letter of protest to the Fakeham Recorder, about this.

Ms Rocker: I'd think about getting a good lawyer, if I were you, vicar.

Reverend: I have a higher power to protect me, madam.

Mr Hope: What the hell's going on? You're treating us like common criminals.

Mrs Right: Yes, and I happen to be a personal friend of the Chief Constable.

Ms Rocker: Not any longer.

Lomax: We, as officers of the law, have been keeping close tabs on you three, for some time now.

Mrs Right: What on earth for?

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Lomax: I'll come to that presently.

Mr Hope: Talk about living in a police state.

Reverend: Yes, you'd think they'd have enough on their plate tracking down terrorists and crime syndicates.

Lomax: After some detailed and painstaking investigative work, on our part, we have come to the conclusion that you three aren't quite everything you're cracked up to be.

Mr Hope: What are you getting at?

Lomax: If you'll just try to exercise a degree of patience, sir, I will explain everything in due course.

Mr Hope: (**impatiently**) Well get on with it then.

Lomax: Now take our ecclesiastical friend here. The Reverend Frank Faith. The Vicar of Saint Osgood's Church; just off Primrose Road.

Reverend: Is it a crime to be a man of god? To exercise a sacred office? To look after the spiritual needs of ones parishioners? To warn against the temptations of sin and iniquity? To encourage the faithful, on the path of redemption and salvation? Then if so, I plead guilty, on all counts, inspector.

Lomax: No, it's not a crime to be a vicar. In fact I happen to be C of E myself.

Mrs Right: Get on with it man.

Lomax: But it is a crime to use a position, as a man of the cloth, as a front, for outright criminal and illegal activities.

Reverend: This is an outrageous slander. Why the very idea is utterly preposterous.

Ms Rocker: We have the goods on you, vicar.

Lomax: You're a vicar in name only, Mr Faith. Your real name is Arthur Thaddeus Selsdon. You may have entered a seminary and taken holy orders. But it was only so that you could infiltrate your way into the church, for purposes other than spreading the good news. You managed to become the vicar of this handy, seaside parish, in order to facilitate the clandestine smuggling and distribution of Cocaine and Crack, right across the South West of England.

Reverend: You've taken leave of your senses, inspector. Why, I can hardly believe that I'm hearing this.

Ms Rocker: And you're going to hear a lot more about this, Mr Selsdon.

Lomax: You're a sham vicar. A shameless counterfeit. A fake and a phoney. Oh you can put on a good act alright. I'll grant you that. But it's just a role you're playing. Like someone acting a part on the stage.

Ms Rocker: He deserves an academy award.

Lomax: But we know for a fact that you're a key executive member of a powerful South American cocaine cartel. And you're up to your arm pits in an evil, money spinning racket that enslaves thousands into addiction, and breeds crime the length and breadth of the land. And don't try and deny it Mr Selsdon; 'cause we have incontrovertible evidence of your criminality.

Ms Rocker: You haven't got a leg to stand on.

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Lomax: When this comes to court the prosecution will tear you apart.

Ms Rocker: You haven't got a prayer.

Mr Hope: Is this true, Vicar?

(Pauses)

Mrs Right: Well? Say something.

Mr Hope: Yeah. Spit it out.

Reverend: **(reluctantly)** I'm afraid so. It is the truth. Alas.

Mrs Right: (incredulous) So you're a crook!

Ms Rocker: You bet.

(The Reverend wearily shrugs his shoulders)

Mrs Right: A racketeer! A drugs runner!

Lomax: He'd give Al Capone a run for his money.

Reverend: (shakes his head) I didn't think my cover would be blown. I thought I'd covered all the bases. That I'd kept things under wraps. But the game's up now, I'm afraid. No use keeping up the pretence now. I'm done for.

Lomax: That's better.

Ms Rocker: You can always shop some of your colleagues. I'm sure the judge would take any such cooperation into account, in passing sentence.

Reverend: And then the cartel would pass their own sentence on me. Death. With no chance of any remission. No thanks, Detective Sergeant. I think I'd prefer a jail cell to a grave pit.

Ms Rocker: Suit yourself.

Mr Hope: A drugs baron, hiding under a dog collar. Why, you're a bigger phoney than all the rest of them.

Ms Rocker: You've no room to talk. It was no joke what you were up to either. Mr Reginald Bob Hope.

Mr Hope: What d'you mean? You've nothing on me. Nothing, I tell you. I'm an entirely innocent member of the public. I do my job and I pay my taxes. I've a clean conscience. I can look myself in the mirror. You're not going to frame me up on some phony rap. No way. I have my rights y'know.

Ms Rocker: Come off it, hope. We know who you are.

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Lomax: Yeah. You can cut the pretence as well.

Mr Hope: I'm just an ordinary stockbroker. Helping others invest their money in viable businesses. Where's the crime there?

Lomax: Yes, and the financier and criminal mastermind behind a huge people smuggling racket. Smuggling tens of thousands of people from the Third World, into Western Europe. Most of them ending up in sweat shops, and earning a pittance. Though a not insignificant number of them have been used as bonded slaves, or sex workers in illicit brothels.

Mrs Right: **(shocked)** Is this true, Mr Hope?

Mr Hope: These are entirely unfounded allegations. I'm as clean as a whistle. Why I've a good mind to sue these people for slander. You can't go around throwing unfounded accusations like these at innocent people. This is an appalling way for officers of the law to behave.

Ms Rocker: Don't try and bluff your way out of this, mister. You haven't got a hope of getting out of this one. We've got a rock solid case against you; ready to go to court. We have the facts, the testimony and the documentation. And you'll be looking at twenty to thirty years.

Lomax: We've had your home, your car and your offices bugged, this last sixteen months. We've had you followed and monitored around the clock. We have video evidence, and hundreds of hours of taped recordings. They're going to throw the book at you, Hope.

Reverend: **(sarcastically)** Welcome to the club, Mr Hope.

Mr Hope: Blimey; I have been rumbled.

Mrs Right: **(piously)** Gentlemen, I'm shocked and appalled by all this. You have betrayed every vestige of honour that your occupations represent. You, Vicar Faith – or should I say, Mr Selsdon - have let down every one of your parishioners. How often have I listened to your sanctimonious sermons; where you preached the virtues of honesty, probity and selflessness. Things that you urged on others, but never practiced yourself. Putting on a brazen act of piety and humility that functioned as a mere smokescreen to hide your wicked, villainous and criminal behaviour. You are an absolute disgrace. As for you, Mr Hope. You have traduced and degraded the honourable and honest profession of stockbroking, by using it as a mere front, to hide an evil international racket. The smuggling of wretched human beings, in their thousands, to be used and exploited by criminal gangs. Profiting from the misery of others, while making the pretence of being a normal, upstanding citizen. I have rarely heard of anything more despicable, than the appalling criminal behaviour you have indulged in. You should hang your heads in shame. The pair of you.

Ms Rocker: Get off your high horse, Mrs Right. You're no better than either of them. And you know it.

Mrs Right: What?

Lomax: We know what your game is, Mrs Right.

Mr Hope: **(scathing)** Another con artist.

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Lomax: Monica Dolores right. You're the Manager of the Royal Unicorn Bank, on Turntable Lane, Fakeham?

Mrs Right: What's wrong with that?

Lomax: Just about everything. The way that you managed things.

Mrs Right: Banking is a legitimate and honourable profession. And I have an exemplary record I'd have you know.

Lomax: Well that's just another piece of camouflage. A purported bank manager in the day. But at evenings and weekends you were up to something else entirely.

Mrs Right: All I did was embroidery.

Ms Rocker: Pull the other one, Mrs Right. We've got you stitched up.

Lomax: **(continuing)** Behind the front of being a respectable bank manager, you ran and controlled an illicit arms trafficking racket. Providing insurgent groups, terrorists, fanatics, fundamentalists, rebel armies, drugs gangs and crime syndicates all around the world, with small arms, automatic rifles and machine guns, in order to conduct their murderous, criminal, and destabilising activities.

Ms Rocker: It didn't matter a hoot to you, who you sold them to, or what they did with them, as long as you got hard cash in return.

Lomax: Yes, we know what you were up to, behind that bland middle class façade you presented to the world.

Mrs Right: Nonsense. As if I'd get myself involved in something like that. **(Indignantly)** me; a former convent girl.

Ms Rocker: We have the hard evidence, madam. It's all there, in black and white. We know what you've been up to all these years.

Lomax: Arms that were smuggled, at huge profit to yourself, but at the cost of misery and death for others, all around the globe.

Mrs Right: I want to see my solicitor. I have my rights y'know.

Ms Rocker: There'll be plenty of time for that.

Mr Hope: **(scathing)** Just an old fashioned, no frills high street bank, eh?

Mrs Right: **(with cynical humour)** Well, it needed livening up a bit.

Lomax: You were a merchant of mayhem and murder.

Mr Hope: Blimey, she's a bigger crook than us two.

Ms Rocker: You're all under arrest. You don't have to say anything. But anything you do say may be taken down and used in evidence against you.

Lomax: Well there you have it, lady and gentlemen. You're to come down with us to the station. We'll need to question you all, pertaining to those serious matters we've just raised.

Ms Rocker: There'll be no bail for you people. Not with the kind of charges you're facing. You'll be under lock and key till your trials start.

Lomax: Right; let's get moving shall we.

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Mrs Right: I demand to see my lawyer. I have my rights y'know.

Ms Rocker: We'll arrange all that down at the station.

Mr Hope: **(with anxious scepticism)** Are you sure that this is a genuine arrest?

Lomax: What are you on about?

Mr Hope: You are real policemen and policewomen aren't you?

Ms Rocker: Of course. What d'you think this is; a pantomime?

Mr Hope: You wouldn't be pulling a fast one, would you?

(Lomax shrugs his shoulders)

Lomax: What us?

Reverend: This is on the level, isn't it?

Lomax: Of course. You saw my warrant card.

Mrs Right: It's amazing what you can fake these days. After all, we know about that.

Mr Hope: We've had to listen to a lot of porkies today, y'know.

Lomax: Yeah; and you've come out with a few of them as well.

Mr Hope: You are who you say you are?

Lomax: Oh absolutely. You can rely on us, y'know? We are genuine, bona fide officers of the law.

Ms Rocker: **(impatient)** Let's get down to the station, shall we? Time doesn't stand still round here, y'know.

(Reluctantly the three suspects leave through the exit door, followed by the three policemen. Lights off. Tabs closed.)

The End

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