

'Corporate Conspiracy'

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A stage-play in three acts

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(Cast in order of appearance)

The cast comprises 8 men and 2 women

<i>James Boxer</i>	<i>Sales Director young, trendy has a gambling addiction.</i>
<i>Juliet Sangster</i>	<i>Accountant. Young, stylish, articulate.</i>
<i>Earl Merryweather</i>	<i>Finance Director. Late 50's old fashioned.</i>
<i>Don Preston</i>	<i>IT Director. Nearing retirement. Lacks confidence and loner.</i>
<i>Peter Redfearn</i>	<i>Managing Director. Late 40's. Superficially assertive but weak</i>
<i>Rachel Grey</i>	<i>Marketing Manager. Late 20's. Attractive, stylish, assertive</i>
<i>Charles Lander</i>	<i>Production Director. Late 50's. Dilatory. Scruffy. Poor communicator</i>
<i>Tom Stafford</i>	<i>Chairman of competitor. Early 50's. Sauv�, sophisticated. Ruthless. Manipulator</i>
<i>Robert - The Waiter</i>	<i>Early 20's. Polite. Eager to please.</i>
<i>A Policeman</i>	<i>Late 40's. Precise. Factual.</i>

## Synopsis

*A murder mystery involving a cast of eight men and two women; age range mid 20's to mid-60's.*

*An international software company's sales plummet and their share price slumps. The American Board of Directors is convinced that a conspiracy has taken place in the UK office believing confidential product information has been passed to competitors. The Board instructs the UK's Managing Director Peter Redfearn to investigate and resolve the crisis. We quickly learn however that Peter is a part of the conspiracy. He and co-conspirators hatch a plan to frame colleagues to cover up the facts. Under pressure, the Sales Director James Boxer commits suicide throwing their plans into turmoil. The mastermind behind the conspiracy (Tom Stafford) who runs a rival company uses his charm to win the affections of several cast members to achieve his personal objectives.*

## ACT 1 Scene 1

*(Present day. It's Sunday morning. A hotel business suite is the setting for the opening scene. It has an oblong board room table with eight chairs. Other occasional furniture including four easy chairs, a small sofa and a telephone are evident. A bookcase and pictures suitable for a board room can be seen. Coffee making equipment and sufficient cups and saucers are in the room. As the curtain rises four characters are on stage. They are in conversation. There are three more characters to arrive. Tension is evident especially between James and Juliet. They have been summoned to the hotel on a Sunday morning by the Managing Director. They work for a leading brand in the software games market. They are there for an urgent meeting.)*

*(James is the Sales Director. He's a young, fashionable, fast thinking ego maniac with a superior attitude, especially toward women. He is a gambler ramping up huge losses at the casino. His addiction has caused him to lose his long-term girlfriend and suffers depression which he tries to conceal. Dressed smart casual. His instinct when under pressure is to attack if he believes he is right or pathetically when in doubt)*

**James:** Why the hell are we here on a Sunday? Why couldn't the old man wait until tomorrow? All this cloak and dagger stuff is ridiculous.

*(Juliet is the head accountant. She's intelligent and attractive and fights hard for equality and believes in speaking her mind. She's dressed in a smart business suit. She doesn't suffer fools gladly and already has a measure of James. She's a master in plotting the downfall of others):*

**Juliet:** We have all sacrificed the day if it weren't important, I'm sure Peter would have waited until tomorrow.

*(Earl is the Financial Director and Juliet's boss. There is antagonism between the two of them. He is middle aged. He is dressed in a business suit and tie; a little old fashioned. He likes to do things by the book and loathes change. He rarely trusts anyone, preferring to keep his own company. Often feels vulnerable and worries about his future):*

**Earl:** I thought Peter wasn't getting back from the States until late this evening?

**Juliet:** He managed to transfer onto an earlier flight.

**Earl:** Oh, I see. I wonder why he didn't call me he normally does.

**Juliet:** Perhaps he was too busy.

**Earl:** But, not too busy to call you?

**Juliet:** Sorry?

**James:** *(Sarcastically):* The question was simple enough. Why did Peter...?

**Juliet:** *(Biting back):* I don't know! Perhaps mine was the first number he came to in his address book. What difference does it make?

**James:** S for Sangster. The first number he came across. I think not!

*(Don is the IT Director. He's an older man. He's brilliant at his job but finds it difficult relating to others. Under pressure he can be volatile. He's a Bachelor and lacks confidence with women)*

**Don:** Actually he 'phoned me first and asked that we meet this morning. I didn't have all your numbers handy and knowing how efficient Juliet is at such things, I called her.

**Juliet:** (*Turning on James.*): So, does that answer your question?

(*Ignores her response and paces the room*):

**James:** This is ridiculous, why on earth are we here?

(*Looking directly at Juliet*)

**Juliet:** Grow up, James! None of us wants to spend weekends in meetings, but it comes with the territory. I thought as Sales Director, you of all people would know that, but of course you'd rather spend your time gambling - throwing money to the wind. Is that why Jenny left you?

**James:** (*Visibly agitated*) Shut up! You know absolutely nothing...nothing about Jenny and me.

**Juliet:** She told me. Had enough of the lies and deceit! Enough of the childish behaviour and gambling..

**James:** (*Shouts at her*) She wouldn't have said that! Wouldn't have said it..

**Earl:** (*Keen to see the bickering stop*): Please, let's just calm down! It's like a playground.

(*Turning to Don*)

**Earl:** Don, do you have any idea why Peter wanted us here this morning?

**Don:** "Worrying issues that needed to be resolved", he said.

**James:** There are always worrying issues.... The Americans expect too much

*(James returns to the table and sits down and stares at Juliet. She ignores his glare)*

*(Peter enters)*

*(Peter is Managing Director of the company. They fall silent as he enters the room. He's a man in early middle age. He's dressed 'smart casual' and has just arrived from the airport. He goes straight to the head of the table putting his suitcase in the corner of the room. He acknowledges them all.):*

**Peter:** Good morning.

**ALL:** Morning.

**Peter:** We'll make a start. I can't wait for the others. Let me get straight to the point. What I report to you today is serious, very, serious indeed. As you know I've just returned from an emergency board meeting in the States...

*(Rachel enters)*

*(Rachel is the Marketing Manager. She enters the room in a panic knowing she's late; tosses her topcoat on a chair and takes her seat. She's dressed in a smart fashionable dress. She's an attractive woman in her later 20's early thirties who needs constant approval. She can be forthright when under pressure):*

**Rachel:** I'm so sorry, Peter, I got held up on the spur road leading off...

**Peter:** OK! I've just started.... What I'm about to tell you is strictly confidential. Anything you hear in this room must NOT; and I repeat, NOT, be discussed with anyone else, is that clear?

**ALL:** Yes, of course.

**Peter:** We are experiencing challenges that are undermining the very fabric of the business worldwide. As you know our parent company relies on our product development to grow the business, but invariably we're beaten to market by competitors with almost identical products. This is affecting our brand, share price, and credibility...

*(Looking especially at Juliet and Rachel who are not board members)*

**James:** Forgive me Peter, but as a matter of protocol shouldn't the board be briefed formally before this is discussed openly...?

**Peter:** No. I want everyone to hear what I have to say...

**Don:** We're all here, aren't we; apart from Charles.

*(Charles enters)*

**Charles:** *(He's late, as always, but seems unrepentant. He's the Production Director in his late 50's, early 60's. He's shabbily dressed in an ill-fitting jacket and trousers with clashing tie. He's good at his job, but has no social skills and no sense of urgency or protocol and is used to taking abuse from Peter):*

**Charles:** Have we started already?

**Peter:** *(Showing distinct signs of annoyance)* I think that's obvious! Forgive me Charles, but have you ever attended a meeting on time? I have a rule weekends' or not. Meetings start on time, and this one was arranged for 10.30am.

**Charles:** *(About to offer a limp excuse.)* Yes! Sorry, it was...

**Peter:** Spare me the excuses! I'll continue if I may. The parent board believe there has been a conspiracy in the UK office! A conspiracy to pass on highly secret information about our product developments to competitors! I believe an individual, or individuals within this office are responsible, and those responsible are more than likely among us this morning.

*(They all look at each other)*

**Peter:** I don't need to tell you the seriousness of the situation. Whoever is responsible could face a lengthy prison sentence if proved guilty. I've been charged with the task of finding out precisely what's been going on and to expose the culprit. The President is keen that this matter is dealt with immediately to avoid further losses, and media speculation.

**Rachel:** It sounds like a fictional drama you would see on TV.

**Peter:** A drama it is fiction it's not!

**James:** The market intelligence reports were right. The competition has been first to market, time and time again. I thought something was odd.

**Rachel:** *(Slightly irritated):* What market intelligence reports?

**Peter:** What?

**James:** *(In a sarcastic tone):* Bloody useless. If there is something odd going on it's no surprise with dim wits running marketing.

**Rachel:** *(Gaining confidence.)* I'm sorry are you referring to me?

**James:** Who else.

**Peter:** We'll deal with this later...we have more important things to discuss.

**James:** She's useless. I had responsibility for sales *and* marketing before you were appointed, and business was good; it's been down-hill ever since...

**Don:** Is that why we're here: to listen to these two arguing like alley cats?

**Rachel:** I had no idea you had responsibility for marketing James before I joined. There's no evidence of the fact! What did you do all day?

*(The following dialogue is said quickly and runs over from one character to the next)*

**Juliet:** Good for you! It's about time his inadequacies were exposed.

**Peter:** *(Raising his voice)* I said later! You're supposed to be senior managers of this company, not adolescence squabbling at school.

**James:** Oh, please no lectures from you Juliet.

**Juliet:** Why do you delight in trying to undermine colleagues James, especially women? Do you feel threatened by successful women?

**James:** Successful women? Don't make me laugh! Peter, are you happy for her to speak to me like that?

**Peter:** *(Said slowly and firmly)* I said enough!

**Charles:** I've thought it strange for some time that our competitors have stolen the march on new designs; designs that were too like be original.

**Rachel:** So, one or more of us could be involved in all this?

**Juliet:** Well, what about you James? Are you the guilty one?

**James:** Me? Why me?

**Peter:** Well, let's just interrogate that for a moment. Over the past couple of years by your own admission James you've developed a gambling habit, and you've made several threats about resigning, but never have! True?

**James:** I've won a lot of money at gambling it's true, but I'm not addicted. But what's that got to do with this conspiracy?

**Juliet:** Lost a lot of money, and yes addicted? Just ask Jenny.

**Peter:** You've also been hostile to colleagues in the office, slow to report competitive activity and spent a good deal of time out of the office without accounting for your whereabouts, although I think it's clear now where you were.

**James:** That's absolutely, not true.

**Peter:** Do you deny that you've been out of the office, unaccounted for?

**James:** So, I'm under suspicion for apparently not being in the office on occasions...

**Juliet:** Sounds reasonable!

**James:** That's ridiculous. This really is a pathetic waste of time.

**Peter:** On the other hand, perhaps it's Don! He's led the design team for some time. Perhaps he's used his privilege to sell information to our competitors.

*(Don looks up, but doesn't react)*

**James:** Aren't you going to defend yourself...? Perhaps it is you!

**Don:** Peter is putting forward a hypothesis, nothing more. I know it's not me, so there's no point in rising to the bait.

**Earl:** Peter, I'm sorry to challenge your methodology, but do you really think this is the best way to deal with such a sensitive issue?

**Juliet:** (*Quick to jump in*) Why not. I think we've already uncovered a suspect.

**James:** I agree with Earl. None of us should be subjected to senseless and unfounded allegations like this. If you know who is responsible Peter why don't you just come out with it?

**Juliet:** Feeling the heat, James?

**James:** (*Snapping at her*) I've nothing to hide.

**Peter:** Is that so? Can you explain the reason why you had a meeting with our main competitor, Greystone Software two months ago?

**James:** (*Stunned that he knows*) Two months ago..., where?

**Peter:** You tell me?

**James:** Well..., now you mention it, I did meet up with Tom Stafford, but what's that got to do with anything?

**Peter:** It has everything to do with it...

**James:** Where's the crime in being seen having dinner with a competitor. They are human too, you know! It's called, 'gathering intelligence', for the less informed.

**Juliet:** Precisely. He was gathering intelligence from you!

**James:** (*Impulsively striking out*) Look, Tom Stafford and I have been friends for some time. We met on an industry golf day, O.K! If I were you, I'd be careful what I said. You may lack integrity, but don't measure others by your standards!

**Peter:** So, Tom Stafford is a friend. Precisely what did you discuss over dinner?

**James:** (*Realising that his protestations are having little impact*): Are you seriously suggesting that I would pass on trade secrets to a competitor? It's just ridiculous!

**Charles:** Forgive me, James; and it's probably not relevant, or my place to ask, but could you explain who arranged and paid for your Caribbean holiday a few months ago? The only reason I ask is because at the time you mentioned you'd a few losses at the casino and ...

**James:** What! What are you talking about?

**Charles:** You must remember; we had a lengthy discussion about it...

**James:** (*Snapping back.*) The trip was an agent's incentive. A friend is in the travel business, that's all; she got it for free. (*Trying to muster a laugh*) Surely, you're not suggesting Tom Stafford paid for it.

**Peter:** Well, did he?

**James:** (*Rising to go*) No! I'm sorry, Peter, but I'm not going to be subjected to this kangaroo court!

**Peter:** Sit down, James. I think you'd better stay for a while.

(*James sits back down*)

**Earl:** So, how much, and what do you know Peter?

**Peter:** Would it surprise you to know that I have absolute proof that you informed Tom Stafford of our last software launch?

**James:** (*Visibly shocked again*) I didn't, I said nothing about it.

**Rachel:** I don't believe it!

**Juliet:** I do!

**James:** What proof?

**Peter:** A voicemail message left by Tom Stafford, acknowledging your message to him. He simply said, "Thanks for letting me know launch date for 'S'. Best regards, Tom. A bit clumsy wouldn't you agree?"

**James:** It's not. Well it's not what it seems.

**Charles:** Forgive me James, but that sounds pretty, specific to me.

**James:** (*Pathetically*) Look, I can't recall what was said, anyway Tom wouldn't trade a confidence!

**Juliet:** Stupid! Naive! So, you admit you told him?

**Rachel:** But you've just said...

**Don:** What are you saying, James?

**Peter:** I think we've established that James told Stafford the launch date, but what else, I wonder?

**James:** Look, I may have quite innocently mentioned the launch date, but I have never spoken

about our research, product pipeline, or any other confidential information. You must believe me! Look I'm going.

*(Stands up ready to leave)*

**Peter:** Sit down! I believe you are a key player, but not the mastermind.

**Charles:** Who is?

*(A brief silence ensues with everyone looking at each other suspiciously)*

**Rachel:** Well, I can honestly say, it's not me!

**Charles:** Me, neither!

**Don:** Who else do you have in mind Peter?

**Peter:** You tell me. Most of our new products are either designed or managed by you Don. I'd imagine passing on secrets to a competitor through James would not be that difficult would it?

**Don:** I suppose it wouldn't. But what would be my motive? I'm not interested in money; not like some; *(Scours at James)*: not interested in promotion, a new career; just not interested!

**James:** *(visibly shaken and upset)* Peter, I've been concealing it, but I've been under a lot of pressure recently and I can't cope with any kind stress. I should have taken time away from the office to resolve things...but I can assure you I'm not the guilty party you're looking for.

**Peter:** I believe you are a part of this conspiracy James, and we'll discover even more revelations..

**Juliet:** So much for all the earlier bravado.

**Rachel:** From arrogance to pathos in such a short time span.

**James:** (*Frantic*) I can't take any more of this,  
(*He storms out of the room*)

**Earl:** Peter please. Let's stop this irrational witch hunt and inform the police. Let them sort this out. Do you want me to go after James?

**Peter:** No, leave him. I'll speak to him later. We'll take a coffee break in the lobby and return in fifteen minutes.

(*They start to leave the room*)

**Peter:** Don; Juliet: could I have a word, please?

(*The others exit*)

**Don:** (*In a worried state*) I don't think this is going to work Peter. I'm worried.

**Peter:** Of course, it will. As we expected, James played right into our hands. It was obvious to everyone that he's implicated.

**Juliet:** Is there anything, the smallest thing that could implicate the three of us? Have we covered our tracks well enough Peter? Could the Americans suspect you?

**Peter:** No; of course not. Why should they? It was me who built the company from nothing and agreed to conduct the investigation. If I'm not under suspicion you certainly aren't. Don..., I can understand your anxiety, but you must relax.

**Don:** (*Irritated by the suggestion that he is unduly anxious*): Please do not treat me like a child! The fact remains, if a thorough investigation were

carried out, I'm the most obvious target aside of James.

*(There is a brief silence.)* Well, aren't I?

**Juliet:** *(To Don.)* Look, I can see you're worried...

**Don:** *(Getting emotional):* Yes, I'm worried. May I remind you, we agreed three years ago to pass confidential intelligence to Tom Stafford. As expected, Greystones' sales volumes have tripled, and the company's shares almost doubled. For us to get anything like the £4 million each out of this, their share price needs to remain stable at least for the next few months. In the last few weeks alone Greystones' shares have plummeted by almost 40% and we don't know why. At that rate of decline we stand to get nothing for all the risk taken, other than a long prison sentence! That's why I'm worried!

**Peter:** Don. Tom has re-assured me about the drop in share price. It's a temporary phenomenon. Don't worry. I know we can successfully implicate the others and force an admission of guilt, I'm sure of it. Then I can prepare a report about the investigation for the Americans, suggesting the situation is now under control. I am confident once James is sacked along with the others the President will want to take the matter no further. After all they'll want the business to recover as quickly as possible and will be eager to avoid publicity.

**Juliet:** I agree.

**Peter:** I know how the Americans think. They'll take my advice; I know they will.

**Don:** I disagree. There is bound to be an investigation and they'll...

**Peter:** No Don. They'll take it no further.

**Don:** I am not so sure.

**Peter:** (*Getting irritated*) Do you honestly think they would risk the integrity of the global business over this? James and the others will go quietly after I've paid them off. We'll hear nothing more from them. Remember it was me who suggested Tom get friendly with James as a part of the plot. Let's not underestimate how far we've come.

**Juliet:** How much will you pay them?

**Peter:** (*Mildly irritated*) Three months basic salary, tax free; nothing unusual about that plus a large bonus. Why?

**Juliet:** Won't the auditors pick this up?

**Peter:** Why are you so preoccupied about the amount they'll be paid?

**Juliet:** I just think we shouldn't be too generous. It will look suspicious and Earl will ask questions.

**Peter:** By the time the accounts are published you will be the new Finance Director and Earl will be long gone. The Americans won't take any interest, I promise you. As soon as the business starts to perform again, and it will, they'll forget any of this happened.

**Don:** I hope you are right!

**Peter:** The sooner we can bring this to a conclusion the better. Let's join the others for coffee.

**Quick Curtain**

**ACT 1 Scene 2**

*(The setting is the same they return to the board room. Charles and Earl return first and talk quietly to each other)*

**Earl:** Charles, I disagree with the way Peter is dealing with this. If the Americans think there has been a conspiracy then the Police should be called in, not hold a kangaroo court in front of the staff.

**Charles:** I couldn't agree more. But, don't you find it strange that Peter has waited until now to expose James? Why wait until he returned from the States to act? If he knew some weeks ago about the voicemail messages from the chap at Greystone, why didn't he confront him then? It's all very odd! Anyway, it doesn't seem to matter what we think Peter will handle it his way.

*(He goes quiet as Rachel, Juliet and Don enter)*

**Rachel:** *(Speaking to Juliet and in a vitriolic way):* I have absolutely no time for chauvinists of either sex. ...immature, self-righteous, self-obsessed...

**Earl:** *(Seizing an opportunity to interrupt.)* So, what did Peter want to speak to you about, Juliet?

**Juliet:** *(Sharply)* Nothing of any consequence.

**Earl:** It took a long time to say, 'nothing of any consequence'.

**Juliet:** Sorry I don't understand?

**Earl:** You may not be the most intelligent accountant whose worked for me Juliet, but I credit you with the ability to understand simple English.

**Don:** *(Before Juliet can respond and keen to keep the two apart.)* Let's not get into a fight over trivia. We really do need to be a little more adult about our dealings with each other. For the record, Peter was merely talking over some costs on the 'Maze' project that's all.

**Earl:** I'm surprised he didn't involve me, but no matter... *(Smirks at Juliet)* You see, all it takes is a modicum of civility Juliet... Thank you, Don.

*(Peter enters the room. The room goes silent)*

**Earl:** It doesn't look as though James is returning Peter.

**Peter:** It seems James has difficulty coping with pressure these days, but we'll press on. He hasn't checked out of the hotel, so he's somewhere around. He may show his face.

**Juliet:** He's probably sulking.

**Peter:** Earl, when we started out this morning you were concerned about the way I was handling the investigation. Was there a reason?

**Earl:** Reason? No; ...only that I believe the board should have been apprised of the situation first before involving everyone else.

**Peter:** I see... any other reason?

**Earl:** *(Looking quite surprised by his persistence)* Not that I can think of...! ...I sense you are leading somewhere.

**Peter:** Yes, I suppose I am. You see my concerns about James and his so called 'friendship' with Tom Stafford applies to you too, doesn't it?

**Earl:** *(Said dismissively but not convincingly)* Yes..., yes, I know him. You can't operate in this

industry without meeting the Tom Stafford's of this world. I met him at a golf day, I recall, possibly at the same time as James; but what are you suggesting?

**Peter:** Didn't you feel a little uncomfortable when James was talking earlier knowing that you too met him at a golf day, but said nothing?

**Earl:** No. Why should I? I wouldn't put it past James to trade secrets, but that's not my style.

**Peter:** So, on that basis, you wouldn't discount the fact that someone like Tom Stafford would seek to exploit such a relationship.

**Earl:** (*In a smug tone*): Tom has presence and doesn't have to try hard to win people over. I'm sure the success of his business over the past few years has largely been attributed to his incredible business skills and charm in good measure!

**Juliet:** You speak of him in almost affectionate terms. Could it be that he's got to you too?

**Earl:** (*Attacking Juliet*): How dare you speak to me like that! Peter, are you suggesting that I've been corrupted by Tom Stafford?

**Peter:** On the face of it, that's precisely what I'm suggesting. You've admitted a quasi-admiration for him. You seem to know a good deal about his character and recent business success. You believed it was possible for him to corrupt James, so why not you too?

**Earl:** Let me be very, clear. My relationship with Tom Stafford has nothing, absolutely nothing, to do with business.

**Peter:** So, what kind of relationship do you have with Tom Stafford?

**Earl:** (*On the defensive*) I'm sorry Peter, but it's none of your business. Who I choose to befriend

is my choice and mine alone I won't be accused of malpractice simply because I'm friendly with the Managing Director of a competitor!

**Juliet:** I can't believe what I'm hearing! You're involved too? What kind of spell has Tom Stafford cast over you two?

**Earl:** (*Becoming extremely angry*) He was right! James was right you are a bitch how dare you sit there and accuse me of conspiring with our competitors. How dare you malign me in this way? I can tell you now; you're finished in this company. I won't have you work another day for me.

**Juliet:** For once I agree with you. But under the circumstances, it looks as though you won't be working with me, if you understand my meaning. (*She glances at Peter to see if she has stepped over the mark.*)

**Peter:** O.K., simmer down!

**Earl:** (*Raging*) Simmer down! She's a troublemaker and I've known it since the first day she joined us. I've shown her every respect and tried to ignore her inadequacies. She needs to go!

**Juliet:** Inadequacies?

(*Still raging and seeking revenge. He gets up and points to Peter*)

**Earl:** Why are you allowing her to talk to me this way? You're supposed to be the Managing Director..., supposed to be, that's amusing. You haven't a clue about managing anything. Since you were first appointed, standards in the business have declined. You pontificate about management theories whilst the business goes to the wall. And what do you do about it? Absolutely nothing! You sit in your ivory tower issuing dictates... You're not a tenth of the man, or Manager, that Tom Stafford is. He's

someone that commands respect, someone who instinctively knows what he wants...

**Peter:** *(Interrupting his flow)* Fascinating! I think we can figure out from that outburst just how much you respect and like him..., but it's more than that, isn't it?

**Earl:** *(Realising that he was losing control.)*  
What...? What do you mean?

**Peter:** You know perfectly well what I mean. You're infatuated with Tom Stafford, aren't you?

*(There's a stunned silence. Earl is visibly shocked by Peter's comment)*

**Peter:** I don't just mean infatuated with his business skills either. Ever since you first met Mr Stafford you've had a..., what shall we say; a crush on him. I think it's perfectly justified to suspect you under the circumstances, don't you? If, and according to you, Tom Stafford is perfectly capable of eliciting information from poor naive James, surely it would be easy to do the same with a lover, wouldn't it?

*(Earl just sits there motionless, dumbfounded, not knowing what to say or do. The others just stare at him, astonished at this latest revelation.)*

**Juliet:** *(Not wanting to miss an opportunity)* Do you deny it?

**Charles:** Earl, I'm the first to say your private life is your own, but is it true? You've undermined the business in exchange for a relationship with another man...?

*(In a controlled way, but clearly embarrassed by the revelation.)*

**Earl:** The assertion that I've betrayed the company is totally and utterly unfounded. There is

not a shred of evidence, nor will there be, that I've done anything to undermine this business... I will not be drawn further on my relationship with Tom Stafford. I think I'd better leave now before I say something I will regret.

*(He gets up to go)*

**Peter:** Would you like to speak to me privately.

**Earl:** *(Pauses and stares at Peter)* Very well if you insist. I certainly won't be subjected any further to a mob interrogation.

**Peter:** Would the rest of you mind leaving the room? I'll call you back in a few minutes.

*(They exit silently. Earl rises and paces around until they leave)*

*(In an angry tone but not wishing to alienate Peter totally)*

**Earl:** Peter, how can you treat me like this? I've been extremely loyal since I joined the company. Can't you see how embarrassing this is, and in front of everyone else. If you were unhappy, why didn't you confront me before?

**Peter:** I would have thought that was obvious! I believe your relationship with Tom Stafford has clouded your judgement and it needed to come out into the open. I believe you've allowed yourself to be compromised and have indeed traded secrets.

**Earl:** Peter, that's just not true. If you really believe that James and I are guilty of conspiracy, why don't you just turn us over to the Police and let them deal with it?

**Peter:** I may just do that, but I think for the sake of the business it would be better to deal with the matter internally. That way the business will

avoid unnecessary publicity and both you and James will avoid prosecution.

**Earl:** You really believe I'm guilty as charged? What kind of information do you think I've traded?

**Peter:** Oh please! Don't take me for a fool! If you recall James pleaded innocence under interrogation until....

**Earl:** So, this is an interrogation?

**Peter:** James eventually admitted his guilt because I knew I was on solid ground with my assertions, just as I am now with you.

**Earl:** Perhaps you'd enlighten me.

**Peter:** Do you think I would be this persistent if I didn't know something?

**Earl:** What do you know?

**Peter:** (*Becoming irritated.*) Don't play cat and mouse...

*(In a mildly humble, little boy lost way.)*

**Earl:** The little I can tell you is of no consequence to your line of questioning, believe me. Yes, I admit I met Tom, and it was at the same golf event that James attended. I also admit that following the event we struck up a friendship. A friendship, that's all. So, any ideas you need to implicate me in a conspiracy, are misguided.

**Peter:** I think the term 'friendship' doesn't adequately describe the relationship does it?

**Earl:** This is not easy Peter. (*Very edgy*) I admit my friendship with Tom is well..., more than straightforward... I've known for years of my..., well... my leanings toward men. I've found it difficult to come to terms with it despite today's

climate on such matters. I'm a private person. I'm married to Joyce. We got together at college, all those years ago; and I had never been with any woman until I met her and haven't been with anyone else since. Do I need to go into detail? You seem to know what I'm about to say, anyway!

**Peter:** No. Go on.

**Earl:** Tom and I have been having a relationship! Until we met, I didn't rationalise my feelings in that way. It's hard to explain, but I just wanted to be with him all the time. It sounds ridiculous I know, but I felt like a schoolboy, infatuated; in love for the first time; that's just how I felt... But, how did you know? At least, I assume you knew what I was going to say?

**Peter:** I did. I knew because I received a 'phone call from a third party informing me that you'd been making a nuisance of yourself, by 'phoning Tom Stafford, non-stop. You were also pestering him at his office. I was asked, to save further embarrassment, if I'd speak to you to put a stop to it.

*(In a panic)*

**Earl:** Oh, my god. It's my worst nightmare. People finding out!

*(Abandoning his awkwardness and now in a really upset state)*

**Earl:** I was obsessed, you see. I just couldn't put him out of my mind. It's so awful. I just couldn't help myself. Tom was also very charming: he's such a diplomat; a gentleman. He didn't put me down or attempt to embarrass me, but never dismissed me either. I foolishly hoped in time ....., he'd feel the same....

*(Breaks down)*

**Earl:** I'm sorry; I'm sorry, Peter; I've been such a fool.

**Peter:** I'm going to ask you to resign with immediate effect.

**Earl:** *(In a humble tone.)* Resign! Do I really have to resign? I promise you, Peter...

**Peter:** It's up to you! Resign or see this go public in an inquiry.

**Earl:** But, what on earth would I say to Joyce?

**Peter:** What would you say if all this came out into the open?

**Earl:** I can't. I just don't know.

**Peter:** You've compromised yourself. You may well have compromised the company. If all this gets out, and it will I can assure you it will...

**Earl:** Okay I'll resign... But, how will I tell the family...?

**Peter:** I'm sure you'll find a way. I suggest you go back to the office this afternoon to clear your desk before staff return tomorrow morning..

**Earl:** Peter, please.. you must promise me that none of this will come out. It would destroy my family. I don't think Joyce could cope.

**Peter:** I can't promise anything, but I'll do all I can.

*(Earl gets up slowly; dazed by the unfolding events and leaves the room. Peter has a moment to reflect before Juliet sneaks in)*

**Juliet:** (*Totally uncaring, scheming*) What happened?

**Peter:** He's agreed to resign. He's going back to the office to clear his desk. I felt sorry for him, but the pieces of the jigsaw are falling into place.

**Juliet:** How did you persuade him to go?

**Peter:** He realised if all this became public knowledge, he wouldn't be able to face his wife and family. The challenge now is dealing with James. I want you to go to the front desk and see if he's checked out. If he hasn't, he'll probably be sulking in his bedroom. Either way, let me know. I'll speak to him and force his resignation too.

**Juliet:** I'll check the desk and text you.

*(Juliet exits. Peter takes a seat when the 'phone rings)*

**Peter:** Hello. Peter Redfearn.

*(He lowers his voice)* Hi, Tom! No, it's fine! I'm on my own.... Yes, it's proving to be a lot easier than I first thought.... Oddly enough, it was Earl who capitulated without a fight and agreed to resign. James was aggressive admitting his friendship with you and stormed out in front of everyone. I've sent Juliet to see if he's still in the building.... Yes, if he's still here I'll force his resignation! Yes, yes. No, not at all...You really must have worked your charm on Earl; he's clearly besotted...! Yes, I know what you're capable of. I'll phone you later, at home. Bye. O.K!

*(He puts the 'phone down and starts to exit when Juliet returns)*

**Juliet:** He's still in the hotel. I tried his room, but no answer.

**Peter:** OK. Look, I'll get the others back. I'll leave a message for James at the front desk to contact me before he leaves.

*(Peter exits and Juliet makes a rushed 'phone call)*

**Juliet:** Hello Tom..., I just thought I'd give you a quick progress report... Oh, really? No, I didn't know Peter had just called. No. Peter just left the room, so I thought I'd 'phone you...O.K. Right..., 8.00pm at your club... Is that right? That's amazing! OK. 'Bye, Darling. I love you! Oh, by the way, I assume Peter knows nothing about you and me? Absolutely! I'll have to go; I can hear them all returning. 'Bye.

## CURTAIN

### ACT 11 Scene 1

*(Later, at Tom Stafford's club. Peter and Tom Stafford enter a private lounge, chatting. The room is tastefully furnished and decorated with military style pictures hanging on the walls and a framed picture of the Queen. An ornamental fireplace can be seen. Five chairs and sofas are placed around a large coffee table. A telephone is on the coffee table)*

*(Tom is a charming but ruthless man. He's tall, charismatic, distinguished looking and mildly effeminate. He's aged 40/50's. He speaks as they enter. They sit)*

**Tom:** I thought as much.... Shall we have a drink before the others arrive?

**Peter:** I'd love one.

**Tom:** I've seen the waiter; he'll be in shortly to take an order.

**Peter:** It's a great club. Why haven't we met here before?

**Tom:** Not sure. I've been coming for years! Served as Chairman on two occasions, captained the golf, been Treasurer, you name it I've done it. It's not what it used to be though. Standards have dropped. Almost anyone can join now. Great shame!

**Peter:** Sign of the times.

**Tom:** So, by all accounts, everything went to plan?

**Peter:** Not quite how I'd describe it, but broadly speaking, yes. I think we fabricated enough so-called evidence for me to present a case to our American board to drop a formal investigation having sacked two senior Managers. As you know, the PR damage would be significant if they ignored my advice. I'm confident they'll back off.

**Tom:** If I were President of your group, I would certainly proceed with an investigation but knowing your main board as I do, I think they'll bury it. At least for your sake, let's hope so!

*(A smart waiter dressed in tails and bow tie knocks and enters. He's holding a silver tray. Tom is a regular at the club and knows the staff well. He also tips generously)*

**Waiter:** Good evening, Mr Stafford. It's a pleasure to see you again. Would you and your guest care for a drink from the bar?

**Tom:** Yes, thank you Robert..., Peter?

**Peter:** Scotch and ice please.

**Tom:** And, I'll have my usual, thanks. *(Hands the waiter a £20 note)*

**Waiter:** (*Very graciously*) Thank you, Mr Stafford. Scotch and ice and a large Gin and Tonic! (*Turning to Peter*) Would you like a double as well, Sir?

**Peter:** Oh, go on then! It'll save your legs!

**Waiter:** Thank you, Sir.

(*Starts to exit*)

**Tom:** Oh, Robert. I'm expecting another two guests. Would you make sure you show them through when they arrive.

**Waiter:** (*Smiling broadly*) Of course, Mr Stafford.

(*The waiter exits*)

**Tom:** So, where were we? (*Being provocative*) Oh, yes. Your board and their reaction! If they knew how much information my company had been fed over the past few years, they'd mount a full investigation, irrespective of the adverse publicity! (*He chuckles*)

**Peter:** That's reassuring!

**Tom:** Sorry, but it's true! But they don't know what we know, do they?

(*Sinister laugh*)

**Tom:** Frankly, we've covered our tracks pretty-well. I can't see how any investigation, if it were to happen, could unearth enough to put two and two together. Don't worry. The difficult part is done.

**Peter:** I hope you're right. I don't relish spending time in jail!

**Tom:** Don't be so dramatic. So, tell me precisely, what happened with James and Earl!

**Peter:** I am afraid my assertions got the better of James. He's a talented guy in many respects but lacks maturity. He's got a gambling problem and a real hang up about women in business as you know. His girlfriend left him not able to cope with his depression. His surface arrogance melted away when I revealed what I knew about you and him! I told him I knew about the lunch date and product launch. That sent him into a panic! He really believed that he'd been at the heart of a conspiracy after I'd finished with him....

**Tom:** But he didn't resign?

**Peter:** No, he....

*(He pauses as the waiter knocks on the door and enters with a tray of drinks. He takes them off the tray and puts them on the coffee table.)*

**Waiter:** Thank you, Mr Stafford. Will there be anything else, Sir?

**Tom:** No, thank you Robert. But could you take care of us throughout the evening.

**Waiter:** Of course, Sir. My pleasure! I'll return to see if everything is OK.

*(He exits)*

**Tom:** So, James didn't resign?

**Peter:** No. He took quite an aggressive, cavalier attitude at first then fell apart announcing he couldn't cope. *(Pause, takes a drink)* It was strange though, when I left the hotel the following morning he hadn't checked out. I even persuaded one of the housekeeping staff to let me into his room to see if he'd packed and he hadn't. Clothes were strewn all over the room and his wash bag was in the bathroom.

**Tom:** What do you make of it?

**Peter:** Knowing James, he probably called up a friend for company, someone's shoulder to cry on. I'd speculate he got drunk and stayed over at their place.

**Tom:** And Earl?

**Peter:** As you know, we spent some considerable time finding a way to implicate him. I must admit I was staggered that he responded to your 'friendly overtures' in the way he did. I would have put hard cash on him avoiding you like the plague knowing you are our nearest rival. But how he responded...

**Tom:** Yes..., let's not go into all that! Let's just say he became extremely embarrassing. He just locked onto me and wouldn't let go. He wrote me several pathetic letters, and would you believe it, sent me a bouquet of flowers to the office! Day and night, he plagued me.

**Peter:** I know how persuasive you can be, have you forgotten? (*He leans over and kisses him on the cheek*)

**Tom:** (*Moves away slightly*) No, I haven't..., but that's different!

**Peter:** (*Looking a bit chagrined*): He admitted his infatuation with you. Apparently, meeting you enabled him to come to terms with his sexuality. I felt quite sorry for him. His big fear was that his wife Joyce and his family would find out...

**Tom:** Oh, god. Don't mention that woman's name to me. He wittered on and on about that damned woman and how guilty he felt, but it didn't stop him pestering me. Oh, dear, what a scream! But I tell you, I hardly said a word to him before he was flirting with me. At first, he found conversation difficult, but once I began to break through, he was liberated! From then on, I couldn't stop him.

He wanted to tell me his entire life story..., and the way he looked at me! From then on, he just pestered me all the time home and office. I had to get one of my people to speak to him. I too feared the consequences at home!

*(Peter begins to wonder if his relationship with Tom is as strong as he thought)*

**Peter:** Is that how you feel?

**Tom:** Feel? About Earl you mean?

**Peter:** No, you and me?

**Tom:** *(Sensing danger.)* We agreed that we didn't want our relationship to become public knowledge. That would be stupid. It would undermine everything we've worked for.

**Peter:** I know. I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking...; any way Earl agreed to resign, said he'd clear his desk and he'd be gone...

**Tom:** So, who else have you spoken to?

**Peter:** I planned to implicate Charles Lander, but the way it worked out I didn't think it was necessary. He's a difficult character at the best of times and I was unsure how successful I'd be at getting him to take the bait. After my session with Earl, I took the rest of the evening over dinner cementing relationships with the others. It was a good session. I felt satisfied that we could begin to undo the self-inflicted damage on the company and win our way back once this is over.

**Tom:** (*Said tongue in cheek*) Win our way back! The fact that we've achieved the objective of making Greystone a market leader and seen the share value soar due to our conspiracy doesn't mean 'I want to see a phoenix rise from the ashes'. I admit the share price has dropped this past week, but it'll recover.

**Peter:** If only I could walk away after cashing in my shares!

**Tom:** Why can't you?

**Peter:** That wasn't the plan. You said it's too risky.

**Tom:** Why?

**Peter:** It was your idea that I stay and rebuild the business to ensure that there would never be a link to me.

**Tom:** Wise advice, I'm sure.

**Peter:** Seriously, are you really suggesting I could get away with cashing in my shares and quitting?

**Tom:** Of course not! Don't take me too seriously. You need to continue. You need to create a new strategy and win back market confidence. I'm hopeful by the time that happens I'd have realised my share options in Greystone and be gone.

**Peter:** It's alright for some.

**Tom:** You'll do alright out of it! Have you thought about the future?

**Peter:** Not in concrete terms.

**Tom:** So, you have a plan of sorts?

**Peter:** A list, long as your arm of things that appeal.

**Tom:** What about setting up home in the Caribbean?

**Peter:** The Caribbean? Why the Caribbean?

**Tom:** I'm buying a place out there and wondered if you'd like to join me?

**Peter:** Me? (*Flattered*) I'm lost for words. I must admit I hadn't...

(*There's a knock at the door. The waiter has returned*)

**Waiter:** Can I get you more drinks Mr Stafford, Sir? (*Smiling at Peter*)

**Tom:** (*A little irritated*) Thank you, Robert. Champagne, Peter?

**Peter:** Perfect. (*Looking chuffed*)

**Waiter:** Very well. Is that your usual brand? (*Eyes on Tom, knowingly*)

**Tom:** Of course.

(*Waiter clears the glasses and exits*)

**Tom:** Think about it, there's no hurry. Still a way to go before we can say we've pulled this off.

**Peter:** (*Smiling*) Yes, I will.

**Tom:** What's the next move as far as the Americans are concerned?

**Peter:** My plan is to report back to the board next week. As I said I can only influence their thinking, not insist they drop the matter. They'll want to avoid adverse publicity like the plague.

Better to 'sweep it under the carpet' than expose the business to further share price losses.

**Tom:** You're right. The last thing they'll want is to see the value of the shares fall still further. The media would have a field day. I would bet...

*(The waiter returns with the drinks.)*

**Waiter:** Your drinks *(He puts them down)* Your two guests have arrived Mr Stafford; would you like me to show them through?

**Tom:** *(He looks at Peter to gain approval)* Yes if you would. Perhaps you'd ask them if they'd like a drink.

**Waiter:** Certainly, Sir. Will you be staying for dinner, Mr Stafford?

**Tom:** Yes, I've already reserved a table for four. Could you ensure I have my usual spot and put a further bottle of champagne on ice?

**Waiter:** Of course, Sir.

*(He exits)*

**Tom:** Anything else we need to discuss before Juliet and Don arrive?

**Peter:** I don't think so..., other than the fact that I'm a little worried that Don isn't coping under the pressure of all this. I just hope if there's an investigation that he can compose himself and think rationally. He's the worrying type and could say anything. If the opportunity arises it may be wise for you to have a word with him.

**Tom:** Yes, I shall.

*(The waiter knocks. Don, Juliet, and the waiter enter. He puts the drinks down)*

**Tom:** Juliet, Don. Take a seat.

*(He kisses Juliet on the cheek)*

**Juliet:** Hello Tom; Peter.

**Don:** Gentlemen.

**Tom:** Peter has just been updating me on yesterday's meeting. It seems to have gone extremely well.

**Juliet:** I think so. But what concerns me is that James still hasn't checked out of the hotel. Before coming here, I 'phoned the reception desk and they confirmed that his clothes are still in the room but he's nowhere to be seen. I've also phoned his flat on a few occasions but just get his voicemail. It's very odd.

**Don:** If you ask me, I think he could wreck our chances of pulling this off.

**Tom:** I'm sure he'll turn up. He's a sensitive creature. I should know! He's probably being comforted by someone or other.

**Don:** I wish I shared your confidence.

**Peter:** We had this conversation yesterday, Don. Believe me you have nothing to worry....

**Don:** *(Interrupting him)* I'm sorry, Peter, but I just don't share your confidence!

**Juliet:** *(To Tom)* I've also tried to re-assure him, but there's no budging you is there, Don?

**Don:** I wish you wouldn't talk to me in such a condescending way.... Just look at the facts. Over the past three years..

**Peter:** *(Interrupting him and impatient)* Yes, yes, we've been through all that...

**Don:** *(Interrupting him and becoming agitated)* Please, Peter, let me just explain to Tom if you are not prepared to listen!

**Tom:** O.K., Don, get it off your chest. What worries you?

**Don:** Thank you, Tom! To anyone, even on the fringes of the industry, it must have seemed odd how well Greystone had done in product development and new launches, but without an in-house development team, and...

**Tom:** It may have seemed odd to some, but we did what we did; its history! It hasn't been commented on as far as I know, so worry not.

**Don:** Within the past year alone Greystone has launched another five products. Five products, that's a huge number of new products for a company with no internal technology base. Can't you see that? O.K., I accept that you've started to build the team, but it's only been in the past few months. Surely someone, somewhere, is going to challenge the achievements and ask questions.

**Tom:** I'm sorry Don, but, like Peter, I am at a loss to understand your concerns.

**Juliet:** I'm not a technical person, or a designer, but from what I can gather from Don, he thinks it would be impossible for any company with the limited infrastructure and resource such as Greystone to achieve what it has in such a short space of time.

**Don:** Precisely!

**Juliet:** And on that basis, isn't it possible, and I state possible, not probable, that Tom will come under pressure to explain the company's phenomenal growth?

**Tom:** Let me re-assure you both. It's not an issue. Of course, I accept the broad analysis that what we've achieved as a company with limited resources would be viewed as remarkable, but my shareholders are delighted. They are not about to retrospectively challenge the strategy. There's no rumourmongering in the media is there? My senior people who have been receiving large bonuses know that I'm influential and get what I want..., and in this case, I did!

**Don:** Yes, but...

**Tom:** (*assertively*) No 'buts', Don. Listen to me. Peter may well be asked to jump through a few hoops and offer guarantees on future governance issues, but that's all your board will do. Flying people in from the States to conduct a thorough investigation would be absolute madness. Such a move would be on the streets in no time, and the company's reputation would be destroyed. Look, worse-case scenario, Peter may be asked to resign, but that won't upset the plans we have. If either of you are fired, I promise you now, you will have jobs at Greystone. But hell, if you're fired, think of the cash you'll have at your disposal to enjoy a pleasant retirement.

**Don:** I'm not so sure. I think you underestimate my ability to cope under pressure. I can tell you now if they did send a delegation to complete a thorough investigation, I just wouldn't be able to hold up under cross examination! That's all I'm saying. I don't think I could lie. I just know I would end up telling them everything they wanted to know.

**Tom:** (*Taking a more-gentle approach*) Don old chap, we all knew when we embarked upon this plan that there would be risks, albeit calculated risks. Do you honestly think I would have agreed to take part if I thought we would be exposed? What you're not really taking account of is the adverse publicity that would rain down on the Americans if they were seen to be acting in this way. Their share price would plummet overnight, and they'd be a takeover target. Can't you see that?

**Peter:** Precisely. It's just what I've been saying all along.

**Tom:** I think we should stay on course and not make any changes to our plans. For your own sake, Don, you need to relax. The next phase will soon be over, and we can move on. Relax!

**Don:** O.K. O.K, I can see I have no option but to sit tight; but I had to voice my concerns.

**Peter:** We understand and respect that; don't we? Tom!

**Tom:** Of course. I appreciate your frankness, we all do. ...now, let's have dinner! Who's hungry?

**Don:** (*In a mildly pathetic way.*) If you don't mind, I won't join you. I have things I must catch up on But, thanks anyway.

(*Turns to Juliet and Peter*)

**Don:** I'll see you both tomorrow.

(*He gets up and exits*)

**Peter:** He worries the hell out of me!

**Juliet:** You don't think he'd say anything do you?

**Tom:** No point speculating further, but you'd better keep an eye on him, Peter. Let's hope your report to the American board will nullify any formal investigation. The sooner you get back to them the better.

**Peter:** I will, make no mistake.

**Tom:** Dinner! Come, let's go through and enjoy some wonderful food and champagne!

*(They exit to the dining room)*

### Quick Curtain

### ACT 11 Scene 2

*(The following evening the scene is the same: Tom's club. Peter has summoned a meeting with Tom Juliet and Don, to discuss urgent and worrying developments. They enter together)*

**Tom:** So, what's all this about. Why the panic?

*(He looks at his watch)*

**Don:** *(Anxious to spill the beans.)* Its James..., he's dead. He committed suicide! I just knew it. I just knew something would happen. He couldn't cope with the pressure...,

**Peter:** *(Quite angry)* For god's sake, shut up, Don! I'm sick of you droning on and on. It's tragic and totally unforeseen and I feel deeply responsible, but there is nothing we can do about it now.

**Don:** Well, I was right, wasn't I? I was right!

**Peter:** Sorry, but I can't recall you forecasting that James would commit suicide!

**Don:** No. But I knew something would go wrong.

**Tom:** Suicide? What on earth happened?

**Juliet:** *(In a hurried way. She is visibly upset and shaken by events)* James didn't return to the hotel. You remember, I said that his room was left with all his clothes...?

**Tom:** Yes, I remember.

**Juliet:** Well, I'd 'phoned the hotel on several occasions to find out if he'd checked out and 'phoned his flat but kept getting voicemail. Well..., James didn't come into the office this morning and at 2.00pm I got a phone call from the hotel saying that a body had been found in the grounds and they were confident it was James. He was found hanging from a tree by the river. Apparently, he had left a note nearby. The Police were investigating.

**Tom:** The bloody idiot! What did the note say? Where is it now?

**Peter:** The Police have it. We have no idea what it said.

**Tom:** Idiot. Stupid idiot!

*(Not believing anyone could be so callous.)*

**Don:** Is that all you can say? Bloody idiot! Don't you have any feelings? The poor lad killed himself because of us..., because of our greed, can't you see, we're responsible for this, we are responsible!

*(There's a knock at the door. Robert the waiter enters)*

**Waiter:** Good evening, Mr Stafford. Good to see you again. May I get you some drinks, Sir?

**Tom:** *(Snaps at him)* No! Not now!

**Waiter:** Very good, Sir. Shall I call in later; are you staying for dinner?

**Tom:** For god's sake, go! Can't you see I am in the middle of an important meeting. If I want drinks or anything else, I will come and find you, O.K?

**Waiter:** Of course, Sir. I'm sorry I disturbed you.

*(He exits discreetly)*

*(Addresses Don directly in a controlled but, cynical way.)*

**Tom:** Your concern for James is very moving, Don. I'm sure we all have the greatest sympathy for his family and friends.

**Don:** *(Angry.)* That just about sums you up! None of you cares. As far as you're concerned, it's just an irritation, another obstacle to overcome! A young man has killed himself!

**Peter:** *(In a caring, supportive way)*  
Don, it's tragic. Of course, we feel it. Of course, we share your shock and....

**Don:** Rubbish! None of you have shown any compassion, none whatsoever. You don't understand the meaning of the word. I repeat: A young man has taken his own life and we are responsible. I take responsibility for my part in this whole sordid affair! I wish I hadn't been roped into something I have always felt uncomfortable about....

**Tom:** But you did! You had reservations, but you did, and if I recollect correctly, you didn't kick and scream much, especially when you were made aware of how much money you could make. Am I right?

**Don:** I made a mistake. I was corrupted, but I had no idea our actions would cause such a tragedy.

**Juliet:** None of us did. Do you honestly think I would have gotten involved if I thought someone would lose their life?

**Don:** I have no idea what your motivations are. I just know I can't live with myself, knowing that I contributed to someone's death. I just don't...

**Peter:** Look, Don, the fact is, there's nothing we can do now to bring James back. Rationally, nothing we can do. We are all human. None of us would have wanted nor expected such a thing to happen. The fact is we are where we are. The important thing is that we keep our heads and agree between us the best way forward...

**Don:** The best way forward is to confess everything to the Police and at least face up to what we've done...

**Tom:** If I may say so, that is precisely not what we should be doing...

**Don:** That's a surprise!

**Tom:** Peter is right. What's happened, no matter how tragic, has happened. Despite what you think about me, I am not immune to the consequences of our actions, but it makes absolutely no sense to do what you are proposing. We need to stay calm and decide on a strategy. There will be questions. It may well be uncomfortable, but we need to get through this and make the most of it.

**Don:** Words, just words. Make the most of it? What you mean is, forget what's happened and press on. That's what he means!

**Peter:** It doesn't seem to matter what we say, you seem wedded to the idea of destroying all our lives.

**Don:** Just as we destroyed his life.

**Juliet:** Don, please don't do anything that would implicate us. I beg you. There must be a way of re-assuring you that we are not...

**Don:** Implicate you? You implicated yourself the day you got involved in all of this. You really don't understand, do you? It's not about us now. It's about what we have done and the need to face up to the consequences. I warned you all. I said it was wrong to create this absurd conspiracy.

**Tom:** Sorry Don but you didn't! You never....

**Don:** I want nothing more to do with any of you. I just hope that you can live with yourselves, that's all!

*(He storms out)*

**Juliet:** Shall I go after him?

**Tom:** Pointless. He's unbalanced. Best leave him to salve his conscience alone.

**Peter:** I'm afraid we're finished!

**Tom:** Just wait a minute! One irrational person among us is enough. The last thing we need right now is to go into confessional mode. We need to think this through and consider our options. Don is a liability, I agree. Perhaps we could turn that to our advantage.

**Juliet:** What do you mean advantage?

**Tom:** Maybe there is a way we could use Don's irrational state of mind to weave him deeper into the conspiracy and in doing so distance ourselves.

**Peter:** Sorry, I'm not following you.

**Tom:** I don't have an answer, but I'll come up with something. The fact is: The Police are involved,

and we must come up with a seamless, watertight defence that we all sign up to.

**Peter:** Hard, when within the hour Don will probably be telling the Police everything.

**Tom:** He may be irrational, but, he's not stupid. For all his moralising he's as much a part of this as we are, and when the realisation of what his moral stance could lead to sinks in, he may very well take a different tack.

**Juliet:** You don't know him. The fact is: James is dead. What can we possibly do now that can alter that? Don will go to the Police, I'm sure.

**Tom:** We must concentrate on pre-empting every move the Police are likely to make. The fact is: they will have to travel a fair distance in logic to understand how one death could lead to a conspiracy. Why should his suicide have any bearing on us?

**Peter:** Are you forgetting the note he left.

**Tom:** The note! Ah, yes, the note.

**Juliet:** There we are then: hung, drawn, and quartered!

**Tom:** You may not like this, but, if we can't come up with a strategy to deal with this, you're both finished.

**Juliet:** Hang on a minute. 'You're both finished'; where do you feature in this Tom?

**Tom:** Let's deal with realities, Juliet. There's no reason why I'd be implicated in this unless James has mentioned my name in his foolish note. As far as the Police are concerned, if they have any sense, they will eventually concentrate their enquiries on you and your people. If, and it's a big, 'if', they choose to question me I could simply deny any

knowledge of James, or come to that, you two. I have been very discreet.

*(Both Peter and Juliet are astonished at his statement)*

**Juliet:** You are not serious!

**Peter:** Wait a minute!

**Tom:** I'm not suggesting I'm about to walk away from this; just pointing out the realities.

**Juliet:** I can't believe what I'm hearing.

**Tom:** What I'm saying is that any investigation involving his work colleagues would start with you. Why would the Police involve me?

**Juliet:** That's not what you were saying...

**Peter:** It does make sense. Tom is right; he won't be their first port of call; we would! And I accept that, hypothetically, it would be difficult to implicate Tom in the way this has unfolded, but, I think we both need re-assuring, Tom, that your earlier statement was merely pointing out the facts and not your intention.

**Tom:** Of course! Merely the facts!

**Juliet:** *(Not convinced but prepared to go along with him.)* So, what do we do now?

**Tom:** Let's return to Don. We agree he's unstable, and upon reflection I agree he's likely to pour his heart out at the first opportunity if he hasn't done so already. There's too much invested in this to let it go now. I think we must isolate and deal with Don.

**Juliet:** 'Isolate and deal with Don'. My god! You're suggesting that we get rid of him!

**Tom:** I would have put it a little more delicately, but, essentially, yes, that's precisely what I'm proposing. Before you both attack the idea, just listen to me....

**Peter:** I'm sorry Juliet. I agree with Tom. We must stop him at all costs. I've tried to persuade him to see sense; we all have, but, I'm afraid he's a lost cause. If it means we must do something to stop him talking...

**Juliet:** (*In a very disturbed way*) I can't agree to that! You are talking about....

**Tom:** Disposing of him? I know it sounds melodramatic, but what are the alternatives?

**Juliet:** I cannot believe we are having this conversation.

**Peter:** Tom makes sense...

**Juliet:** Makes sense? Murdering someone makes sense!

**Tom:** It never makes sense, but, it's the only option we have.

**Juliet:** What you're suggesting is absurd. Of course, Don will tell the Police everything. Of course, he'll implicate us, but we can't be seriously thinking about disposing of him. I'm not a murderer! I'm many things, but, not a murderer! Are you?

**Tom:** I'm not suggesting we murder him....

**Juliet:** What the hell are you saying then?

**Peter:** I think Tom is suggesting that we get someone to do it for us. Am I right?

**Tom:** Yes.

**Juliet:** So, we just look in yellow pages under, 'murderers', do we?

**Peter:** Juliet. I know this sounds ridiculous, like a bad dream, but really what are the alternatives? There's no way we can have a rational conversation with Don he just won't listen. You know he won't. I can't see another way.

**Juliet:** (*Staggered that they are so casual about the idea.*) Can't see another way? We are talking about someone's life here. There's already been one death and now we're plotting another. It's madness! Madness!

**Tom:** It's madness not to do it! I'm not trivialising the seriousness of what I'm proposing, but what are the alternatives? Are you prepared to spend an exceptionally long time in prison?

**Peter:** It is madness, Juliet, but Tom is right; it would be madness not to.

**Juliet:** (*At her wits end.*) We're not rationalising a business decision; we're talking about determining someone's life! Can't either of you see that? Let's suppose for one awful moment that we did what you said...? What makes you think that would solve our problems? Surely, we'd just end up with an even more complicated situation. Instead of the responsibility of a suicide to face up to, we'd be murderers, or complicit in murder.

**Peter:** Possibly, and of course I can see what you are saying, but, it's possible that the Police would put two and two together and make five....

**Juliet:** Make five?

**Peter:** They may link Don to James's suicide.

**Juliet:** I don't follow you.

**Peter:** Just for a moment let's assume we found someone to dispose of Don...

**Juliet:** Kill Don!

**Peter:** OK. Kill Don! It's highly probable that the suicide note that James left referred in some way to his innocence in the plot. The Police will investigate what has been going on in the company and we have no way of knowing what they would find, but, what we could do is vouch that the two of them, Don and James, had bitter arguments and we'd wondered for some time if they were plotting against the company. Most people would testify to the fact that Don was an odd character...

**Juliet:** I'm still lost.

**Tom:** It's perfect! If the two of you could pull it off it could be just the motive we're searching for.

**Juliet:** (*Frustrated that she can't understand what he is saying*) Can you explain that again, in words of one syllable.

**Peter:** Juliet, just listen for a moment! I went to the States for a board meeting, O.K? It was revealed at that meeting the business downturn was probably due to an internal conspiracy. I was asked to return to the UK early to investigate. I find out that James, Earl, and Don, were involved. Although James denies any impropriety, he couldn't cope with the idea of being imprisoned and commits suicide. Earl resigns and Don, who has been the mastermind and close to James throughout the conspiracy, becomes mentally unstable and is killed walking in front of a car!

**Juliet:** (*Laughing in a manic way*) Oh, please! You are not serious? Unstable and walks in front of a car! So, we just arrange for him to be mown down.

**Tom:** Stranger things have happened. A little bizarre I'd agree, but it could work. Do you have a better plan?

**Juliet:** Look, let me try and speak to him again. Perhaps he just needs reassuring.

**Peter:** What will you say? What could you say that would make him see sense? I think you'd make things worse. There's nothing to be gained.

**Tom:** O.K., speak to him, but, if you can't get through to him then we'll go with Peter's plan. Are you both agreed?

**Peter:** I can't see an alternative.

**Juliet:** I'll go and speak to him...

**Tom:** But, are you agreed that if you fail, we revert to Peter's plan?

**Juliet:** I'll speak to him. Don't press me further.

*(She exits)*

**Peter:** Let us know how you get on.

**Tom:** She'll have to agree. There's no chance she'll win him over.

**Peter:** Are you sure we are doing the right thing?

**Tom:** How can running someone down be the right thing. No; but, it's the only option.

**Peter:** I sincerely hope it doesn't come to it. How would we do it?

**Tom:** I have one or two contacts in mind. I'm sure a short 'phone conversation will have the matter

resolved in no time, Peter. I'm going home. I've a lot to do before a series of meetings tomorrow. If you hear anything let me know.

**Peter:** Of course.

*(Tom kisses Peter on the cheek as he exits. Peter sits in deep thought pondering what will happen)*

## **CURTAIN & INTERVAL**

### **ACT 111 Scene 1**

*(The scene is Don's sitting room at home. As the curtain opens, he's on the 'phone to Charles his fellow director. He's been drinking quite heavily and is slurring his words. He is holding a tumbler of whiskey as he speaks. Don is a bachelor and lives alone. The room is untidy but reflects his creativity. Computer magazines are evident on a coffee table as is a nearly empty bottle of whisky. Another unopened bottle sits next to it. Occasional furniture and books are evident)*

**Don:** Hello Charles..., you O.K? No. I'm at home. Just come in from the pub. Have you heard about James? You haven't! Of course, you wouldn't know. He's dead! Committed suicide in the grounds of the hotel, you know, where we had the meeting. That bastard Redfearn doesn't care. None of them do. No. I.... Yes, but there's more to it..., I can't say.... As much as I need to confide in someone I can't you see...? What you'll come over now? O.K., I'll see you in a few minutes. Bye.

*(He puts the 'phone down and staggers to the table where he empties the remainder of the whisky into his glass and opens the remaining bottle. The doorbell rings. He looks amazed, thinking that Charles had arrived; but, it's Juliet. He staggers to the door, speaking as he goes. The dialogue is heard off-stage)*

**Don:** That was bloody quick.

**Juliet:** Hello, Don. How are you? I'm pleased I caught you at home.

**Don:** Oh, I thought you were Charles.

**Juliet:** Charles?

**Don:** (*Slurring throughout*) I was just speaking to him on the 'phone. Bloody good chap. He's not like you lot. He's got integrity.

**Juliet:** You've been drinking!

(*They enter the room*)

**Don:** Wouldn't you, under the circumstances? Clearly not! You don't have a conscience, do you?

**Juliet:** Is Charles coming here?

**Don:** That's what I said.

**Juliet:** Why is he coming over?

**Don:** Got nothing to do with you. Do I need your permission or anyone's permission to invite people over to my flat?

**Juliet:** I just came round to see if you were OK, that's all.

**Don:** Why the interest? You've never shown any interest in me before.

**Juliet:** Don. Don't think that we are all...

**Don:** Evil! Well I do. Not one of you has any remorse about what we've done. All you're interested in is getting the money. You are not even worried about getting caught, but you will be, believe me.

**Juliet:** Look Don...

**Don:** I suppose they've sent you, have they? Try to talk me around?

**Juliet:** No, I just wanted...

**Don:** Rubbish! They sent you, didn't they?

**Juliet:** No. Quite the contrary, it was my idea.

**Don:** Your idea that you come and try to talk me around. Means the same thing to me! You're all the same.

**Juliet:** Don. I genuinely thought you'd be upset so I wanted to see if you were alright.

**Don:** You shouldn't listen to them. You're not like them. They are evil. You could see they didn't care a fiddle about James. What is the world coming to...?

**Juliet:** We've got to talk.

**Don:** Talk about what? Isn't it enough that we're responsible for James? It was our greed. We thought we could get away with it. We didn't think about the consequences. Money, that's all that mattered. It doesn't matter to me anymore; I can tell you....

**Juliet:** *(Said with great sincerity)* Believe me, Don, I do understand how you feel.

**Don:** *(Thinking that she had changed her stance.)* You do? So, you agree with me then, do you?

**Juliet:** Agree with you?

**Don:** That we should go to the Police and tell them everything. Get everything out into the open.

**Juliet:** No, I didn't say that...!

**Don:** (*Realising he had misunderstood her*) Why are you here then? They did send you. Told you to persuade me to stay quiet or else! I bet they wouldn't hesitate to threaten me in some way or other. I wouldn't put it past them.

**Juliet:** (*Becoming desperate*) Don, you must listen to me. James is dead, I know that. OK, I didn't like him or what he stood for, but I certainly wouldn't have wanted this for him. The fact is: he's dead, and we can't do anything about that now. But, what's the point of going to the Police confessing our guilt and spending years in prison? Do you really think going to prison will take the guilt away? Surely you don't want to go to prison, do you?

**Don:** You haven't been listening, have you! You don't listen! I don't care anymore. I can't live with this hanging over me. Oh, that's funny..., 'hanging over me'.

**Juliet:** But you must understand....

**Don:** Let me tell you what I understand. I can't live with myself knowing that I was responsible for that young man's death. I don't care what they do to me. Whatever it is, I deserve it. How can you live with yourself?

**Juliet:** Clearly if I could turn the clock back I would, but, I can't. None of us can. The choice as I see it is: that we can go to the Police and expect to spend a very long time in prison, or we could do what we can to see this thing through hurting no-one else in the process. I'm not interested in the money. I just don't want to go to prison.

**Don:** I bet.

**Juliet:** I will always have a conscience about what happened to James, that won't change, but I could do some good with my life if I have my freedom. Look, we could see this through together and when we

get the money we could work together in some charitable projects. We could vow to give all the money away to charity. Now that would make sense, wouldn't it? Isn't it better to have our freedom to do good work for others rather than rotting in jail? You wouldn't deny me my freedom, would you?

**Don:** Who am I to deny you your freedom? That's the job of the jury! I'm not denying you anything, but, don't expect me to be a part of it. If I choose to tell the Police what I know, then I will; and hang the lot of you.

**Juliet:** Don, I've tried; I've really tried. What can I say to make you see sense before it's too late?

**Don:** Too late? What do you mean, too late?

**Juliet:** It doesn't matter...

*(The ' phone rings. Don staggers to answer it.)*

**Don:** Hello Don Preston. Yes. Hello.... No, I can't; tomorrow I've too much to do. Thanks for thinking.... Yes, next time maybe.

*(The doorbell rings)*

**Don:** Look, I'll have to go, someone's at the door. Suddenly, I'm so popular.

*(Puts the phone down and exits to the front door)*

**Juliet:** I'd better go.

**Don:** No, you stay there. That'll be Charles. Just wait there.

*(Exits)*

**Juliet:** *(She sighs and says quietly to herself)*  
Oh, my god!

*(Don and Charles enter together)*

**Don:** Juliet's here.

**Charles:** Have you been drinking Don? Hello, Juliet. What are you doing here?

**Don:** We were just talking about James. *(To Charles)* Did I tell you about James?

**Charles:** *(Looking toward Juliet.)* That's why you asked me to come over, isn't it? Can't you remember? So, what happened?

**Juliet:** Yes, it's tragic.

**Don:** *(Angrily)* Tragic! Is that all you can say?

**Charles:** Are you OK, Don? Why are you so aggressive?

*(Don swaggers and falls into a chair the alcohol is catching up on him)*

**Don:** Aggressive. So, would you be. You don't know the half of it. I've just had a few drinks to forget. Forget this whole affair.

**Charles:** Forget what?

**Don:** The whole bloody affair.

**Juliet:** He hanged himself in the grounds of the hotel. You remember, we all left in the morning, but James was nowhere to be seen. He hadn't been in his room overnight and late the following day he was discovered.

**Don:** Yes. Left a note! A suicide notes! Couldn't cope with being accused, I'd imagine. Poor bastard: he didn't deserve this. He didn't deserve us exploiting him...

*(Juliet looks at Charles, horrified that Don will blurt everything out. Charles looks at Juliet, recognising that he is drunk and is rambling incoherently)*

**Charles:** *(To Juliet in a whisper.)* Is he OK?

**Don:** You don't have to whisper, you know. I'm not deaf. I can hear what you're saying and thinking. Do you want a drink, Charles?

*(Gets up and searches for the bottle of whisky and pours himself a large glass)*

**Charles:** No, thanks.

**Juliet:** I think you've had enough, Don.

**Don:** *(Launching at Juliet)* Now you're telling me I can't have a drink in my own home! You came here with a message from your masters; tell us what they told you to say; go on.

**Juliet:** Look, I'd better go. Are you coming, Charles?

**Don:** Go on; tell him why you came this evening. Tell him about James. Tell him what we plan to do.

**Charles:** *(Looks at Juliet)* I'm sure all this can wait until tomorrow Don.

**Don:** No. You should know. Ask her.

**Juliet:** Shall we go?

**Don:** The truth is, and what she won't tell you, is that we have been playing a kind of game, you see, Charles. A game! A game that ends up with people killing themselves! Is that the kind of game you like to play, Charles?

**Charles:** What are you talking about? This makes no sense.

**Don:** It's a game about greed. We didn't care about what happened to people. We did it to make money...

*(His expression tells the others that he is about to be sick)*

**Don:** I'm afraid I'm not feeling well.

**Charles:** Let's get him to the bathroom.

*(Charles and Juliet help him to the bathroom off-stage and Juliet returns. She goes straight to the 'phone and picks up the receiver. She calls Peter and speaks quietly)*

**Juliet:** Peter, listen I'm at Don's. I'll have to be quick. No sooner I arrived, Charles turned up. Don's drunk and on the verge of telling him everything. Before Charles arrived, I tried desperately to reason with him, but, you're right, he's just not prepared to listen... No... Not at all... Nothing...! OK. But should I stay and... Right! Look, I'd better go. I'll speak to you, later.

*(She puts the 'phone down as Charles enters the room)*

**Juliet:** How is he?

**Charles:** Drunk as a Lord. He's making no sense at all. I took him into the bedroom. He just flopped down and was rambling about a conspiracy or something. 'We did it. It's our fault'. What's he talking about, do you know?

**Juliet:** He's taken the suicide very badly.

**Charles:** I didn't know about James until Don 'phoned me earlier. It appears he just wanted to talk to someone. I must admit I didn't know Don was a drinker. But there you are, perhaps we never really get to know people that well.

**Juliet:** I'm sure he's not a hardened drinker, but sometimes people turn to drink in times of crisis.

**Charles:** Terrible affair; James, I mean; poor chap. Precisely, what happened?

**Juliet:** I received a 'phone call from the hotel, saying James had been found hanging from a tree within their grounds, and the Police had been called.

**Charles:** It's devastating. If it was suicide, it must have been an accumulation of the Tom Stafford thing, the gambling and the last straw Jenny leaving him? Personally, I thought Peter handled the interrogation very badly, but he didn't say enough to drive a sane man to suicide, did he?

**Juliet:** I don't know. I really don't know. He must have been riddled with guilt.

**Charles:** That's a strange expression under the circumstances 'riddled with guilt'. After all, he denied being involved and frankly I believe in his innocence. Yes, he admitted being a friend of..., what's the chap's name?

**Juliet:** Stafford; Tom Stafford.

**Charles:** Yes; Tom Stafford. But, that's hardly a good enough reason to commit suicide, if indeed there is ever a good enough reason to do it.

**Juliet:** Maybe there's more to it, who knows?

**Charles:** It just doesn't make sense. Maybe that's what Don was rambling on about. Perhaps he does know what happened.

**Juliet:** He's in shock. I wouldn't take anything he said as being credible.

**Charles:** In saying that, you think he does know something?

**Juliet:** I've no idea, but you can see the state he's in.

**Charles:** True. Presumably, the Police will want to make immediate enquiries within his family and people in the business.

**Juliet:** I'm sure they will.

**Charles:** So much for Peter wanting to keep quiet about all this.

**Juliet:** (*Thinking for a moment that he knows something.*) Wanting to keep quiet; what do you mean?

**Charles:** You know. When he arrived, he made a dramatic statement about not wanting the meeting recorded and that we were placed under strict instruction not to, 'breath a word outside of the four walls.

**Juliet:** Oh, I see..., yes, I remember... Look, shall we leave Don to sober up. It's probably best he sleeps it off. Come tomorrow, I doubt he'll remember a thing.

**Charles:** No... You go. Now I've made the effort to come over I'll wait a while to see if he's OK before I leave.

**Juliet:** He'll be fine. Perhaps you could see me to my car, I'm a little apprehensive in the dark.

*(Off stage Don is heard rambling)*

**Charles:** I'd better sort him out. Can you manage on your own? I'll walk you to the car if you wish.

**Juliet:** I'm sure I'll be fine. Good night Charles.

*(She exits, leaving Charles in the room. He is about to go and see how Don is when the 'phone rings. He answers it)*

**Charles:** Hello. This is Don Preston's 'phone.

*(He looks at the phone. The caller has hung up)*

**Charles:** Very odd.

*(Don is heard off-stage shouting and moaning. Charles goes to see how he is. He is heard talking to him off-stage)*

**Charles:** Come on, old chap, you've had too much to drink, that's all. Just settle down and get some sleep.

*(Don also heard off-stage)*

**Don:** Sleep! I can't sleep. Do you know what we've done? That poor lad, he's dead, you know. We killed him; it's our fault.

**Charles:** You'll feel better in the morning. I'll be next door for a while.

*(Charles returns to the sitting room; sits down and begins to read a magazine. The doorbell rings. He gets up and leaves the room to answer the door. He is heard off-stage)*

**Charles:** Hello, can I help you?

*(A gun shot is heard off-stage. Charles stumbles back into the living room and collapses to the floor, covered in blood. The front door is slammed shut)*

*(A pause before Don staggers into the room to find Charles dead on the floor. He's hysterical)*

**Don:** Charles. Charles! What happened! Speak to me! Charles.

*(He staggers to the front door off-stage and is heard shouting)*

**Don:** Help! Someone helps! Please help me!

## CURTAIN

### ACT 111 Scene 11

*(The following day at Tom Stafford's club; Juliet and Tom are together, waiting for Peter. Juliet is visibly shaken)*

**Tom:** So, come on tell me what happened before Peter arrives.

**Juliet:** I went to see him as I told you on the 'phone. He'd been drinking quite a lot before I arrived. He ranted on at me that we'd murdered James and that he didn't care what happened to him when the Police discovered the truth. I tried to sympathise and re-assure him that the suicide was the last thing we expected to happen, but he just wouldn't listen.

**Tom:** And...?

**Juliet:** He said that he'd invited Charles around to the house, presumably to tell him what happened and get it off his chest.

**Tom:** Bloody fool.

**Juliet:** He wasn't very coherent, but, carried on drinking. Well, I tried on several occasions to get him to see sense. I told him that going to the Police wouldn't solve anything, but he was insistent that it would. Just as I was about to give up and leave, Charles arrived. Don immediately started to

tell Charles that we were responsible for James's suicide. Charles just assumed he was rambling. At one point it looked as though Don was about to pass out, so we helped him to the bathroom and...

**Tom:** OK. Let's get to the 'phone call you received from Don.

**Juliet:** Eventually, I left, but Charles wouldn't come with me. I didn't want him to stay in case Don recovered and told him everything. It's such a mess.

**Tom:** Go on.

**Juliet:** Well, I left and drove home. I had only been in a couple of minutes when the 'phone rang. It was Don. He was in a terrible state. He could hardly get his words out. 'He's dead, dead. Charles, he's dead. He's been shot. You did it! You did it! He just kept repeating it, over and over.

**Tom:** The blithering idiots!

*(Suddenly realising that the shooting was Tom's doing; said very deliberately.)*

**Juliet:** You mean you sent somebody to kill Don at his flat; but they shot Charles by mistake?

**Tom:** *(He pauses before responding.)* Sending people around seemed the best way.

**Juliet:** But we agreed that I would speak to him. I would go to his flat and speak to him to persuade him...

**Tom:** There was no time to waste.

**Juliet:** No time to waste? But I was going to be there. I could have been shot.

**Tom:** But you weren't.

**Juliet:** What kind of man are you?

**Tom:** Look. After you arrived at Don's you called Peter and told him that he wouldn't listen and that he'd invited Charles around...

**Juliet:** Yes, I did.

**Tom:** Peter called me and told me what you'd said. It was obvious that we couldn't wait any longer. We had to act before Don told Charles everything. I had to act.

**Juliet:** You had to act! A quick 'phone call to friends and arrangements are made for someone to be shot. It's as simple as that? What kind of world do you live in, Tom? You are not the man I thought you were.

**Tom:** You're emotional! Let me get you a drink...

**Juliet:** (*Angry*) Emotional! Yes, I'm emotional. I'm a human being with feelings. I don't go around deciding to kill people...

**Tom:** It wasn't like that...

**Juliet:** It was precisely like that!

**Tom:** For god's sake. Can't you see I arranged this to protect you and Peter! If Don had told Charles everything that was corked up in his mindless head, you'd both be finished. Can't you see that?

**Juliet:** That's rich. 'Don's mindless head'! So, picking up the 'phone and arranging for a murder is not mindless? You did this to protect you. The last thing that would have crossed your mind was our welfare.

**Tom:** I did it for you! I was keen to act before the situation deteriorated further.

**Juliet:** So, you think with Charles dead, shot dead, our chances are improved, do you?

**Tom:** I wasn't to know that those idiots would shoot the wrong person, was I?

**Juliet:** Listen to yourself. You're so casual about all this.

**Tom:** I did it for you and Peter.

**Juliet:** That's the third time you have referred to the fact that you have done something to protect us. Do you think you are immune from all this? Do you seriously believe that you could walk away from this unscathed? You are involved and up to your eyes!

**Tom:** You're being a little melodramatic!

**Juliet:** I shall ignore that ridiculous comment!

**Tom:** Look, I'm sorry.

**Juliet:** Fifteen minutes earlier and I would have been at Don's flat when your thugs called; didn't you realise I could have been shot, myself?

**Tom:** I see. So, you're angry because of the timing, not the fact that I sent someone around?

*(With a look that could kill)*

**Juliet:** I credited you with more intelligence.

**Tom:** *(Realising he needs to make serious amends)* Look, I wasn't to know they'd go immediately. I just assumed by the time they got there you and Charles would have gone. Surely you can see that.

**Juliet:** *(Screams out)* It's a nightmare! A nightmare! I can't believe this is happening.

*(He puts his arms around her to comfort her)*

**Juliet:** Get off me! You're responsible for everything. The whole sordid affair was orchestrated by you. You persuaded us all to get involved in your conspiracy and now two people are dead!

**Tom:** Get a grip of yourself. You'll end up as crazy as Don.

**Juliet:** Have you no idea how insulting you are. How immune you are from reality. Can't you get into your thick skull what's happened?

**Tom:** Look...

**Juliet:** There's no point trying to sweet talk me; it doesn't work anymore. I must have been a fool.

**Tom:** It's a mess, I agree, but, if we can't keep our heads, if we can't act in tandem there's no chance of getting through all this. So long as we agree to a story between us the Police...

**Juliet:** Do you honestly think we could cover up all that's happened and get away with it? The police are not stupid. They've already questioned Peter at length and I'm sure Don has taken every opportunity to tell them everything they need to know. It's over, Tom. I'm afraid, it's over; and do you know, I'm relieved it's all out in the open.

*(Peter enters the room and is in an anxious state)*

**Tom:** Peter, what's happened?

**Peter:** That's what I want to know. How on earth did Charles get shot?

**Tom:** But the Police..., they've questioned you?

**Peter:** Yes; about James. What I knew about his mental state. That sort of thing!

**Tom:** And you said nothing about anything else?

**Peter:** Nothing. Of course not! But what happened to Charles?

**Tom:** I've just explained to Juliet: The gunmen must have gone straight to Don's after I spoke to them. Obviously, Charles was still there when they arrived, and well..., mistaken identity, I guess.

**Peter:** Well, I can tell you, if there had been a chance of concealing this affair the odds have narrowed considerably.

**Tom:** You mean Don has told them everything?

*(There's a knock at the door. It startles all three of them. It's Robert, the waiter)*

*(Conscious the last time he got shouted at he approaches Tom a little more cautiously)*

**Robert:** Sorry to disturb you Mr Stafford, but would you like drinks?

**Tom:** Peter? Juliet?

**Peter:** Brandy, please.

**Juliet:** Nothing for me.

**Tom:** Make that: two brandies, Robert!

**Robert:** Very well, Sir.

*(Exits)*

**Juliet:** Sorry, but can we go back a little, Peter? Were you aware that Tom was sending thugs to murder Don at his flat when you knew I'd be there?

**Peter:** *(Sensing a problem replies evasively)* I'm sorry I didn't...?

**Tom:** Yes, he was fully involved. Does that matter now?

**Juliet:** It matters to me.

**Tom:** We have more important things to concentrate on than dissect who said what to whom and when. What I want to know is: what Don has told the Police?

**Juliet:** I can't believe...

**Peter:** Apparently, he's told them everything! Including the fact that he believes the bullet that killed Charles was meant for him and was probably carried out by you, Tom.

**Tom:** Me? You mean he mentioned me?

**Peter:** Why are you so surprised?

**Juliet:** Because he doesn't see that he's implicated in this sordid affair!

**Peter:** What are you saying Juliet?

**Juliet:** He's as much admitted it. He sees himself as our saviour. In all of this he's been trying to protect us.

**Tom:** Oh, Juliet, please. Can we concentrate on trying to get out of this ghastly mess rather than bickering about who said what, when and why?

**Juliet:** No, we can't. Peter needs to know what you're really like!

**Tom:** Peter, please tell me what Don's said to the Police?

*(Sensing he ought to listen to Juliet but because of his infatuation with Tom ignores his instinct)*

**Peter:** I can't recall everything he told me, but clearly, he's implicated all of us, especially you. He's told them the story from start to finish.

**Tom:** But, why mention me?

**Juliet:** (*Exasperated*) Words fail me! Is it just your ego that clouds your thinking or do you have a more serious psychological problem? Why wouldn't he mention you? Why would you be immune? You are in this up to your neck. You came up with the conspiracy three years ago. You persuaded the three of us to get involved. If only we'd known. It was your idea that Peter force confessions out of James and Charles that led to a suicide. Not content with that, you decide that Don should be murdered, but instead it's Charles that dies. But, do you care? No. Of course not! What you care about is being implicated.

**Peter:** Juliet. Is this necessary? I'm sure Tom accepts that we're all involved but we need to find a way of dealing with this. We must find a way of defusing anything that Don has said to the Police.

**Juliet:** You just don't get it do you? He's used us. He has orchestrated this so that he wouldn't be implicated if it all went wrong. Can't you see?

**Tom:** Ridiculous! It's obvious the two of you are in the front line...

**Peter:** What does that mean in the front line?

**Tom:** You were the ones that passed the intelligence across. It's your company that's investigating a conspiracy. It is you that carried out the interrogation with your board. I'm just stating the facts.

**Juliet:** Now you see his true colours!

**Tom:** *(Realising he is on difficult ground)*  
Please. This is ridiculous! Can't you see if push comes to shove, and I can be kept out of this I can be working on the outside to get you cleared! I could ensure that...

**Juliet:** On the outside! You mean while we're on the inside serving long prison sentences, you're on the outside living the life of Riley. What planet do you live on? I can assure you that you are on the front-line standing shoulder to shoulder with us. Make no mistake!

*(Robert returns with the drinks and hands them to Tom and Peter and exits. Both swallow them down in one go)*

**Peter:** Tom. I have to say I'm somewhat confused and disturbed by what you've just said.

**Tom:** Look you needn't be. For some odd reason Juliet has the notion that I'm trying to avoid responsibility. Of course I'm not, but surely you can see if the two of you have any chance of getting out of this mess we have to come up with a plan, a cast iron plan that will persuade the Police that we're innocent parties.

*(Juliet turns and says to Tom bearing in mind that Peter is totally unaware that Juliet has been having an affair as he has with Tom)*

**Juliet:** I don't know what I saw in you. You are a weak, manipulative, pathetic ego maniac. Just like most of the men I have ever met. You used me.

**Tom:** Juliet please listen...

**Juliet:** You used all of us to achieve your objectives. You plotted a selfish scheme that would transform your company from being on the verge of financial collapse to a leading player in the market, and in the process make you an extraordinarily rich man. You almost did it! I give you credit! But you

did it playing on our fallibility and greed. James commits suicide; Earl is humiliated by your sexual pretence; I'm tricked into falling in love with you and now Charles is dead. I hope you can live with all that!

*(There is a pause as Peter starts to comprehend what's going on)*

**Peter:** I see. So, the two of you are having an affair?

**Juliet:** Were! Past tense! We were having an affair! God how stupid and naive I've been.

*(Peter Glares at Tom)*

**Peter:** I see. I think I know what you mean!

*(Juliet misses the significance of this. Tom feeling uncomfortable tries to change the subject)*

**Tom:** Look. I'm sorry if I've given you the impression that I am not fully culpable. Of course, I am. We're all implicated...

**Peter:** But there's more Tom. Isn't there?

**Tom:** *(Feeling uncomfortable)* Look Peter this isn't the time...

**Juliet:** More? What are you saying Peter?

**Peter:** I didn't know Tom liked his bread buttered both sides.

**Juliet:** Buttered both sides?

**Peter:** You really live dangerously don't you Tom?

**Juliet:** Why are you talking in riddles? Say what you mean!

**Peter:** Well. Our 'Tom' is not only prepared to deceive his wife, his mistress, our work colleagues, he's deceived me too.

**Juliet:** Let me get this clear. He's been having an affair with both of us. You mean you have...the two of you...together? I'm...I just don't know what to say.... the fact that you are not denying it...

*(She rushes at Tom and tries to hit him. He defends himself. She steps back, glares at him and rushes out)*

*(Peter turns to Tom and in a controlled and calm way but hurt by the revelation)*

**Peter:** What kind of person are you Tom? Juliet was right in all she said, I just didn't realise the significance of it at the time. You seem to want it all, laid out before you without a moment's concern about the feelings of others around you. You use people and take huge risks to flatter your ego, and yet when actually faced with the consequences of your actions as you are now, you can't believe it's possible for you to be caught out.

**Tom:** Peter. My dear Peter! It's understandable that you feel the way you do, but you must believe me, I have no feelings for Juliet I never did. She made numerous passes at me, and at the time, I felt it would help us to draw her in if I indulged her. I just played along with her.

**Peter:** Played along with her! Yes, that's precisely what you do. You use people, and as soon as they've served their purpose you 'dispose' of them. You wanted to dispose of Don and had no qualms in suggesting a way to achieve it, but it backfired literally, and Charles died. Remorse no! Fear of being implicated a big yes! I must tell you Tom I feel totally and utterly humiliated. To think that I soaked up all your charm and yes, I too fell in love with you. I must tell you that before too long the

Police will be knocking on your door and it will give me great pleasure to know that you will receive all you deserve.

**Tom:** Please listen to me. I know how you must feel but I am not the monster you are portraying. I'm sure in the same position I'd feel the same, but you must believe me that Juliet meant nothing to me...

**Peter:** I believe you. No one means anything to you.

**Tom:** Please just listen for a moment. Yes, I admit I used her, but I used her for our benefit...Look it's still not too late. The Police only have the statement of a lunatic to go on at this stage that's all. They've questioned you, but the fact that you're here means they don't suspect you....

**Peter:** Even now you're missing the point. The reality hasn't sunk in has it. You don't understand about people and their feelings. You don't understand because you don't care. You are driven by what's in it for you almost at any cost. Juliet was right. I was running a successful business before you perverted my mind with the idea of a conspiracy.

**Tom:** Peter, just listen to me!

**Peter:** I admit I was attracted to the idea by greed. But I was also attracted; blinded by you. I should have realised your company was on its knees from the outset. Rather than do what most business people would do in similar circumstances which is to fight back, you chose to use your charm, your ruthlessness, and I admit your creativity and

audacity to invent a conspiracy that seemed plausible.

**Tom:** But Peter, listen to me...

**Peter:** No. You listen to me! I sacrificed everything. I surrendered everything I have ever believed in for you. I became deceitful, dishonest, and ruthless. I still can't believe that I went along with the plot to have Don murdered!

**Tom:** Peter I'm so sorry. I just don't know what to say to make you realise that...

**Peter:** (*Angrily*) spare me the sob story! Even now you can't face up to the truth. You can't see who and what you really are. In an odd way I feel desperately sorry for you. Most people have a conscience. They know when they are lying to themselves but not you. You still disassociate yourself from blame, from responsibility for what's happened. I'm sure you'll sweet talk the Police when they arrive on your doorstep.

*(Tom realises that his overtures have failed he retaliates)*

**Tom:** As I said earlier, we covered our tracks well. Why on earth do you think the Police would believe I had anything to do with this? What motive would I have? You seem to forget Peter that it was you, Juliet and Don that conspired to steal company secrets. There is absolutely no evidence whatsoever that Greystone was the recipient of any of your inventions. I made sure of that. If your present evidence to the contrary I shall merely assert that the information you have was stolen from us. Believe me I have covered my tracks extremely well. You see the conspiracy, the murder and even the suicide all point in your direction. There is no way the Police will be able to level anything at me. I feel sorry for you Peter! Unfortunately, you have proved to be as weak and pathetic as Don. I can forgive Juliet, she was just besotted with me and rarely thought

rationally but you are a great disappointment! As guilty as I am, I've at least had the wit to plot every detail meticulously. Believe me the Police have nothing on me. Nothing at all!

**Peter:** You are wrong there. You see until Juliet blurted out that the two of you were having an affair, I was ignorant of the fact. I can't tell you what a relief that was (*Tom looks surprised at the statement*):

**Peter:** Don't worry Tom it will all become clear in a moment or two. That aside, I've been struggling mentally with this conspiracy for some time. Clearly, I'm not as ethical as Don otherwise I would have backed out long ago. But the longer it went on the more I felt compelled to bring it to a head. This morning it was a relief when the Police arrived at the office to question me over the death of James. You see Don had told them everything, and I mean everything! Even if I'd had the courage to lie, I wouldn't have known where to start to cover everything up. I came here today expecting you to try and persuade Juliet and me to continue with this charade and I was right. I told them as much. You see Tom, the Police immediately saw what Juliet and I hadn't seen, because we were blinded. They saw a very clever psychopath that would almost certainly have covered his tracks in the way you described. Having admitted everything to them, they asked if I would be prepared to co-operate with them and I agreed.

**Tom:** Co-operate?

**Peter:** Yes co-operate. The idea was to get you to admit your involvement in a way that would stand up in a court of law...

**Tom:** Oh please! What could you possibly do to incriminate me? We are here alone. There is no one here to witness what I've said. You are a fool indeed if you think I'm going to fall for that one. (*Says jovially*) Unless of course you have a hidden microphone ...!

**Peter:** How astute you are!

**Tom:** *(Gives a nervous laugh)* Oh really. You expect me to believe that?

**Peter:** Believe it or not it's true.

*(He shows him the lapel microphone)*

*(Peter goes to the door and opens it. A Policeman walks in)*

**Policeman:** Mr Thomas Stafford. I am arresting you on the suspicion of murder and conspiracy. Anything you say may be taken down in evidence and may be used in a court....

**LIGHTS FADE**

**FINAL CURTAIN**





