

# NOTES <sup>ON</sup> A SCANDAL

SCREENPLAY BY PATRICK MARBER

BASED ON THE BOOK BY ZOË HELLER

FADE IN:

EXT. PARLIAMENT HILL, NORTH LONDON - DAY (SEPTEMBER)

Barbara alone on a bench. She is high above the city, the view is magnificent.

She watches the couples, kids playing, families.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
People have always trusted me with their secrets.

INT. SITTING ROOM - DAY

Barbara writing her diary in her one bedroom, basement flat.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
But who do I trust with mine?

A whole shelf of hardback notebooks, her collection of diaries dating back to the 1950's.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
You. Only you.

EXT. ARCHWAY ROAD - EARLY MORNING

The roar of traffic. The urban ravine of the Archway Road.

The red, black and gold cast-iron 'suicide bridge' which straddles it.

Barbara driving to work in her old VW Polo.

EXT. ST GEORGE'S SCHOOL/CAR PARK - MORNING

The school is a bleak, Victorian building with various modern add-ons.

Barbara locks her car and heads for the main entrance.

INT. CLASSROOM - MINUTES LATER

Barbara takes out her lesson planner, text books, registrar. She organizes them neatly on her desk.

Barbara stares at the rows of empty desks and chairs.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
The first day of a new term.

Sound of PUPILS arriving outside. Barbara observes them from her high window.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Kids in school uniform stream through the gates.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
Here come the local pubescent proles.

They play football, gossip, fight and skirmish. A diverse ethnic mix, about fifty percent white.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
The future shop assistants and plumbers. And doubtless the odd terrorist too.

A teacher (BRIAN) oversees the general activity.

SHEBA HART comes in through the main gates pushing her tatty, old bicycle. She looks a little lost.

Brian directs her to the bike racks.

INT/EXT. RECEPTION AREA/MAIN COURTYARD - LATER

Barbara watches TED MAWSON (Deputy Head) outside with Sheba, he's introducing her to MEMBERS OF STAFF passing by.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
In the old days we confiscated cigarettes and 'wank mags'. Now it's knives and crack cocaine. And they call it progress.

The school bell rings and Sheba is whisked away in another direction.

INT. CLASSROOM - ANOTHER DAY

Barbara writes 'Wittenberg' on the board. Other stray phrases already there: 'Diet of worms' 'Martin Luther'.

She's teaching 'The Reformation' to a class of bored 16 year olds.

The bell rings. The kids immediately snatch up their books to leave. Barbara makes a gesture - they sit back down.

KID  
(under his breath)  
Fuckin' poison granny.

Barbara surveys her class. Another gesture: 'you may go'.

INT. SPORTS HALL - AFTER-NOON (A WEEK LATER)

A committee meeting of around TWENTY TEACHERS chaired by the Headmaster, SANDY PABBLEM.

His secretary (GITA) takes notes. The staff sit in chairs in a circle, Barbara amongst them. In passing we see teachers ELAINE CLIFFORD and SUE HODGE.

PABBLEM  
Before we start, can those of you who haven't delivered your reports please lob 'em in my general direction.

He goes round the circle. Staff hand him their school issue report files, all thick with their work.

PABBLEM  
Thanks Bill, Elaine. Thank you, Linda - how's Greg?

LINDA  
A bit better, thanks.

He holds his hands together - a gesture of emotional solidarity.

PABBLEM  
Good, good.

Sheba comes in mouthing apologies for her lateness.

PABBLEM  
Ah! Has everyone met our new Art teacher, Sheba Hart?

General murmurs of 'hello' and 'welcome'.

PABBLEM  
I've invited Sheba to sit in on this meeting. As you know, I regard The Arts as absolutely central to our policy of 'reform through nurture.'

Barbara gestures to the empty chair beside her. But another teacher (BILL RUMER) is comically commanding Sheba to sit next to him. Which she does.

PABBLEM

Welcome to you.

Sheba takes out a note-pad and pen, looking nervous but keen. Pabblem continues collecting the reports.

PABBLEM

Thank you, Sue. Ooh, that's a big one! I'll be up 'til the crack of dawn. Anyone else not handed in their homework?

He turns to Barbara, a hint of nervousness.

PABBLEM

Barbara...?

Barbara coolly produces her file. It's impossibly thin. Pabblem pretends to weigh it on his hand so that others can witness its paucity.

Encouraged by polite laughter he opens it to reveal a single sheet of typed paper.

PABBLEM

This is your report? On the History Department? On its entire workings? And your general thoughts for its future development?

BARBARA

You'll find it's quite thorough, Headmaster.

The teachers look tense but one or two are secretly amused - this is vintage Barbara. Gita looks appalled.

Pabblem stares at the report; it's one paragraph long.

PABBLEM

(reads aloud)

'The History Department functions much as one would expect for a school of this stature and intake. Examination results have been consistent for thirty years; below the national average but above the level of catastrophe. Recommendation: no change necessary'.

Barbara looks innocent, defying Pabblem to explode.

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BARBARA

It took me most of the summer to write it.

He stares at her in impotent fury.

Barbara sneaks a look at Sheba.

BARBARA (V.O.)

Hard to read the wispy novice. Is she a sphinx  
or simply stupid?

EXT. PLAYGROUND - LUNCH-TIME (A WEEK LATER)

Sheba on playground duty, wrapped in a coat, she's patrolling  
amongst the children. Barbara lurks nearby.

BARBARA (V.O.)

Artfully dishevelled today. The tweedy tramp  
coat is an abhorrence. It seems to say, 'I'm  
just like you'. But clearly she is not.

Sheba intervenes between two kids sparring for a fight.

BARBARA (V.O.)

A fey person, I suspect. Fey.

Suddenly - a roar from some BOYS playing football. The goal  
scorer, a BOY of fifteen, celebrates by whipping his shirt  
off and waving it in jubilation - naked from the waist up.

BARBARA

Put your shirt on!

BOY

I got the winner, Miss!

BARBARA

Glory be. Shirt.

Barbara glances at Sheba. She seems to be looking straight at  
her. Barbara wonders if Sheba disapproves her ticking off the  
boy. As he runs away:

BARBARA

Good goal!

INT. SCHOOL CANTEEN - DAY

Barbara with her tray eating lunch.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
She has certainly rippled the waters of our  
stagnant pond. They flock to her.

She watches Brian approaching Sheba.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
Even limp, little Brian had a go. Oh, the  
horror.

Other TEACHERS, almost queuing for Sheba's attention.

INT/EXT. CANTEEN/COURTYARD - ANOTHER DAY

BARBARA (V.O.)  
And Fatty Hodge has pounced on her.

Barbara at a grubby canteen table - watching with a seemingly  
benign smile.

Sheba and SUE HODGE are on a bench outside, bathed in  
sunlight as they eat their sandwiches.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
A dubious double-act; the blonde and the pig  
in knickers.

Sue chews like a rabbit as Sheba chortles.

INT. STAFF ROOM - A WEEK LATER

Barbara on a break. A few other TEACHERS dotted around. Brian  
comes in looking a little sheepish.

BRIAN  
I just went past the Art Studio...

Barbara glances up.

BRIAN  
It's bloody Lord of the Flies in there.

ELAINE CLIFFORD  
Have they gone for her?

BRIAN  
(nods)  
Torn her posters down, full on paint fight,  
they're chanting, 'get your tits out for the  
lads'. Girls too. It's carnage.

Barbara looks concerned, shares a shake of the head with Elaine. Bill looks up from the coffee station.

BILL  
How was Madam?

BRIAN  
Totally lost it.  
(imitates Sheba)  
'Stop it! Stop it you little fucking bastards.'

ELAINE  
You should've stepped in.

Brian looks anxious, thinks she's right.

BILL  
He didn't want to patronize the little lady.  
She'll be alright. The bourgeoisie need a good  
pasting now and then, reminds 'em where the  
true power resides.

He lobs a tea-bag in his mug.

BILL  
This time next year she'll be Headmistress.

Antonia - another teacher - explodes:

ANTONIA  
Oh Christ, will you shut up?! I'm trying to  
work!

She gestures to a mountain of school books she's marking.

BILL  
(sarcastic)  
Sorry, sorry. Char, anyone?  
(pointedly)  
Babs?

BARBARA  
Milk, no sugar.

BILL  
Sweet enough?

BARBARA  
Evidently.

ELAINE  
Didn't her father invent inflation?



BRIAN  
You what?

ELAINE  
Wasn't her dad that academic; Donald whatsit?  
Economics bloke, he invented the word  
'inflation'.

BRIAN  
(lying)  
Oh yeah, yeah, I know who you mean.

BARBARA  
I think you'll find that Mrs Hart's father was  
Professor Ronald Taylor. He didn't 'invent  
inflation', he devised a theory about the  
relationship between inflation and consumer  
expectation.

A silence. Brian and Elaine share a look at Barbara's  
expense.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - A WEEK LATER

The school day over. Barbara walks through the lobby. She  
hears loud noises from the library and goes to look.

A photocopied sign on the door: HOMEWORK CLUB.

Through the window she sees TWO BOYS fighting and Sheba  
desperately trying to separate them. OTHER KIDS encourage the  
fighters. It's mayhem.

SHEBA  
Stop this immediately! Stop it both of you or  
you'll be up before the Head!

Barbara waits: let Sheba suffer or be her saviour?

The chaos continues - she takes a deep breath then bursts in,  
bellowing:

INT. LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

BARBARA  
ENOUGH!

Immediate silence. She parts the boys with swift and vigorous  
force. Sheba is hugely relieved but Barbara's not finished  
yet.

BARBARA  
(To the boys)  
Outside. Now!

The two boys file out. Barbara surveys the rest of the class. A BOY has a baseball cap on. Barbara points to her head, the boy removes the cap from his own.

BARBARA  
(To other kids)  
Get on with your work!

Which they do, at once. And then Barbara marches out.

Sheba is unsure whether she's supposed to follow. Barbara gestures for her to come with.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE LIBRARY - MOMENTS LATER

The boys are looking at the floor, hands in pockets.

BARBARA  
Why were they fighting, Mrs Hart?

SHEBA  
The motive was unclear.

BARBARA  
(To first boy)  
Davis I know - you're a little thug, aren't you?  
(To second boy)  
And who might you be?

The second boy is STEVEN CONNOLLY (15).

STEVEN  
(mumbling)  
Steven Connolly, Miss.

BARBARA  
What?

STEVEN  
Steven Connolly, Miss.

BARBARA  
Year?

STEVEN  
Year Ten, Miss.

BARBARA  
(suddenly remembers)  
The naked footballer. Why were you fighting?  
(beat)  
It's a perfectly simple question.

STEVEN  
Dunno, Miss.

BARBARA  
You don't know. One minute you're an inert lump, the next you're attempting to castrate a fellow pupil. Nothing occurred between these two states?

STEVEN  
No, Miss.

BARBARA  
(cod Irish accent)  
Don't be a hero, Connolly, it's hardly da place.  
(pause)  
Yes? Brain - mouth - and speak.

STEVEN  
(reluctantly)  
He was saying stuff about Miss.  
(nods at Sheba)  
He was bang out of order.

This is news to Sheba.

BARBARA  
(To Davis)  
What did you say?

DAVIS  
I never said nothing.

BARBARA  
(correcting him)  
'I didn't say anything'.  
(To Connolly)  
What did he say? Oh, come on!

CONNOLLY  
He said she's a tart...he said he gave her one up the arse.

Sheba is shocked, Barbara is not.

BARBARA  
(To Davis)  
Did you indeed? Odious boy, apologize at once.

DAVIS  
(To Sheba)  
Sorry, Miss.

BARBARA  
Deputy Head in the morning. Now back in, both  
of you.

The boys shuffle in to the library. Sheba shakes her head.

BARBARA  
Little towers of testosterone, you'll get used  
to them.

SHEBA  
Thank you so much. I'd better...

She gestures to the library but Barbara holds out her hand.

SHEBA  
Oh, sorry, we haven't met properly, have we?  
Sheba Hart. Art department.

They shake hands.

BARBARA  
Barbara Covett. History.

Barbara watches Sheba go back in. And smiles for the first  
time.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
Quite a nice voice, plummy and deep. As if her  
mouth was pure, as if she'd never had a  
filling.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - ANOTHER DAY

Barbara and Sheba on playground duty. They smile at each  
other.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
The complexion of a white peach. One can  
almost see her veins.

INT. SCHOOL CANTEEN - ANOTHER DAY

BARBARA (V.O.)

Her trendy politics are similarly transparent.

Barbara, Sheba and Sue in the busy lunch queue.

BARBARA

We serve them best if we teach them to read,  
write and add. They don't need to know about  
the basket weavers of Chile.

SUE

Barbara's very keen on the basics.

Sheba helps herself to some sad looking coleslaw.

SHEBA

(To Barbara)

But when you started, didn't you want to give  
them a...a real education? To help them  
overcome - well...

(sotto)

...the poverty of their backgrounds?

BARBARA

Yes of course but one soon learns that  
teaching is crowd control - we're a branch of  
the social services.

Barbara spots a boy stealing a Kit Kat.

BARBARA

(To boy)

Put it back!

Sheba looks mournful, Sue tries to rally her.

SUE

Console yourself with the gems. Every now and  
then you find one with an agile mind and a  
will to learn. That's when it's satisfying,  
when you can really make a difference.

Sheba seems to really 'hear' this.

BARBARA

The rest is just cattle prod and pray.

They carry their trays to a vacant table. Barbara watches  
Sheba intently, she seems so defeated by it all. But her  
sadness is beautiful to behold...

BARBARA (V.O.)  
I can see why others are beguiled by her.

EXT. ART STUDIO - LATE AFTER-NOON (ANOTHER DAY)

Barbara waiting outside.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
But I wonder if she possesses the requisite  
heft?

Sheba emerges pulling on her coat, surprised to see Barbara there.

BARBARA  
Fancy a coffee?

SHEBA  
Mmm.

They head off. But then Barbara spots SUE emerging from the other side of the playground. She tries to usher Sheba at speed but Sue is gaining on them. A chase!

Fatally, Barbara glances back and Sheba follows suit. She sees the panting Sue and waits for her to join them - much to Barbara's frustration.

INT. GREASY CAFF - LATER

Barbara smoking - ever so slightly sulking. Sue and Sheba sip cappuccinos. Sue mock taps the table with her spoon.

SUE  
Ahem. I've got a bit of an announcement:

BARBARA  
You're leaving St George's?

SUE  
No!

BARBARA  
(flatly)  
Oh, you're pregnant.

Sue registers a moment of anti-climactic sadness.

SHEBA  
That's fantastic! Congratulations! When are you due?

SUE  
June the seventh.

SHEBA  
A summer baby, how lovely.

BARBARA  
So you'll be taking maternity leave?

SUE  
Mmm, can't wait!

Barbara nods, encouragingly.

BARBARA  
Rest is so important.

SHEBA  
Do you know what it is?

Sheba catches Barbara's eye and suggests she put her cigarette out. Barbara does so but only to please her.

SUE  
Rog reckons it's a boy but I'm certain it's a girl. Aren't they supposed to be low slung? I can't believe nobody noticed, I'm 14 weeks! Didn't you see how chunky I'm getting?!

Barbara notices a dab of froth on Sheba's nose. She hands her a serviette. Sheba thanks her with a smile.

EXT. CHEMIST/STREET - LATER

Barbara and Sheba waiting outside. Sue inside buying a hot water bottle.

SHEBA  
Do you want to come for lunch, on Sunday?

BARBARA  
Where?

SHEBA  
To mine, to our house.

BARBARA  
Won't you be with your family?

SHEBA  
Yes but you're very welcome. It's no big deal, I'll just do a lasagne or something.

BARBARA  
I adore lasagne.

Barbara is almost blushing.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - SATURDAY

BARBARA (V.O.)  
Bliss!

Women's wear. A SHOP ASSISTANT nods as Barbara discusses the virtues of a skirt she's interested in.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
A merry flag on the Arctic wilderness of my calendar.

Shoe Department. Five different pairs for consideration.

To ANOTHER SHOP ASSISTANT's relief Barbara finally plumps for a pair of black, low heelers with a strap.

INT. HAIRDRESSERS - SAME DAY

Barbara seemingly asleep while the GIRL washes her hair.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
One must make an effort when one receives an invitation.

She half opens one eye and sees the girl making faces. The girl at the next sink mocks her own customer similarly.

INT. BARBARA'S FLAT - EVENING

Barbara walks into the bedroom in her new heels. She twirls in front of the mirror, 'catching herself'.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
The art of it is seeming not to.

Barbara carefully spray starches her white blouse.

INT/EXT. BARBARA'S CAR/STREET - SUNDAY

Barbara cruising down the street looking for a space. Her VW Polo incongruous amongst the smart cars already parked.



BARBARA (V.O.)

Lasagne tends to disagree with my bowels...

She parks and takes out her compact, touches up her make up.  
She's early. And nervous.

BARBARA (V.O.)

I'll ask for a small portion.

She lights a cigarette. Determined to stay calm.

EXT. SHEBA'S HOUSE - TEN MINUTES LATER

Barbara walks up the front steps of a large Victorian house.

She observes the front garden; a cherry tree, a rusty bike, a mildewed cricket bat handle impaled in the unkempt grass.

She stands there, pristine in her grey skirt, white blouse, new black heels. She holds a bunch of flowers.

She composes herself and presses the bell. No sound.

She tries again. Waits. Nothing. She tries the knocker.

The door is opened by a tall, slightly shaggy MAN in his late fifties.

BARBARA

I think I've come to the wrong house.

MAN

(smiles)

No, you're bang on. I'm Richard. Come in!

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

BARBARA

I'm so sorry, I thought-

RICHARD

That I'd be twenty years younger and twice as handsome.

He helps her out of her coat.

RICHARD

Sorry, were you out there long? The bell's knackered.

He dumps her coat over the bannister. The hall is cluttered with junk, boots, bicycles etc.

RICHARD

Bash!

A flustered Sheba pokes her head out the kitchen.

SHEBA

Hi, Barbara! The kitchen's on fire!

Richard raises an eyebrow and ushers Barbara:

INT. SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

BARBARA

Oh, what a splendid room.

RICHARD

What can I get you? We're semi-pro drinkers here; absinthe, hooch, pick your poison.

BARBARA

Could I have a dry sherry, please?

RICHARD

Erm...I might have some apricot brandy knocking around...

BARBARA

Or a dry white wine?

RICHARD

Done. Have a seat.

Barbara takes in the room; the look is 'battered bourgeois' - the big sofas, the bare boards, paintings, overflowing bookshelves, Sunday papers.

She sits in an armchair and finds herself semi-recumbent such is its hidden depth. A GIRL of 15 drifts in. She quietly observes as Barbara struggles to sit up.

BARBARA

You must be Polly.

POLLY

(shrugs)

Must be. Hi.

BARBARA

I'm Barbara.

POLLY  
Hi, Barbara.

Polly's contempt is instantaneous but she makes a vague stab at concealing it.

She flops into a sofa, sips her bottle of Evian.

POLLY  
Are you going somewhere?

BARBARA  
Excuse me?

POLLY  
You're all poshed up.

BARBARA  
Oh...I have an appointment. Later. In town.  
(beat)  
Have you always lived here?

POLLY  
Mum inherited it. It's her little joke -

RICHARD  
(coming in)  
- I only married her for the property.

He carries an opened bottle of wine and glasses.

RICHARD  
(To Polly)  
Morning.

He hands drinks round.

RICHARD  
Did Pete go?

Polly nods.

RICHARD  
He was welcome to stay.

POLLY  
He's not really into lunch.

RICHARD  
(To Barbara)  
Cheers.

BARBARA  
Mmm. What is it?

RICHARD  
A witless Chardonnay.

BARBARA  
Are you interested in wine?

RICHARD  
Only the drinking part. You?

BARBARA  
Well, I spent a portion of the summer on the  
Amalfi coast and I became-

She's interrupted by loud thumps as someone thunders down the  
wooden stairs.

RICHARD  
Here's trouble...

BEN runs in and leaps head first onto the sofa.

RICHARD  
Easy, Rocky! Easy!

Ben is twelve. He has Down's Syndrome. Barbara didn't know.

She watches Richard and his son playfully fighting with each  
other.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
I'd anticipated a suave, young lawyer and two  
perfect poppets. Not so. She's married some  
crumbling patriarch - he's nearly as old as  
me!

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Everyone sat at the big table, eating their slightly burnt  
lasagne and salad.

Barbara has a tiny portion, almost untouched. She conceals it  
with a large lettuce leaf.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
And then there's the daughter; a pocket  
princess.

Polly picks at her food, uninterested.

BARBARA (V.O.)

And finally, a somewhat tiresome court jester.

Ben wolfs his food down, making a mess which Sheba wipes up habitually.

BEN

I'm going to be a wizard.

BARBARA

Oh? ...Is that when you're a grown up...?

SHEBA

No, he's just been cast in his school play!

Ben beams with pride as Sheba hugs him.

RICHARD

(critic's voice)

Amongst next year's cultural highlights I greatly look forward to Benjamin Hart in the key role of 'The Wizard'. Indeed I find myself to be beside myself with anticipation for this doubtless auspicious stage debut.

As Richard continues...

BARBARA (V.O.)

A rogue image swam through me, hubby's prune old mouth pursed at Sheba's breast.

INT. SITTING ROOM - LATER

Sheba and Ben are dancing to 'Funky Kingston' by Toots and the Maytals up loud on the Bang & Olufsen.

BARBARA (V.O.)

After lunch a rather mortifying family tradition...

Sheba's quite drunk and having a ball. Richard moves to his own slower rhythm amusing the delighted Ben.

BARBARA (V.O.)

They do things differently in bourgeois bohemia.

Polly and Barbara, sour bedfellows on the sofa, both mortally embarrassed.

Polly offers Barbara a fag which she accepts gratefully.

As the music continues Barbara's expression changes: her admiration for Sheba's enthusiasm, her love for her son, her natural warmth, her beauty...

As Sheba dances Barbara is almost overcome by her.

Richard grooves up and encourages Polly to join in. She bats him away and draws on her Marlboro Light. Now he tries to haul Barbara to her feet, she protests but he's relentless. Polly - the traitor - 'helps' her up.

Barbara stands in the centre of the room. An awkward moment as she half raises her arms for a formal dance but Richard's not there to reciprocate.

Ben grabs Barbara's hand and they dance.

A mobile phone rings - unheard by all except Polly. She passes it to her mother.

Sheba goes out into the hallway to speak. Her conversation seems intense, possibly furtive...

EXT. GARDEN - LATER

Richard and Ben are playing French Cricket. The garden is large, rambling and overgrown.

Barbara and Sheba head to a partially concealed SUMMER HOUSE at the back. Sheba carries coffee and biscuits on a tray.

SHEBA

I'm sorry I didn't tell you about Ben - not that it's - just sometimes people don't quite know how to react.

BARBARA

Not at all, he's charming.

(beat)

Has it been difficult?

SHEBA

Well, you just get on with it, don't you? Polly's the tricky one but who isn't at fifteen? I was impossible.

BARBARA

Surely not!

SHEBA

Wilful and flighty - lethal combination. You?

BARBARA  
I think I was rather quiet.

SHEBA  
Did you want children?

BARBARA  
Mmm. But I never found the time.

They reach the large, bashed up Summer house.

BARBARA  
How wonderful.

SHEBA  
Richard took me away for our wedding anniversary, years ago. When we got back it was here, as if by magic.

They go inside.

INT. SUMMER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

Barbara sips her coffee, conscious she's in Sheba's 'lair' and feeling privileged to be so.

The 'studio' is full of Sheba's pottery works, drawings and sketches. A comfy, messy den of curios and artefacts.

SHEBA  
It was supposed to be my studio but it's more of a refuge really.

BARBARA  
A room of one's own.

There's a big stack of vinyl LP's and 7" singles by the stereo. A large photo pinned to the wall amongst a collage of other images. Sheba as a teenager with a gang of friends, exotically dressed in post punk splendour - heavy eye make up etc. Threatening, confident, sexy.

BARBARA  
Is this you?

SHEBA  
Well...it was.

Barbara admires some glazed plates on a shelf.

BARBARA  
I like these. Such vibrant colours.

SHEBA

Take one. Take two. Have the lot actually.

BARBARA

Oh, I couldn't possibly.

Sheba takes a few down and hands them to her.

SHEBA

Honestly, no one else wants them.

BARBARA

I'll treasure them.

Too intense, too much - Barbara knows it.

Sheba starts wrapping the plates in old newspaper. Barbara carefully sits on a rickety chair.

BARBARA

It must be exhausting, running a family and teaching as well?

SHEBA

I can't wait for term to end. Roll on Christmas and a month of sod all. Oh, I shouldn't have kidded myself I could teach. I've spent the last ten years looking after Ben - I was desperate to get out and do something - finally we got him into this great local school and I'm free to work and...

She shakes her head at the difficulty of it all.

BARBARA

You're going to be a terrific teacher.

SHEBA

Thanks, but I'm bloody hopeless and everyone knows it.

She finishes with the plates and flops into the shabby, old sofa.

BARBARA

Children are feral, don't let them sense your anxiety.

SHEBA

How do you cope?



BARBARA

Oh, I'm a battle-axe. I'm not popular but at least they respect me.

SHEBA

Well, you're popular with me.

Barbara smiles. A hint of therapist and patient. Barbara on her chair, Sheba on the couch - the hip bone exposed, the ankles, her hands waving as she continues to talk.

BARBARA (V.O)

She spoke of her 'vile' mother, her grief over the death of her father, the glory days when Richard scooped her up and then jettisoned his wife and children for what she called a 'non stop fuckfest.' It's a peculiar trait of the privileged: immediate, incautious intimacy. But Sheba went well beyond the tendencies of her class. She was utterly candid; a novice confessing to the mother superior.

It's getting dark outside. Richard and Ben have gone in.

The atmosphere in the Summer House is intimate now, sisterly. Sheba concludes her long speech:

SHEBA

But you know, marriage and kids, it's wonderful but it doesn't give you meaning. It gives you an imperative but it doesn't help you...my father used to say - you know on the tube - 'Mind The Gap'.

Barbara looks a little confused.

SHEBA

I dunno, the distance between life as you dream it and...

(softly)

...life as it is.

Barbara stares at her, rapt.

BARBARA

I know exactly what you mean.

INT. SITTING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

CLOSE: A gold star on a page of Barbara's diary.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
A gold star day!

She sticks the star down with her thumb.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
I always knew we'd be friends. Out mutual  
reserve inhibited us but now it is manifest; a  
spiritual recognition!

As she continues to write we see the strangely anodyne  
possessions of her life: the trinkets, the cat toys, etc.

INT. SCHOOL HALL - DAY

Assembly. Pabblem making announcements. The PUPILS sit in  
rows. STAFF on a raised platform.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
'S' and I share the ability to see through the  
quotidian awfulness of things. In a different  
(better) age we would be ladies of leisure;  
lunching together, visiting galleries,  
travelling, putting the world to rights.

Barbara sits behind Sheba who is casually twirling the hair  
at the back of her neck. A strand falls into Barbara's lap.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
We would be companions.

The strand of hair taut between her fingers.

INT. SCHOOL HALL - LATE AFTER-NOON (DECEMBER)

The school carol concert. The last day of term.

A school band on stage doing a 'rap' version of 'Hark The  
Herald Angels Sing'. Toasting each other, the hoods, the  
attitude.

Sue Hodge is conducting them, gleefully.

Pabblem beams. This is what his school is all about.

Brian is into the groove. He wears a Tottenham Hotspur  
baseball cap and stuffs a mince pie in his gob.

Gita fakes enjoyment - in common with many other staff.

The kids are allowed to 'dress down'. Some are in festive fancy dress. Some clap along. Others throw food around.

Barbara sits at the end of a row. An empty seat beside her. Bill tries to sit in it but Barbara says it's reserved.

She looks around for Sheba. Not here. She slips out of the room.

INT. BARBARA'S CLASSROOM.

Barbara goes over to the window and looks out. It's dark outside. There's a dim light on in the Art Studio.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR.

Barbara heads for the exit. Christmas decorations and children's art fill the walls.

The rap music echoes down the empty corridor.

EXT. PLAYGROUND.

The playground in darkness. Barbara heads towards the Art Studio. The light still on. But then it goes out.

Barbara waits for Sheba to emerge. But she doesn't.

Now Barbara approaches, perplexed...

She hears a noise - a chair scraping back - male laughter, a 'shhh' - silence.

Barbara sneaks up to a window. Standing on tip toes she can just see inside.

Darkness. Footsteps. A murmur...

And then...a match...a tiny flare of light. And then an orange glow - a cigarette.

Still she can't see properly, her eyes beginning to adjust.

She can make out Sheba's desk now...

and Sheba sitting on her chair at the desk...

Her shirt undone to the waist...

Barbara holds her breath.

Sheba's mouth - she's saying something...

And now the orange glow comes back into view.

She sees a white shirt. A man holding a cigarette.

Sheba gesturing - something to do with the cigarette...

The man stands in front of Sheba.

A playful exchange of words. He puts the cigarette out.

Sheba nods and then undoes his zip. Pulls him towards her.

Barbara watching as Sheba gives head.

The man comes quickly. Sheba's hand on his mouth, silencing him.

Barbara's hand on her own mouth.

Distant applause and stamping. The carol concert's finished.

The lovers hear the applause. They kiss passionately.

Sheba buttons her shirt. He goes to the door and slips out.

Barbara edges round the building to see him...it's that boy - fifteen year old - STEVEN CONNOLLY.

Barbara grips the wall for support.

Steven heads towards the school gates pulling his coat on and lugging his school bag over his shoulder.

The Art Studio lights flash on.

Barbara turns back, sees Sheba picking something from the floor - a fag butt. She wraps it in paper and pockets it.

CHILDREN and STAFF start streaming out the school doors.

Barbara alone for a moment before she's engulfed.

INT. SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Barbara sat in her armchair, still in shock. Thinking.

EXT. SUPERMARKET CAR PARK - DAY

Sheba and Ben loading the car with their shopping. Sheba humps a box of mineral water into the boot.

Her mobile rings, she answers.

BARBARA (V.O)

It's Barbara. I need to talk to you about Steven Connolly.

Sheba freezes. The best she can do:

SHEBA (IN PHONE)

Who...?

INTERCUT AS  
NECESSARY

INT. SITTING ROOM - SAME TIME

A thin smile from Barbara.

BARBARA (IN PHONE)

Let's not, shall we? I'm afraid I've learnt of your 'activities'.

Sheba - horrified - before she can respond:

BARBARA

Doubtless you're aware you could go to jail. I'm driving to Eastbourne tonight, I'm spending Christmas with my sister. I'll be with you at five.

Barbara puts the phone down. Silence.

Then, a strange CROAK. Her cat, Portia, has vomited at her feet.

EXT. SHEBA'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

Before Barbara can knock Sheba comes out in her coat.

SHEBA

Let's go to the pub, OK?

BARBARA

I brought you this, for all of you.

Barbara hands her a bottle of sherry. Sheba looks at it like it's a bomb, then deposits it inside the door.

EXT. HIGHGATE STREETS/PUB - MOMENTS LATER

They walk in silence. Sheba sick with fear. Barbara has to double her pace to keep up.

They arrive at the pub. It's festooned with festive cheer. A couple of drunks barge past them singing carols.

Barbara gestures to a wooden table with benches, chained to the wall outside - quieter.

EXT. PUB - LATER

Sheba and Barbara sat with their drinks - a dry sherry and a hefty scotch. Barbara lights a cigarette. Sheba is shaking with fear (and cold).

SHEBA

So...when...when will you tell them?

Barbara is inscrutable, relishing her power.

BARBARA

I need to know the circumstances. You must inform me of everything.

Sheba takes a slug of her drink, her only option to comply.

SHEBA

Actually, you were there, when I first noticed him...

EXT. PLAYGROUND - FLASHBACK

A roar. Steven scores his goal then whips his shirt off and points in glory at Sheba.

SHEBA (V.O.)

I think you gave him a telling off.

BARBARA (V.O.)

No, I gave him a slight ticking off.

Sheba gives Steven a little smile.

SHEBA (V.O.)

He dedicated his goal to me. It was just a sweet thing, it amused me.

Steven runs off past Barbara who tells him to put his shirt back on.

But Sheba continues to gaze at the boy - his smooth skin, his hips, his muscles moving as he pulls the shirt over his head.

INT. ART STUDIO - AFTER-NOON

Sheba alone, repairing her torn posters.

SHEBA (V.O.)

A few days later he came to see me.

Steven comes in carrying a large envelope.

STEVEN

Miss, would you look at my drawings, please?

SHEBA

I'll look at them in class. You do Art, don't you?

STEVEN

I'm not allowed...

(embarrassed)

I'm special needs. I gotta do extra reading instead.

SHEBA

You did these at home?

He nods and hands her the envelope.

Sheba looks at the boy's 'work'. Pencil sketches of fruit, a can of coke, a woman vaguely like herself, his own hands...

SHEBA

These are good. You can draw.

Steven is thrilled.

SHEBA

Hands are very difficult, aren't they?

STEVEN

Yeah, they're a right bastard.

SHEBA

You have to really study them, the bone structure...look...

She does a quick sketch of his hands. She's talented, deft. Her sketch is simple but clear.

STEVEN

Can I keep it, Miss?

She hands it to him - unsure if she's already crossed a line.

SHEBA (V.O.)

I told him I'd speak to the Deputy Head, look into his timetable.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Sheba with Ted Mawson. Kids streaming past between lessons.

TED

If we started pulling strings for one child the whole system would unravel.

SHEBA

But he's talented, he's actually found something he believes in!

TED

Oh, they're all talented!

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. PUB - EVENING

Sheba and Barbara at their table. Barbara looks steely.

BARBARA

You'd found your 'gem' as Sue would say?

SHEBA

I said I'd teach him after school, but only if he felt like it. It's our job, isn't it?

BARBARA

Within specified hours and a specified curriculum.



SHEBA

He came every day for two weeks. Yes, I was flattered but more than that I was excited to find someone who actually wanted to learn.

BARBARA

But you must've suspected his motives?

INT. ART STUDIO - DAY

Sheba showing Steven a book of Da Vinci's drawings.

SHEBA (V.O.)

I sensed he had a little crush on me but so what? It was innocent.

STEVEN

So he invented a sort of helicopter five hundred years ago? Does your brain in.

Sheba smiles, charmed by him.

ANOTHER DAY: Steven's new drawing of his hands. A slight improvement.

SHEBA

That's so much better. Look, you've absolutely got that knuckle.

STEVEN

(grins)  
Nailed it.

She's pleased for him and ruffles his hair. Mistake. She knows it instantly.

STEVEN

Do that again, Miss.

SHEBA

Don't be silly. Off you go.

She gets up, starts tidying, pushing chairs under desks. He leaps up to help her.

STEVEN

What you having for tea, Miss?

SHEBA

I don't know, I'll probably buy something on the way home.

STEVEN  
Are you a good cook?

SHEBA  
Not really.

STEVEN  
You suck?

Pause. She narrows her eyes.

SHEBA  
Go home, Steven.

He stares at her and then leaves. Sheba puts on her coat.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
That's when you should've stopped it.

INT. OUTSIDE SPORTS HALL - DAY

SHEBA (V.O.)  
I did! I told him I wouldn't teach him  
anymore.

Busy lobby area. Sheba comes out of a meeting, carrying  
papers and files.

Steven, in sports kit, suddenly throws her a football.

STEVEN  
Miss!

Sheba catches it and sternly hands it back to him.

SHEBA (V.O.)  
He wouldn't accept it. He just kept coming  
back.

EXT. STREET - ANOTHER DAY

Sheba cycling home. She passes Steven in the street. He gazes  
at her.

SHEBA (V.O.)  
It began to feel like 'our secret'. And  
secrets can be seductive...

EXT. DELICATESSEN/STREET - ANOTHER DAY

Sheba comes out with a bag of shopping. Steven is polishing her saddle with his sleeve. He finishes with a flourish and stands back gesturing for her to alight.

She dumps her bag in the bike basket.

SHEBA  
What are you doing here?

STEVEN  
I live here.

He gestures to the tower blocks of a grim looking estate.

STEVEN  
'S'alright, apart from the crack'eads and that. Some bloke got stabbed last week.

Sheba looks concerned. He steadies the bike as she fiddles with the chunky lock.

SHEBA  
I'm going now. Good day to you, young man.

STEVEN  
D'you wanna come for a walk?

SHEBA  
Absolutely not! I'm going home to my family.  
As should you.

She climbs on the bike. He's still holding the handlebars.

STEVEN  
My Dad's got the hump. He got sacked, been taking it out on me.

He gestures with his arm, Sheba looks shocked.

SHEBA  
He hits you?

Steven vaguely nods, embarrassed.

SHEBA  
Does your mother know?

STEVEN

(shakes head)

She's got this kidney problem, been waiting months for an operation. I don't wanna give her more grief.

SHEBA

You could call the Social Services. They'll come and see him, give him a warning.

STEVEN

(shrugs)

I'll be alright.

SHEBA

If he does it again you tell me, OK?

STEVEN

Thanks, Miss.

She looks at him, full of sympathy. He leans in and holds her face.

STEVEN

You're beautiful, Miss. You don't know how beautiful you are.

Before she can respond he's on his way.

EXT. PUB.

Barbara looks at Sheba reproachfully.

SHEBA

(desperately explaining)

My heart went out to him...he was so vulnerable. I knew it was wrong and immoral and completely ridiculous but...I don't know...I just...allowed it to happen.

BARBARA

The boy is fifteen!

SHEBA

But he's quite mature for his age.

BARBARA

'But' is not a helpful word here! He's a minor and you've broken the law.

Sheba nods, chastened. Pupil to teacher.

SHEBA  
This'll sound sick but something in me  
felt...entitled.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

Between lessons. Staff and pupils coming in and out of  
classrooms.

SHEBA (V.O.)  
I've been good all my adult life; decent wife,  
dutiful mother, coping with Ben...

Steven passes Sheba in the crush of bodies, he slips her a  
handwritten note.

INT. ART STUDIO - LATER

Sheba struggling to control her class as they splatter each  
other with paint.

SHEBA (V.O.)  
This voice inside me was going, 'why shouldn't  
you be bad?

She sits at her desk and reads the note: 'MEET ME AT 8  
TONIGHT. PLEASE.' His mobile number is scrawled below it.

INT. SHEBA'S HOUSE, SITTING ROOM/HALL - THAT EVENING.

Sheba in an armchair with a glass of wine.

SHEBA (V.O.)  
'Why shouldn't you transgress? You've earned  
the right.'

Ben is watching TV with Richard. Sheba checks her watch:  
7.45.

She stares at her husband and son. She decides. She gets up,  
ruffles Ben's hair, kisses him on the top of the head.

SHEBA  
Sue phoned, OK if I go for a drink?

RICHARD  
Sure. I'll put bugalugs to bed.

He tickles Ben as Sheba goes out into the Hall.

She checks herself in the mirror.

Polly emerges from the kitchen talking intensely on her mobile. Sheba flinches, somehow feeling 'caught'.

SHEBA

I'm just going for a drink, with Sue.

Polly points to her phone 'I'm busy' - and slopes upstairs.

EXT. PUB.

BARBARA

Why Sue?

Sheba gulps her scotch, feeling the cold.

SHEBA

Dunno, first person I thought of.

On Barbara: disappointed.

EXT. RAILWAY ARCH - NIGHT

Sheba locks her bike to a railing. She makes her way to the meeting place, giddy with anticipation.

SHEBA (V.O.)

I remembered that gorgeous feeling, like being sixteen. I'm going to give you what you want and you don't know it yet.

Steven is waiting there, smoking.

STEVEN

Evening, Miss.

She looks him in the eye.

SHEBA

Have you done this before?

He nods but his cockiness is slightly diminished.

STEVEN

Not with someone like you, I mean...a proper woman.

She touches his cheek, tenderly. They walk together.

EXT. DISUSED RAILWAY YARD - NIGHT

Sheba follows Steven down an 'alley' between a disused train and a siding.

Steven stops. A clearing. He puts his coat down.

STEVEN  
Make yourself comfortable.

He looks at Sheba, barely believing his luck.

SHEBA  
It's incredibly important that we keep this secret. Does anyone know you're here?

STEVEN  
No.

SHEBA  
You can't tell anyone, ever.

She stares at him. He takes her hand, soothes her...

STEVEN  
Miss, I'm no genius but I aint no dickhead. I wont tell anyone. You can trust me.

SHEBA  
(distantly)  
We'd both get into terrible trouble.

Steven looks into her eyes. She kisses him. They fall onto the ground. They start making out like teenagers - laughter, gasps and elbow banging.

SHEBA (V.O.)  
It was easy. Like having another drink when you know you shouldn't.

Sheba and Steven fucking. Semi-clothed. It's very quick.

STEVEN  
Miss?

SHEBA  
What?

He murmurs in her ear.

SHEBA

What?

(he murmurs again)

What?!

STEVEN

Can I come inside you?

SHEBA

Yes!

And he does. Sheba holds him tight.

LATER: Steven lies on her stomach. She strokes his hair. He reaches for his cigarettes. Thinks.

STEVEN

Can I smoke, Miss?

SHEBA

You can do what you want. But enough of this 'miss'.

He grins. Lights a fag, offer her one, she shakes her head. Steven cracks open a can of beer and offers her the other. She takes it and swigs some. He watches her intently.

STEVEN

Were you a model once?

Sheba shakes her head.

STEVEN

You shoulda been. You're well fit.

SHEBA

'Gosh but don't I know it'.

STEVEN

You're into 'The Streets'?!

SHEBA

My daughter is.

STEVEN

She the same age as me?

SHEBA

None of your beeswax.

He's smart enough not to persist.



STEVEN  
Anyway, the point is you're fit.

SHEBA  
Well, so are you.

STEVEN  
You reckon? My sister says I look like a  
bollock with measles.

SHEBA  
(shakes her head)  
You've done my brain in.

They toast each other in the moonlight.

It's freezing cold and they start to button up their clothes.  
But Steven can't bear to let her go, he stops her doing up  
her shirt, kisses her.

STEVEN  
You wanna do it again?

Sheba smiles. Men can't do this.

STEVEN  
What? What?

She laughs then sees he's getting upset.

SHEBA  
Yes. I want to do it again.

She pulls him towards her and feels his cock.

SHEBA  
I want to do it again.

INT. SHEBA'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Sheba parks her bike in the hall. As she checks herself in  
the mirror, an angry voice from the sitting room:

RICHARD (O.S.)  
Oh, you TART! You feckless bitch!

Sheba freezes - then realizes he's shouting at the TV.

She goes into the sitting room. Richard is slobbered out on the  
sofa, remote control perched on his belly. He raises an arm  
in greeting.

RICHARD  
I'm dying! These people are killing me! I'm  
having a coronary right here on this sofa.

SHEBA  
Coffee?

RICHARD  
Love one. Add a vat of scotch will you?  
(At TV)  
ANSWER THE QUESTION! It's 'yes' or 'no' you  
dozy, old bastard!

SHEBA  
(amused)  
Change channels.

She goes in to the kitchen.

RICHARD  
I keep flipping back. I'm in an orgy of  
masochism.

Sheba starts making coffee.

The fridge with its collage of family photos and school  
schedules. The clutter of family life...

EXT. PUB - NIGHT

Barbara stubs another cigarette out, she's realized  
something.

BARBARA  
The day we met, it had already begun?

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - (FLASHBACK)

The 'Homework Club' day. Steven and Davis getting a dressing  
down from Barbara as Sheba watches.

SHEBA (V.O.)  
Yes.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
You had further relations that day?

EXT. PUB.

Sheba thinks, truth is best policy here.

SHEBA  
We went to the Art room.

BARBARA  
Well, I'm glad I was such an aphrodisiac. I was trying to help you.

SHEBA  
And you did. I'm incredibly grateful. You've been such a good friend.

BARBARA  
(quietly)  
Not reciprocated it seems.

Sheba suddenly sees that Barbara's anger is personal - and potentially explosive. She proceeds carefully...

SHEBA  
I desperately wanted to confess to you. But how could I? ...Barbara...?

She waits until Barbara looks at her.

SHEBA  
It would've put you in an impossible situation. But I so wish I had. You'd have made me see sense.

Barbara considers, is Sheba 'playing' her? No, impossible.

They sit in silence. Barbara watches Sheba - then blinks:

BARBARA (V.O.)  
And then I realized my fury had blinded me...

SHEBA  
Do we need more drinks?

Barbara nods, miles away.

SHEBA  
But can we go inside? I'm freezing.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
There was a magnificent opportunity here...

INT. PUB - MOMENTS LATER

Sheba at the bar, Barbara at a table.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
With stealth I might secure the prize, long  
term, forever in my debt...

Sheba heads back to Barbara carrying the new drinks.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
I could gain everything. By doing... nothing.

Sheba sits, fraught with anxiety. Barbara lights a cigarette.

SHEBA  
I...I know you have to tell them; the head,  
the school, whoever. All I ask is you wait  
'til the new year? I'm begging you, please,  
let me have this Christmas with my family...?

She's almost in tears. Barbara stares at her. Then smiles.

BARBARA  
I think you've misunderstood me.  
(beat)  
I'm your friend. We're friends.

SHEBA  
I know. Of course. But...

BARBARA  
Oh, you poor thing, have you got yourself in a  
terrible state? I'm not going to report you. I  
only want to help you, to support you through  
this.

She gives Sheba a tender squeeze on the hand.

SHEBA  
You're not going to tell?

Barbara shakes her head. Sheba is overcome with relief.

SHEBA  
You won't tell anyone?

BARBARA  
Who would it benefit? Not you nor the boy and  
certainly not the school. No. It's a private  
matter and we must keep it so.

SHEBA  
Yes - maybe I should resign?

BARBARA

No, no, no! That might alert suspicion. You must stay at the school but the affair has to end.

(Sheba nods)

Immediately. Your solemn promise. I can't help you unless you promise.

Sheba realizes that Barbara means it literally.

SHEBA

I - I promise.

BARBARA

Will it be difficult?

Sheba stares into her glass.

SHEBA

He'll be very upset. He comes from such a...loveless home.

BARBARA

You're not in love?

Sheba looks up, an innocent. She gives a slight nod. Barbara tries not to react but is clearly shocked.

SHEBA

I know it's appalling and illegal and unethical but I'm hopelessly besotted.

Barbara looks vaguely sick.

SHEBA

Sorry. When you're in love you want to tell the whole world about it.

BARBARA

I wouldn't though.

They manage to share a grim smile.

BARBARA

But isn't it...just a physical thing, mainly?

SHEBA

Well...

(raises an eyebrow)

I can't tell you.

BARBARA

I think you just have.

SHEBA  
Do you know what I'm talking about?

BARBARA  
Well, I've read quite a bit of D.H. Lawrence.

EXT. PUB/STREET - LATER

Barbara and Sheba walking.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
I played the maiden aunt but I'm well aware of the proclivities of the fifteen year old male. Even I have been the subject of their graffitied yearnings in the school toilets. By law they are children, but their grim, pungent urges are entirely adult...

They arrive at Barbara's car.

BARBARA  
So you'll tell him straight after Christmas?

Sheba nods, determinedly.

BARBARA  
All for the best.

SHEBA  
I know. Thank you so much. You've been so brilliant.

BARBARA  
And you'll tell me when it's done?

SHEBA  
Yes.

A big hug. Then, Sheba sees the travelling cat box on the passenger seat. Portia is asleep.

SHEBA  
You never said...

BARBARA  
Standard issue for spinsters.  
(frowns)  
She's been off her food recently, I'm a bit worried about her...

SHEBA

There's a terrific vet up the road, he was great with Ben's rabbit.

Barbara lingers, relishing this time with Sheba.

BARBARA

Have you got many people coming tomorrow?

SHEBA

Mmm, my lot, Richard's lot - including first wife.

They share a grimace.

BARBARA

And your mother?

SHEBA

Oh yes.

A second grimace.

BARBARA

Well, Happy Christmas.

SHEBA

You too. And thank you.

BARBARA

Courage mon brave!

Barbara gets in her car.

BARBARA (V.O.)

And bon voyage to her little leprechaun.

Barbara drives off as Sheba heads back to her house.

BARBARA (V.O.)

Sheba and I share a deep understanding now.

INT. SHEBA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Sheba composes herself in the hall and then goes into the sitting room.

BARBARA (V.O.)

No one can violate our magnificent complicity.

Richard is wrapping a present. He turns with the ineptly wrapped package, taunts her with it.

RICHARD

Ha!

She tries to steal it from him.

RICHARD

Don't snatch! Wait 'til tomorrow!

He chucks the present under the Christmas tree.

RICHARD

You've been gone ages.

SHEBA

Oh, Barbara was...just some school thing.

He pours some wine for them.

SHEBA

How's his nibs?

RICHARD

Still awake, madly excited, I said he could wait up for you.

SHEBA

And her ladyship?

RICHARD

(points upstairs)

'Depressed'. Pete phoned. They had a barney, he's not coming tomorrow.

They share a moment of parental sadness.

SHEBA

Do you think he's bad news?

RICHARD

Well, these older men can be very dodgy.

She smiles, suddenly kisses him, passionately. Richard is slightly surprised but responds in kind.

INT. POLLY'S BEDROOM - LATER.

Polly is lying on her bed, i-Pod on, smoking. She's been crying. Sheba sits with her.

POLLY

Did Daddy tell you?



Sheba nods.

POLLY

He's gonna bin me, I know it.

SHEBA

You're very lovely and he's clever enough to appreciate it.

POLLY

I'm fat as fuck, mum.

SHEBA

He'll be back.

POLLY

I can't live without him.

Sheba holds her. The girl resists a little but then succumbs - grateful for the contact.

EXT. GRAND HOTEL, EASTBOURNE - CHRISTMAS DAY

Establishing Shot. The sea. The promenade.

The white stuccoed Regency hotel.

Sounds of festive music from a jazz combo.

INT. DINING ROOM - SAME TIME

A huge ornate room packed with the elderly, the infirm and their families. A small band playing on a raised area.

Barbara surveys the room: an old man spilling his soup, an old woman tottering in on her crutches, an elderly couple struggling to pull their cracker.

She's mid-lunch with her family: her sister, MARJORIE, with husband, DAVE, also their daughter LORRAINE and her husband MARTIN. They all wear paper hats.

Barbara is deep in thought, ruminating on Sheba...

BARBARA (V.O.)

Her fetish for the boy was simply her snobbery manifested; 'he's working class and he likes Art'. As if he were a monkey who'd just strolled out of the rain forest and asked for a gin and tonic.

She straightens her paper crown, oblivious to everything.

DAVE

Ba! Wakey wakey!

MARJORIE

Lorraine was asking if you'd heard from that nice friend of yours?

BARBARA

(confused)

Who?

LORRAINE

Jennifer.

BARBARA

Oh...yes. She left the school, she's teaching at a Primary in Stoke. There's a chap apparently. I heard they're engaged.

Lorraine and Martin stifle a giggle but Barbara's seen it. She bides her time...

BARBARA

How's your eczema, Martin?

He shakes his head, a sad look in his eyes.

MARTIN

Bit grim. But Lorraine's found this top specialist in Hastings.

LORRAINE

He's state of the art. He'll give it a really good bash in the new year.

She puts an arm round her disconsolate husband. Barbara eyeballs the hapless couple.

BARBARA

It must be so distressing - for both of you.

Marjorie squeezes her son in law's crusty hand.

MARJORIE

You've been in my prayers all year.

BARBARA

Fingers crossed for a Christmas miracle.

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DAVE  
(raises his glass)  
And so say all of us!

INT. KITCHEN, SHEBA'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

In contrast: noise, hubbub and mayhem. Booze, food, mess.

Round the big table: Richard, Polly, Ben. Richard's first wife MARCIA and their daughters SASKIA and CLAIRE. Sheba's older brother EDDIE with his WIFE and their infant BOYS.

Sat next to Ben, Sheba's MOTHER (MRS TAYLOR) - a formidable woman in her sixties.

Sheba gets up, gives Polly a little squeeze then fetches more cream from the fridge.

Her mobile beeps, a text message. She reads: 'happyxmas miss! wish i woz fucking u blind rite now'

Sheba looks around - her mother is watching her. She deletes the message and turns off the phone.

INT. SHEBA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Sheba outside the half open sitting room door with a tray of coffees. Sheba's mother is sat with Marcia.

MRS TAYLOR  
Her father was an exceptional man.  
Exceptional. Bathsheba's a loner I'm afraid.  
She's beautiful (thank God) - and it's got her  
through - but it's not quite the same as  
possessing substance.

Sheba listening in horror.

MARCIA  
Mmm, strong personality, weak character.

MRS TAYLOR  
She's a time bomb, actually. Non-bonders are  
always dangerous.

Marcia nods, knowingly. Sheba is really stung. But she goes in with the tray.

The women smile as she serves them their coffee.

EXT. SHEBA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Sheba comes out the front door and down the steps with two black bin bags crammed full of rubbish.

As she's stuffing the bags into the front bins:

STEVEN  
Happy Christmas.

Steven is lurking near the car. He hands her a little package. Sheba glances at the house - the front door is open.

SHEBA  
Everyone's inside! Please, you have to go!

STEVEN  
Aren't you gonna open it?

She quickly opens the package.

STEVEN  
It's made of real fake gold.

It's a cheap, gold necklace with an 'S' on it. It glints in her hand. She's touched by the gesture.

SHEBA  
Thank you.

STEVEN  
What's up? I haven't heard from you...

She motions him back to the side of the house where it's hidden from the front door.

SHEBA  
I - I can't see you anymore - I'm sorry - I'm really sorry.

She's beside herself. He pulls her towards him.

SHEBA  
I can't, it's over.

STEVEN  
Why?

RICHARD (O.S.)  
Bash?!

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They freeze. Richard's legs appear above them at the top of the outside stairs. Then a bag of rubbish.

RICHARD

Bash?

(To someone inside)

She's not here!

Richard dumps the bag on the doorstep, groaning a bit with drunk exhaustion.

RICHARD

Oh, sod it.

He goes inside closing the front door behind him.

STEVEN

(innocently)

Was that your Dad?

Sheba is stunned.

SHEBA

No. He...he's my uncle...

She stares at Steven. Lost. He returns her gaze.

STEVEN

D'you wanna end it?

SHEBA

I - I - don't look at me like that.

STEVEN

Have you gone off me?

SHEBA

No - I - you should go. Please.

Don't...just...you have to go now.

He strokes her cheek, she catches his hand.

SHEBA

It's stupid.

He gives her a slight grin.

SHEBA

Go away.

He shakes his head.

SHEBA

Go.

She struggles with herself. He kisses her and she suddenly responds. She clenches the necklace.

INT. HOUSE - MINUTES LATER

Sheba comes in and nearly bumps into Polly who's heading upstairs - she's on her mobile.

SHEBA

Is it him?

Polly nods happily and climbs the stairs, still talking. Sheba watches her daughter go - natural teenage love.

Sheba goes into the kitchen, contemplates the necklace. One of Eddie's kids runs in. Sheba stuffs the necklace into her pocket. The boy runs out with the plastic cup he was looking for.

Sheba loads dirty crockery into the dishwasher.

Family noises from the sitting room.

She takes out a sachet of detergent, opens it with her teeth. She stares at the hard tablet, the little ball in its centre.

She breaks down, knelt at the machine, retching with sobs.

BARBARA (V.O.)

I long to phone 'S' but it's late.

INT. SPARE ROOM, MARJORIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Barbara at a little dressing table writing her journal.

BARBARA (V.O.)

Poor girl, all alone with her awful family.

Above her a framed silkscreen print of 'The Last Supper'. Portia lies on the bed, whimpering a little.

BARBARA (V.O.)

Our lives are acutely similar in so many respects.

A knock at the door. Barbara annoyed at the interruption.

Sis? MARJORIE (O.S.)

Marjorie comes in wearing her nightie. Sees Portia, coos at her and then strokes the cat as an excuse to enter.

MARJORIE  
Writing the old diary? I can't imagine how you keep at it. I'd have nothing to say.

Marjorie sits on the bed, settling in for a sisterly chat.

MARJORIE  
You know you're welcome whenever you want? Not just once a year.

BARBARA  
It's just...I'm rather busy at the moment.

MARJORIE  
Your racy London life. I'm glad it's so full.  
(pause)  
I'm sorry about Jennifer. She was lovely.

Barbara flinches a touch.

MARJORIE  
Is there anyone else...someone else who's special?

Silence.

BARBARA  
I don't know what you mean.

MARJORIE  
I didn't mean to pry.

Barbara stares her out.

MARJORIE  
Well, Good-night.

BARBARA  
To you too.

Marjorie goes. Barbara reflects, a stab of regret.

EXT. RAILWAY YARD - NIGHT

Sheba and Steven, half dressed, fucking like horny rabbits.

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They lie in each others arms. Steven toys with the 'S' necklace, happy she's wearing it.

INT. PIZZA EXPRESS - DAY

Barbara and Sheba with menus. Barbara glances over hers, catches Sheba's eye.

BARBARA  
Are we ladies who lunch?

SHEBA  
I think we must be.

Barbara twinkles with delight.

SHEBA  
Oh, belated Christmas present.

She takes a beautifully wrapped package out of her bag.

BARBARA  
Thank you! Shall I open it?

SHEBA  
Silly not to.

Barbara unwraps it, savouring the ribbons, cooing over the smart wrapping paper.

BARBARA  
Oh my word, Asprey.

She takes out a sterling silver photo frame engraved with the name 'Portia'.

Barbara can barely speak, just nods in gratitude.

SHEBA  
How is she?

Barbara shakes her head, Sheba gives her a consoling squeeze.

BARBARA  
You're the most wonderful friend.

INT. SUMMER HOUSE - NIGHT

Sheba and Steven lying, post-coital on the sofa.



SHEBA  
Don't fall asleep.

He opens his eyes, looks around.

STEVEN  
Bit close to home, isn't it?

SHEBA  
Well, Little Lord Fauntleroy complained of  
brambles up his arse.

He grins, thinks, animal instinct at work.

STEVEN  
Yeah...but d'you wanna get caught?

SHEBA  
No!

STEVEN  
Course you do. Trash it all.

SHEBA  
Why would I want to do that?

He's not sure he wants to explore this, jokes instead:

STEVEN  
So you can be with me.

She digs him in the ribs.

SHEBA  
You're cocky.

STEVEN  
You love it.

He gently disengages from her arms, gets up, looks around,  
exploring her territory.

He turns back, she's deep in thought, considering what he's  
suggested...

STEVEN  
I was only making conversation. It's polite to  
talk after sex, so's I don't feel like a slut.

He wanders over to her record collection. Sheba pulls on her  
sweater and comes over to him. He's looking at 'Kaleidoscope'  
by Siouxsie and the Banshees.

STEVEN

Any good?

SHEBA

It's a masterpiece. Don't they teach you anything?

Sheba strokes his naked back, stares at the record cover.

SHEBA

We used to worship her...we were children  
...she made us feel invincible...

She's sixteen again. Lost in the memory of it.

Steven wanders over to her work table. There's a half completed wizard's hat on it. He tries it on. A comical figure in his pants, socks and pointed hat.

SHEBA

(smiling)

Take it off.

STEVEN

What's it for?

SHEBA

Take it off, please. I'm still making it.

STEVEN

Yeah but why?

SHEBA

It's for my son.

STEVEN

But he's twelve, isn't he?

SHEBA

He's got Down's Syndrome.

Pause.

STEVEN

You never said. Sorry.

He takes the hat off, puts it back on the table.

Sheba turns away not wanting to burden him with her sadness.

He looks at her, suddenly knows he's way out of his depth.

INT. KITCHEN - SATURDAY MORNING

Barbara saunters in carrying her shopping. She stops short, horrified.

Portia is lying on the floor in a pool of urine and vomit.

INT. VET'S SURGERY - LATER

The vet has just told Barbara the news.

VET

I'm sure she's had a very happy life.

BARBARA

Oh, yes. She has. Thank you.

She strokes Portia as the vet continues to talk.

INT. SHEBA'S KITCHEN - LATER

Barbara sat at the table, tears in her eyes. Sheba plies her with scotch.

SHEBA

You've had a terrible shock.

Barbara drinks some more.

BARBARA

Where's Richard? I don't want to disturb your weekend.

SHEBA

It's fine, everyone's out.

Sheba's mobile rings. They both stare at it. Sheba presses 'BUSY' - looks a touch anxious.

SHEBA

Can they treat her?

BARBARA

He says it's a matter of weeks...

She's recovering now, embarrassed by her tears.

BARBARA

Oh, she's only a pet.

SHEBA

I cried for weeks when our dog died. Weeks!

BARBARA

One does get so attached.

Barbara dries her eyes with a tissue.

BARBARA

I should leave you in peace...

Not what Barbara wants but Sheba stands to facilitate it.

SHEBA

Yuh, well...

She's in a tight t-shirt, arms bare. Her 'S' necklace on.

Barbara gazes - takes in Sheba's make-up: red lips, dark eye liner - an echo of her youth.

BARBARA

I like that top. It suits you.

SHEBA

Oh, thanks.

Sheba edges to the door, hinting. But Barbara lingers. She speaks very softly...gently...

BARBARA

When I was at school, if one of us had had some bad news or was feeling a bit down...we used to stroke each other. One of us would do one arm and someone else the other...it's the most wonderful sensation. Did you do that at your school?

Sheba shakes her head.

BARBARA

It's incredibly relaxing. For the giver and the receiver...

Barbara approaches. Sheba's arms are crossed. Barbara gently un-crosses them, holds her hands...

BARBARA

Close your eyes.

(Sheba frowns)

Please. It doesn't work if you don't.

Sheba closes her eyes, knowing this is 'the deal'.

Barbara holds Sheba's hands in hers and then stretches out her arms, palms upwards.

BARBARA

Good.

Barbara begins to gently run her fingertips along Sheba's bare forearms. Up and down.

Sheba is in a silent rictus of embarrassment.

Barbara continues. All the while gazing at Sheba's face, her breasts beneath the tight t-shirt, her arms...

BARBARA

There's a good girl.

Sheba opens her eyes, tries to remain polite...

SHEBA

I think that's enough.

BARBARA

Close your eyes.

SHEBA

(firmly)

I really think that's enough, Barbara.

She stares her out. Barbara stands her ground but is wretched with humiliation.

But now her focus changes from Sheba's face to over her shoulder:

BARBARA

There's someone in your garden!

She points through the French windows. Sheba turns. At the foot of the garden a FIGURE jumps down from the back wall and slips into the Summer House.

BARBARA

A thief - he came over the wall!

SHEBA

Oh - it'll be one of the neighbours' boys, lost his ball.

Sheba knows it's Steven - prays he stays put.

BARBARA

No, he's gone into your summer house - quick,  
phone the police!

SHEBA

It's just a kid from next door, forget it!

Sheba's mobile rings again. They both stare at it - Sheba  
paralysed - and now Barbara twigs it. She snatches the phone  
and answers:

STEVEN (V.O.)

Where are you? I want your hot, sweet cunt  
right now!

Barbara listens, sickness rising in her. She hands the phone  
to Sheba.

SHEBA (IN PHONE)

Richard just called, he's on his way - I can't  
- I'll call you.

As she speaks Barbara collects her bag and storms to the  
front door, Sheba sprints after her.

SHEBA

Barbara!

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Barbara's heading for her car, Sheba catches up.

SHEBA

I'm sorry, Ba. I tried to end it, honestly, I -  
I just couldn't!

Barbara fumbles for her car keys, fighting back tears.

BARBARA

I risked everything for you and in return you  
humiliate me.

SHEBA

I - I - didn't mean to upset you. Please - I  
need your help more than ever now - please,  
don't go!

Barbara opens the car door.

BARBARA

You promised you'd end it, why didn't you?

SHEBA  
Because...

BARBARA  
(witheringly)  
You're 'in love'?

SHEBA  
I - I -

BARBARA  
And the child? Do you imagine he reciprocates  
your soppy 'feelings'? Oh I dare say he's  
fascinated by the neurotic compulsions of a  
middle class lady with marital problems!

SHEBA  
Ba-

BARBARA  
There's nothing crueller than the adolescent  
boy, I know them! Once he's had his fill he'll  
discard you like an old rag -

SHEBA  
Ba-

BARBARA  
- and revert to rutting with schoolgirls. YOU  
ARE NOT YOUNG!  
(beat)  
I say this to help you.

Sheba is too stunned to respond.

BARBARA  
End it now.

SHEBA  
Erm...yes - I - I'm thinking...

BARBARA  
Don't think - DO! DO! DO! DO!  
(beat)  
Or shall I sit here polishing my nails until  
your husband returns?

SHEBA  
No - no - please - I'll do it, I promise.

BARBARA  
So what are you waiting for?

Barbara gets in her car and drives off.

EXT. STREET - TEN MINUTES LATER

Sheba on her bike, speeding towards Steven's home.

EXT. COUNCIL ESTATE.

Sheba gets off her bike, starts pushing it.

To her surprise it's a clean street, well kept blocks and houses. Not the sink estate she'd imagined - or been told of.

Kids riding around on bikes. She asks them if they know Steven Connolly. They point her in the right direction.

She finds his home - not the tower block but an ordinary maisonette. She rings the bell.

MR CONNOLLY opens the door. He's a slight man without an ounce of aggression in him. She'd expected tattoos and brutality.

SHEBA

Mr Connolly? I'm Mrs Hart, from St George's - Steven's not in trouble. I just need to see him about...an art project and I was in the area so...

MR CONNOLLY

(amiably)

Of course, come in, come in!

He shows her in.

MR CONNOLLY

Very good of you to give him these extra lessons.

(calls upstairs)

Steve! Visitor!

He's holding a remote control. He gestures into the sitting room where there's a massive TV set, the screen image paused.

MR CONNOLLY

I'm watching 'Amelie'.

(nods, moved)

Have you seen it?

Sheba shakes her head.



MR CONNOLLY

(calls up)

Steve! Mrs Hart's here!

(To Sheba)

Probably on his mobile, usually is. Why don't you go up? First door on the right, probably best to knock.

He goes back into the front room.

Sheba climbs the stairs. The house is spotless. Framed school photos line the walls and there are family shots of Steven with his parents and two sisters.

She finds his bedroom door. It says 'STEVE'S GAFF' in letters cut out from different magazines - punk style.

She hears his voice, knocks and goes in. He's astonished.

STEVEN (IN PHONE)

Call you back, OK? Later.

They look at each other.

Sheba takes in the adolescent room, shocked at its 'childishness': the music posters, football paraphernalia, the kid's duvet and strewn clothes.

EXT. COUNCIL ESTATE - MINUTES LATER

Sheba pushing her bike. Steven smoking, edgy.

SHEBA

So that's your vicious father?

STEVEN

(shrugs)

You wanted a sob story, I gave it you. Made you feel like Bob Geldof.

SHEBA

You lied to me!

STEVEN

Oooh, sorry, Miss. D'you prefer it if I lived in a shit'ole?

SHEBA

And your mother?

STEVEN

(sniffs)

I think she's gonna pull through. What d'you want, what you doing here?

And now she has to tell him.

EXT. PLAYAREA/COUNCIL ESTATE - LATER

Steven sits on a swing, flicking at his fag in fury.

STEVEN

They're gonna expel me now!

SHEBA

No they won't. I'll get the blame if she tells.

STEVEN

As if she won't?

SHEBA

She likes me, she might not.

STEVEN

Likes you how? Like 'that'? You giving her one 'n' all?

SHEBA

(snaps)

Why are you being so cruel? Why, Steven?

He's chastened. He swings slowly to and away from her.

STEVEN

I really like you. You're a nice person and you've been cool. And it's been great, OK? But it was s'posed to be fun. Now it's like this serious thing. Whatever shit you're working out, you know; your husband, your kid, you - I dunno...I can't help you.

Sheba manages a smile. Determined not to show him her pain.

SHEBA

So you're seeing someone else?

He looks at her, caught. Nods an apology. She stares at him. A stab of intense jealousy.

SHEBA

So you just - what - you prefer her? Because she's young? Huh? Because she helps you with your gums? What - because she's so nice and tight? I risked my whole life for you, you little shit!

STEVEN

I never asked you to!

SHEBA

I taught you how to fuck!

Sheba is powerfully conscious she's out of control. She clenches her fists, holds it in, fights back her tears.

STEVEN

Why are you so upset?

She can't answer. He suddenly gets that she loves him. He glances around.

STEVEN

I'd give you a hug but there's people who know me...

(pause)

I can't deal with this. I'm not old enough.

She's overcome with guilt, tries to be practical.

SHEBA

Steven. Don't be embarrassed at school. Ignore me, OK? You're a sweet boy...and I've loved our time together. I'm sorry if I ever harmed you.

He shakes his head.

STEVEN

You never.

They look at each other, tenderly. Then Sheba walks away.

INT/EXT. BARBARA'S CAR/STREET - THAT NIGHT

Barbara driving at speed. Her mood has brightened...

She cuts up another car and hurtles along. She spots Sheba outside Steven's estate, a wan figure on the pavement.

Sheba gives her a sad little wave.

Barbara pulls in to the kerb and leaps out. Sheba comes to her, face streaked with tears.

Barbara opens her arms. Forgiveness. They hug. Barbara comforting Sheba - and herself in so doing.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
As Ma would've said, 'the boy done her like a kipper'.

INT. BARBARA'S FLAT - NIGHT

Barbara in her dressing gown, writing her journal.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
She has nowhere to turn but trusty old Ba.

The silver Asprey frame has pride of place on her mantelpiece. A photo of Portia inside it.

INT. SUMMERHOUSE - NIGHT

Sheba wraps the 'S' necklace in paper and puts it in the bin.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
She mopes and mourns for her pubescent paramour - often at punishing length.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

First day of the new term. Barbara watching as Sheba comes in the main entrance.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
But she knows my interventions have saved her life and she is sweetly grateful.

INT. STAFF ROOM - DAY

Staff buzzing around, comparing their Christmases, moaning about holidays not being long enough.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
Her betrayal hurt me more than I dare show.

Barbara sat in her chair, Sheba comes in. They smile at each other.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
But I will forgive her and heal myself in  
private.

INT. SUMMERHOUSE - NIGHT

Sheba carefully sticking a silver crescent onto Ben's wizard  
hat.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
She's worth it, this one. She's the one I've  
waited for...

INT. LIBRARY, HOMEWORK CLUB - DAY

Barbara patrols the desks.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
At last she's beginning to understand that her  
dalliance with Master Connolly was a  
consequence of her dead marriage.

She arrives at Steven's desk. He keeps writing.

INT. RAF MUSEUM - DAY

An outing. Barbara walking with Sheba.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
It's a sham - fuelled only by the memory of  
former glories.

Richard and Ben are behind them looking at the aeroplanes.

INT. CANTEEN - LUNCHTIME

Sheba and Barbara sitting with their trays, talking.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
Whereas we are going through the fire, forging  
our friendship with a stronger bond each day.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Barbara at her high window, watching Sheba lock up her  
bicycle far below.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
In fact, we are now entering a delicate new phase...

EXT. ART STUDIO - DAY

Barbara approaches and sees Sheba inside.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
We are silently and stealthily negotiating the terms...of a life lived together.

Sheba sees Barbara and nods amiably.

INT. SHEBA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Sunday lunch. Barbara at the head of the table, making the family laugh with some anecdote.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
Now more than ever we are bound by the secrets we share.

Ben snorts as Barbara makes a funny face.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
I'm invited to drop in on them this summer. At their house in the Dordogne. I might just do that...

INT. BARBARA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Barbara sat up in bed, writing.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
Though no rush. We'll have plenty of time a deux once she's left her family...

EXT. PARLIAMENT HILL - DAY

Barbara and Sheba on the bench seen at the beginning. They share sandwiches.

BARBARA  
Do try the prawn, it's delicious.

Barbara munches contentedly.

BARBARA

I once sat here discussing Elgar. For three hours.

SHEBA

God! Who with?

BARBARA

Oh, just a friend. Jennifer. This was our haunt.

Sheba conceals her discomfort.

BARBARA

We were quite chummy for a while. But...the poor thing suffered from this terrible depression. I tried to help but she rather unravelled. She became alarmingly...deluded.

SHEBA

Did she go to hospital?

BARBARA

No, she got a job in Stoke.

Sheba thinks, putting it all together...

SHEBA

When was this?

BARBARA

Last summer. I did what I could but she was too far gone. Even so I feel I should've done more...

SHEBA

I'm sure she knows you did your best...you're such a sensitive person.

Sheba pats Barbara's shoulder, Barbara takes her hand.

BARBARA

One conceals it of course.

She turns to Sheba, vulnerable.

BARBARA

People languish for years with partners who are clearly from another planet.

SHEBA

Mmm...

BARBARA

We so want to believe we've found our 'other'.  
One needs courage to recognize the real as  
opposed to the convenient.

SHEBA

Yes.

Barbara is still holding Sheba's hand.

BARBARA

When I was young I had such a vision of  
myself. I dreamt I'd be someone to be reckoned  
with. You know, in...in the world.

(beat)

But one learns one's scale.

Sheba squeezes Barbara's hand. Barbara responds gratefully.

BARBARA

I've such a...dread...of ending my days alone.

SHEBA

Mmm. Well we all-

BARBARA

Though recently, I've allowed myself to  
imagine I might not be...am I wrong?

SHEBA

Of course not.

Sheba gives Barbara a 'loving' hug. Barbara crumples in  
gratitude.

EXT. VET'S SURGERY - DAY

Barbara rushes in, cradling the stricken Portia in her arms.

INT. VET'S SURGERY - DAY

The vet feels Portia's tummy.

VET

Do you want to stay?

Barbara shakes her head.



VET

Sometimes people find it comforting to see them at peace. Would you like to come back ...in twenty minutes, to say good-bye?

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Barbara comes out of the vets. A zombie on the busy street.

Then she remembers - Sheba lives nearby. She starts to hurry, almost pushing people out of the way as she rushes to her friend.

EXT. SHEBA'S STREET - MINUTES LATER

Barbara panting for breath, a broken woman desperately needing comfort. She hurries towards Sheba's house.

Suddenly - the Hart's car comes out their driveway nearly knocking her over. Richard is at the wheel, he parks up, the car skewed on the road, engine running...

Ben and Polly are in the back. Barbara sees Polly groaning comically, mockingly - and Ben (who holds his wizard hat) is laughing at his sister's antics. Sheba is shushing them.

Sheba sees Barbara is in great distress, says something to Richard and gets out the car.

Barbara falls into her arms, sobbing.

SHEBA

Is it Portia? Oh no.

Richard gives Sheba a quizzical look from the car, 'what's up'? Sheba grimaces, indicates this might take a while.

Richard exhales in frustration and points to his watch - 'we're late'.

BARBARA

I have to go back to the vets...after it's done...will you come with me? I just can't on my own...

SHEBA

Oh, I - of course I would but...Ben's doing his play at his school and-

BARBARA

A play??

SHEBA

The - wizard thing, remember? We're all going.  
We're a bit late actually...

BARBARA

Someone has died!

SHEBA

I - I know...and - and it's terribly sad.

Ben is banging on the car window. Richard shouts at Polly to stop him. She shouts back. It's mayhem in there.

BARBARA

You owe me this.

Richard revs the engine, Sheba turns, impossibly pulled in both directions. Richard's face - 'We have to go'.

Ben looks anxiously from the car. Meanwhile, Barbara's on the turn, Sheba pleads:

SHEBA

He's doing a show for the first time in his life!

BARBARA

That's your choice is it?

SHEBA

Look - why - why don't you come? You're very welcome...

Barbara doesn't hear it.

BARBARA

I thought you understood what friendship means.

SHEBA

He's my child!

Richard honks the horn in frustration.

SHEBA

He's my son, he's just a little boy!

BARBARA

Don't play the good mother with me.

Barbara eyes the car - a threat. But now Richard leaps out and shouts across the bonnet.

RICHARD

Excuse me? Can one of you tell me what's going on? Is this some kind of coven?

BARBARA

(coolly)

Oh, I can explain perfectly. Would you like me to?

SHEBA

(jumps in)

It's just that Barbara's had some very bad news, about her cat.

RICHARD

(To Barbara)

My condolences. Poor, poor pussy! Now can I have my wife back please?

BARBARA

(fixes him)

I don't like your tone.

RICHARD

(To Sheba)

Why is she always here? What fucking spell has she cast on you?!

Polly pokes her head out the car window.

POLLY

Ben's getting really stressed! I think he's gonna blow!

RICHARD

(To Sheba)

God's sake, woman, will you get in the bloody car!

SHEBA

GIVE ME A MINUTE WILL YOU! I CAN HANDLE THIS!!

Richard storms back to the car.

BARBARA

Oh - oh - so I'm to be handled am I? Like toxic waste. So you see me on sufferance? I'm an imposition, to be tolerated!

Emergency! Sheba hugs Barbara.

SHEBA

No! Of course not! I love our time together!  
I'm your good, good friend.

BARBARA

Then stay with me.

SHEBA

I would if I could. And I'm desperately sorry  
about Portia. But you know I have to go.

Sheba gently detaches herself. A moment of reckoning:

BARBARA

Think very carefully, madam. Be aware of the  
consequences.

The car starts pulling away from the kerb, slowly making it's  
way up the road.

SHEBA

Please don't make this mean more than it is!

BARBARA

I need you to stay. I don't know what I'll  
do...

A herculean honk of the horn - and now Sheba runs for it.

SHEBA

I'll phone you later! I promise!

Sheba gets in the car. Barbara watches it disappear down the  
road.

BARBARA (V.O.)

They always let you down in the end...

EXT. BARBARA'S GARDEN - LATER

Barbara digging a hole in the ground with a small trowel.

She's exhausted from the effort, has been sobbing for the  
last hour. Her hands and arms are covered in soil.

BARBARA (V.O.)

Jennifer said I was 'too intense'. Meaning  
what exactly?

Barbara buries Portia's body tightly wrapped in a blanket.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
That I am loyal in my friendships?

Then she buries the cat toys and the cat bowl. And with a grim last look - the Asprey frame from Sheba.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
That I will go to the ends of the earth for  
someone I admire?

She treads the earth down.

INT. BEN'S SCHOOL - SAME TIME

Ben's little 'play'. Audience of parents and relatives watching their kids. Richard videos it.

Ben comes on in his wizard hat, waving a wand. Applause and laughter. Sheba is powerfully moved. Polly holds her hand.

INT. SITTING ROOM - LATE AFTER-NOON

It's getting dark outside. Barbara sat in her chair.

She's still wearing her 'gardening' clothes. Dried mud on her face and arms. She's immobile, a statue in grief.

The door bell rings. She goes down the corridor - hoping it's Sheba come to apologize. She opens the door.

BRIAN  
Not disturbing you, am I?

She shakes her head, still dazed by the day's events.

BRIAN  
It's just...I need to talk to you about Mrs  
Hart. Sheba.

BARBARA  
Ah...

She looks at him, feels sure he knows something...

BRIAN  
It's a bit delicate. Can I come in?

Barbara leads him into the kitchen.

BARBARA  
Tea?

BRIAN  
Lovely, thanks.

She fetches milk and sugar. Brian hovers.

BRIAN  
You haven't got a biscuit?  
Barbara produces a tin and hands it to him.

BRIAN  
Cheers.  
As he munches he notices the muddy trowel on a side table.

BARBARA  
Would you like me to take your hat?  
He removes his Tottenham Hotspur hat and scarf.

BRIAN  
Been up the lane. White Hart Lane. Home of the  
mighty Spurs.

BARBARA  
Were you victorious?

BRIAN  
Three nil! Jermaine Defoe - get in there!  
He mock heads a ball.

BARBARA  
My father supported Charlton Athletic. It  
never seemed to give him any pleasure.  
Barbara prepares the tea.

BRIAN  
Where's the moggy?

BARBARA  
She's dead.

Brian eyes the mud on her face and arms.

BRIAN  
Oh, dear. My condolences. Ahhh. Is this not a  
good time?

Barbara thinks. Then, a dark glint in her eye.

BARBARA

It's a very good time.

They sit at the kitchen table.

BARBARA

Mrs Hart.

BRIAN

Yeah. Well...it's just...erm...

BARBARA

Anything you tell me will be in strictest confidence.

He nods, gratefully.

BRIAN

The thing is...I was wondering if she's...ever mentioned me?

Barbara's eyes widen.

BRIAN

Does she ever...mention me?

BARBARA

Let me think...

She puts her fingers to her temples, a little theatrically.

BARBARA

No. Never.

(beat)

Actually - yes! She mentioned you'd invested in a new shirt. I think it was last term.

BRIAN

Yeah, I lashed out at Nicole Farhi. The thing is...over the last few months, ever since I met her really, I've...

BARBARA

Brian, are you in love?

BRIAN

I've been a bit bloody obvious, haven't I?

BARBARA

You've been utterly clandestine.

He senses she's mocking him but can't be sure.

BRIAN  
So she mentioned the shirt then?

BARBARA  
You do know she's married?

BRIAN  
Yeah but she's quite flirty. You never know  
with people, do you?

BARBARA  
Indeed you don't.

BRIAN  
But I wouldn't want to make a move if I'm  
gonna get knocked back. What with staff  
politics and the Head being such a stickler -  
you have to be really careful these days.

BARBARA  
It's a minefield.

BRIAN  
So...would...do you think you could have a  
word with her? Suss the lie of the land?

BARBARA  
You'd like me to ask Mrs Hart if she's  
inclined to commit adultery with you?

He looks at her - could not be more exposed. But she's had  
her fun and is tired of toying with him. To business:

BARBARA  
I don't want you to suffer more than is  
necessary. No one should. I couldn't possibly  
speak for Mrs Hart but instinct tells me you  
might not be her type.

Brian nods, crestfallen. Then thinks...

BRIAN  
She's got a type then?

BARBARA  
It's no reflection on your attractiveness. But  
I get the impression her preference is  
for...the younger man. Surprisingly young.  
(pause)  
Boys, I'm told.

Brian absorbs the information.



BARBARA

Naturally she's never discussed any of this with me. But I've been hearing some rather disturbing rumours that there's one in particular. Playground gossip, staff room whispers and so on...

She's alone now, turned away from him, as if he were invisible. Or she in confession.

BARBARA

I think you might know the boy in question ...Steven Connolly.

BRIAN

Year Ten?

She nods, distantly. Brian stares at her, slow cogs whirring, his moral outrage increasing with his jealousy.

Barbara turns to him now - as if none of this had been said.

BARBARA

I think the kettle's boiled.

INT. BEN'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Sheba tucking Ben in. His wizard's hat sits on a bed post. She brushes his hair from his face.

BARBARA (V.O.)

You say the words and it's done. Easy.

Sheba kisses Ben good-night and turns out the light.

INT. BARBARA'S FLAT - SAME TIME

Barbara picking at her dinner in front of the TV, vaguely watching the lottery show.

BARBARA (V.O.)

Judas had the grace to hang himself.

She goes to the kitchen, scrapes her scraps into the bin.

BARBARA (V.O.)

But only according to Matthew - the most sentimental of the apostles.

INT. POLLY'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Sheba tidying. She finds a pair of boxer shorts belonging to Polly's boyfriend.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
Is this the last night of her old life?

Polly stands in the doorway having had a bath. Sheba holds up the shorts, quizzically. Polly smiles.

INT. RICHARD'S STUDY - LATER

Richard hard at work. Sheba removes a finished mug of coffee and sets down a new one. He strokes her hand.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
I wonder how long my messenger will take?

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Barbara in the bath.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
People like Sheba think they know what it is to be lonely. But of the drip drip of long-haul, no-end-in-sight solitude they know nothing.

She draws on her cigarette.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
What it's like to construct an entire weekend around a visit to the launderette. Or to be so chronically untouched that the accidental brush of a bus conductor's hand sends a jolt of longing straight to your groin.

INT. SUMMER HOUSE - NIGHT

Sheba alone on the sofa, thinking.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
Of this, Sheba and her like have no clue.

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INT. BARBARA'S BEDROOM/SITTING ROOM - SAME TIME

Barbara in bed. The phone is ringing but she doesn't move.  
The ansafone beeps and Sheba leaves her message.

SHEBA (V.O.)

Ba, I'm so sorry about today. It was an impossible situation. Richard feels dreadful too. You must be so upset. Poor you. Poor Portia. Call me as late as you like. Let's not fall out, come to dinner tomorrow night, OK?

Barbara listens, guilty but resolved.

INT. SITTING ROOM, SHEBA'S HOUSE - EVENING

Coffee after dinner. Richard lies on a sofa, feet on Sheba's lap. She idly strokes his calves. Not a sight Barbara enjoys as she sits across from them, nervously smoking.

RICHARD

Actually, I write quite quickly, it's the thinking that takes an eternity.

(sighs)

You're never satisfied; when I'm lecturing I long for time to write and when I've got it I yearn to be back with the students.

From her seat Barbara has a view of the front path. She sees a WOMAN in her mid-thirties jump out of a car and come storming up to the front door.

Barbara watches Sheba, her last moments before the calamity...

SHEBA

More coffee, anyone?

RICHARD

I'll have a slug, please.

SHEBA

Barbara?

BARBARA

No, thank you.

The woman has now established that the bell makes no sound. She starts to bang on the door. Richard looks at Sheba - 'who's that?' Sheba shrugs 'dunno'.

Richard opens the door. A big Irish voice, full volume:

MRS CONNOLLY  
Are you her husband?

RICHARD  
What? Whose?

MRS CONNOLLY  
Don't you fuck with me Mister, don't you dick  
me around! WHERE IS SHE? Tell her Steven  
Connolly's mother wants to see her right NOW!

Mrs Connolly forces her way in.

RICHARD  
Hey, hey, excuse me!

He tries to grab hold of her but she lashes out catching him  
across the face. He exclaims in pain.

Sheba comes out into the hall and Mrs Connolly lunges at her,  
kicking, punching, scratching, screaming.

MRS CONNOLLY  
Ya slut! Ya fuckin' whore! How could you! He's  
only a child! My little boy is a CHILD!

Richard and Barbara manage to pull her off but she's strong  
and hurls herself at Sheba again, grasping her hair.

A struggle. Barbara and Richard plant themselves between the  
two women - keeping them apart in the tight hallway.

RICHARD  
What the hell is going on! Will you just stop  
and calm down for one second, please! PLEASE!

MRS CONNOLLY  
You ask your wife what's going on. ASK HER! Ya  
perverted bitch!

She manages to whack Sheba once more as MR CONNOLLY appears  
in the front doorway. A sad, quiet figure.

MR CONNOLLY  
Come on. Leave them alone.

He stares at Sheba with contempt.

MR CONNOLLY  
There's nothing here for us.

He leads his weeping wife down the path back to the car.

Richard closes the front door. Sheba sits at the foot of the stairs, tears streaming.

Richard stares at her, horribly confused...

Polly appears at the top of the stairs. Followed by Ben in his pyjamas. Polly's voice, taut with vulnerability.

POLLY

What's happening..?

Barbara looks at Sheba who gives her a weak nod. Barbara climbs the stairs to deal with the children.

INT. LANDING/SITTING ROOM - LATER

Barbara sat on the stairs with a partial view of the sitting room - where Richard and Sheba are in meltdown.

BARBARA (V.O.)

By the time I took my seat in the Gods, the opera was well into its final act...

SHEBA

It just happened. It just happened!

RICHARD

Things don't just - people make them happen. You think you're the only one who's ever wanted someone young? Everyone - sometimes - everyone thinks about it. But they don't act on it, they deal with it!

SHEBA

When you met me I was-

RICHARD

You were an adult it's not the same! You're his teacher!

SHEBA

And you were mine! I'm not justifying, I'm not saying-

RICHARD

Oh, you're so full of shit! It's totally different, you were TWENTY!

SHEBA  
He'll be sixteen in May! He's not some innocent.

RICHARD  
Of course he's innocent - he's FUCKING FIFTEEN! Are you INSANE?!

Barbara lights another cigarette - a casual spectator.

RICHARD  
If you meant to destroy us why not do it with an adult? That's the convention, it's worked for centuries.

SHEBA  
It wasn't about us.

RICHARD  
This boy-

SHEBA  
I told you, it's over.

He holds his head in pain.

RICHARD  
Why?

SHEBA  
I...just wanted him.

RICHARD  
Why?

SHEBA  
I don't know!

RICHARD  
WELL FIND OUT!

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

A Police car waits outside the gates.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

Gita with TWO POLICE OFFICERS, they head for Pabblem's office. School kids pass by, curious.

INT. STAFF ROOM - DAY

Teachers gossiping as the rumours spread.

INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - DAY

Between lessons. Barbara passes Brian as they head in opposite directions.

EXT. SHEBA'S HOUSE - DAY

Two POLICE OFFICERS walk Sheba to their waiting car. Richard stands in the background.

INT. BARBARA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Barbara lies in bed, in the dark.

BARBARA (V.O.)

My guilt is tempered with relief. She assumes the boy cracked and told his mother all. Who am I to disabuse her?

INT. SCHOOL ENTRANCE - DAY

Barbara spots Brian coming in. As he strides away down the corridor.

BARBARA

Brian, do stop a moment, please...

BRIAN

I don't want to hear it.

INT. BARBARA'S FLAT - NIGHT

Barbara watching the news on TV. A report on the 'London teacher sex scandal'.

TV JOURNALIST

...and there are further unconfirmed reports that a member of staff may have known of the affair...

Barbara watches, agog with fear.

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INT. PABBLEM'S OFFICE - DAY

The spotless office of a liberal zealot; the pot plants, the good cause posters, a carved 'ethnic' figurine.

BARBARA  
I've told you, had I known anything I'd have informed you immediately. My only loyalty is to the school!

Pabblem at his desk, doesn't believe a word of it.

PABBLEM  
Brian thinks you've known for months.

BARBARA  
Brian 'thinks'?!

PABBLEM  
And then there's Sue Hodge-

BARBARA  
Will you be running through the entire staff room?

PABBLEM  
If you knew and did nothing then you've enabled a crime.

BARBARA  
I didn't so I haven't. Your point?

He stares at her, has wanted to do this for years.

PABBLEM  
I think it would benefit everyone if you retired. With immediate effect.

BARBARA  
Oh so it's a witch hunt - Salem comes to Islington!

She strides to the door but Pabblem gets there first and blocks her exit.

PABBLEM  
The stress of the job, radical new ideas in teaching not to your taste-

BARBARA  
I've got an idea; your school, your disaster - why don't you resign?



PABBLEM

BECAUSE I AM NOT THE CONFIDANTE OF A CRIMINAL!  
Now...tell me about this 'friendship' with Mrs  
Hart...

BARBARA

I think you'll find that a friendship between  
consenting adults is perfectly legal - even  
under your regime. My record here is beyond  
reproach, the majority of the staff regard me  
as their moral guardian.

Pabblem quails at the outrageousness of the woman. Barbara  
tries to open the door but he stops it, eyeballs her.

PABBLEM

I've just spoken to another of your 'close'  
friends. Jennifer Dodd.

Barbara reacts. He gently closes the door, stares at her,  
penetrating.

PABBLEM

She was most enlightening.

He has deployed the ultimate weapon. For the first time ever,  
he's got her.

BARBARA

Jennifer became unwell, that's why she left  
the school.

PABBLEM

She says it's because you were stalking her.

BARBARA

She's an hysteric.

PABBLEM

Jennifer threatened you with an injunction,  
didn't she?

BARBARA

Nonsense!

He dashes to his desk and brandishes a piece of paper.

PABBLEM

A fax from her solicitors! Jennifer didn't  
want you within five hundred yards of her - by  
law! You call that a friendship?! She told me  
you sent her fiancée a wreath!

Barbara looks away, won't let him see her distress.

PABBLEM

Now we wouldn't want all this to come out, would we? Thirty years of 'exemplary' service ending in shame and humiliation. ~~Hmmmm~~? Your choice, Barbara.

INT. SCHOOL TOILETS - MOMENTS LATER.

Barbara vomiting.

Above her head, amongst the graffiti: Mad Babs Covett = nasty old lezza

Someone else has scrawled: i wanna lick her mangy twat!!!

INT. STAFF ROOM - LATER

Tea break. Staff buzz around, agog with the 'Covett sacking rumour'. Barbara comes in. A pause as people see her.

Sue Hodge - big as a barn - stares at her defiantly from Barbara's own chair. Elaine Clifford serves her tea while other teachers fuss around her.

Barbara hurries out the room.

EXT/INT. BARBARA'S STREET/FLAT - LATE AFTER-NOON

Barbara gets out her car and approaches home. Shattered.

There's a FIGURE on the other side of the road. He emerges from behind a car - sees her. They lock eyes. It's STEVEN. He looks ravaged with exhaustion and the stress of it all.

He comes up to her, close. Barbara bustles past him and he follows, impassive, it scares her.

She rushes down the stairs to her door, fumbling for the key. He follows after. Just as he comes tearing down the stairs she manages to get in and slam the door. He bangs at the window in fury.

Inside - Barbara clutches herself in fear and shame. Junk mail littered at her feet.

She listens...relieved to hear the sound of his footsteps up her stone stairs.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
He knows. Does she know too?  
(beat)  
More than I can bear.

INT. SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Barbara in her armchair, curtains drawn. Still and silent.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
Is that why she's not returned my calls?

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Barbara removing her make up. Slow, meticulous, distant. She stares at herself, consumed with self-loathing.

She opens her mirrored cabinet. Tucked in the corner there's a bottle of paracetamol. She focuses on it.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
Is this the shape of it? 'Ex-teacher takes  
life in basement flat'.

And then the phone rings...

EXT. SHEBA'S HOUSE - DAY

PRESS have assembled on the pavement with TV cameras and PHOTOGRAPHERS - some on step ladders.

TWO POLICE OFFICERS prevent them from storming the front garden.

The POLICE hold them back as Barbara hurries up the path to the front door where Richard lets her in.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Richard looks bedraggled, up all night misery. She gestures outside.

BARBARA  
Barbarians!

Richard nods. They stand facing each other. A weird echo of their first meeting four months ago.

RICHARD  
Sorry about your job.

She's over-emotional and speaks needlessly.

BARBARA  
You see, the headmaster thought I knew!  
He's on to her in a flash:

RICHARD  
Did you?

BARBARA  
No!

They stare at each other.

BARBARA  
Where is she?

RICHARD  
In her lair.

He gestures outside.

EXT. GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER.

Barbara hurries to the summerhouse. Polly and Sheba are mid-row. Barbara hides behind a bush.

POLLY  
Your boyfriend is younger than mine!

SHEBA  
He's not my boyfriend!

POLLY  
Don't kid yourself we'll ever forgive you.

SHEBA  
I don't expect you to. Hate me - I deserve it.  
But I won't stop loving you and I won't stop  
being your mother!

POLLY  
The fuck is that?! What's that?! You slept  
with a child!

Polly storms off, then spots Barbara.

POLLY

Oh, Jesus wept! The spectre at the feast!

BARBARA

Watch your tongue, young lady.

POLLY

Frigging freak!

Barbara knocks on the open door. Sheba turns, relieved to see her. Barbara opens her arms and they hug warmly.

BARBARA

There, there.

Barbara fishes in her bag and gives Sheba a tissue.

BARBARA

Here you are.

Barbara sits Sheba down.

SHEBA

Thanks for coming.

(pause)

I'm so sorry about school. Was he awful to you?

Barbara nods, bravely. They sit in silence for a while.

SHEBA

Listen...would...you can say no...I'd completely understand. Richard... needs some time alone...actually, he's asked me to leave. Could I come and stay with you? Just for a few days?

Barbara manages to affect the illusion of 'thinking about it' despite her elation.

BARBARA

You're welcome for as long as you like.

Sheba hugs her with gratitude.

INT. HOUSE - LATER

Richard paces in the sitting room as Barbara hovers in the hall.

BARBARA

Is Ben at school?

Richard nods.

BARBARA  
Does he...know what's happening?

RICHARD  
(furiously)  
It's really none of your business!

Sheba comes down the stairs carrying a suitcase.

Richard gives Barbara a look, 'go'. Barbara takes the suitcase and goes out the front door.

Instantly the cameras flash - and then the groans as the press see it's not who they want.

Richard faces Sheba, his back to the front door.

RICHARD  
I knew who you were when we met. You were young. I knew it might get tough. But I was prepared.

He holds her shoulders:

RICHARD  
You're a good mother. But at times you've been a fucking lousy wife. Why didn't you come to me? You could've told me how lonely you were. You never trusted me to help you. I'm not saying I'm so fucking fabulous but I was here.

Sheba accepts it. They look at each other. Then he opens the front door and stands behind it as she goes out.

A HUGE FLASH OF WHITE LIGHT as she faces the CAMERAS.

FADE TO:

INT. SITTING ROOM - NIGHT (A MONTH LATER)

BARBARA (V.O.)  
This last month has been the most delicious time of my life.

Sheba asleep on the sofa bed. A bare leg exposed. Barbara in an armchair, watching over her.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
Of course we've had our ups and downs. The  
pressure is intense when two women share their  
lives.

Her hand hovers over the leg, wants to stroke her but doesn't  
dare.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
But oh, what marvellous intensity it is!

She carefully covers Sheba's leg with a blanket.

EXT. BARBARA'S FLAT - DAY

A bright Spring day - but the basement curtains are drawn.

A pack of JOURNALISTS, TV CREWS and PHOTOGRAPHERS. They joke  
amongst themselves, an atmosphere of crude jollity.

The front door opens a crack. They jump into action. Barbara  
emerges with her tartan shopping trolley on wheels.

MALE JOURNALIST  
It's the crone!

Barbara comes up the exterior stairs to ground level. They  
cluster around her. Barbara wheels her shopping basket  
through their midst, imperious.

A few give chase but the majority know it's not worth it.

Back at the flat a curtain twitches and the cameras flash.

INT. SITTING ROOM, FLAT.

Sheba closes the curtain. She wears a long, ratty t-shirt,  
knickers and socks.

It's noon. She's just got up. She starts to fold her sheets  
and blankets. A prisoner.

BARBARA (V.O.)  
Admittedly, circumstances are not always  
ideal...

INT. BATHROOM.

Sheba on the loo, urinating. Utterly desolate.

BARBARA (V.O.)

The swinish press, the stringent bail terms,  
meetings with lawyers and so on.

The clutter of Sheba's toiletries and make-up mingled with  
Barbara's.

BARBARA (V.O.)

But all things considered we're coping  
admirably. In fact, gold stars abundant!

Sheba steps on a tiny gold star - incongruously bright and  
shining - on the grubby floor.

INT. CORRIDOR/BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Sheba comes out the bathroom and wanders down the corridor  
into Barbara's bedroom.

She hitches up her t-shirt in front of the mirror, broodily  
posing like an adolescent.

BARBARA (V.O.)

The cuckold permits her to see their children  
once a week. Under strict supervision of  
course.

Sheba sits at the dressing table. She examines her foot. She  
picks the gold star off. Odd...

BARBARA (V.O.)

There are usually tears - such big, salty  
tears she cries - and fits of teenage tantrums  
too.

Sheba puts on some make up, dark eye liner, red lips. She's  
bored out of her brain.

BARBARA (V.O.)

In time she'll recognize she's just not the  
mothering kind...

Sheba stops, spots another gold star on the carpet. She picks  
it up and flicks it into the bin.

BARBARA (V.O.)

And then Barbara will be there to comfort her;  
nurse, beloved friend and wise counsel.

The bin is full of fag butts, evidence of a long night's  
work. Sheba sees another gold star amongst the detritus.



BARBARA (V.O.)

I used to waddle through the world virtually invisible but now I seem somehow to shine.

Sheba spots a scrap of crumpled paper ripped from a notebook - two gold stars on it.

BARBARA (V.O.)

At last, I am me.

Sheba takes the scrap of paper from the bin. Sees Barbara's handwriting on it. Sheba reads...

CLOSE: the page from Barbara's journal.

Sheba reading in horror.

INT. SUPERMARKET - SAME TIME

Barbara choosing food, comparing prices, has to be frugal.

She merrily picks out a big, white loaf. Fish fingers, sausages, baked beans. Comfort food.

INT. BARBARA'S BEDROOM.

Sheba leaps up, pulls opens a dressing table drawer: Make up. Another: a hair dryer. Another: Stationery; pens, paper and a packet of gold stars...

Sheba frantically searches, ransacking the place.

INT. SUPERMARKET - SAME TIME

Barbara queues at the checkout, chatting with her fellow shoppers. No longer one of the lonely - a woman of purpose.

INT. BARBARA'S BEDROOM

Sheba searches drawers, under the bed, in cupboards, turns out the laundry basket - until finally...in the bottom of a little drawer beneath the mirror she finds the journal.

She flicks through: Barbara's black ink handwriting - mainly neat but now and then with violent crossings out and furious, mad, margin scrawlings.

The gold stars charting the various ups and downs...

A photo: Barbara and JENNIFER DODD in Paris, smiling at the camera. Jennifer is around the same age as Sheba, a similar look.

Beneath the photo Barbara has written, 'Paris 2003 - before the worm turned'.

On another page Sheba finds a Pizza Express receipt marked 'Ladies who lunch!!!'.

And there are numerous clippings from recent newspaper reports on the scandal.

On an earlier page a strand of hair is taped in. Barbara's handwriting: 'A strand of her hair'.

Sheba reads on with mounting horror...

EXT. STREET/BARBARA'S FLAT - LATER

Barbara wheeling her full shopping trolley down the street. The Press still camped outside her flat.

JOURNALIST  
The crone returneth!

Barbara sails through the hordes.

INT. BARBARA'S FLAT - CONTINUOUS

She lets herself in. Instantly knows something's wrong.

BARBARA  
Sheba...?

The flat has been completely trashed. Furniture and cushions ripped with a carving knife, crockery smashed, books and ornaments torn from shelves.

Sheba is sat on the edge of an armchair. Fully dressed now, wearing her coat, her suitcase by her side.

She's savage with rage - clutching the journal. Her make up disturbing, eyes black with mascara, lips a violent red.

SHEBA  
What you say, about me, about Richard. You're not fit to shine his shoes. And Ben and Polly...that I'd be better off without them?

Sheba rises. Slowly approaches. Barbara holds her ground.

SHEBA

Why did you do it? Because I didn't help you collect your CAT!

Sheba slaps her hard across the face. Barbara flinches but doesn't budge, accepting her punishment.

Sheba slaps her again. Barbara stands firm, taking it, despite the pain.

BARBARA

Let it all out...

SHEBA

You've cost me my family!

BARBARA

Oh, take some responsibility! They'd have found out in the end! I've given you exactly what you wanted - without me you'd still be stuck in that marriage!

SHEBA

What?!!

BARBARA

You can't accept it yet but-

SHEBA

You think I wanted to be HERE WITH YOU!!

BARBARA

Maybe you didn't want it to - to happen quite like this but we both know you need me, I'm your friend!

SHEBA

You've put me in prison, I could get TWO YEARS!

BARBARA

They'll fly by! I'll visit every week. We have so much life to live - together!

SHEBA

You - WHAT? You think this is a LOVE affair?! A relationship?!

She brandishes the journal as evidence.

SHEBA

Sticky gold stars and - and - a strand of my HAIR??! A receipt from PIZZA EXPRESS!?

(MORE)

SHEBA (cont'd)  
(gestures to the room)

It's a basement flat off the ARCHWAY ROAD and you think you're Virginia frigging Woolf! And where did you get my hair? Did you pluck it from the bath with some special fucking tweezers?!

BARBARA  
Don't you know it's rude to read a person's diary, it's PRIVATE!

Barbara lunges for the diary but Sheba pulls it away.

SHEBA  
It's all BULLSHIT! We're not COMPANIONS, we're not FRIENDS - you don't even like me!

BARBARA  
(urgently)  
No! I - I have only tender feelings for you - only love!

SHEBA  
YOU'RE BARKING FUCKING MAD! You don't know how to LOVE! You've never - your whole life - me - Jennifer fucking Dodd - you're just WASTE and disappointment, you DYKE, you BITTER OLD VIRGIN! Endlessly justifying yourself with how lonely you are - you're lonely for a REASON! They hated you at school - all of them - for THIRTY YEARS! I was the idiot who bothered but only cos no one told me you're a VAMPIRE! So what is it, Ba - you - you wanna roll around on the floor like LOVERS?! You wanna fuck me, Barbara?

BARBARA  
Please don't diminish our-

SHEBA  
Our WHAT?! OUR WHAT??!!

Sheba starts ripping out the sacred pages from the diary. Barbara fights for the book desperate to rescue it.

BARBARA  
Give it back!

They tug and pull - struggling - locked together.

BARBARA  
I know you - born selfish and vain - think you've a divine right - you BIG BABY! You don't belong in the world, YOU BELONG HERE!

Sheba lets out a roar of fury right in Barbara's face.

SHEBA  
AAAAAAAGGGGGHHHH!!!

Barbara releases her grip and Sheba tears the book from her.  
She runs out the front door - wild.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Sheba charges up the basement steps only for the amazed Press  
to surround her.

SHEBA  
HERE I AM! HERE I AM!

Sheba screams and howls giving them exactly what they want.  
Barbara watches it all from her window.

JOURNALIST 1  
Oh my god, she's gone berserk!

JOURNALIST 2  
It's Christmas!

Sheba tries to break through them but is trapped in their  
tight circle. She's scared now...

SHEBA  
Please...let me go now...that's  
enough...please...

They continue to flash their cameras and pummel her with  
questions.

Barbara rushes out the door and barges through them, elbowing  
her way with all the force in her body - a strangely heroic  
little figure amongst the seething men.

BARBARA  
Let me through you OAF - GET OUT MY WAY - give  
us some room here!

She manages to hustle an almost grateful Sheba back into the  
flat. She slams the door.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Barbara and Sheba getting their breath. Two fighters all  
punched out.

INT. BARBARA'S FLAT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Barbara with a big, black bin liner tidying the mess. She scoops some broken glass into the bag.

Sheba at the kitchen table, still holding the journal.

SHEBA

We never invited you to the fucking Dordogne.

BARBARA

I'm sorry but you specifically said if I happened to be in France then I must drop-

SHEBA

We didn't mean it!

Barbara forces herself to stay calm.

BARBARA

Well...fine.

(an afterthought)

I won't come then.

Sheba shakes her head, 'bonkers'. She puts on her coat.

SHEBA

I asked you to lunch because I liked you. I would've been your friend.

BARBARA

(softly)

I need more than a friend.

They look at each other. No anger, just stalemate. Sheba hands Barbara the journal and leaves.

Barbara in her trashed flat. Desolate.

She places the journal on an empty shelf.

INT/EXT. TAXI/LONDON STREETS - LATER

Sheba in a cab, heading home.

EXT. SHEBA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sheba stood outside her house. Warm lights on inside.

She climbs the stairs and nervously knocks on the door.

After a while Richard opens it. They look at each other.  
And then he motions her in and closes the door.

EXT. HIGH STREET - DAY (A WEEK LATER)

Bustle of people. Barbara amongst them.

INT. STATIONERS.

Barbara selects a new journal from the shelf.

She goes to the checkout - ignoring the section where they  
sell the gold stars.

EXT. BARBARA'S STREET.

Barbara walking, her new journal in its plastic bag. She  
heads down the concrete stairs to her front door.

INT. BARBARA'S FLAT, SITTING ROOM - DAY

Barbara at her kitchen table. The flat looks bare and bleak,  
stripped of all life.

She takes out her new diary and smooths down the spine on the  
first page.

She uncaps her pen, poised to write.

She thinks. Nothing to say.

She sits in silence.

EXT. PARLIAMENT HILL - DAY (3 MONTHS LATER)

CLOSE: newspaper headline: 'Sex Teacher sentenced to 10  
months'.

Under it a press photo of Sheba being shepherded into court  
by Richard.

A WOMAN sat on 'the' bench reading the newspaper. She sips a  
takeaway cappuccino, reads on, engrossed in the story.

BARBARA (O.S.)  
I knew her...

The woman turns, Barbara is standing behind her.

WOMAN

Really?

BARBARA

We taught at the same school.

WOMAN

God. What was she like?

BARBARA

(thinks)

...A bit chilly. And perhaps a touch...furtive. A sort of absent person. But I didn't know her well.

(beat)

May I?

She sits next to the woman.

WOMAN

Do you still teach?

BARBARA

No, no, retired. Thank goodness.

The woman sips her coffee producing a little dab of froth on her nose. Barbara points to it, amused. The woman shrugs, charmingly, and searches for a tissue. In an instant Barbara produces one and hands it to her.

WOMAN

Thanks.

They sit back admiring the view.

BARBARA

I do love it here.

WOMAN

Mmm.

BARBARA

It's spectacular at dusk.

Barbara turns to her lovely new prey.

BARBARA

I'm Barbara.

WOMAN

Annabel.



They shake hands.

As they continue to talk the camera moves behind them to take in the view, as at the beginning.

Two women on a bench. The city in the distance.

FADE TO BLACK.