

OSLO SYNDROME
By Barbara Lee

ACT I

THE ADMIN OFFICE OF THE HEALTHCARE DEPARTMENT OF HMP GREENHILL. THERE ARE FOUR DESKS, A PRINTER, FAX MACHINE, FILING CABINETS ETC. STAGE RIGHT THERE IS A KITCHEN. STAGE LEFT IS THE ENTRANCE TO THE OFFICE, A BARRED IRON GATE. MEGAN IS SITTING WORKING AT ONE OF THE DESKS. ANNA APPEARS AT THE GATE, CARRYING TWO BULGING CARRIER BAGS. SHE PUTS THESE DOWN AND UNLOCKS THE GATE WITH A BUNCH OF KEYS ON HER BELT. SHE ENTERS, LOCKS THE DOOR BEHIND HER AND CARRIES THE BAGS ACROSS THE ROOM, PUTTING THEM DOWN JUST OUTSIDE THE KITCHEN, TALKING AS SHE GOES.

ANNA: I'm sure my arms have been stretched six inches carrying this lot up the hill. And this heat makes it worse. D'you want coffee?

MEGAN: No thanks. It's much too hot.

ANNA: I can't do without my fix of caffeine, whatever the weather.

ANNA GOES INTO THE KITCHEN. THERE IS THE SOUND OF A KETTLE BEING FILLED.

MEGAN: Do you think everyone will come?

ANNA: (Off) Sure to. Sandra's very popular and it's not every day you turn fifty *and* celebrate working here for ten years.

MEGAN: Fifty. I can't imagine being fifty.

ANNA: (Off) Believe me, it creeps up on you. I thought forty was the end of the world when I was your age.

MEGAN: And is it?

ANNA STICKS HER HEAD ROUND THE DOOR.

ANNA: Pretty much.

MEGAN: Where is Sandra anyway?

ANNA: At the morning meeting. If I were her I would've taken the day off and spent the time in my pyjamas drinking wine and watching Judge Judy.

MEGAN: That's not Sandra's style. She wouldn't want to miss out on the party.

ANNA COMES OUT OF THE KITCHEN.

MEGAN: Can I have a look in those?

ANNA: Sure.

ANNA AND MEGAN START RUMMAGING THROUGH THE CARRIER BAGS.

ANNA: Hmm. Let's see, we've got quiches and... some sort of dippy stuff. I thought it looked good. Or is it a salsa?

MEGAN: What's the difference between a dip and a salsa?

ANNA: I don't know. What is the difference between a dip and a salsa?

MEGAN: It's not a joke, I really want to know.

DISTANT: AN ALARM BELL RINGS. BOTH WOMEN STAND STILL FOR A MOMENT, THEN CONTINUE TO EXAMINE THE CONTENTS OF THE BAGS. THE ALARM STOPS.

MEGAN: Is that anything to worry about?

ANNA: Nah. They're probably just testing the alarm. It wouldn't stop if it was a real fire.

OFFICER SWEETING ENTERS THROUGH THE GATE, AND CROSSES TO ANNA AND MEGAN.

Officer Sweetie, to what do we owe the pleasure?

MEGAN NEARLY BURIES HER FACE IN ONE OF THE CARRIER BAGS. SWEETING HOLDS OUT A SHEET OF PAPER TO ANNA, WHILE GAZING AT MEGAN.

SWEETING: Treatment refusal form. Sedgwick.

ANNA: What's his problem?

SWEETING: He says he feels too ill to go to hospital.

ANNA: Now I've heard everything. Let's have it. Do we need to re-book it?

SWEETING: I expect so.

ANNA: Let's put this lot in the fridge.

ANNA PUTS THE FORM ON HER DESK, TURNS AWAY FOR A SECOND, THEN TURNS BACK.

ANNA: They're back!

MEGAN: Oh no!

ANNA: I'll get the disinfectant.

ANNA GOES INTO THE KITCHEN.

SWEETING: What's she talking about?

MEGAN: Mice. The little buggers run all over our desks and leave their poo behind.

ANNA RETURNS WITH A BOTTLE OF DISINFECTANT AND A CLOTH AND STARTS CLEANING HER DESK.

SWEETING: That's nothing. They've got rats on C Wing.

MEGAN: Oh no!

ANNA: I thought the feral cats were taking care of them.

SWEETING: They're supposed to, but there's so much weed on C Wing the cats are too stoned to do any rat-catching.

MEGAN GOES TO HER OWN DESK AND SCRUTINISES IT.

MEGAN: I can't see anything here.

ANNA: What about Sandra's?

MEGAN MOVES OVER TO SANDRA'S DESK AND LOOKS AT IT.

MEGAN: Nothing, as far as I can see.

ANNA: Oh, great. I've been singled out by a bunch of rodents.

MEGAN GOES TO THE CARRIER BAGS AND LIFTS ONE.

SWEETING: Can I help you with those, Megan?

MEGAN: Oh, yes. If you like.

SWEETING AND MEGAN CARRY THE BAGS INTO THE KITCHEN. ANNA PUTS THE DISINFECTANT ASIDE, SITS DOWN, PULLS THE PHONE TOWARDS HER AND DIALS A NUMBER.

ANNA: Gastroenterology. (Beat) No, I said gastroenterology, not gynaecology. This is a men's prison. What would I want with gynaecology? Ah, to hell with it.

ANNA HANGS UP THE PHONE. MEGAN AND SWEETING
RETURN. MEGAN HANDS ANNA A MUG.

MEGAN: Here, Anna, you left your coffee behind.

ANNA: Thanks.

MEGAN (to Sweeting): Are you joining us for Sandra's lunch?

SWEETING (trying to be casual): Oh, I might pop by.

MEGAN: I'll see you at lunchtime, then.

SWEETING: OK.

SWEETING CROSSES THE ROOM AND LEAVES THROUGH
THE GATE.

ANNA: Why do I bother arguing with a recorded message?

MEGAN: Frustration, I suppose. I've done it myself, but only since I started working here. I never did it in my last job.

ANNA: Do you know, I once phoned one of the hospitals – St James', I think – and asked for Rheumatology. I swear, the machine replied, 'Do you want Rheumatology or Rheumatology?' I said, 'Let me have a think about it and I'll get back to you.'

MEGAN: You're making that up.

ANNA: A slight exaggeration, that's all. This place is going to send me into a mental institution before I'm much older.

MEGAN: Does it get to everybody like that?

ANNA: Yes, pretty much. Well, most of the nurses are sane and well-balanced, and the Pharmacy lot are OK. And Sandra's quite normal. No, on reflection, it's just me.

SANDRA COMES IN, CLUTCHING AN A4 SIZE NOTEBOOK.

Anything interesting at the meeting, Sandra?

SANDRA: You could say that. We're getting a visit.

ANNA: Who from? The Tooth Fairy?

MEGAN: A celebrity, like that one from TOWIE?

SANDRA: Wrong and wrong. We are getting, ladies, a visit from the Minister.

ANNA: Of silly walks?

MEGAN: Of sound?

SANDRA: What? No, the Minister of Justice.

ANNA: Oh, big whoop. He's always coming here. There are plenty of other prisons to choose from but he can't keep away from good old HMP Greenhill. I'm thinking of starting a rumour that he's having a torrid affair with the Governor.

MEGAN: Oh, Anna, you can't. People might believe you.

SANDRA: Yes, but this time he's coming here, to Healthcare. To us. He's expressed a wish to see what we do.

ANNA: Like hanging on the phone for hours on end waiting for the hospital to answer and ending up having a blazing row with a recorded message because it doesn't know its gastroenterology from its gynaecology?

MEGAN: And prisoners who refuse to go to their hospital appointments for stupid reasons so you have to rebook them so the hospital discharges them and they have to be re-referred, which pisses the doctor off and he acts like it's all our fault.

SANDRA: OK, OK, I understand. Dr Hamilton's a grumpy old sod at the best of times.

ANNA: That reminds me... (she picks up the phone and dials a number) Time to sort out Mr Sedgwick's appointment.

SANDRA: So maybe if we could tidy the place up a bit...

ANNA: If I'd wanted a job as a cleaner I would have got a job as a cleaner. Gas-tro-ent-er-ol-ogy. (Beat) Great. I'm twelfth in the queue. No, we're understaffed and under pressure, so let the bastard see the conditions we have to work under. And for God's sake we'd better not let him near the food for lunch or he'll scoff the lot.

SANDRA PUTS THE NOTEBOOK AWAY IN A CUPBOARD AND GOES TO HER DESK.

SANDRA: I'm sure he's not that bad. Oh – and there's going to be a power outage later this morning. It'll be emergency lights only, no phones, and we need to make sure everything's saved on our computers.

MEGAN: They're cutting the power while the Minister's here?

SANDRA: No, he'll be long gone by then.

MEGAN: Do you think they can fix the heating while they're at it? It's sweltering now, so God knows what it'll be like this afternoon.

ANNA: Knowing this place, I'd say almost certainly not.

SANDRA: I phoned yesterday and asked about getting it turned off, but they said they can't. They told me why, but I can't remember. It all sounded a bit iffy to me.

ANNA: The Minister will probably help himself to the food. You'll see, or rather you won't. He'll walk out of here with a quiche in each pocket and salsa under his hat.

MEGAN: Or dip. Does he wear a hat?

SANDRA: I don't know.

ANNA: Probably, so that he can talk through it. (into the phone) Hello, I'm ringing from Healthcare at Greenhill prison. I'm going to have to cancel an appointment for one of our patients. (to MEGAN and SANDRA) You'll see. He's going to cut funding again and again until we're on the edge and then... (to phone) Yes, his name's Robert Sedgwick, date of birth 3rd of April 1973. I'm not sure why he's not coming today, but I'd like to rebook. (to MEGAN) Can I have the diary, please. (MEGAN hands the diary to ANNA, who thumbs through it) No, we can't send him out on the 25th (beat). Because we only have the staff to send out two in the morning and two in the afternoon (beat). No, he can't come on his own. He needs to be escorted by two officers (beat). What time? (beat) Ah, I'm afraid not. We can only send them out between nine and ten-thirty in the morning and two and three-thirty in the afternoon (beat). Ten forty-five? Yes, we can probably manage that. Thanks very much. 'Bye. (She hangs up)

SANDRA: Let's hope he goes to that one.

ANNA: A perfect example of how to arrange an appointment for a patient. Your minister should have been here to see what a good job we do. Oh bollocks. I forgot to ask for an appointment letter.

SANDRA: He's not my minister. I never voted for him.

ANNA: I know what his game is. Cut to the bone and when the few staff left are so demoralised they start doing the job badly he'll say, 'the system's not working' and privatise it. Then before we know it we'll have zero hours contracts, minimum wage, and won't be able to afford to retire until we're eighty.

MEGAN: And I'll never get off that sofa.

SANDRA: What sofa?

MEGAN: My friend Katie's sofa.

SANDRA: I thought you'd found a flatsshare.

MEGAN: It fell through. The girl I was meant to replace broke up with her boyfriend so she won't be moving in with him. I almost wish I was back in Cardiff.

SANDRA: Couldn't you go back?

STEVE COMES IN WITH A PHARMACY BOX IN ONE HAND
AND A SUPERMARKET CARRIER BAG IN THE OTHER.

STEVE: Morning, ladies. I've got jerk chicken, rice and peas, made it myself. We can microwave it later on.

SANDRA: Lovely, Steve. Are you OK? You look a bit frazzled.

STEVE: A Wing. Driving me mad. One guy refused to let me see if he'd swallowed his methadone. 'Open your mouth,' I said. 'Fuck you, asshole,' he said. At least, I think that's what he said only it was hard to tell with his mouth shut. Then a whole lot of others refused to open their mouths. I tell you, the abuse we get at times makes me wonder why I bother.

MEGAN: But surely they'd want to take their methadone?

STEVE: You'd think so, but if he's being bullied on the wing he has to hold it in his mouth and then give it to the bully to take.

MEGAN: After it's been in his mouth? Eew.

SANDRA: You'd be surprised how desperate some people get.

STEVE GOES INTO THE KITCHEN. SANDRA'S PHONE RINGS
AND SHE PICKS IT UP.

Healthcare... yes, of course. (She hangs up.) I've got to collect the Minister from the Governor's office and bring him here. Anna, try to lay off the left-wing stuff for a while.

ANNA: Hey, I can only be as I am, but I'll try to draw the line at physical violence.

DISTANT: SOUND OF VOICES SHOUTING.

Is that A Wing?

STEVE: Yeah. Better go back. (He stands up.)

ANNA: Sandra, maybe you should bring the Minister here via A Wing. Then he'll see for himself what prison is really like, not the Disneyfied version he's usually shown.

SANDRA: Maybe I should.

SANDRA AND SHE AND STEVE EXIT, JUST AS OFFICER
SWEETING ENTERS. HE GOES TO MEGAN'S DESK.

SWEETING: Another treatment refusal form. Walters.

MEGAN: What is it this time?

ANNA: He OD'd on someone else's methadone.

MEGAN: He's got hospital phobia.

ANNA: He's got a fear of confined spaces.

MEGAN: He shouldn't have got himself put inside then.

SWEETING: No. He's afraid if he goes to hospital they'll tell him he's dying.

ANNA: And is he?

SWEETING: I don't know.

ANNA: Let's have a look. (She types a few words on her computer.) Ingrowing toenail. What a wuss.

CLOSE TO: THE SOUND OF A MAN MOANING IN PAIN.

What's up with him?

SWEETING: I've just brought him over to see the doctor. Stomach pains. It might mean an A&E for you. Anyway, I'll leave you to it. I've got to go.

MEGAN: A Wing?

SWEETING: Er... no. I'm on D.

SWEETING GOES OUT.

ANNA: He's very goodlooking, isn't he?

MEGAN: Is he? I hadn't noticed.

ANNA: Hadn't noticed? The way he always hangs around you when he comes here, I'm surprised you don't trip over him.

MEGAN: Well, maybe he is rather cute.

ANNA: Rather cute? He's the king of cuteness.

MEGAN: The duke of deliciousness.

ANNA: The earl of eroticism.

MEGAN: The count of...

ANNA: Monte Cristo? Only that's about someone who escaped from prison, isn't it?

STEVE ENTERS.

STEVE: We have an A&E going out. Ambulance. Blue light.

ANNA: What, Moaning Minnie from downstairs?

STEVE: No, there's nothing wrong with him. He just enjoys the attention. This is another guy. Spice overdose. He sat down on the central heating pipe and fell asleep. Burnt the skin off his bum.

ANNA: OK, I'm on to it. Can you sign the paperwork once I've done it?

STEVE: Sure.

STEVE SITS DOWN AT THE SPARE DESK. ANNA PRINTS OFF A REFERRAL LETTER, AND FILLS IN THE FORMS, WHILE SANDRA COMES IN WITH THE MINISTER. ANNA GLANCES UP, AND OSTENTATIOUSLY STARTS SCRUBBING AT HER DESK WITH THE CLOTH.

SANDRA: This is the admin office, and these are the administrators, Anna Wright and Megan Ellis. And this is Steve Norton, one of our nurses.

THE MINISTER GOES UP TO STEVE, WHO STANDS UP. THE MINISTER TRIES TO FIST-BUMP STEVE, WHO CATCHES HIS FIST IN HIS HAND AND SHAKES IT.

MINISTER: Hello! Nice to meet you.

THE MINISTER GOES TO MEGAN AND SHAKES HER HAND.

MEGAN: Nice to meet you.

MINISTER: Yes, yes, it is.

ANNA (to Sandra) We've got an A&E. Blue light.

SANDRA: What did Quebec 1 say?

ANNA: Aagh! I knew I'd forgotten something. (She dials a number.) Hello, can you ask Quebec 1 to call 4367, please. Thanks. (She hangs up.) Here, Steve, can you sign these for me? (she gives the papers to Steve.)

MINISTER: It all seems to be happening here.

SANDRA: Yes, things do rather swing into action when there's an A&E going out. We have to do the paperwork, take it to Security and ask Quebec 1 to call an

ambulance. Quebec 1 is the call sign for the officers who arrange for prisoners to be taken to hospital.

ANNA'S PHONE RINGS.

ANNA: Healthcare. Yes, we've got an A&E. Blue light. (pause) Well, I'm sorry but if the doctor says he needs to go to hospital, he needs to go to hospital. (pause) All right, I'll just tell him to stop dying, shall I? (she slams the receiver down) Jesus, what a bunch of...

SANDRA: Anna!

ANNA: Steve, is the paperwork ready?

STEVE: All done. I've got to go back to the wing.

ANNA STANDS UP AND GOES TO STEVE'S DESK. ON HER WAY, SHE BUMPS INTO THE MINISTER, WHO NEARLY LOSES HIS BALANCE AND ENDS UP DIPPING HIS FINGERS INTO ANNA'S COFFEE MUG.

ANNA: Thanks, let's go.

ANNA TAKES THE PAPERS FROM STEVE AND THEY BOTH LEAVE.

MINISTER: Ow!

SANDRA: Oh, I'm sorry, Minister. Come into the kitchen and you can wash your hands and I'll make you a coffee if you like.

MINISTER: That's very kind. Thank you.

THEY GO INTO THE KITCHEN. BIRDSEED APPEARS AT THE GATE. HE IS WEARING A HOODIE IN SPITE OF THE HEAT.

BIRDSEED (to Megan) Hello, how are you doing?

MEGAN JUMPS AND GOES OVER TO THE GATE.

MEGAN: You're not supposed to be here. This area is out of bounds to prisoners. If you're waiting to see the doctor you need to go downstairs.

BIRDSEED: Is that a fact? Well, I'm a bad boy then. Bad, bad Birdseed.

MEGAN: Birdseed?

BIRDSEED: Aye, Birdseed McKillop at your cervix.

MEGAN: You're making that up.

BIRDSEED: No, I'm not. I swear, and I wouldn't lie to you (he looks at MEGAN'S ID badge) Megan.

MEGAN: Look, you're going to get into big trouble, Mr Birdseed. The Minister's here.

BIRDSEED: Firstly, it's not Mr Birdseed. Birdseed is my first name, so it's either Birdseed, or if the formality makes you feel better, Mr McKillop. Secondly, I'm doing life or something I didnae do, so I don't give a toss for any ministers.

BIRDSEED MOVES OUT OF SIGHT. ANNA COMES UP TO THE GATE, HOLDING TWO LARGE BOTTLES OF FIZZY DRINK, AND LETS HERSELF IN. MEGAN RETURNS TO HER DESK.

ANNA: Look what I've got, a present from Pharmacy. I asked them to throw in a few Tramadol capsules but they refused, spoilsports.

BIRDSEED RUSHES IN BEFORE ANNA HAS A CHANCE TO LOCK THE GATE, BUMPING INTO HER AND SENDING HER SPRAWLING TO THE FLOOR.

Hey! What the hell are you doing? You can't come in here. Get out.

BIRDSEED: I'll show your minister what I think of him and the whole poxy government.

SANDRA AND THE MINISTER COME OUT OF THE KITCHEN.

MINISTER: Why was that lady cleaning her desk?

SANDRA: She's got OCD.)

MEGAN: We've got mice.)

THE MINISTER LOOKS FROM SANDRA TO MEGAN. SANDRA NOTICES BIRDSEED.

SANDRA: You're not allowed in here.

BIRDSEED: So the lassie keeps telling me.

BIRDSEED PULLS A KNIFE AND HOLDS IT TO THE MINISTER'S THROAT WHILE GRABBING HIM WITH HIS OTHER HAND.

OK, Mr Minister. It's time we took a wee walk.

BIRDSEED HALF-DRAGS THE MINISTER TO THE GATE.

Now I'll show you what's what.

BIRDSEED TAKES THE MINISTER OUTSIDE THE GATE AND PUSHES HIM SO THAT HE IS FACING INTO THE ADMIN OFFICE.

You, what's your name, Megan. Come over here.

MEGAN SHAKES HER HEAD.

Come on, I'm not going to hurt you. Just be a good girl and come over here.

SANDRA: Can't you see she's terrified?

MINISTER: I'm terrified if it comes to that.

BIRDSEED: Shut up!

ANNA WALKS OVER TO THE GATE.

ANNA: Look, it's OK. Megan's scared shitless, poor kid. What do you want with her? I'll do whatever it is.

BIRDSEED: Put your hand down the front of my shirt.

ANNA: What? You must be joking.

ANOTHER ALARM BELL SOUNDS AND THERE IS THE SOUND OF PRISONERS SHOUTING.

BIRDSEED: I would remind you, darling, that I have a knife. Now, I'm not normally given to violence, but desperate measures, you know?

ANNA: You're doing life for murder but you're not given to violence. Oh well.

ANNA PUTS HER HAND DOWN THE FRONT OF BIRDSEED'S SHIRT.

How far down do I have to go?

BIRDSEED: Just a little further, darling. There are you are.

ANNA PULLS OUT A PAIR OF HANDCUFFS.

ANNA: Bloody hell. Handcuffs.

BIRDSEED: Give the lady a coconut. Now, put them on.

ANNA STARTS TO PUT THE HANDCUFFS ON HER WRISTS.

Not on yourself, dummy. On him.

ANNA: Oh, sorry.

ANNA PUTS THE HANDCUFFS ON THE MINISTER'S WRISTS.

MINISTER: You'll never get away with this, you know. When my office hears about this they'll have armed response all over the prison.

BIRDSEED: Not like that, you daft cow. You're supposed to handcuff him to the gate, not just tie his wrists together.

ANNA HANDCUFFS THE MINISTER TO THE GATE. HE KICKS OUT, INTENDING TO GET BIRDSEED BUT HE STRIKES ANNA ON THE KNEE INSTEAD.

ANNA: Aagh! For Christ's sake.

BIRDSEED: Now look what you've done. You've kicked the lady. That's not very nice.

MINISTER: She handcuffed me.

BIRDSEED: Only because I told her to. Now, Anna. Have a look in my trouser pockets.

ANNA: Oh, for God's sake. What's in your hoodie?

BIRDSEED: Never mind that. I just want your hand in my trousers.

ANNA: Dirty bugger.

ANNA PUTS HER HAND IN EACH POCKET IN TURN AND EXTRACTS A PAIR OF HANDCUFFS FROM EACH.

SANDRA: I can't bear this. I'm going to get help.

SANDRA GOES TO HER DESK AND DIALS A NUMBER.

Hello, can you ask Romeo 3 to ring 4368, please? (Beat) What? There's no one? Look, we have a hostage situation in Healthcare... yes, it's the Minister of Justice. Well, what are you going to do? I suppose three terrified women, a psychotic prisoner and a minister of the crown don't matter.

SANDRA REPLACES THE RECEIVER AND SITS WITH HER HEAD IN HER HANDS.

BIRDSEED: I'll ignore that remark about a psychotic prisoner. Anna, use the cuffs on his ankles.

ANNA BENDS DOWN AND HANDCUFFS THE MINISTER'S ANKLES TO THE GATE.

Nice and cosy are you, pal?

MINISTER: If you think you're going to get away with this...

BIRDSEED: Oh, I'm not getting away with anything. You're the one who's been getting away with things. Letting an innocent man like me rot in jail for years, to give you an example. Anna, you can go back to your desk now.

ANNA: Why, thank you so much.

ANNA GOES BACK TO HER DESK AND SITS DOWN. MEGAN STANDS UP.

MEGAN: Anna, I... No, nothing. It doesn't matter.

MEGAN SITS DOWN.

END OF ACT I

ACT 2

LATER THAT MORNING. ANNA, SANDRA AND MEGAN ARE SITTING AT THEIR DESKS, IN A STATE OF SHOCK. ANNA OCCASIONALLY RUBS HER LEG WHERE THE MINISTER KICKED HER. BIRDSEED IS STANDING OUTSIDE THE GATE, GUARDING THE MINISTER. DISTANT NOISES OF SHOUTING AND ALARM BELLS THROUGHOUT.

ANNA: So it looks as though we're stuck here. In this bloody heat.

SANDRA: I've tried to get through to Security, A Wing, even the Governor's office, but they're all occupied with the riot. And once the inmates on the other wings realise what's going on they'll kick off too.

MEGAN BEGINS TO CRY. SANDRA GETS UP AND PUTS HER ARM AROUND HER.

Come on, love. I know it's bad but it's not for ever. Once they've got the riot under control they'll come and help us out.

ANNA: They'll help the minister out at any rate.

STEVE APPEARS AT THE GATE, CARRYING A PHARMACY BOX. HE LETS HIMSELF IN, APPARENTLY NOT NOTICING THE MINISTER HANGING THERE. HE COMES INTO THE OFFICE, TURNS ROUND AND DOES A DOUBLE TAKE.

STEVE: What the hell's going on?

MINISTER: Can you get me out of here? This man (nodding at BIRDSEED) is holding me hostage.

STEVE TAKES THE RADIO OFF HIS BELT AND HOLDS IT UP AS IF TO SPEAK INTO IT.

SANDRA: It's no good, Steve. No one's responding. They're all trying to sort out A Wing.

BIRDSEED PUTS THE KNIFE UP TO THE MINISTER'S THROAT.

STEVE: Come on, man. You know that'll never get you anywhere. Give it up.

BIRDSEED: Let me in or I'll slash the bastard.

MINISTER: Please, do as he says.

STEVE: I was going to.

STEVE UNLOCKS THE GATE. IT SWINGS FORWARD, TAKING THE MINISTER WITH IT. BIRDSEED COMES INTO THE OFFICE.

BIRDSEED: You'll be getting a bit seasick with all this to-ing and fro-ing. Maybe we should get you a wee paper bag like they have on planes.

MINISTER: I don't think... I can't see why... you shouldn't do this... what do you want anyway? What do you hope to achieve?

BIRDSEED: Those half-sentences are beginning to piss me off. You'd better think about what you want to say before opening your big gob, pal. I'll tell you what, I'm a wee bit hungry. I didn't have breakfast.

BIRDSEED CROSSES THE OFFICE AND SEES ALL THE FOOD IN THE KITCHEN. HE TURNS TO FACE THE WOMEN.

Well, this looks nice. Were you planning on having a wee party without inviting old Birdseed? Never mind, I'm here now.

BIRDSEED STROLLS INTO THE KITCHEN.

SANDRA: That food is for the staff because...

ANNA: Sandra, he's got a knife. If he wants to eat, let him.

OFFICER SWEETING COMES TO THE GATE.

SWEETING: Who the hell are you? What are you doing?

MINISTER: I happen to be the Minister of Justice in Her Majesty's Government, and I did not choose to be handcuffed to this gate by a man who clearly belongs in a psychiatric institution.

SWEETING ENTERS THE OFFICE AND LEAVES THE GATE UNLOCKED. THE GATE SWINGS BACKWARDS.

SWEETING: I'll radio for help.

MINISTER: Please shut the gate. I can't stand the movement.

SWEETING: Sorry.

SWEETING PUSHES THE DOOR CLOSED AND LOCKS IT.

MEGAN: I wouldn't bother radioing, Jason. They're all dealing with A wing.

SWEETING: Are you all right?

MEGAN: Yes, I suppose so.

ANNA: And the rest of us are in exuberant good spirits too, since you ask.

SWEETING TURNS TO STEVE. STEVE NODS AND THEY BOTH RUSH INTO THE KITCHEN TOWARDS BIRDSEED, WHO HAS PUT DOWN THE KNIFE AND IS STUFFING HIS FACE WITH CHICKEN AND RICE. THEY MANAGE TO OVERPOWER HIM AND DRAG HIM INTO THE OFFICE AND SIT HIM ON A CHAIR. THEY HOLD ON TO HIM.

BIRDSEED: Hey! I was enjoying that. It's good chicken.

STEVE: It's my chicken and I made it for my workmates, not you.

SWEETING: Where did you get those handcuffs, McKillop?

BIRDSEED: I cannae remember. Maybe I found them.

SWEETING: Don't play games. Give me the keys.

BIRDSEED: I don't have them.

SWEETING: Then we'll search your cell.

BIRDSEED: You can if you want, but you won't find any keys there.

SWEETING: Why are you doing this? What do you want to get out of the situation?

BIRDSEED: You're good, eh? You'll make a great little hostage negotiator when you grow up, son. Anyway, it's like this. Ten years ago I was working as a nightclub manager. It was a good job. Now, the owner brought in a young lad to help me. He was OK, or so I thought, but then the owner says to me, Birdseed, he said, I think that young lad Tom is skimming off the top. I said I'd keep an eye on him. Then, three days later young Tom was found on Streatham Common, shot in the back of the head.

SWEETING: The hallmark of a gangland killing.

BIRDSEED: You've been reading too many tabloids, son. But yes, you're right. And what do the police do? They come up with my name and because I didn't have an alibi for the night in question and have been in bother with the law before, they put two and two together and made four thousand. I've been in here nearly ten years now and whenever I apply for parole I always get knocked back because I refuse to admit it.

ANNA: What about DNA evidence?

BIRDSEED: There wasn't any for me, but there wasn't any for anyone else either. It must have got lost, or destroyed, or eaten or something. Then the club owner, the bastard, said I told him I'd deal with young Tom so he wouldn't be able to take any money again. I said no such thing. Add to that a

defence brief who couldn't defend a nun on an indecency charge and I was well fucked.

STEVE: And how will chaining up the minister help?

BIRDSEED: It'll draw attention to my cause. I'll let the bugger go when he agrees to parole me. In the meantime, the newspapers will be on to me. A miscarriage of justice, they'll call it.

SWEETING'S RADIO CRACKLES INTO LIFE. HE GOES INTO THE KITCHEN TO ANSWER IT.

MINISTER: I won't give in to blackmail. Anyway, it's the Home Office you need to be dealing with. Try chaining up the Home Secretary if you dare.

ANNA: And besides, if the media are interested in HMP Greenhill it'll be because of the riots, not your protest. I told you...

SWEETING RETURNS.

SWEETING: Sorry, I've got to go. Can you manage him, Steve?

STEVE: I expect so.

MEGAN LOOKS AT ANNA, WHO LOOKS DOWN AND REALISES SHE IS NOT WEARING HER ID. SHE TAKES IT OUT OF HER BAG AND PUTS IT ON.

SWEETING: Will you be OK, Megan?

MEGAN: I'm sure I will.

ANNA: And Sandra and I have an even chance of making it through to the end of the day, too, thank you.

SWEETING LEAVES. BIRDSEED STANDS UP SUDDENLY AND KNOCKS STEVE TO THE FLOOR, RUNS INTO THE KITCHEN AND GRABS THE KNIFE. HE RETURNS, BRANDISHING IT, AS STEVE SLOWLY GETS TO HIS FEET.

BIRDSEED: If any of you fuckers try anything with me again, I'll shred you. Now, I'm going to stand guard over the minister, but I'll be watching all of you.

HE CROSSES THE ROOM TO STAND NEXT TO THE MINISTER.

STEVE: Bastard, I'll get him.

SANDRA: No, Steve. Not when he's got the knife. It's too risky.

MEGAN: Anna, how come he...

SANDRA: I'm going on C-NOMIS to look him up.

SANDRA TYPES A FEW WORDS. SHE STARES AT THE SCREEN.

My God, it's true. You really are called Birdseed McKillop.

ANNA: Your parents must have been off their heads.

BIRDSEED: Nah, whatever name you give them when you come in they have to put it on the system. You see, when I was young there was an urban myth that budgie food contained cannabis seeds, and if you smoked it you'd get high. So I tried it and it just made me puke. All my mates laughed at me and the nickname stuck.

ANNA: You know, you're not the only one who's been kicked around by life. Five years ago I was on the verge of a successful career as a writer.

BIRDSEED: Is that a fact?

ANNA: Aye, I mean, yes. I was this close to signing a two-book contract. I'd already written a novel and was starting on a second when the publisher went broke, leaving me and a lot of other authors in search of a deal. I went from nearly being the darling of literary London to a big fat nothing. As the saying goes, I couldn't get arrested.

BIRDSEED: Ha ha.

MEGAN: What was your book about, Anna?

ANNA: It was about three hundred pages.

MEGAN: No, seriously.

ANNA: I can't talk about it. Anyway, I tried hawking it around other publishers, or rather, my agent did. Can you imagine it? I actually had an agent then. But nobody wanted to know. Either they were cutting back and couldn't afford to take on any new authors, or they didn't like the book. Eventually my agent went out of business so I had no one to represent me. I felt so low I wanted to kill myself. After all, if I wasn't a writer, what was I? I never married or had kids, never wanted to, but it might have given my life some kind of purpose to have people who relied on me.

SANDRA: Did you actually try to kill yourself, Anna?

ANNA: No, but I planned it. The day, time, place, method, everything. But then one night I sat down and wrote a poem about it, and found that having written about it, I didn't want to. But the despair didn't go away.

MEGAN: Can you remember how it went?

ANNA: Hang on.

SHE REACHES INTO HER BAG AND PULLS OUT A CUMPLED SHEET OF PAPER, WHICH SHE SMOOTHS OUT.

Here it is. I carry it around with me everywhere to remind me that however bad things are they can always get worse. Here we go.

*Where the Graveney meets the Wandle is the place I want to be.
With my sleeping bag and whisky to warm me through the night
And with a bellyful of Tramadol my spirit will be free.
It has come to this, I'm giving up on life without a fight.*

BIRDSEED: Maybe you should stick to writing novels, hen.

ANNA: You little shit! What do you know about it? Are you a literary critic between murders?

BIRDSEED: I'm entitled to my opinion.

STEVE: Maybe you should keep your opinion to yourself.

MINISTER: Well, I thought the poem was good. Very... pithy.

STEVE SITS DOWN AT THE EMPTY DESK AND BEGINS TO WORK ON THE COMPUTER.

ANNA: Pithy? Do you even know what the word means? You right-wingers are such philistines. (SHE WALKS UP TO THE MINISTER) You don't get it, do you? Your lot are destroying all the creative endeavour in this country. People can't make art when they have to worry where their next meal is coming from.

SANDRA MEANWHILE IS LOOKING UP SOMETHING ELSE ON THE DATABASE.

MINISTER: What are you saying, that the government should give money that could be spent on schools and hospitals to people like you who want to write poems or paint pictures?

ANNA: Schools and hospitals. That won't wash with anyone any more. You spend bugger all on schools and hospitals – or prisons for that matter. I worked all the time while I was writing my novel and never expected any handouts from anyone. But I left my job when I thought I was going to make a living out of writing and when I found that wasn't going to happen I couldn't find another one, and because I left my job of my own accord I couldn't claim benefits. I ended up going to a fucking food bank!

MINISTER: Look, I'm not the over privileged rich boy you seem to think I am. When I was a student I had to work over the summer. I worked in my father's office doing quite menial jobs like photocopying and making the coffee.

ANNA: Proper little working-class hero, aren't you? A Xerxes of the Xerox. Actually, that's quite hard to say.

ANNA RETURNS TO HER DESK. THE PHONE RINGS. SANDRA ANSWERS IT.

SANDRA: Hello, Healthcare (pause). At the risk of sounding stupid, why? (pause) Yes, but really. A phone? (beat) OK, we'll sort it. Ambulance or taxi (beat). OK, but will he be able to sit down in a taxi? (beat) OK, 'Bye.

MEGAN: What's happening?)

ANNA: What is it?)

SANDRA LEANS FORWARD CONSPIRATORIALLY.

SANDRA: That was Dr Hamilton. A patient has to go to hospital because he's got a mobile phone stuck up his bum.

MEGAN: What, deliberately?

SANDRA: A bit hard to do it by accident.

ANNA STANDS UP AND SHAKES HER BOTTOM FROM SIDE TO SIDE.

ANNA: This is what happens when it rings. (Sings) Diddle dum-dum, diddle dum-dum, diddle dum-dum-dum. I'll do the paperwork.

ANNA GOES TO THE CUPBOARD AND COLLECTS THE FORMS.

SANDRA: I'll call Quebec 1.

SANDRA DIALS A NUMBER

MEGAN: Why would anyone want to put a phone there? And why would anyone want to use a phone that's been up there?

SANDRA: Hello, it's Healthcare. We've got an A&E going out. Taxi (pause) What's wrong with him? Well, I'm not sure how to describe it really, he's...

ANNA TAKES THE PHONE FROM SANDRA.

ANNA: He's got a case of posterior-mobile electronic device interface (beat). Oh, all right, he's got a phone stuck up his arse.

SANDRA, MEGAN AND STEVE LAUGH. ANNA HANDS THE PHONE BACK TO SANDRA, WHO LISTENS FOR A MOMENT.

SANDRA: OK, thank you.

SANDRA HANGS UP THE PHONE AND GETS BACK TO HER COMPUTER.

SANDRA: Oh my God, he's here.

MEGAN: Who's here, Sandra?

SANDRA: My son, Danny.

MEGAN: I never knew you had a son.

SANDRA: I don't talk about him. We don't have the same surname because I went back to using my own name when I divorced his dad.

STEVE: What did he do?

SANDRA: He ran off with a woman who works in a pet shop.

STEVE: Not your husband, your son.

SANDRA: Like so many of the guys who end up here – drugs, then burglaries to fund the habit. I feel it's all my fault.

MEGAN: How can it be your fault?

SANDRA: There must have been something I could have done, some warning sign I missed. When his dad left Danny became very sullen and withdrawn, but I put it down to the divorce, and being a normal teenage boy – you know, a pain in the arse. Then the school contacted me. He'd been caught bullying younger kids into giving him their lunch money. When I asked him why, he said he 'needed money' but wouldn't say why. I told him if he needed money he should go out and get a part-time job but he just laughed at me and said I had no idea.

ANNA: Was that when you became suspicious?

SANDRA: No. Stupidly, it didn't occur to me. I thought he was still upset over the divorce. But then he refused to go back to school after the holidays. I gave him three alternatives – go back to school, get a job or get out. He ignored me. Spent most of the day in bed and was out every night. Then I began to notice money going missing from my purse, just small amounts at first, but then fifty pounds went in one go. Well, it was only me and him in the house, so I knew it had to be him.

MEGAN: What did you do?

SANDRA: I challenged him. I said I knew he'd been taking money from me and I wanted to know the reason why. The look on his face was one I had never seen before – sort of a mixture of surprise and anger, but also relief.

STEVE: That still doesn't explain how it's your fault.

SANDRA: Because when I saw that look of relief on his face it would have been a chance to have a proper talk and for him to tell me exactly what he had been doing. Instead, because I was so angry I couldn't bear to be in the same room as him.

ANNA: Did you call the police?

SANDRA: I didn't have to. They found him. Danny went to his room, stuffed a few things into his rucksack and said he was going. I cried and cried, but then I thought he'd be back, it was just a melodramatic gesture. That night, the police came. Danny's melodramatic gesture included breaking into a house. That earned him a spell in Young Offenders. He finally admitted to a drug problem, but the treatment he got in Young Offenders didn't help him. Well, to be fair, he didn't exactly engage with the process, as they say.

MINISTER: What about when he got out? Did he get help then?

SANDRA: No, Minister, he did not. You may be surprised to learn that I couldn't afford to send him to a private rehab clinic, and his father was no help, not with Pet Shop Girl demanding this and that. Trying to get help for him was like pulling hen's teeth. Nobody could help, they were all overstretched and you know why? Because your government cuts back most from those who have the least. He was on a methadone script, but with no trained support to back it up he was soon back to his old ways and ended up in prison.

MINISTER: But there's some excellent work being done by...

SANDRA: No there bloody well isn't! Oh, there are people willing to help all right, but without money they can't do anything. It's hopeless, and now my son's here and I'll always be wondering if I'll see him. Every day I'll look out of the window at the exercise yard and at the faces downstairs waiting to see the doctor, and I won't know how to react if I do see him. (SHE BURSTS INTO TEARS)

BIRDSEED: (TO MINISTER) Now look what you've done. You've made that nice lady cry. This is all your fault.

MINISTER: I don't see why...

BIRDSEED: I've still got my knife. I could make some cutbacks of my own.

MEGAN RUNS UP TO BIRDSEED.

MEGAN: Oh no, Birdseed. Please don't do that. There's been enough trouble today. Oh God, it's so bloody hot. I wish I was back in Wales. I'll never see him again.

MEGAN STARTS TO CRY AND RETURNS TO HER OWN SEAT.
ANNA GETS UP AND PUTS AN ARM AROUND HER.

ANNA: Never see who again, Megan?

MEGAN: Darryl, my brother-in-law.

ANNA: Your brother-in-law? But why... I mean, he's married to your sister, right?

MEGAN: Yes, and I've been in love with him ever since she first brought him home three years ago. I can't help it.

ANNA: Does he feel the same way about you?

MEGAN: No, of course not. To him, I'm just Sian's little sister. But I can't help it. There's something about him that causes this reaction. That's why I had to leave home. Sian and Darryl bought a house just down the road from Mum and Dad's. I saw him nearly every day and I couldn't bear it. I went round there one day. It was very hot – almost as hot as it is in here – and he came to the door wearing just a pair of jeans, and I thought I'd explode with...

ANNA: Lust?

MEGAN: Love, pure love.

ANNA: Darling, when a young man struts around topless it's not love that makes you feel all unnecessary, believe me. You must learn to distinguish the two.

MEGAN: But I do...

ANNA WALKS OVER TO THE MINISTER.

ANNA: You see what you've done?

MINISTER: It's not my fault that poor, misguided girl thinks she's in love.

ANNA: I'm not talking about Megan, though it's scandalous that she's still sleeping on a friend's sofa after three months in London because she can't find a place to live. No, I'm talking about Sandra being unable to get treatment for her son and him ending up here. For Christ's sake, man, what are you lot spending our income tax on?

MINISTER: Substance misuse treatment in the community is not my department, but I promise to pass on your concerns to my appropriate colleagues if you let me go. (TURNS TO BIRDSEED) So how about that, sir? If you let me go I'll see what I can do to help that poor lady and her son.

BIRDSEED: No, I don't think so. You see, a politician's word isn't worth shite, I think we all know that. Sandra's laddie is no worse off with you here than if you were back in the House knocking off some pretty young researcher.

MINISTER: I'm a happily married man!

ANNA: Congratulations, but I can't help thinking you've brought this situation on yourself.

MINISTER: Be that as it may, can I have some water, please?

ANNA:) Well, all right.
BIRDSEED:) No, you can't.

ANNA: Oh, come on, Birdseed. Do you want to be known as the man who denied a dying man a drink?

MINISTER: Dying? Who said anything about dying?

ANNA: I'm speaking metaphorically. After all, we're all dying.

BIRDSEED: So you want me to show compassion to this guy, do you? I thought you knew me better than that, Anna.

MEGAN: But she doesn't know you, do you Anna?

BIRDSEED: I was speaking metaphorically.

MINISTER: Look, can I have some water or not?

ANNA:) Yes.
BIRDSEED:) No.

ANNA WALKS TOWARDS THE KITCHEN.

ANNA: What harm can it do?

ANNA GOES INTO THE KITCHEN. BIRDSEED GETS OUT HIS KNIFE AND STARTS TO CLEAN HIS FINGERNAILS WITH IT.

BIRDSEED: OK, Anna. If you want to be an angel of mercy you can. I'm bad guy enough for both of us.

MINISTER: For God's sake, let me go. If you do it'll look better for you at your next parole hearing.

BIRDSEED: Ah, that's where you're wrong. If I have to go through another parole hearing I'll be known as the twannock who chained a government minister to a gate, not the twannock who set him free. So unless you decide, unanimously, to let me out, it makes no difference what I do.

MINISTER: Unanimously?

MEGAN: I think he means unilaterally.

BIRDSEED: Why, thank you. And the title of Brain of Britain goes to Wales's own Megan.

ANNA RETURNS WITH A PLASTIC CUP OF WATER.

BIRDSEED: You were a long time with that water, hen.

ANNA: My hands were shaking so much I spilt the first lot. Here you are. (SHE HOLDS THE CUP TO THE MINISTER'S MOUTH) Drink up and don't spill it.

THE MINISTER GRUNTS TO INDICATE HE HAS HAD ENOUGH.

Finished?

ANNA TAKES THE CUP AND PUTS IT ON THE NEAREST DESK.

MINISTER: Thank you.

ANNA: You're welcome. What about something to eat?

BIRDSEED: Aye, what about something to eat? I'm sure the staff canteen can run to oysters and caviar, washed down with a magnum of Dom Perignon.

MINISTER: I'm not hungry. (TO ANNA) You're being very kind considering you were vilifying me a few minutes ago.

ANNA: Well, I guess even a right-wing bigot has some human rights.

MINISTER: As opposed to a left-wing bigot?

OVER STEVE'S RADIO COMES AN ANNOUNCEMENT: 'CODE BLUE ON ALPHA WING. CODE BLUE ON ALPHA WING'.

STEVE: Gotta go.

SANDRA: Steve, will you be all right? It sounds mad over there.

STEVE: Oh sure. Anyone gives me any trouble and I'll bring them back here and Birdseed can chain them up. See you later.

STEVE GOES TO THE GATE AND OPENS IT. HE STEPS ON BIRDSEED'S FOOT ON THE WAY OUT.

BIRDSEED: You watch yourself, pal.

STEVE: It was an accident, pal. We're not all violent.

STEVE GOES OUT, LOCKING THE GATE BEHIND HIM.

MINISTER: I'm afraid there's another problem.

BIRDSEED: What now? You want a nice, fat Cuban cigar, rolled on the thigh of a raven-haired beauty to round things off?

MINISTER: Oh no, nothing like that. It's just that, well, you'll have to unlock me.

BIRDSEED: And why should I do that?

MINISTER (shouts): Because if you don't I'm going to piss myself, that's why.

BIRDSEED: Oh, well nanny wouldn't be pleased with that, would she?

MINISTER: Look, just get me out of here. Take me to the gents' and then you can chain me up again if you like.

BIRDSEED: Oh aye, and what happens if a screw comes in and sees us? I'll be back in my cell, and back on basic.

ANNA: The officers are all busy on A Wing, Birdseed. Why don't you do what he says?

BIRDSEED: No! I'll let him go when I decide and not before.

MINISTER: If I wet myself it'll be very unpleasant for all of us.

BIRDSEED: Yeah, well, try sharing a cell with a guy with uncontrollable flatulence for six months and you'll know what unpleasant is.

MINISTER: Please! I swear I can't hold it much longer.

ANNA: Oh God. Where's that cup?

ANNA TAKES THE PLASTIC CUP OFF THE DESK AND STANDS
IN FRONT OF THE MINISTER. SHE UNDOES HIS TROUSERS
AND ASSISTS HIM.

ANNA:) What have I done to deserve this?

MINISTER:)

END OF ACT 2

ACT 3

THE MINISTER IS STILL HANDCUFFED TO THE GATE. THERE IS THE SOUND OF RUNNING WATER FROM THE KITCHEN. SANDRA AND MEGAN ARE SITTING AT THEIR DESKS, FANNING THEMSELVES WITH SHEETS OF PAPER. BIRDSEED IS SITTING ON THE FLOOR NEXT TO THE MINISTER. THE WATER STOPS AND ANNA COMES INTO THE OFFICE.

ANNA: Well, that's not something I want to do again in a hurry.

MINISTER: I'm sorry to be such a nuisance.

ANNA: Oh, don't worry about it. Taking the piss is what I'm good at. Ask my colleagues.

BIRDSEED: Taking the piss! Yeah, that's a good one.

STEVE COMES TO THE GATE, UNLOCKS IT AND COMES IN, LOCKING IT BEHIND HIM. THERE IS A LARGE BRUISE ON HIS HIS CHEEK.

Jesus, what happened to you, man?

STEVE: There's an A&E going out.

SANDRA: You?

STEVE: No, Hodgkins. He's a suspected heart attack so it's a blue light. They've already called the ambulance.

MEGAN: I'll do it.

MEGAN GETS UP AND GOES TO THE CUPBOARD TO GET THE NECESSARY STATIONERY. SANDRA TAKES A CLOSER LOOK AT STEVE'S FACE.

SANDRA: That looks nasty.

STEVE: Oh, I'm OK. Some idiot took a swing at me when I asked him to get out of my way so that I could see to my patient.

SANDRA: Here, come and sit down and let me have a look at it.

STEVE SITS IN SANDRA'S CHAIR.

You need some arnica on that. Let's see what I've got.

SANDRA PICKS UP HER BAG FROM UNDER THE DESK AND RUMMAGES THROUGH THE CONTENTS.

Let's see. Paracetamol, inhaler, HRT capsules, indigestion tablets, ear drops, eye drops, mouth ulcer gel, throat lozenges. No, it doesn't look as though I've got anything. What about you, Anna?

ANNA SEARCHES HER BAG.

ANNA: No. I've got some arnica tablets for anxiety – homoeopathic – but no cream or lotion.

MEGAN: Maybe if you crush the tablets and mix them with water you could put it on Steve's face.

ANNA: It's worth a try.

STEVE: Or you could go to Pharmacy and see if they've got anything.

SANDRA: Yes, we could do that. I'll go.

SANDRA WALKS UP TO THE GATE, BUT BIRDSEED HOLDS UP A HAND TO STOP HER.

BIRDSEED: No, I don't think so.

SANDRA: Why the hell not?

BIRDSEED: How do I know you won't bring reinforcements?

SANDRA: Don't be daft. We've had people coming and going all day and you choose now to stop me going to the Pharmacy? Let me past.

BIRDSEED: Sorry, hen. Nothing doing.

ANNA: OK Birdseed. How about you go with Sandra to Pharmacy? It's only just down the corridor and I'll keep an eye on posh boy here.

MINISTER: I've already told you...

ANNA: Yeah, I know. You once got a paper cut working in Daddy's office and you hardly complained at all. What a little trouper.

BIRDSEED: I don't know.

ANNA: Go on, you can trust me.

BIRDSEED: Oh, all right. Let's go. But I'll be watching you, Sandra.

BIRDSEED AND SANDRA GO OUT THROUGH THE GATE.

MEGAN: Here's the paperwork, Steve. Is it very painful?

STEVE: Only when I breathe.

STEVE SIGNS THE PAPERS AND HANDS THEM BACK TO MEGAN. MEGAN GOES OVER TO ANNA AND THE MINISTER.

MEGAN: Anna, what did you mean when you told Birdseed he could trust you?

ANNA: Nothing. I just wanted him to let Sandra go.

MEGAN: It was almost as if you knew him. Before all this, I mean.

ANNA: Don't be silly. No, he realises we don't mean him any harm so he can trust me, that's all. Now, if you don't get a move on, the patient on A Wing might die, and that won't impress the Minister here.

MEGAN: But he knew your name before you put on your ID.

ANNA: Either you or Sandra must have mentioned it while he was hanging around outside. Yes, when Sandra introduced us to the Minister. That must be it.

OFFICER SWEETING COMES IN AND SMILES WHEN HE SEES MEGAN.

SWEETING: Are you off to Security, then?

MEGAN: Yes. What about you? What are you up to?

SWEETING: Oh, I just thought I'd come and see if you were all OK, what with... (HE NODS IN THE DIRECTION OF THE MINISTER.)

MEGAN: Oh, Birdseed's not giving us any trouble. I mean, he and Anna are old friends.

ANNA: We're not. I don't know where you got that idea from.

MEGAN: Well, anyway, I've got to go to Security.

SWEETING: I'll come with you.

MEGAN: Really? Shouldn't you be helping to sort out A Wing?

SWEETING (nervously): No, you're OK. Someone's got to keep an eye on the rest of the prison. Let's go.

SWEETING AND MEGAN LEAVE, JUST AS SANDRA AND BIRDSEED RETURN, WITH A LOT OF SWINGING THE GATE BACK AND FORTH.

MINISTER: If you don't let me go soon I'll be sick.

BIRDSEED: Aye, and so will I if I have to listen to any more of your whingeing.

SANDRA: Steve, we've got something for you.

SANDRA HOLDS UP A TUBE OF CREAM.

STEVE: Thanks, Sandra.

SANDRA GOES OVER TO STEVE AND APPLIES CREAM TO HIS
BRUISE.

SANDRA: Hold still. Anna, was Officer Sweeting escorting Megan to Security?

ANNA: Yes. You'd think she'd know the way by now.

STEVE: Ow!

SANDRA: It's all right, it's all right. Brave as a lion. Yes, well, I think Sweetie would rather spend time with Megan than get on with the job.

ANNA: Well, when the job means calming down those maniacs on A Wing I can hardly blame him.

SANDRA: But it's not fair to the other officers, is it? Steve, when you got hurt, were there any officers around?

STEVE: I couldn't see any. Probably in the senior officer's room drinking tea.

SANDRA: Marvellous. I suppose compared with some of them, Sweetie is James Bond. There. All done.

STEVE: Thanks.

BIRDSEED (TO MINISTER): And how are you? Have you got Oslo Syndrome yet?

MINISTER: I think you'll find it's called Stockholm Syndrome.

BIRDSEED WAVES HIS KNIFE AT THE MINISTER.

BIRDSEED: Hey, don't you correct me, pal. If I want to call it Oslo Syndrome I will.

MINISTER: Yes, yes of course. Oslo Syndrome it is, and no, I haven't.

BIRDSEED: And don't you patronise me, either. You politicians are all the same. However hard you try and hide it, you think you're better than the rest of us ordinary folk.

ANNA GETS UP AND WALKS TO THE GATE, STRETCHING
HER ARMS AND SHAKING OUT HER LEGS.

MINISTER: Of course I don't. Well, not honest, law-abiding, hardworking families, anyway.

ANNA: What about hardworking single people, like me?

MINISTER: Well, yes, those too. We're all struggling at the moment.

BIRDSEED: Christ, even chained up to a gate you're still a condescending bastard.

ANNA: You shouldn't be surprised, Birdseed. It's the public school ethos. They're taught that they're the kings of the world and the rest of us mere mortals are there to be kept in our place. Is that how it was at Eton?

MINISTER: How do you know I went to Eton?

ANNA: Educated guess. A comprehensive school educated guess.

SWEETING AND MEGAN COME IN.

SANDRA: So what's going on in the outside world, you two?

SWEETING: A Wing's still total chaos. They've brought in reinforcements.

MEGAN: The SAS?

SWEETING: No, love. Not the SAS. It's called the Tornado Team.

ANNA: The Tornado Team? I wonder who came up with a name like that?

SWEETING: They go into prisons where there's trouble to back up the officers.

SANDRA: Officers like you, you mean?

SWEETING: Like... like everybody.

ANNA: Well, let's hope they can put a stop to all this.

MINISTER: Maybe when they've put down the riot they'll come over here.

BIRDSEED: Nah, I don't think the SAS would be interested in one little wanker like you, so you're stuck here until I say otherwise.

SWEETING: I told you, it's not the SAS.

THE LIGHTS GO OUT

MEGAN: What's happening?

SWEETING: It's all right, darling. Here, let me take your arm.

MEGAN: That's not my arm.

SWEETING: Sorry. I thought it felt a bit squishy.

SANDRA: It's OK, Megan. They warned us the power was going out.

MINISTER: This is...

BIRDSEED: This is what?

MINISTER: This is not what I expected on a prison visit.

ANNA: Well, I'm sorry we weren't able to lay down the red carpet for you. You should have been gone by now.

MINISTER: I am aware of that, you silly woman. I am meant to be chairing a meeting of the Recategorisation Committee this afternoon.

ANNA (IMITATING BIRDSEED): Hey, don't get arsey with me, pal. Does recategorisation mean we'll become Cat D and get a better class of prisoner?

MINISTER: Those meetings are confidential.

BIRDSEED: Or perhaps you could use your influence to get me out of here.

MINISTER: Not when I'm chained up, I can't.

THERE ARE TWO GUNSHOTS. MEGAN SCREAMS. THERE ARE VARIOUS CRIES AND EXCLAMATIONS FROM THE OTHERS. THE EMERGENCY LIGHTS COME ON. THE MINISTER IS SLUMPED AGAINST THE BARS OF THE GATE, BLEEDING FROM THE SHOULDER. BIRDSEED IS LYING ON THE FLOOR. SWEETING IS STANDING, HOLDING THE GUN. HE LETS IT DROP TO THE FLOOR.

STEVE: Oh man!

MEGAN: Jason, what have you done?

ANNA MOVES TOWARDS BIRDSEED AND FALLS TO HER KNEES.

ANNA: Oh God! Birdseed, don't die on me. Please don't die!

BIRDSEED RAISES HIS HEAD SLIGHTLY.

BIRDSEED: I wasnae going to, hen. This wee laddie missed me by a mile.

ANNA: Then what the hell are you doing on the floor, you bastard?

BIRDSEED: Hey! Don't get mad at old Birdseed. It was just my idea of a wee joke.

ANNA: Some bloody joke. I thought you were dying. Here, Sweetie, give me that gun.

ANNA GOES FOR THE GUN BUT SWEETING PICKS IT UP BEFORE SHE CAN REACH IT.

MEGAN: So there is something going on between you. I thought so.

ANNA: OK, so you have me bang to rights. When did you first suspect?

MEGAN: Well, I knew there was someone when you started disappearing at lunchtime and coming back with a huge grin on your face and walking funny.

ANNA: Walking funny?

MEGAN: Sort of... strutting.

ANNA: Strutting? I don't strut.

SANDRA: She's right, you know. You can be a right little strutter.

ANNA TURNS TOWARDS SWEETING.

ANNA: Where did you get the gun, Sweetie?

SWEETING: I went along to D Wing. Me and Officer Griffith did a search of a cell because we heard the inmate had some interesting goodies. I found the gun and took it while Mr Griffith had his back turned. I knew the power would be going off so I seized the moment.

MEGAN: Oh Jason, that was really clever of you.

MEGAN KISSES SWEETING ON THE CHEEK.

MINISTER: No it wasn't bloody clever. That fool just shot me.

STEVE CROSSES THE ROOM AND INSPECTS THE MINISTER'S SHOULDER.

SWEETING: I didn't mean to hit anyone. I just wanted to scare Birdseed.

STEVE: It's just a flesh wound. I'll get some dressings from Pharmacy and fix you up until we can get you to hospital. (TO SWEETING) Man, you are a terrible shot.

STEVE LEAVES THROUGH THE GATE. THE MINISTER MOANS AS THE GATE OPENS AND CLOSES.

SANDRA: Sweetie, whatever possessed you?

SWEETING: I wanted to put an end to all this. I thought if I could scare Birdseed we could search him for the keys and release the Minister.

MINISTER: Well, that worked really well. I'm injured while that thug isn't the least scared.

BIRDSEED: Hey! Who are you calling a thug?

BIRDSEED RAISES HIS FIST AS IF TO PUNCH THE MINISTER.
ANNA REACHES UP A HAND TO STOP HIM.

ANNA: Birdseed, he's already hurt.

MINISTER: Yes, Birdseed. Listen to your girlfriend.

BIRDSEED: OK, OK. I can be a nice guy when I want to.

SANDRA: Anna, can you come over here a moment? I want you to look at something.

SANDRA AND ANNA CROSS TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE
OFFICE.

ANNA: What is it?

SANDRA: What the hell are you playing at?

ANNA: You mean, with Birdseed?

SANDRA: No, with Prince Harry. Of course I mean with Birdseed.

ANNA: I saw him a few times when he was waiting to see the doctor. He'd always say hello to me. Then it got so I'd stop and chat with him for a while. The officers never noticed anything. They were too busy hiding out in the treatment room. And if the other prisoners ever commented a few well-chosen words from Birdseed would soon shut them up.

MEGAN COMES OVER TO JOIN THEM.

MEGAN: But why, Anna? You were taking a huge risk.

ANNA: Oh, Megan. Why not? I've got nothing in my life except this job, and I felt so old. So then, one day I went over to A Wing to deliver some health promotion leaflets and his cell door was open. He was lying on his bed, looking fed up and... well, I went in.

MEGAN: What did he say? I've got a feeling he didn't tell you you shouldn't be there, and if you didn't go away he'd report you to the officers?

ANNA: No, he didn't say anything, but he did an awful lot.

SANDRA: You know it means your job, and quite possibly a prison sentence. I think they call it an inappropriate relationship with an inmate.

ANNA: Yes, I know that. But maybe, just maybe it was worth the risk (SHE GLARES AT BIRDSEED) until he pulled that playing dead stunt.

BIRDSEED: Ah, that was just a wee joke. Where's your sense of humour?

ANNA: There's nothing wrong with my sense of humour. I work here, don't I?

SANDRA: Not for much longer.

MINISTER: I shall see to it that you and your thug boyfriend face the full force of the law.

STEVE RETURNS, CARRYING A FIRST AID KIT.

And about time too. What have you been doing?

STEVE: Talking about cricket with my mate Phil the Pharmacist. Now, let's have a look at this arm.

STEVE EXAMINES THE MINISTER'S ARM.

Man, there's no way I can work with this. I'll have to cut it off.

MEGAN: His arm? Isn't that a bit drastic?

STEVE: No, sweetheart. His jacket.

MINISTER: You can't cut that jacket. It's Savile Row.

STEVE TAKES A PAIR OF SCISSORS AND BEGINS TO CUT THE SLEEVE.

BIRDSEED: Hey, remember when they put all those paedophiles on B Wing? The guys used to call it Savile Row.

SANDRA: That's not remotely funny.

THE DISTANT SHOUTING STOPS.

ANNA: Listen.

MEGAN: What?

ANNA: The noise has stopped.

SWEETING'S RADIO CRACKLES INTO LIFE. HE PUTS DOWN THE GUN AND PICKS UP THE RADIO.

SWEETING: Romeo 2.

DISTORTED VOICE COMES FROM THE RADIO.

Romeo 2 out.

SANDRA: What did they say?

SWEETING: The Tornado Team has been stood down. A Wing is under control.

THE PHONE ON SANDRA'S DESK RINGS. SHE PICKS IT UP.

SANDRA: Healthcare. (pause) Yes, I see. Thanks for letting us know. 'Bye (SHE HANGS UP) Good news, folks. The Governor is coming over to see us, make sure we're OK.

ANNA: What's he going to do about laughing boy here? (she indicates the MINISTER)

SANDRA: Birdseed?

SWEETING: Come on, mate. You can't go on with this. Tell us where the keys are.

BIRDSEED SHEEPISHLY PULLS A KEYSRING FROM HIS HOODIE POCKET AND HANDS IT TO SWEETING.

We'll soon have you out of here, sir.

SWEETING UNLOCKS THE GATE AND STARTS UNDOING THE HANDCUFFS.

MINISTER: Ow! Mind my arm.

SWEETING: I'm doing my best, sir. Here, Steve, can you give me a hand?

SWEETING AND STEVE HELP THE MINISTER INTO THE OFFICE AND SIT HIM ON A CHAIR.

STEVE: Anna, can I have the first aid kit?

ANNA: Sure.

ANNA PASSES STEVE THE FIRST AID KIT AND HE BEGINS TO WORK ON THE MINISTER'S ARM.

MINISTER: Ow! That really hurts. Are you sure you're qualified to do this?

STEVE: You can phone the NMC and check my registration if you want.

BIRDSEED: You know what he's saying, pal? He's implying that because you're black you're not capable of bandaging his fat, useless arm. Or maybe he thinks men shouldn't be nurses and wants to be looked after by some pretty

young bird in a short skirt and black stockings like something out of a Carry On film.

STEVE: Man, I've heard it before and I'll hear it again. Life's too short to get vexed by small-minded bigots. I know I'm good at my job.

MINISTER: I'm sure you are. I'm sure you're... (STEVE TIGHTENS THE BANDAGE SUDDENLY) Ow! But... are you nearly finished?

STEVE: It's OK, man. You'll soon be all right again.

MINISTER: Could somebody fetch me some water, please? You – Anna, you did it very well before.

ANNA: Yep, that's me. A great little water carrier. I should have been born under the sign of Aquarius.

MEGAN: What sign are you?

ANNA: Leo, and I don't believe in astrology. Leos never believe in astrology.

ANNA GOES INTO THE KITCHEN.

SANDRA: She seems very cheerful considering what's likely to happen.

BIRDSEED: Aye, poor Anna. I was hoping we could get together when I'm out of here, but it looks as though I'll be on my tod.

SWEETING: I wouldn't count on getting parole any time soon.

ANNA RETURNS WITH A PLASTIC CUP OF WATER.

ANNA: Here you are, and don't imagine for a moment that I'm going to help you out again when you need emptying.

THE MINISTER SLUMPS FORWARD IN HIS CHAIR. STEVE FEELS HIS PULSE.

STEVE: Oh God, what's going on? Here, Jason, help me get him on to the floor.

SWEETING AND STEVE MANOEUVRE THE MINISTER ON TO THE FLOOR. STEVE STARTS CARRYING OUT CPR.

BIRDSEED: Hey, what's it like kissing another guy?

STEVE (carrying out chest compressions): Well... it isn't... kissing... for a start.

STEVE STOPS THE CPR.

It's no good. We've lost him.

SWEETING: Oh my God, does that mean I'm going to be up on a murder charge?

MEGAN: No, of course not. You didn't mean to kill him, you meant to kill Birdseed.

BIRDSEED: Yes, because anyone can take a pot shot at old Birdseed. But a minister of the crown, that's a different matter.

MEGAN: It'll be manslaughter at worst, won't it Sandra?

SANDRA: I suppose so.

THEY ALL CONTEMPLATE THE MINISTER FOR A FEW SECONDS.

ANNA: D'you know what? I'm hungry, really hungry.

STEVE: Now you come to mention it, so am I.

SANDRA: Well, there's all the stuff we brought in.

ANNA: Do you think anyone will come, given all that's happened?

SANDRA: I don't know. It's getting late, I suppose everyone just wants to go home, but we've got to wait for the Governor.

ANNA: We can't let it go to waste.

BIRDSEED: Oh great. Beats prison food.

ANNA: Who said anything about you? You're the one who caused all the trouble.

BIRDSEED: With a little help from my friend Anna.

ANNA: All right, all right, let's get fed.

ANNA, SANDRA AND STEVE GO INTO THE KITCHEN.
SWEETING AND MEGAN EMBRACE EACH OTHER.

SWEETING: Megan, if I get sent down, will you wait for me?

MEGAN: Oh, Jason, I don't know. You see, there's someone else. I'm not seeing him, but I want to, ever so badly.

ANNA RETURNS, HOLDING A PLATE OF QUICHE SLICES.

ANNA: And we all know why you can't be with hm. Give him up, Megan, unless you want to break your sister's heart, and quite possibly your parents' too. Look, I'm about to lose my job and might go to prison. If I can face what's coming to me, so should you.

BIRDSEED: You're very calm about it.

ANNA: Nothing left to lose. And who knows? I might write a novel about prison life.

SANDRA COMES IN WITH A BOWL OF CRISPS AND A BOTTLE OF FIZZY DRINK.

SANDRA: Anna's right, you know, Megan. Now, let's eat.

MEGAN AND SWEETING GO INTO THE KITCHEN AND RETURN WITH A CAKE ON A PLATE. STEVE RETURNS WITH THE JERK CHICKEN AND RICE. ANNA GOES INTO THE KITCHEN AND RETURNS WITH PAPER PLATES AND PLASTIC FORKS. THEY ALL HELP THEMSELVES TO FOOD.

ANNA: You must tell me your secret, Steve. This chicken is wonderful.

STEVE: Thanks. My gran's special recipe.

SANDRA: Coke, anyone?

BIRDSEED: Aye, go on.

THEY CARRY ON EATING AND DRINKING. THE MINISTER ROLLS OVER TO WHERE SWEETING LEFT THE GUN AND PICKS IT UP.

SANDRA: I'm not sure you deserve it after all you've put us through.

BIRDSEED: Oh go on, Sandra. I'll be punished soon enough.

ANNA: Now, I know this is not the way we intended to hold this little gathering, but we should remind ourselves what it's for. A wonderful friend and colleague is celebrating not only her twenty-first birthday, but ten years working in this wonderful institution. So let's all drink a toast to Sandra.

ALL: To Sandra!

STEVE: Happy birthday, Sandra. Well, sort of.

THE MINISTER STANDS UP.

MEGAN: Do you think you'll manage another ten years, Sandra?

SANDRA: Well, I don't know. Financially I don't have much choice but if there are any more days like this...

MINISTER: Enjoying the party, everyone?

THE MINISTER POINTS THE GUN AT BIRDSEED. MEGAN SCREAMS. THE OTHERS STARE AT THE MINISTER.

Who's turn is it for Oslo Syndrome now?

BLACKOUT

THE END