



# 'The Mandarin's Dilemma'

or 'Made Knaves by Duty'

A Musical Comedy in Two Acts

LIBRETTO

Version 5th Jan 2015

music, lyrics and book by Joe St.Johanser.



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or 'Made Knaves by  
Duty'

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## **CHARACTERS**

### **Helena Besty**

Assistant Principal Cabinet Office - An ambitious and determined young Mandarin

### **Bernard Hapless**

Parliamentary Adviser to the PM - a frightfully intellectual but shy young man

### **Rumena Haaridan**

Deputy Leader of the Opposition - Glamourous, sexy, power mad and deadlier than the male.

### **Gordon Blackead**

Prime Minister - Charismatic megalomaniac.

### **Sir Tristram Seville**

Permanent Secretary to the Cabinet - an aging Mandarin.

### **Sir Norman Persimmon**

Permanent Secretary Foreign Office - a Mandarin.

### **General Sir Jock Stirrup**

Commander of Her Majesty's Army Land Forces

### **Captain Jill Bobbitt**

Feisty young Captain - aide to General Stirrup

### **Jemima Peacegirdle**

Probing TV journalist

### **Magdalene Bodge**

The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition

### **Chorus and Dancers**

MPs, Journalists, Waiters, TV Crew, Cleaners, Military, Fashion Models

# SCENES

## ACT ONE

Scene 1. A fast jet above the Atlantic and a motorbike on a landing field

Scene 2. Sir Tristram's office in Whitehall and the House of Commons

Scene 3. An expensive restaurant

Scene 4. The lobby of the House of Commons and a corridor of power adjacent.

Scene 5. The War Room.

Scene 6. Bernard Haplesses's office

## ACT TWO

Scene 1. A fashion show catwalk

Scene 2. Dressing room at the fashion show

Scene 3. The War Room

Scene 4. Sir Tristram's office in Whitehall

Scene 5. A corridor of power adjacent to the lobby of the House of Commons

Scene 6. Rumena Haaridan's office

Scene 7. A box for the Ballet at the Opera House.

Scene 8. The lobby of the House of Commons and a corridor of power adjacent.

Scene 9. The lobby of the House of Commons and a corridor of power adjacent.

Scene 10. the House of Commons

Scene 11. Sir Tristram's (now Helena Besty's) office in Whitehall

Time: The present

## MUSICAL NUMBERS

### ACT ONE

- 1a. and 1b. Opening (Gen. Sir Jock Stirrup, Capt. Jill Bobbitt)
2. Intermezzo One
3. Yahboo Chorus (Gordon Blackead, Rumena Haaridan, The Speaker, Chorus of MPs)
4. 'I believe I have mastered the art' (Helena Besty)
5. Intermezzo Two
6. Bernard's Soliloquy and Tete a Tete Duet (Bernard Haplesses, Helena Besty)
7. 'You know too well this job' (Bernard Haplesses, Helena Besty)
- 7b. Intermezzo Three
8. 'The Mandarin's Club' (Sir Tristram Seville, Sir Norman Persimmon)
9. Dance of the TV Crew (TV Crew and Chorus of Journalists)
10. TV Interview music (Rumena Haaridan, Jemima Peacegirdle)
11. 'The Other Place' (Rumena Haaridan)
- No 12 Intermezzo Four
- 13a. Sextet 'The thin red line' (Capt. Jill Bobbitt, Gen. Sir Jock Stirrup, Quartet of Officers)
14. Intermezzo Five
15. 'You know that I admire' (Bernard Haplesses, Helena Besty)
16. Chorus 'Let off the leash the dogs of war' (Gordon Blackead, Chorus of Warlike Soldiers and Citizens)
- 25a. and 25b. Ballet on the brink (Sir Tristram Seville, Sir Norman Persimmon)
26. TV Crew second dance (TV Crew and Chorus of Journalists, Jemima Peacegirdle, Gordon Blackead)
- 27a and 27b.. Intermezzo Nine
28. Animal Chorus (The Leader of the Opposition, Rumena Haaridan, The Speaker, Chorus of MPs)
29. Here I sit (Helena Besty)

### ACT TWO

17. Fashion Dance (MPs, Journalists, Fashion Models, Rumena Haaridan, Jemima Peacegirdle, Helena Besty)
18. Intermezzo Dressing room music (Fashion Models, Bobby the Dresser, Rumena Haaridan, Helena Besty)
- 19a. and 19b. Intermezzo Six
20. Radio Music (Gen. Sir Jock Stirrup, Capt. Jill Bobbitt, Marine Commando Captain, Officers)
21. Intermezzo Seven
22. Mandarin's Dilemma Trio (Sir Tristram Seville, Sir Norman Persimmon, Helena Besty)
23. Intermezzo Eight
- No 24 The Seduction (Rumena Haaridan, Gordon Blackead)

## ACT 1

### Scene 1

*Scene is the tiny rear cockpit of a fast jet flying at Mach 3.2 above the Atlantic . The sun glitters off the silver sea in which are studded the emerald green jewels of the British Isles, seen through grey-white billows of cumulus. We also see a motor bike waiting at the landing field.*

#### Music No. 1a

The general is sitting cramped and uncomfortable in his fast jet flying suit and helmet. He raise his hand to his face mask and triggers the coms link

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

Captain Bobbitt ... Captain do you read me? ....  
aargh!

The general is surprised and discomforted by a sudden flick diving bank to the left that tightens the harness around his aged midriff.

*CAPTAIN JILL BOBBITT*

Loud and clear sir. I'm standing ready at Mildenhall on the runway. I've got a bike and you will be riding pillion I'm afraid. Sorry about that.

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

Yes that's better. Yes - I'm not looking forward to the pillion seat - I'm just coming up to the British Isles - ETA 4 minutes according to the pilot - he says there'll be a few broken windows along the south coast with the sonic boom we are generating - Mach 3.2 apparently - Washington London door to door in 4 hours they promised me - that's classified by the way - the Americans don't want anyone to know how fast their latest recce plane is - aargh!

The general is surprised again by another sharp manoeuvre.

*CAPTAIN JILL BOBBITT*

General?

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

God Almighty! ... no I'm fine, this damn pilot is not feeling a thing ... yes yes.. I confirm your orders - get me to the War Room in minimum time

- your motorbike leg is within the four hours...short of killing us both Bobbitt!...

*CAPTAIN JILL BOBBITT*

Wilco sir. I'll get you there. Very low prob of death. Ha ha.

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

Yes. But not zero eh Captain?...they've got the sigint stacked up waiting for us. All I know for now is what's on the news channels. That bloody Gondwana Great Leader bozo has done it at last and invaded his neighbour and our oilfield...

#### Music No. 1b

Lights fade - time passes - Captain Bobbitt ready with the motorbike as the General hurries in, puts on helmet and climbs aboard. The bike roars off and London flashes past ..

*CAPTAIN JILL BOBBITT*

*[shouting]* Hold tight sir! Round my waist not my tits if you can manage it!

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

*[shouting]* Ever been to Gondwana Bobbitt? Bloody hellhole!... For God's sake Captain don't kill me off or they'll have General Hapstead running the war!

as the scene fades to black and tabs in .

#### Music No. 2 Intermezzo One

and then tabs open to

### Scene 2

#### *Sir Tristram's office in Whitehall*

*A deep yellow shaft of dusty sunlight angles through the tall windows and falls across a large old fashioned desk, with its green Morocco leather inlay that has protected the top since it was new in Gladstone's time. Sir Tristram Seville, a tall, elegant figure with silver grey hair swept back in distinguished wings at the sides of his narrow face, neatly bookending his eagle's beak of a nose, is sitting in a winged chair. Helena Besty, a neat very pretty young woman with shiny, clean-as-a-whistle blonde tresses is sitting silent and upright in the dark corner away from the sunlight, her knees demurely together.*

Sir Tristram Seville rises from his winged chair and steps the few paces needed to reach the large TV screen [very large gauze upstage on rostrum]. He adjusts the screen to avoid the sun's brightness [lights up on gauze]. He returns to his chair and sits frowning at the screen, on which plays out [in silent mime] this week's episode of the ceremonial soap opera that is Prime Minister's Questions in the Commons.

*SIR TRISTRAM*

'God Almighty - what is that pillock doing now?'

*HELENA BESTY*

He's only trying to do what you told him to do Sir Tristram.

*SIR TRISTRAM*

'Don't remind me. Why didn't you stop me?'

*HELENA BESTY*

I did try - you called me a foolish young woman.

*SIR TRISTRAM*

'As I recall it I called you a silly cow - for which bétise I now apologise.

Nevertheless you should have stopped me. I was wrong.

A rare outcome of course, but even Her Majesty's hand selected Permanent Secretary may occasionally cock things up.

I should have delivered my thoughts personally rather than using that confounded texting phoning machine you gave me - damn stupid name - Eye something.. Eyeplod, Eyeplant, Eggplant...'

Sir Tristram waves his elegant cuffed hands in the air as he despairs of remembering the esoteric name. Helen, suitably chastened at the memory of her failed attempt to bring a modern communication device into the office, says nothing.

'And now he's cocking it up. Bloody Gondwanaland! Bloody mad President!

### **Music No. 3 'Yahboo chorus'**

The TV noise suddenly increases as Sir Tristram works the remote [full lights on gauze for the number which bursts out of mime into full throated roar]. Much movement of members - bobbing up and down, wrestling with neighbours, behaving like animals.

Bloody stupid invasion! Bloody nuisance election!'

*CHORUS*

Mister Speaker, Mister Speaker  
Would you please notice me.  
I've been bobbing up and down right here

Since I came at half past three.  
It's really most undignified  
Looking like I need to pee.

*GORDON BLACKHEAD*

The House must listen carefully  
To the proposals that I make.  
We must resist the aggressive acts  
Of this mad potentate.  
Appeasement cannot be condoned -  
For all our childrens' sake!

*CHORUS*

Mister Speaker, Mister Speaker,  
Have I caught your eye at last?  
I'm sorry but it's been six hours  
Since I ate my last repast.  
I really should have eaten more,  
I hadn't planned to fast.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

This disgraceful muddle shows  
(It isn't any wonder),  
You boom and blast and long to hear  
The sound of cannon thunder  
Yet what we hear is by all accounts  
A most appalling blunder.

*CHORUS*

Mister Speaker, Mister Speaker,  
I'll try just once again.  
I really need to speak you see,  
I have to make it plain,  
My belly and my bladder  
They just can not stand the strain!

*MR SPEAKER*

Order, order, honourable members!  
The House must remember we're on TV.  
Whatever your passion, whatever your  
fire,  
I pray you all to listen to me.  
These animal noises are really not funny,  
Our behaviour is up there for all to see!

*CHORUS*

Yah boo! yah boo! and sucks to you!  
We love to berate and castigate,  
We've already named this  
Gondwanagate.  
Na, na, na, na na!  
Moo!

Chorus freeze. Lights down on the gauze as Sir Tristram turns the TV down and off.

HELENA BESTY

I hate that animal howling. It gets worse with this election fever. It never seems to improve. If only there were more women in parliament debate would be more civilised.

SIR TRISTRAM

Helen my dear, I entirely agree. As usual you are correct in your view. I don't know if you have noticed, but the Right Honourable Leader of the Opposition is a woman, and so is her Shadow Chancellor - Ms. Rumena Haaridan - they of course hate each other.

HELENA BESTY

Yes. Yes they do. But the baying chorus behind them is solidly male. Never mind, Sir Tristram, I'll take Bernard to dinner and see if I can persuade him to attempt a rescue.

SIR TRISTRAM

Ah yes. The Prime Minister's speechwriter - your poetry loving boyfriend - how convenient. If only it were you in distress my dear, rather than our people in Gondwanaland, I'm sure your boyfriend would wish to help. But with the election imminent he will surely be focussed on his day job writing the Prime Minister's speeches... even more than on his vain attempt to write one decent poem.

Sir Tristram laughs sarcastically. Helena looks sweetly at him, rises neatly to her feet and marches out of the room, already reaching for her mobile and starting to text a message.

Even with your ineffable charm you may find him hard to persuade.

blackout on Sir T lights up on Helen centre stage

#### **Music No. 4 - I believe I have mastered the art**

HELENA BESTY

I believe I have mastered the art  
Of persuading my boyfriend Bernard  
To do my bidding.

I remember well that little girl,  
Fond of twisting my Papa round my  
thumb;  
To do my bidding

Learning I had girl power.  
Papa called me 'little flower.'

Now somewhat older,  
No longer little,  
But not yet old .

I believe I have mastered the art  
Of persuading my chiefs and colleagues  
To do my bidding.

A charming smile; now there's power:  
Soft golden hair; some hair power.  
Shapely bump of a female rump;  
Now there's power!

Feminism, gender equality;  
Positive discrimination  
Was positive for me.

I'm near my destination  
And now I can see  
The topmost twig  
Of the Mandarin's tree.  
Now there's power!

Holds pose, contemplating her success to date, then exits. Tabs start in.

#### **Music No. 5 - Intermezzo Two**

### **Scene 3**

*Later that evening in an expensive St. James restaurant close to Whitehall. Soft pink lampshades cast an expensive, romantic light, with pools of shadow between each table, as they are intended to do, making it hard to see clearly. The heavy, white table-linen and elegant modern cutlery befit the well-starred reputation of the establishment. Bernard Hapless, a tall, thin pale young man, handsome enough in a slightly lopsided fashion, with dark hair falling across his broad forehead, is sitting at one of the tables*

#### **Music No. 6- Bernard's Soliloquy and Tete a Tete Duet**

He takes a drink, feels the burn - reaches across the table for his still cold bottle of Pils- pours a little more into his rapidly warming glass - pulls a slim, black notebook from his inside jacket pocket, opens it to the page where his half finished poem was scribbled and sucks the end of his gold propelling pencil. He had always thought it was helpful to work with elegant tools. He begins to write. The pencil lead snaps. Alas for elegance. Quick, before the thought should vanish - he unscrews more lead from the pencil and writes a line, musing to himself.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

'No sign of her... Hope she gets here  
before I need another Pils... I'll need a  
clear head with her... I've got time to  
wait... I should use it... perhaps I can get  
another line of my poem ...

"Truth is beauty - beauty truth -  
That is all ye know  
And all ye need to know".  
A precise statement.  
A famous line.  
But what does it mean?

Poor Keat's famous line...  
An abundance of thought for the mind

If words are to carry their normal  
meaning... it means that science and  
mathematics are beautiful and nothing  
else is. Keats denies the beauty of art,  
music, and of poetry? Surely not.

A puzzle beyond me...  
I am a poet...  
I'll cling to that.

Helen enters walking confidently through the  
restaurant, side-slipping past the other tables with a little  
smile on her lips. She wears - of course - a little black  
dress - that showcases the neat, firm roundness of her  
figure. Her shiny blonde hair also neat behind a black  
hair band.

Here she comes.  
Now there is beauty.  
Beauty in glorious technicolour.  
But truth? Ha!  
Hello Helena.

*HELENA BESTY*

'Darling Bernard.  
How lovely to see you!'

Bernard leaps up and enjoys the little hug and the air-  
kisses. She unhurriedly offers him both cheeks. She  
smells wonderful. His loins feel the burn as the scent  
and feel of her hits the spot. He backs away. His brain a  
mushy putty. Just as she had planned. She grins at him.  
He waves her down in her seat and somewhat dizzily  
waves for the waiter. Dinner is ordered and served.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

(Beauty is truth, truth beauty  
- but not in her case.)

*HELENA BESTY*

It's been too long  
Since we had one of our little  
Head to head sessions.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

(She doesn't say tete-a-tete she says head  
to head.  
She's anti the whole Europe project)

*HELENA BESTY*

Wouldn't you like me to put my head  
Next to yours  
So you could smell the perfume  
Of my hair.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

(Of course I would.  
I can't resist, I'm helpless.)

*HELENA BESTY*

Wouldn't you like me to sit my  
Neat, sweet little personality  
Next to yours  
So you could breathe the air  
Around me?

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

(Of course I would.  
It's hopeless to resist.)

*HELENA BESTY*

I've something to ask you.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

(I knew that was coming.)

*HELENA BESTY*

It's really important.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

(Probably it is.)

*HELENA BESTY*

And you're the one to do it.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

(I suppose I must be.)

*HELENA BESTY*

It won't be much trouble.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

(The lie direct - the beautiful untruth.)

HELENA BESTY

'Well Bernard. You must be wondering why I insisted on meeting you tonight. Sorry about your choir rehearsal.'

BERNARD HAPLESSER

'I hope you think it is worth this little addition to the national debt, or are you paying for this yourself?'

HELENA BESTY

'The question is nuncupatory.'

BERNARD HAPLESSER

'What - nuncupatory? -oh Jack Vance - of course - your favourite author. Good old Jack Vance - Great Master of Science Fiction.'

HELENA BESTY

'Yes Bernard. I just love science-fiction.'

Another sweet smile - then a change of mood.

But this is Government business. And rather urgent. And alas - it is not science fiction but rather ugly science fact'

BERNARD HAPLESSER

'Urge away old thing. I await your urging.'

HELENA BESTY

'Also very serious business. The PM is in trouble. If we don't fix it, soon the country will be in trouble. People will be embarrassed. Some people will die.'

BERNARD HAPLESSER

'Of embarrassment? Sorry. Go on - I'm paying attention.'

HELENA BESTY

'I assume you've read my text?'

BERNARD HAPLESSER

'Well I tried to read it - but you know I find it hard to decipher your text speak - I prefer not to have to use my thumbs for communication. Writing is supposed to be elegant.'

Bernard slides his gold pencil and little notebook in his inside jacket pocket.

HELENA BESTY

'Here are the circumstances of my little difficulty. The Prime Minister unfortunately misunderstood

Sir Tristram's text briefing him. Sir Tristram is not good with texting either.

You know of the incursion of Gondwanaland forces into our sovereign territory of the British Protectorate of South Gondwana?

BERNARD HAPLESSER

'It's all over the news'

HELENA BESTY

'Instead of doing what he was told and uttering an oily string of platitudes in reply, he has effectively issued an ultimatum to the Gondwanaland President.

### **No. 7- You know too well this job**

The country is on the verge of war with Gondwana. Sir Tristram is furious.'

Darling Bernard.

You know too well this job, to which I devote my life;

I have become a servant of the Crown, and not your wife;

To it I apply the talent that is my lot,

In part it's true because I want to reach the top;

(I don't deny my ambition)

But in truth it's what I was born to do;

To advise the Ministers of the Queen, her subjects too,

So they stay free from care as they live out their span,

With peace, prosperity and justice for every man;

(And woman too - man embraces woman - they are all my children).

BERNARD HAPLESSER

I know too well the wiles you Mandarins employ

An offer of a place at Eton for the eldest boy will massage

The ego of the Gondwana potentate;

Simultaneous soft sanctions to frustrate his foreign trips;

(That usually does the trick!)

Or you can reveal the fist inside the velvet glove;

Our airforce can patrol the skies above his palace.

Helena stops Bernard by placing her hand over his mouth.

She looks around - the waiter is busy at another table - she leans in close to his ear

*HELENA BESTY*

Unfortunately there are complicating factors.

Sir Tristram knew them but the PM - when he issued his ill-advised ultimatum - did not.

Sir Tristram has authorised me to let you have level Z clearance for this information. MI5 knows the Gondwanese have refined uranium from their mines. They have made several 'dirty' bombs.

One bomb left in a suitcase and exploded in the City of London could bring the country to its knees for half a year.

The economic effect would be catastrophic. Thousands would suffer radiation sickness. Some people would definitely die.

Bernard is now quite sober.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

'What can I do?'

*HELENA BESTY*

'You have to pressure the bastard until he retracts his ultimatum'

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

'I write his speeches. I know how he thinks. He can't retract after that. Not with the election next week. He would lose face and then lose the election. I hate to say it, but even if he were told of the consequences he might consider them a lesser evil than losing the election'

*HELENA BESTY*

'You must blackmail him.'

Bernard feels the full force of her blue eyes. They are lovely eyes, classical deep, limpid pools for a man to drown in, but now they glitter in a most unfeminine fashion.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

'I can't blackmail the Prime Minister!'

The blue-eyed gaze intensifies. Bernard feels the air between their two bodies crackle with high voltage. He winces at the burnt air smell of an imminent lightning discharge. [light effect to go with music]

*HELENA BESTY*

'If you don't then the ruination of the British economy and the deaths of thousands of people will be your responsibility.'

He splutters feebly.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

'I don't have anything to blackmail him with.'

*HELENA BESTY*

'That, my dear Bernard, will not be a problem.'

Helena's eyes flick away for a second, checking the waiter's location. He is still occupied at another table. Once again she leans in close to whisper in Bernard's ear. He winces again and shrinks away an inch, fearing contact that would ground the high voltage. Probably blow all the lights in the restaurant and singe his eyebrows. [light effect to go with music]

'I'm getting the names and phone numbers from my contact. I'll text you the details later tonight.'

His eyebrows rise higher and higher as she expounds further. He feels the lights in the restaurant dim and flicker briefly. The pools of shadow between the tables seem to expand. [effect] Tabs in.

### **No. 7b - Intermezzo Three**

## **Scene 4**

*The next morning. A corridor of power adjacent to the lobby of the House of Commons. The lobby is relatively uncrowded at this hour. A cleaner is polishing the floor with mop and bucket. Sir Tristram enters and flares his aquiline nostrils as he encounters the sweet smell of House of Commons antiseptic floor cleaner mingled with aromatic wax wood polish. He paces back and forth, pausing in his pacing to gaze up at the lofty ceiling. So high one could almost see hazy clouds forming. Ornate plasterwork with bosses of carved heraldic shields and various sculpted heads gazed back at him. He admired and was a connoisseur of the architecture of the corridors of power in this area of London. Some old, most of it nineteenth century or rebuilt modern after the Blitz, but generally dignified and spacious. Expansive. Like his lower waistcoat button after dining at the Mirabelle or Le Gavroche, as was his custom. He was not accustomed to this more public corridor of power. The anonymity of Whitehall better suited his persona but needs must - here he was lost in the crowd.*

While he is pacing a TV crew enters and sets up TV lights, some distance away. His old colleague and partner in many a plot Sir Norman Persimmon,

Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office enters from behind him. Sir Norman is of middle height and rather stout. His face broad, dark and impassive, with projecting iron-grey eyebrows. Against Sir Tristram's tall lean angularity he forms a contrasting shorter, broader figure. Like Sir Tristram he wears a dark grey worsted suit, impeccably hand tailored Savile Row in style, the clever cut and faint vertical stripe flattering his rotund figure. His shoes are black Oxfords, highly polished. His shirt the delicate white of ultra fine cotton, with French cuffs and little gold cufflinks. His tie the mauve and green stripe of his public school.

He grips Sir Tristram's elbow and speaks energetically.

*SIR NORMAN*

'Tristram you old sod, what is this all about?'

*SIR TRISTRAM*

'Ah, Norman, thank you for coming. I thought we could meet here to prevent rumours forming amongst all our busy-eyed colleagues.'

*SIR NORMAN*

'Yours to command old boy. I do believe I owe you a favour from the Arts Council incident'

*SIR TRISTRAM*

'Thank you'

Sir Tristram pauses and considers.

'Norman - we have a little problem. You heard the PM's speech. Effectively an ultimatum to Gondwanaland'

Sir Norman grimaces.

*SIR NORMAN*

'I had the ambassador at my office early this morning. Not at all cowed. Rather cocky in fact'

*SIR TRISTRAM*

'Well he would be.'

Sir Tristram leaned in closer to Sir Norman's ear. This requires him to stoop considerably.

'Fortunate that you have Z level security clearance.'

*SIR NORMAN*

'Yes, probably. Just me at the Foreign Office these days. So far has our status fallen'

*SIR TRISTRAM*

'You need to know some most secret information, which we seem to have kept from the PM so far. The Gondwanaland military have hidden several

dirty bombs in London - Strontium 90 or some such noxious radiation. Apparently they can detonate them at will. The result would be ruin. We do not want war with Gondwanaland. The PM must back down. You must help me persuade him'.

Sir Norman assimilates this information. It takes him all of three seconds. Sir Tristram waits patiently and gazes again at the ceiling.

*SIR NORMAN*

'Oh my God.'

*SIR TRISTRAM*

'Yes, indeed.'

*SIR NORMAN*

'O fuck.'

*SIR TRISTRAM*

'Fuck exceedingly, indeed.'

Sir Norman takes another cogitational pause - this time a mere two seconds - it might be a 'senior moment'. Sir Tristram turns away, gazing moodily at the cleaning woman mopping the floor some distance away, then back abruptly.

*SIR TRISTRAM*

'Your view please.'

Sir Norman steps back a pace and gloomily delivers his considered opinion.

*SIR NORMAN*

'He won't retract the ultimatum. The voters love a nice war. His ratings have shot up. He is a shoe-in for victory next week - and one more triumphant term as the people's leader. We could try to convince him of the bomb threat and the possible horrible consequences. But you know his desire for victory will sweep all reason before it.'

*SIR TRISTRAM*

'Yes. I have a plan.'

*SIR NORMAN*

'I'm so glad to hear it.'

*SIR TRISTRAM*

'I am afraid in fact you won't be glad to hear it.'

*SIR NORMAN*

What do you want me to do?

*SIR TRISTRAM*

I want you to say that the Gondwana Great Leader has agreed to withdraw his forces. He is only occupying the oilfields until he has accrued sufficient kudos among his population for facing down the imperialist powers and then he will withdraw. We have promised him assistance in securing places for the daughters of his third wife at Benenden School and a substantial sum in Foreign Aid.

*SIR NORMAN*

Uncanny - those are the very offers I have had my people make this morning. His third and very favourite wife should be very suitably grateful to the Great Leader. We advised him that the PM's ultimatum was merely to boost his chances at the upcoming election.

*SIR TRISTRAM*

Great minds think alike do they not Norman?

*SIR NORMAN*

But the Great Leader has not agreed to those terms.

*SIR TRISTRAM*

*(beat)* A mere temporary difficulty, my dear chap.

**No. 8 - 'The Mandarin's Club'**

How fortunate we are in our club ethos;  
How lucky that we understand each other's mind;  
How smoothly we together run the country,  
(And much of the rest of the world),  
How strongly do our Mandarin ties us bind.

What comfort do we draw from long association,  
What pleasure from our mutual taste in art,  
What fun we have when we see 'Giselle' together,  
What laughter when at last we part;  
(After a long evening).

Let other countries rulers be corrupt,  
Let them cheat and fiddle fit to bust,  
Let their hapless populations be fleeced and cheated,  
Let our citizens know in us they trust;  
(We just need a little diplomacy).  
*congratulatory handshake*

The cleaning lady edges closer, still busy with her mop and pail, and pays attention to a piece of floor not ten feet away. Almost as though she were listening. Sir Tristram appears not to notice. He and Sir Norman exit still engrossed in conversation as the TV dance around setting up

**No. 9 'Dance of the TV crew'**

We spend our days in setting up for her  
And as we set up - its just a blur;

Each time we set things up we find  
Its one more small step for mankind

I've fixed the plug!  
Just fix the plug!  
Don't look so smug!

How smug of us, how smug of us.  
We like to see her on TV  
Her on TV is our cup of tea.

We bring order out of chaos  
We're from TV don't delay us  
It takes a big man to gainsay us

Time flies like an arrow swift  
And only one way should this lift  
I love my logic brain  
Let's sing our song again  
Life on TV is my cup of tea

Rumena Harridan, Shadow Chancellor, enters - glamorous and powerful in a bright red Chanel suit and killer heels. She and Jemima pose before the TV camera and get ready start their interview as the makeup girl fusses over them both and the lobby crowd throngs around

*JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE*

We're on in twenty seconds Rumena. Are you comfortable?

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

As I shall ever be in these circumstances.

*JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE*

I thought you liked TV.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

No darling. I like what it can do for my public image. You probing journalists with your penetrating questions! Who knows what you might uncover as you struggle to tear away all my protection and see me wriggling helplessly naked.

*JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE*

Yes. Only doing my job.

The producer gives the nod to start and counts down

### **No 10 TV Interview Music**

*TV PRODUCER*

We're live in 5 4 3 2 1 - go news anchor!

*JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE*

Good morning Britain. As we wake up to the news from Gondwana and the crisis with British hostages I'm with the Leader of the Opposition, Ms Rumena Haaridan. Ms. Haaridan - we understand your party has agreed to support the government over the Gondwana invasion. Surely that is inconsistent with your anti-war manifesto policy?

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Good morning Jemima. When circumstances change I am prepared to change my mind. What do you do?

*JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE*

Yes. Is your leader in accord with the party in this matter?

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

The Gondwana invasion is a most serious matter. We intend to support the government in its strong stance against aggression.

*JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE*

Please answer the question. Is your leader in accord with the party in this matter?

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Aggression must be resisted. Appeasement is not a good idea.

*JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE*

Yes. I'm sorry to press but I must ask you to answer the question. Is your leader in accord with the party in this matter?

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

I accept your apology. It is sure that our great party is not in favour of giving in to threats from jumped up dictators.. We have strong lead in the polls and I am sure we shall win a handsome majority in the election.

*JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE*

Yes. Thank you Ms. Haaridan - that's all we have time for.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Always a pleasure Jemima.

*TV PRODUCER*

... And we're out.

*JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE*

That was very good thank you.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Thank you my darling - now let me meet your charming crew of reprobates - I might make the odd convert.

The cleaning lady moves further down the corridor as Gordon Blackead enters, stepping around her as he walked briskly towards the lobby and stops at the entrance, hidden in the deep shadow cast by the arch of the lobby ceiling. The Prime Minister exudes charisma and charm, the qualities that have given him his position. Somewhat short and somewhat round, he has a smooth young face with sweetly chubby cheeks gathered tight over his near-permanent grin, pasted like a platitude under his innocent wide brown eyes. A forty year old boy with sleek dark hair. He sees his quarry out on the floor of the lobby. The TV interview has finished and Rumena is chatting to Jemima, the TV crew and a small group of journalists. He wills her to catch sight of him. She does so. His brown eyes make an almost imperceptible gesture of invitation. She catches the gesture, leaves her coterie and drifts over to the shadow of the corridor, standing with her back to the PM, apparently not talking to him.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Good morning Prime Minister.

*GORDON BLACKEAD*

Rumena, I need a word. Just two minutes of your valuable time here in this anonymous spot away from the reptiles of the Press.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

I've just been feeding the reptiles. I throw them a few gobbets of rotting meat and gossip. I love to see them gobble it up. Two minutes is no problem, but then I must get back to them - they are still hungry. If they don't eat my gobbets they may eat someone elses.

GORDON BLACKHEAD

I'm hoping for support from the Opposition on this Gondwana issue. Sir Tristram will brief you - we have a meeting planned this afternoon in the War Room and I want you there. You can leave your beloved Leader to face the Chancellor. She will not be in the loop at this stage.

Rumena smiles. A somewhat chilling sight. Her eyes are very dark brown, almost black, and seem to absorb the light. Her teeth are perfect - perfect as far as the world's finest orthodontists and surgeons could chisel and sculpture them. The same applies to her nose and cheekbones. She now heads a rock-solid organisation within the Party in Parliament and in the country. Her TV image is glamorous and shiny.

RUMENA HAARIDAN

We must put the interests of the country before party advantage Gordon. If my beloved Leader can not understand that and wishes to be an appeaser then she deserves to be promoted to the other place.

GORDON BLACKHEAD

Yes we must see if we can persuade her to accept a peerage. The House of Lords needs someone with her talents. I can facilitate that as required. I know how ambitious you are. And ruthless enough to make it happen.

Gordon Blackhead also smiles and exits as Rumena sings her aria

**No. 11 - 'The other place'**

'The other place'; not Hades,  
But the House of Lords.  
To join the nearly dead.

In truth for her the promotion I truly  
desire  
Is indeed to the life after this:  
I wish her truly dead!

Transplanted to the Realm of Eternal Fire  
To stand in my way no longer.  
To that end I'll conspire  
With Gordon.

I've come far since mother fled  
With me from the Balkan inferno,  
An ugly fat child in ugly dirty clothes,  
Ethnically cleansed but unclean,  
To dwell in a Bradford ghetto:

Do you suppose

She would recognise me now?  
Now that cosmetic surgeons  
Have chiselled my cheekbones and  
breasts  
And shaped my overlarge nose?  
Dear Gordon.

Many middle-aged lovers paid  
For my operations: and I've repaid each  
one,  
Climbing up on each lap,  
Climbing into each bed,  
Up the party ladder,  
Put myself on the map.

Now a dozen ex-lovers,  
Senior party men,  
In thrall lest I tell their wives all.  
Dance as my fingers may snap.  
Oh yes Gordon.

Tab close

**No. 12 - Intermezzo Four**

**Scene 4**

Later that afternoon - the War Room. General Sir Jock Stirrup KCB. CBE, Commander of Her Majesty's Army Land Forces, takes a cautious sip from his tea-cup and replaces it delicately in its saucer. Apart from the loud ticking of a clock the only break in the heavy silence in the room is very occasional tiny ting of fine bone china. The group have evidently been waiting for some time. The General is flanked in his seat at the long boardroom table by several other General Officers, several younger individuals, Majors and Captains, one Captain Jill Bobbitt, stand behind. More silence.

MAJOR-GENERAL

They're making us wait today, Jock.

GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP

Ours not to reason why old boy.

Another sip from the cup. Another ting. Another silence.

MAJOR-GENERAL

I wonder where they are planning for us to do or die today.'

CAPTAIN JILL BOBITT

My money is on Gondwanaland.'

A faint but discernable note of sarcasm from the Commander

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

Thank you for your insight Captain.' .

Captain Jill wriggles restlessly - and voices her inward thoughts, joined by the other military in a contained rhythmic movement

**No. 13a Sextet 'The Thin Red Line'**

*CAPTAIN JILL BOBBITT*

I hope we're going to see some action,  
Let off the leash the dogs of war,  
I'm tired of being an action virgin,  
My nature's red in tooth and claw!

*CHORUS*

We serve our time,  
The thin red line,  
We do not independently opine.  
(Ours but to do or die).

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

I hope this is a false alarm,  
I've no desire to see war again.  
When one is Commander of the Army  
Then one is the one to lose his men.  
*Capt. B snaps a salute*  
(And women too nowadays - God help us).

*CHORUS*

We serve our time,  
The thin red line,  
We do not independently opine.  
(Ours but to do or die).

The group resume their silent wait - then there is sudden opening of the door, through which strides Gordon Blackead, the Prime Minister, followed by his small train: Sir Tristram with his female secretary and the Right Honorable Rumena Haaridan, Shadow Chancellor. These all seat themselves without preliminaries opposite the military officers at the long table .

*GORDON BLACKEAD*

Morning gentlemen - and lady. I have not convened COBRA because I prefer to get things organised at this level - without fuss and general hooah. I assume you all know the Shadow Chancellor. Rumena is here as we have and wish to retain all party support in this matter. She has the full support of the Leader of the Opposition and the Shadow Cabinet I believe.

Here the PM glances sideways at Rumena, aware that all present know of the undying enmity between the Shadow Chancellor and her Leader. There is a moment's pregnant silence. Nobody moves a muscle save the female Captain who snorts and stifles a guffaw by assuming a savagely fixed grin.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

We all want this matter handled carefully - the possible downside in case of a cockup could be most unpleasant.

*GORDON BLACKEAD*

Yes... General please brief us.

Jock Stirrup swivels his neck round, gesturing to the Captain Bobbitt, who focusses a laser pointer at the unfurled wall map on the wall. He gives his briefing.

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

The Gondwana forces comprise some 10,000 to 11,000 infantry, probably most of the President's Guard division, 20 tanks, old Soviet types, maybe 40 pickup trucks with heavy machine guns or AA artillery mounted - so called 'technicals' - and probably 10 Apache helicopters - I'd like to know where they got those from - they have penetrated unopposed some 20 miles across the border and currently hold the BP oilfield and the copper mine. This intel is from the CIA satellites of course. We think some two hundred British subjects are effectively held captive.

He pauses and looks enquiringly at the PM, who proceeds confidentially

*GORDON BLACKEAD*

I have as you know issued an ultimatum to Gondwana to withdraw. If they do not we should take suitable action.

Stirrup stares at his folder.

For the avoidance of doubt - by suitable action I mean of course military action to attack and destroy the invading Gondwana forces, recapture the oilfields, and the copper mine, invade Gondwana in retaliation, occupy the capital, depose the Great Leader and not withdraw until suitable reparations have been paid over.

Perhaps, General, you could outline your plans.

Stirrup's stony face becomes even stonier.

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

I have ordered a frigate to steam at all speed to Gondwana. It will be on station in twenty four hours. It carries one Marine Commando platoon - that is 23 men - and 1 Apache helicopter. No other forces are available at short notice.

pause

Our men will of course do their duty if ordered to do so, but I would counsel against an attack with those particular odds.

pause

The American 19th Fleet is also 24 hours sailing from Gondwana - it comprises 2 aircraft carriers with a complement of 400 fast jets, 50 Apache helicopters, some 20,000 Marines, supporting vessels etc. (*beat*). It would be prudent to have an understanding as to any support that might be provided from that direction before issuing attack orders.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Not very likely to be forthcoming I imagine. We all know that our current US Presidential incumbent was elected on her fundamentalist Biblical credentials, her denial of Darwinian evolution, her ability to shoot a moose and her dislike of foreign adventures.

*MAJOR-GENERAL*

Especially those in partnership with one-time imperialist powers.

The PM smiles thinly. . A heavy silence once again takes possession of the room.

Stirrup breaks the silence.

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

Of course Her Majesty's Government has more powerful and immediately deliverable military capability at its disposal. We have a Trident submarine somewhere in the Atlantic and another in Faslane. Either could lob a nuke or two on the President's Guard Division within 20 minutes of the order. I'm sure that would somewhat dissuade them from further aggression - any of them that remained to even think of it. But no doubt you will wish to keep that weaponry in reserve for defence of the realm against stronger forces as is our normal practice.

The General's attempt to lighten the atmosphere meets with small chuckles all round. Except from Sir Tristram.

*SIR TRISTRAM*

Alas I do not find that sally amusing General. I feel that now is the time to enlighten you on one or two recent developments. I need to ask those without level Z clearance to leave the room please. That will be all save Sir Jock, Major General Bloggett, Major-General Hapstead, myself, and the PM please.

There is a further silence, this time a shocked silence, before people come to and remove themselves from the room, Rumena last of all, with a very quizzical raised eyebrow as she goes. Sir Tristram proceeds.

We have learned from certain most secret sources that Gondwana also has a degree of nuclear capability - in the form of suitcases packed with highly radioactive material extracted from the uranium mines in the south of the country - transuranic isotopes - some with a half life of some 10,000 years I believe. Were one of these suitcases to be blown up with a large charge of dynamite or similar explosive in the City of London it is probable that our economy would suffer a catastrophic and possibly permanent decline. Large parts of London would need to be permanently evacuated. Several million jobs would be lost. Tens of thousands would die from the radiation over the ensuing years. An unknown but probably large number would die from poverty related causes - like hunger - in the ensuing years of economic collapse.

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

I see.

The General's military training is now obvious in his decisive response to this appalling news. He rises to his feet at attention, his jaw like a rock and his eyes flinty. A geological marvel.

I await your orders Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister stands up and begins pacing up and down the room, his arms folded behind him. He looks a little like Napoleon deciding to invade Russia.

*GORDON BLACKHEAD*

I see no reason why Gondwana should not be apprised of our own nuclear capability and our resolve to defend our vital commercial interests and Her Majesty's subjects - perhaps a small detonation - say 20 kilotons - off the coast. Might kill a few fish and the odd fisherman - justified in the greater cause.

He smiles. His brown eyes grow cloudy with vision. His fresh cheeks make him look younger than ever.

Sir Tristram now fears the worst. The time had come to carry out his little deception. Undoubtedly it would in due course destroy his career and possibly result in his prosecution for treason or the like. But needs must. And no one would be taking notes that might become material evidence. The PM had to be diverted from his dreams of glory. He shams a consultation with his mobile phone. He plunges in.

*SIR TRISTRAM*

However, Prime Minister, I have good news from the Foreign Office. Sir Norman Persimmon has just informed me. It seems that the Great Gondwana Leader is minded to accept your ultimatum. He will shortly withdraw his forces. You may claim a victory.

The PM loses his smile. A new expression comes over his face.

*GORDON BLACKHEAD*

He may be minded to accept it. It expires at the stated deadline in time. If he has withdrawn by then well and good. If not then poof to the sardines!

You shall have my order in writing General, within the hour.  
See that it is executed.

He glides from the room and exits. The room returns to its heavy silence as the three generals and the civil servant remain motionless in thought. Lights fade as room disappears

### **No. 14 Intermezzo Five**

Lunchtime the next day. Bernard Haplesses's tiny office. He is eating his lunch on his knees at his desk. Avocado and anchovy on rye and a double espresso - all out of a box. Helena crashes in, her hair dishevelled, her face pink flushed, her eyes wild, her language foul.

*HELENA BESTY*

Bernard you bastard! My God! Christ almighty! Bernard, you mindless crackbrained idiot! You walking dungheap! You cesspit of incompetence! You total crock of stinking shit! What in your hopelessness have you managed to achieve this time! Aaahh!

Helena has been kicking the furniture and throwing folders to punctuate her fury and despair. Bernard's mouthful of avocado and anchovy appears to acquire a distinctly unpleasant flavour. He is, it seems, in bad odour, and, in this miasma of scatological language, so has become his sandwich.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

Help me Helena, I haven't a clue what I am supposed to have done.

*HELENA BESTY*

My little blackmail has obviously failed to deter the PM. He has ignored it. Sir Tristram tells me his little stratagem has also failed. The PM has called his bluff and is charging ahead with his ghastly attack plans! General Sir Jock Stirrup is all set to push the nuclear button! He is presenting a stony face, a flinty-eyed gaze and a rock-like chin. The man's a bloody geological marvel! Armageddon looms over the City of London! And you...you...you...

She splutters incoherently, unable to talk, then calms herself a little.

And you eat avocado and anchovy sandwiches - how disgusting!

She wills herself even calmer.

I can't believe my little bit of blackmail had no effect at all. Did you do as I said?

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

Yes of course I did. Though I did find your detailed instructions in the text you sent me rather odd.

*HELENA BESTY*

What do you mean - odd?

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

Well....I wondered why you thought you could blackmail him by threatening to leak to the newspapers his failing to pay his dues at the golf club.

*HELENA BESTY*

What? The evidence I gave you was that he employed several foreigners as servants and didn't pay NHI tax or provide paid sick leave or any retirement benefit. As the law requires.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

Ah foreigners - so '4NR' - the number 4 then capital N capital R - that means foreigner?

*HELENA BESTY*

Yes of course.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

Not 'for a number of rounds'?

*HELENA BESTY*

No.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

Sick leave - ah - maybe '7k' - number 7 then little k - means sick?

*HELENA BESTY*

Yes of course.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

Not 'seven thousand pounds'?

*HELENA BESTY*

No.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

Now I see it - 'rtrmt' - retirement - obviously.

*HELENA BESTY*

Obviously.

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

Sorry.

*HELENA BESTY*

Oh my God - but everybody knows those abbreviations - where have you been living?

Once again Helena is furiously despairing

### **Number 15 - 'You know that I admire'**

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

'In my ivory tower I suppose. I'm sorry'

Helena crumbles and starts to snivel. Perhaps from frustration, perhaps from helplessness, perhaps from the thought of the thousands of radiation deaths in the near future.

She goes for a tissue in a lower drawer on the far side of the desk and buries her head. Bernard has a fine view of her rear end as she sobs.

*HELENA BESTY*

'No Bernard, it is my fault. It never occurred to me that ... I shall have to fix it somehow... Oh God..the possible consequences!... Oh God... I can't think what to do'

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

You know that I admire your finest feature,  
I contemplate with pleasure what I see.  
A silhouette sweet Nature made its creature,  
A perfect, polygonal construction:  
Targeted like an arrow straight at me.

His love and compassion for her stirs his blood and that in turn nourishes his brain. The answer comes.

Some joke that my brain is the size of a planet  
It's true that I see much deeper than most.  
When a problem's before me I focus in on it,  
Synapses in trillions click out complexity:  
And the heat from my brain is enough to burn toast!

The problem before me is not at all facile,  
And Helena's stratagem would never succeed.  
The PM is not very easy to blackmail,  
And expert blackmailers are obscure ipso facto:  
But I know of one who will serve in our hour of need.

Bernard goes to Helena, pulling her up and holding her shoulders between his hands as he emphasises his message

Here's the plan. It involves Rumena Haaridan. She can make a blackmail happen. This must be kept secret. She has organised her annual fashion show for tomorrow. Her parliamentary fashion show. You must be there.  
Undercover. You can model a dress.  
That'll get you access..

*HELENA BESTY*

No Bernard I've never done anything like that - please no!

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

We need to make sure she knows her supreme career chance is available if she acts. Let us pray she has lost none of her ambition.

*HELENA BESTY*

That woman's ambition is infinite. She could lose much of it and it would still be boundless!

BERNARD HAPLESSER

You'll be fine - it's just for charity.

Blackout

- then up again as GB re-enters with large chorus of militant citizens and soldiers who march in (mild) goosestep. The march is joined by all who were in the War Room save Sir Tristram, Helena Besty and Rumena Haaridan

### **No. 16- 'Let off the leash the dogs of war'**

CHORUS

Let off the leash the dogs of war,  
My nature's red in tooth and claw.

GORDON BLACKHEAD

I know the country loves a war,  
To get them voting one just waves a flag.  
The nation loves to hear the lion roar,  
But winning after starting; there's the snag.  
(We have the nukes they don't - God help them).

All exit marching under doom laden lights - tabs in GB remains in spot

You shall have my order in writing  
General, within the hour.  
See that it is executed.  
poof to the sardines!

## **INTERVAL**

### **ACT 2**

#### **Scene 1**

*The next day . A fashion show catwalk - a dressing room adjacent. The smile on Rumena Haaridan's face is high, wide and toothsome. Her brilliantly white teeth flash in the multicoloured pulsating lights which illuminate the fashion house show catwalk. She is closeup, beneath the catwalk, with the TV anchor Jemima Peacegirdle next to her and surrounded by adoring colleagues from Parliament who have come to enjoy the annual Parliamentary fashion show.*

### **No. 17 - Fashion Dance**

Lights up on the fashion show. The music pumps and booms and flounces, as do a series of male and female fashion models, down and up the catwalk. One or two young men, ridiculous in green and pink pastel suits with bits of chiffon hanging off and ludicrously tight trousers: the tight trousers ogled through dark sunglasses by female fashion journalists of a certain age. One or two older men, Parliamentarians in fancy dress, inveigled into making fools of themselves for charity: these had wide smiles which suddenly froze as they were met with a barrage of flashes from the dozens of cameras, set on preserving their embarrassment for posterity and the next morning papers. Bernard Haplesseser is among the gaggle of MPs, somewhat to the rear of the group, smiling nervously. Most of the models are young females who strut boldly down, pausing at the catwalk end amid a storm of flashes and a burst of applause, before twirling and cantering back up. These have wide grins as they offer themselves to the gaze of the journalists and cameras, the grins becoming pitying smiles as they pose before the gaggle of male MPs positioned at the catwalk turn, each MP surreptitiously striving to appraise each model's underwear as well as each dress: a task made fairly easy by the height of the catwalk above the audience, but complicated by the skimpy designs, whereby it is hard to tell dress apart from lingerie.

FIRST MP SPECTATOR

Rumena Haaridan is enjoying herself with Jemima Peacegirdle isn't she?

SECOND MP SPECTATOR

Isn't she just!

FIRST MP SPECTATOR

I was in love with Rumena once- a blissful few days-

SECOND MP SPECTATOR

Yes - I was in love with Rumena too - in my case a blissful half hour!

Now Helena appears, cute and perky in pink, her dress cut short and clinging tightly. Bernard's heart blips - he is hopelessly in love. He averts his gaze as Helena wobbles down the catwalk, smiles sweetly at the MP's admiring the light reflected by the pink dress on her legs, and teeters back on her impossibly high heels. Clearly she is a tyro at the catwalk strut, but her apparent innocence charms the crowd and she draws a strong burst of applause. Bernard sits back down, relieved. The show continues as Helena exits upstage and enters the dressing room scene downstage.

FIRST MP SPECTATOR

I say - this one's a smasher - doesn't look like a professional model - where did Rumena get her from?

*SECOND MP SPECTATOR*

Rumena looks pleased - she's definitely smiling encouragement.

*FIRST MP SPECTATOR*

As a crocodile smiles at a baby zebra about to cross a river!

There is a burst of bump and grind music as one of the MPs on the catwalk clowns for the audience. Then the show winds down. Rear tabs in for scene change to dressing room

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Wasn't the new one lovely? A real find. Now you're not to be jealous but I need to chat to her after the show. What time is your deadline?

*JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE*

I can pop it in the evening news at the last minute. I'm not jealous. Don't make me jealous.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

I shan't my darling. Just make sure you get the news out the way I told you. I'm leading my party to resist aggression whereas my dear leader is an appeaser.

Rumena exits

*SECOND MP SPECTATOR*

Rumena has fondled half of your shadow cabinet I'm told.

*FIRST MP SPECTATOR*

We'll never know. We'll have to wait for her memoirs What a woman!

Jemima exits

She certainly has that Jemima Peacegirdle TV presenter personality in her pocket- probably in her knickers too! I never knew she liked girls as well.

I wish I had one tenth of that woman's influence on the TV crowd. You know Rumena was the one who instituted this pleasant little annual Parliamentary event - angered, so she says, by the lack of attention given to the country's vital fashion industry.

*SECOND MP SPECTATOR*

Yes - as I recall she said the industry was a large contributor to Britain's export balance.

*FIRST MP SPECTATOR*

Whatever the truth of that, the industry is certainly a large contributor to Rumena's fashion wardrobe!

The MP's laugh heartily at this sally.

*SECOND MP SPECTATOR*

Your shadow cabinet is in a sorry state don't you think? I hear Rumena has fallen out big time with her leader.

*FIRST MP SPECTATOR*

Yes alas. It could cost us the election. Those two ladies hate each other. Her Majesty's Leader of the Opposition thinks Rumena is too pushy and wants her job. Which of course she does. I admire her command - but it's not good for the party.

The MPs exit still laughing.

## **No. 18 - Intermezzo Six**

Rear tabs open to reveal the lights fringing the dressing room mirrors as Helena sits down in front of one after her appearance. The girls in the dressing room laugh together as they wriggle out of their haute couture dresses and high heels and put on the track suit bottoms, tank tops and trainers that are their day wear. Bobby, the stick-thin, nervous, little male dresser gathers up the dresses, tut-tutting as he hangs them up carefully on the rack, occasionally darting in to help one of the wriggling girls before she ruins a dress that is proving hard to take off.

Helena gazes at herself in the mirror, blue eyes steady but her brow etched with a worry frown. She needs to deceive Rumena the arch-deceiver.

Rumena Haaridan comes gliding into the dressing room, accompanied by a nose-numbing blast of expensive perfume, full of charm and powerful charisma. She throws out compliments and congratulations like confetti. The girls are much flattered and impressed. The little dresser almost swoons.

## **Scene 2**

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Congratulations! Excellent! Well done Chelsea! Darlings you were wonderful. I adore you. Such pizzazz! Such embonpoint!

*BOBBY*

'Ms. Haaridan so wonderful to see you again! I've always been a great admirer of your fashion sense. You are gorgeous! You are inimitable!'

Rowena chuckles.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Bobby sweetheart, I do aim to please. The voters expect me to keep up appearances.

The conversations burble on and gradually subside as the girls finish dressing and leave. Rowena pats the dresser on both cheeks.

Now Bobby do leave us alone for a moment.

She sits down in the chair that Helena had carefully left vacant beside her. Bobby stares. Rowena winks at him. He quivers.

*BOBBY*

'Of course Ms. Haaridan.'

He knew the rumours of Rowena but had not thought her tastes extended so extensively as it were. He should have realised - of all people. He flutters on tip toes through the door and closes it behind him.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Now Ms. Besty - Helena isn't it? What a lovely name. I hear you have an urgent need to see me.

You see the lengths I must go to to keep my dealings from my colleagues - hiding in a dressing room. You were marvellous by the way. Not at all what one might expect from a Mandarin. Sir Tristram's under secretary are you not? Civil servants of the higher levels are paid to be dull are they not?

*HELENA BESTY*

Yes. Thank you. Sir Tristram is most grateful.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

And I am grateful to Sir Tristram for providing his beautiful assistant to enhance my little fashion show.

*HELENA BESTY*

Yes. Thank you. Sir Tristram has asked me to suggest a little stratagem to you. In relation to this Gondwana matter.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Of course. Little stratagem - yes of course.

*HELENA BESTY*

You do not have Z level clearance. Not extended to Deputy leaders of the Opposition.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

No. Nor to my dear colleague the Leader of the Opposition. We ministers in waiting are uncleared while we wait. I recall being removed from the PM's little war room meeting.

*HELENA BESTY*

No.

But I can tell you the substance of the background. The background to our military operations in Gondwana.

I must ask you to keep this most secret. This is a matter of top-level national security. If it were to become public the consequences would be disastrous.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Of course. The Prime Minister knows he has my support in this Gondwana matter, though I do wonder why he hasn't yet sent in a gunboat, or rather a couple of Apache helicopters, which I suppose is the modern equivalent. The public will love him for it. He surely needs a boost if he is to win reelection. We can't oppose military action - even if I wanted to which I don't - we have a lead in the polls but it is not that large - and my dear leader is delightfully trying to be an appeaser.

Helena hesitates for a moment.

*HELENA BESTY*

The fact is the Gondwana people have planted several dirty bombs in London.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Dirty bombs? Does that mean what I think it means? Radioactive material? Plutonium? Strontium?

*HELENA BESTY*

Yes. Half lives of 10,000 years or more some of it. If the bombs were exploded it would cripple the country. Armageddon. Ruin our economy. Kill tens of thousands by radiation and maybe hundreds of thousands by cold and starvation till we eventually recovered. Unless the UN could ship in enough food. Or maybe an airlift would be needed - ships too slow. If there were enough of us

Mandarins alive to maintain civil society and organize the evacuation and distribution. I have to think about it but I wish I didn't.

We would become a third world poor country for decades.

Rumena absorbs this information - lights darken and shadows intensify

### **No. 19a- Intermezzo Seven**

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Sending a gunboat not a good idea then?

*HELENA BESTY*

The PM wants to use a nuke instead.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

What! I always thought he fancied himself as Napoleon.

*HELENA BESTY*

Purely a demonstration - fry a few sardines a few miles off the coast as he puts it.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Supposing that does not intimidate the Great Gondwana Leader? What then? Armageddon?

*HELENA BESTY*

Quite. Is there anything you can do to change his mind? The matter is most urgent. We are prepared to countenance any tactic that might - shall we say - intimidate the PM- and prevent Armageddon.

Rumena smiles. Her black eyes grow blacker, sucking in all light and allowing none to escape, as though gravity had assumed infinite proportions around her. The room appears to grow dark as power seems to drain from the lights

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

I think there may be a little something that I could try.

I hear Sir Tristram will be retiring soon. His position as Cabinet Secretary will become briefly vacant. The Prime Minister should indeed be overwhelmingly grateful. Not beyond the bounds of possibility that he - or she - might stretch out his - or her - arm for a long reach inside the promotion procedure. It is not unheard for a rising star to skip two levels.

blackout tabs in

### **No. 19b- Intermezzo Seven**

## **Scene 3**

*The War Room - the boardroom table has gone - many maps - the military stand around a coms device which Captain Bobbitt is handling. They are talking in clipped tones. We also see a dirty dishevelled Royal Marine Captain in battledress crouching over his coms device from a hilltop in Gondwana with tanks visible on the plain below.*

Major General Hapstead enters

*MAJOR-GENERAL*

I've now got four admirals and one air-vice marshal in the next room, along with the Defense Minister and his posse.

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

Yes. Amazing how the command chain thickens. Bugger's muddle if we are not careful. I want to keep the Navy out of it till we are clearer.

*MAJOR-GENERAL*

MI5 is here - she wants to report.

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

We'll have MI5 - the rest in a minute.

Major General Hapstead brings in the head of MI5

*HEAD OF MI5*

Good Morning General.

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

Well?

*HEAD OF MI5*

My outfit has now managed to find a couple of the dirty bombs. Destructive capability is as reported. The search is unfortunately much hampered by the PM's insistence that the matter be kept secret to avoid panic.

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

Yes.

to Bobbitt

Have you got coms yet?

*CAPTAIN JILL BOBBITT*

Yes sir. I have encrypted communication with a Royal Marine Commando Captain on the ground in South Gondwana. He has deployed from the frigate with twenty-two men as ordered by yourself sir.. Fifty-five miles by Apache helicopter from the ship

to the shore and eighteen miles on foot. He has a hilltop position with a good view overlooking the enemy base.. Apparently some five miles distant on the plain below.

Gen Sir J leans in to the coms device as Bobbit turns up the dial.

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

What can he see? Update him with the SAS deployment.

### **No. 20 Radio music**

*CAPTAIN JILL BOBBITT*

(speaking clearly but with difficulty over the com link noises )  
Delta Two Delta Two this is Stingray -  
Acknowledge Over.

*ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO CAPTAIN*

(speaking clearly but with difficulty over the com link noises )  
Stringray this is Delta Two Over.

*CAPTAIN JILL*

*BOBBITT*

Captain - update sitrep visuals. You're on loudspeaker with General Stirrup.

*ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO CAPTAIN*

I have a good sight of the main body of the enemy from my hilltop - I can see fifteen tanks and all the Apaches drawn up just outside the oilfield buildings. Probably five thousand heavily armed infantry in this location, the others must be enjoying themselves in the local township.

*CAPTAIN JILL BOBBITT*

Thank you Captain. You can expect the SAS two hours after dark. Maintain cover and get some rest.

*ROYAL MARINE COMMANDO CAPTAIN*

Wilco Stingray. Out.

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

to an SAS colonel who is standing by

Colonel. Give me your plan of deployment

*SAS COLONEL*

A ten man SAS squad will drop by parachute as soon as night falls, some five miles away, then join the marines on the ground. Another twenty will drop by the shore, together with anti-tank weapons, to be ferried onwards by the frigate's Apache. The odds are impossible General.

(beat) My men will attack if ordered. (beat) I will give the command if ordered.

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

Yes. We none if us like it Colonel. I'm about to alert the Navy. It is entirely possible they will be ordered to launch a nuclear strike as a demonstration on the coast. Make sure your men are well clear of the coast by 1800.

*SAS COLONEL*

(salutes and leaves). Y'Sir.

*HEAD OF MI5*

Security is being compromised. More and more people now know the situation. The press have reporters in Gondwana and are screaming for action to rescue captured British citizens. The majority of the press certainly want war; only the 'Guardian' wants what it calls 'negotiation' and others label 'appeasement'.

*GENERAL SIR JOCK STIRRUP*

Yes. General Hapstead please invite the Navy to join us.

all freeze - lights to black as music starts immediately

### **No. 21 Intermezzo Eight**

## **Scene 4**

*Sir Tristram's office in Whitehall. A deep yellow shaft of dusty sunlight angles through the tall windows and falls across a large old fashioned desk. Three mandarins are in gloomy conference around Sir Tristram's desk.*

*SIR TRISTRAM*

My dears - I'm afraid we must face the fact that our little attempts at bribery, lying and blackmail have proved ineffective.

*SIR NORMAN*

We seem to have lost our touch.

*SIR TRISTRAM*

Quite.

*HELENA BESTY*

Shall I summarise Sir Tristram?

*SIR TRISTRAM*

Please do.

*HELENA BESTY*

One. Your inducements to the Gondwana President have not been taken up. Two. Your false assertion that they had been taken up has not had any effect on the Prime Minister's warlike disposition. Three. My attempted pressure on the PM has failed. I apologise for the farcical nature of the failure.  
(beat)

Four. We have released top secret information to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the hope that she may make use of it to influence the PM.

SIR NORMAN

(beat) Bribery, lying and blackmail having failed we are now trying treason.

SIR TRISTRAM

Quite.

SIR NORMAN

For the greater good.

SIR TRISTRAM

Quite.

HELENA BESTY

Quite.

### **No. 22 Mandarin's Dilemma**

We are the sea-green incorruptibles,  
Servants of the Crown.  
To us a bribe is quite contemptible,  
All corruption we disown.

Not for us the foreign holiday,  
Not for us the stuffed envelope,  
Not for us the high-class call-girls,  
Not for us the furtive grope.

And yet for us to do our duty,  
Peace and order to maintain,  
We must lie and cheat and blackmail,  
Not once but twice and thrice again.

This indeed is our dilemma,  
This indeed is what we face.  
Our reward is in a small way,  
To be the saviours of our race.

## **Scene 5**

*Later that night. A corridor of power adjacent to the lobby of the House of Commons. A cleaner is polishing the floor with mop and bucket. Rumena Haaridan enters and talks to the cleaner. Jemima Peacegirdle enters with her producer, then leaves the producer to go across to Rumena.*

RUMENA HAARIDAN

Good evening my pet.

JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE

I got your text. You need to see me urgently.

RUMENA HAARIDAN

Yes. I want you to place another little tidbit of news before the great British public. Should make them choke over their cornflakes as they decide which way to vote later in the day. Timing is crucial. It's a matter of a bomb threat - no ordinary bomb.

I will also give you an exclusive on a rather surprising change of Prime Minister that I fully expect to see materialise.

JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE

You think your party will win, despite its line on appeasement?

RUMENA HAARIDAN

(deliberately) Whichever party wins I think there will be a majority in the House for urgent and decisive action. (beat) It is merely a matter of who leads that majority.

JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE

I don't follow.

RUMENA HAARIDAN

Stay close to me my pet. All will be revealed.

Rumena exits and Jemima stares after her in puzzlement. Blackout
--

### **No. 23 Intermezzo Nine**

## **Scene 6**

*Later that night. Rumena Haaridan's office.*

Rumena Haaridan enters her office and moves around the room turning down the lights. She plumps the cushions on the large sofa prominently positioned in the centre of the room. Its back visible in the light but its front obscured in the darkness. The little office desk and
---

attendant chair is set off to one side, apparently of minor importance in her scheme of things. Satisfied at last with the ambience she pours herself a drink - something pink in a long slim cocktail glass, and lies back on the sofa, displaying her legs to the door through which she knew Gordon Blackead would soon appear. This routine she had played many times. Gordon Blackead, however, might prove a harder nut to crack than most of those on her long list of cracked nuts.

The door opens. In comes the cleaning lady carrying a bucket and mop and with a camera case dangling from her shoulder. Rumena waves at the drinks cabinet and the cleaning lady goes over and pours herself a drink, downing it in one swig. Then going through into the little annexe and closing the door gently.

The door opens again. Gordon Blackead comes through. He sidles around the door to be met by Rumena's legs, which he studies intently. Then Rumena's head arises into view.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Hello Gordon. Thank you so much for meeting me here. So much more comfortable for us both and away from prying eyes.'

*GORDON BLACKEAD*

This matter is most secret. No word of our agreement must get out'.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Of course. I understand completely. A most appalling situation. The country must stand together. You and I Gordon - we are the country. If we stand together then all will be well.'

*GORDON BLACKEAD*

Thank you. Indeed - the country must stand up for itself. Her Majesty's Government can not give in to the aggression of petty dictators. The last government - your lot - ran down our armed services to such an extent that we can not act decisively with conventional arms - the Americans are uncharacteristically non-belligerent under the direction of that mad born-again moose-shooting female - too many American oil firms in Gondwana I suppose - they will not help'.

Rumena has undraped herself from the sofa, poured the PM a drink - a large heavy tumbler of whisky with just a splash of soda - hands it to him and drapes herself around him, taking off his jacket and tie.

Indeed there is a faction in the intelligence community that suspects they may be partly the cause of this invasion. Our recourse must be a nuclear one - merely a demonstration off the coast.'

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

What if the demo fails to achieve the required withdrawal.'

### **Music No. 24 The Seduction**

*GORDON BLACKEAD*

The PM's eyes glitter with Napoleonic fire. He takes a large swallow from his drink, coughs as the power of the liquor hits him, and allows himself to be taken down to the sofa.

Nobody calls my bluff and gets away with it.

He continues invisibly from the depths, his speech punctuated by the sound of his shoes coming off and being dropped on the floor.

I need you to split your party after the election and join with me in a pro-war coalition in the House. My party will no doubt split as well, but together we will have a majority against appeasement.'

More intimate bits of clothing appear over the top of the sofa. Evidently the coalition is already being formed.

I've worked out ... the numbers.... very carefully. With the majority... we can do...anything we ....want.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Yes Gordon. I agree. I'll do it. It will be my pleasure to see my leader possibly winning the election but not gaining power. Ghastly bitch! I have a large enough following in the Party. Many more hawks will join us. I'm sure it will work.'

*GORDON BLACKEAD*

You will of course be Deputy Prime Minister, under me as PM.'

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

I'm sure I shall enjoy being underneath you Gordon'.

Ensuing sounds verify that notion, as the sofa rocks and bounces. The annexe door opens a crack. The cleaning lady creeps out with her video camera and quietly films the proceedings.

## **Scene 7**

*A box for the Ballet at the Opera House*

### **Music No. 25a Ballet on the Brink**

It is the evening of election day. Sir Tristram has escaped from his duties at the side of the PM and availed to the ballet. His companion in the secluded box at the Opera House is Sir Norman. He is perusing his programme as the orchestra tunes up and helping himself to the hors d'oeuvres being set out by a waitress. Sir Tristram lifts his champagne glass to his nose and sniffs the perfume of the bubbles through his aquiline nostrils. A small smile comes over his worried face.

*SIR NORMAN*

This will be my fifteenth election night - I must have spent the last five with you old boy - here at the ballet.

*SIR TRISTRAM*

Life's small pleasures remain.

*SIR NORMAN*

So they do, old boy. Though at these prices I hesitate to call vintage Bollinger a small pleasure! One must make full use of one's free ticket privileges, of course - another pleasure to see our beautiful Prima Ballerina Assoluta again - but one wonders why she picks this modern stuff to perform.

*SIR TRISTRAM*

Oh its danceable enough. It will serve its purpose if it blots out the progress of the masses through the ballot boxes as it is endlessly regurgitated by those ghastly TV pundits.

*SIR NORMAN*

Do you remember those Gilbert and Sullivan operettas we did at school? You were in upper school as I recall when I made my appearances. I played a girl in most of them. The orchestra tuning up always reminds me.

*SIR TRISTRAM*

Oh indeed I do recall your sweet painted cheeks. My dreams are haunted yet.

*SIR NORMAN*

Those were the days.

*SIR TRISTRAM*

Oh indeed.

The TV news reader wallahs of those days had all been in the war hadn't they? Majors and Wing-Commanders most of them. They had gravitas. Not

like these panicking ninnies. Buzzing like blue-arsed flies.

*SIR NORMAN*

Yes, the leak of the dirty bomb danger has paralysed their brains while simultaneously galvanizing their jawbones.

But one can't entirely blame their panic. There won't be many more little pleasures if the bombs go off and that stuff is spread around the City.

I envy you your retirement. I have to stay in town. They have prepared me a little bunk in the Foreign Office bunker. I'm afraid we expect the worst.

*SIR TRISTRAM*

Lucky you. I shall be tucked up in my Cotswold cottage and free of all care when whoever heads the new Government takes over tomorrow. One prays to avert a hung Parliament. My successor is Helena Besty as you know. The PM insisted she be jumped up three ranks - she was his choice, nobody else would do. But she has no experience of hung Parliaments.

*SIR NORMAN*

To be fair old boy neither do most of us. The wisdom of the electorate is inscrutable. We shuffle the cards and they deal us a hand. Every once in a blue moon it is a Royal Straight Flush!

Music swells as the overture starts. The two men lean back in their seats and prepare to enjoy the splendid sight of their favourite performing with her troupe.

### **Music No. 25b Ballet on the Brink**

How fortunate we are in our club ethos;  
How lucky that we understand each other's mind;  
How smoothly we together run the country,  
(And much of the rest of the world),  
dignified hi five  
How strongly do our Mandarin ties us bind.

What comfort do we draw from long association,  
What pleasure from our mutual taste in art,  
What fun we have when we see 'Giselle' together,  
What laughter when at last we part;  
(After a long evening).

Let other countries rulers be corrupt,  
Let them cheat and fiddle fit to bust,  
Let this Kingdom's subjects trust in us;  
(We just need a little diplomacy).

## Scene 8

Once again the sweet smell of House of Commons antiseptic floor cleaner mingled with aromatic wax wood polish. The Commons lobby corridor is crowded with MPs jostling to be interviewed for the TV cameras. Journalists buzz. Such is the crush and excitement that the floor polish is now overwhelmed by the pungent odour of anti-sweat preparations, as the crowd pushes and yells. The TV crew dance excitedly as Jemima Peacegirdle prepares for her morning anchor session after a long night of election results.

### No 26 'It's just another day'

To us it's just another day,  
All work and for very little pay.

Jemima's still a bird of prey

She's an eagle.  
Ripping out the hearts of politicians  
She's a vulture  
Picking through the bones of politicians

Boop de boop boop de boop

We're still here to plug and play

Democracy!  
Although they argue constantly  
Who's got the best policy  
It's better than autocracy

Boop de boop boop de boop

*TV PRODUCER*

We're live in 5 4 3 2 1 - go news anchor!

*JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE*

Good morning Britain. As we wake up to the election result it is clear that there will be a hung parliament and the need for a coalition. Events are moving swiftly

GB enters, is greeted by makup girl, sat in chair and powdered

with the added complications of the news from Gondwana over the crisis with British hostages, the rumours of dirty bombs in London streets and possible British armed action. The morning papers have too much news for one headline.

GB has bib removed and is stood up, camera swings to him

I'm with the Prime Minister Mr Gordon Blackead.

*GORDON BLACKEAD*

Good morning Jemima.

*JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE*

Good morning sir. What are your plans for forming a government?

*GORDON BLACKEAD*

The British public have not given my party a majority to govern - and in particular they have rejected me as leader. I shall therefore be resigning forthwith. It will be up to my successor as party leader to negotiate a coalition. I have no more to say.

walks off.

*JEMIMA PEACEGIRDLE*

Thank you sir... I ... er...er... back to the studio

stands dumb before the live camera

*TV PRODUCER*

and we're out!

blackout - time passes -

### No 27a Intermezzo Ten

## Scene 9

lights up . The Commons lobby is crowded with MPs being interviewed for the TV cameras. Journalist buzz.and HB enters the lobby corridor. Helena has her cellphone to her ear. She turns to Bernard who is close at her side.

*HELENA BESTY*

'Bernard you are wonderful. It all worked like a charm. Gordon has now left the Palace after his resignation was accepted and Rumena is on her way to meet Her Majesty and kiss hands. She has

managed to form a coalition with elements of all parties and now commands a majority. She will be the new PM in a matter of minutes. The electoral turnout and the defections gave her the advantage. And I think I love you'

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

'I know I love you'

*HELENA BESTY*

'Is it the aura of power that surrounds the youngest ever Chief Secretary to the Cabinet?'

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

'Perhaps. More likely the aura of Chanel No 5 that wafts from behind your dainty ears.'

*HELENA BESTY*

'Bernard stop it! People will notice us.'

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

'What's a bit of sex among civil servants? The public might appreciate our being alive. The Cabinet Secretary will need to get used to being noticed'.

*HELENA BESTY*

'I have to set an example.'

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

'I must admit, old Sir Tristram was something of an atribiliar sea-green incorruptible.'

*HELENA BESTY*

'What.'

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

'Carlyle - of Robespierre.'

*HELENA BESTY*

'Oh yes... the extraordinary thing is that The Great Gondwana Leader has now actually withdrawn his troops. Amazing that Sir Norman's offer of places at Benenden for his daughters actually worked at last.'

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

'Probably that was what it was all about in the first place. The real stroke of luck is the Great Leader's unfortunate prostate trouble that required him to visit Harley Street for an extended stay. He could hardly visit Harley Street while his country was at war with us! His misfortune is our good fortune.'

Bernard looks around at the mob before the TV cameras.

'Do you really think Gordon would have attacked them with a nuke?'

*HELENA BESTY*

'We shall never know thank God.'

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

'Now you have to deal with Rumena - and she is even more ambitious than Gordon was.'

Helena's brow furrows.

*HELENA BESTY*

'Yes indeed. Momentarily my ambition is satisfied by attaining the top of our particular greasy pole - one hopes the same is true of her.'

The news of the change of Prime Minister has now reached the journalists and MPs, who enter in chattering groups. The level of excitement increases still further as Helena exits down the corridor of power, Bernard following behind.

## **No 27b Intermezzo Ten**

### **Scene 10**

#### *The House of Commons*

The floor of the Chamber is crowded to overflowing with many new MPs and the rump of the old guard. Rumena's splitting of both parties and forming an antiwar coalition is causing great confusion. Rather than two sides to the House there need to be four at least to accommodate the changed allegiances. Much pushing and shoving from the displaced and the confused.

*SPEAKER*

Order, order! Honourable members must accommodate themselves to the new arrangements. No doubt new alliances will be formed and our ancient two party layout will reassert itself. The Prime Minister, Ms. Rumena Haaridan!

Rumena is squeezed in tightly on the front bench between her eager supporters. She wears a little black suit cut very tight, with a very short skirt. She wriggles out, performing miracles of agility in keeping her knees together in ladylike fashion, and sashays to the despatch box. She smiles steadily at the TV camera, holding her gaze until the camera operator changes focus from her knees to her face.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

Thank you Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank all my supporters in this House and in the country who have showed they are against war and

barbarity by electing me to this high office of State.

Howls from the opposition - now on all sides - cheers from her supporters - also on all sides. Scuffles and shovings intensify. One or two fights break out.

*SPEAKER*

Order, order! The members will cease behaving as animals at feeding time. The Prime Minister!

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

The house will know of the latest news from Gondwana. All troops have been withdrawn from the oilfields in our protected territory. The President of that great country is now undergoing treatment for his unfortunate complaint in Harley Street. He has our sympathy. I shall insist that he is cared for properly.

Another steady smile to the camera. Diverse reaction from the members according to their sex - the females wryly amused, the males wincing.

The house will also be pleased to hear that several suitcases of a toxic radioactive substance have been retrieved and are being taken to one of our power stations where they will contribute their substance to help in keeping our old people warm this winter.

She sits back down amid a storm of applause and catcalls.

*SPEAKER*

Order, order. The Leader of the Opposition!

Her one time leader, still the leader of the Opposition, now rises. The catcalls intensify - much hissing. A few barks.

*LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION*

Mr Speaker - I congratulate the Ms. Haaridan on her appointment as leader of the coalition government. She has succeeded in splitting two great parties with a proud history. History will be her judge. I commiserate with Mr. Gordon Blackhead on his failure to form a government and his subsequent resignation. We would have gladly supported him in his resistance to aggression. How ironic that his new appointment as President of the International Monetary Fund will involve him in providing loans to Gondwana paid for in part by money extracted from the pockets of the British taxpayer!

Raucous laughter. The animal noises, now including whinneys, yappings, grunts and strange moans, intensify further.

## **No. 28 - Animal chorus**

*CHORUS*

This Mother of Parliaments  
Oh won't you please listen  
Was built to accommodate  
A two party system.

The electors have spoken-  
O please ask for hush -  
The hand they have dealt us  
Is a Royal Straight Flush.

Each party has split up  
Then each split again  
Can't think how to vote now  
We had better abstain.

*RUMENA HAARIDAN*

The electors have spoken.  
I'm very good at poker.  
Fate has dealt the hand and history  
Will judge me the Kingdom's power  
broker

Chorus freeze. Lights down on the gauze and up on the office desk as Helena Besty turns the TV down.

Rumena Haaridan is still lit - like a waxwork.

## **Scene 11**

### **No. 29 'Here I sit'**

*HELENA BESTY*

Here I sit where Sir Tristram so recently  
sat;  
My master and mentor has hung up his  
hat.  
Propelled by my charms, some will say,  
To the top of ambitions' greasy pole.

Yes here I sit, and some of my juniors  
may hope I fall flat;  
My Ministers mad dreams that I need to  
combat.  
Propelled by my brains, if I may say,  
Which bade me achieve my high goal.

Bernard enters

Now here I sit

With you in my life  
Dear Bernard what do I say?  
Will I fulfil my role?

Do you want to take turns?  
Prime Minister what can I say?  
Do you seek to control?  
I've black crimes on my soul.  
Sir T., I now understand  
The Mandarin's dilemma!

Ambition is a powerful driver, Bernard.  
Look at that animal behaviour.  
Are humans different from animals?  
Is there any hope for us?

*BERNARD HAPLESSER*

So is love Helena, that's pretty animal  
too.  
Let's see what our next generation does  
with human nature.

He goes to embrace her - she pushes him away gently  
but definitely.

*HELENA BESTY*

Watch the TV Bernard - her speech is not  
finished yet.

end of the opera