

IT'LL ALL BE FINE!

A Whitehall Farce

By Gareth Jones

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CHARACTERS

The Remainers:

HEATHER WILLIS

CABINET OFFICE MINISTER (F/50's) Downing Street's *Eminence Grise*.
Civil Service. Dominatrix. Dipso.

ELDRED DANCER

COMMERCE SECRETARY (M/40's) International Banker & Broker.
Smooth operator but prone to panic.

The Leavers:

SUNITA 'SOSHA' SURI

HOMELAND SECRETARY (F/40's) Constitutional lawyer. British Indian.
Wheelchair-bound. Pedant.

BERTRAM 'BERTIE' MAYPOLE

BRITANNIA SECRETARY (M/50's) County patriot. Publican's *John Bull*.
Choleric bigot. Silly Ass.

The Waverers:

OSCAR SAVORY

OVERSEAS SECRETARY (M/60's) Tabloid columnist. Media idol.
Society playboy. Machiavel.

The Secret Services:

TALIA LINN (F/25-30)

Communications/security ops. MI5.
Nerdy *ingénue*. Martial artist.

The Visitors:

BENNO BAUER (M/40-50)

Austrian immigration officer,
amateur archivist and con man.

BENJAMIN von BALDUR (M/40-50)

German diplomat. Hypochondriac.

SETTING

Number 10 Downing Street, The Cabinet Room. March 29th 2019

ACT ONE

The Downing Street Cabinet Room, or a spectral version of it, cavernous but claustrophobic and curiously shrouded, perhaps in anticipation of some apocalypse.

Even the portraits seem etiolated and lugubrious, as if Gainsborough had been retouched by El Greco designing Thomas Otway's 'Venice Preserv'd'.

The year is 2019. The date March 29th. A clock ticks on the mantelpiece. It's noon.

Imposing double doors upstage centre and three doors each to stage right and left. The only concession to modernity is the bank of monitors tucked upstage right, as if for decency's sake, supervised by a young woman in microphone and headphones.

TALIA: (into mic) ...yes he's landed, I can see them now...

Her voice echoes, slightly spooky. Shadowy figures enter from stage right and left.

TALIA: (into mic)...Northolt. Motorcade just leaving....

Police sirens echo from the monitor speakers.

TALIA: (into mic) ...Wilco. Twenty minutes.

Conspiratorial exchanges are whispered in penumbral fragments between the grey and black suits gathering in furtively small groups, one hardline, defiant...

OSCAR: Give him some bang for his buck.

BERTIE: Buck stops here.

SOSHA: No buts. No bucks.

OSCAR: Stronger. We'll come out stronger....

... and one moderate, apprehensive...

ELDRED: Concessions. Unpleasant but essential

HEATHER: Compromise. Must secure compromise!

ELDRED: Breathing space. Transition....

The young woman flicks impassively from one monitor to another.

TALIA: (into mic) ...Motorcade passing Grenfell Tower....

The two groups involuntarily merge in shared panic.

OSCAR: Anyone know this feller?

HEATHER: German Foreign Office.

BERTIE: Ghastly Kraut.

SOSHA: No no you can't say 'Kraut', it's not...

HEATHER: *(interrupts, from her notes)* Benjamin von Baldur.

OSCAR: Never heard of him.

HEATHER: Career diplomat. Middle East, Far East, Near East. Brussels.

BERTIE: Another one.

ELDRED: Friend of the German Chancellor.

Eyes swivel.

ELDRED: Some of us do our homework.

OSCAR: Ah, the big guns.

ELDRED: So keep your head down.

HEATHER: *(reads on)* 'Ambassador Plenipotentiary.'

BERTIE: Who?

HEATHER: It means he has full powers. Last word.

BERTIE: I'll last word him!

HEATHER: Twelve hours to go. If something doesn't happen today, we're out. .

ELDRED: No deal. No trade. No travel. No nothing.

HEATHER: On our own.

BERTIE: It'll all be fine.

Nervous or exasperated stares. The faint noise of angry protest rises from outside.

HEATHER: There is a traffic jam from Dover to Bristol. The airports are down. Supermarket shelves are empty. The peasants are revolting...

BERTIE: I don't get it. Why all this fuss?

ELDRED: You cocked it up. That's why.

BERTIE: I was perfectly reasonable. I explained our position and told them they could take it or leave it.

ELDRED: They left it.

BERTIE: They would. They're foreigners.

SOSHA: Strictly speaking 'foreigner' is not...

OSCAR: *(interrupts)* Now don't blame Bertie.

ELDRED: I'm not. I'm blaming you.

OSCAR: *(sighs)* Plus ça change...

TALIA: *(into mic)* Motorcade passing Nelson's Column...

BERTIE: Nelson. Now he taught'em a thing or two!

SOSHA: Mandela was a great man.

Leaden silence. HEATHER chooses her words with some delicacy.

HEATHER: Sosha... history did not begin last year. Can we please try and stay on the same page?

BERTIE: Come on chaps, this is a great opportunity! We've got'em scared!

ELDRED: Scared?

HEATHER: I don't think so.

ELDRED: Bye bye to our biggest market?! Exports drying up, imports too expensive to buy?

HEATHER: An offshore tax haven. Switzerland without the cuckoo clocks.

SOSHA: Don't worry. My friends in India have it all under control.

BERTIE: Bit of true grit and they'll roll back on all this rubbish!

OSCAR: I wouldn't push it Bertie.

ELDRED: What a stupid bloody idea! The economy wrecked, enemies everywhere, crowds baying for blood...

OSCAR: Oh come on now, I'm very popular.

ELDRED: Popular?

OSCAR: *(optimistically)* Wait till it gets *really* bad!

TALIA: *(into mic)* Motorcade entering Whitehall...

OSCAR: Bit of a shake-up, that's what we needed.

HEATHER: And you've certainly had it.

ELDRED: Which side were you on? Which side, eh?!

OSCAR: Both, of course. First one. Then the other.

HEATHER: And now?

OSCAR: My position hasn't changed.

BERTIE: Nor has mine. I'm stuck!

Fractional pause. SOSHA twiddles her wheelchair.

OSCAR: Don't you mean...

BERTIE: Stuck!!

SOSHA: Positions change. I don't.

ELDRED: You mean the lies are just the same?

OSCAR: Now hang about...

BERTIE: Who are you calling a liar...?

Fists are flexed, knuckles bared.

SOSHA: Technically speaking he did not call anyone...

ELDRED: *(interrupts)* The campaign was stuffed with them!

HEATHER: Unity, gentlemen! At this crucial hour we must...

Stress-victim ELDRED goes faintly demented, advances on the adversary.

ELDRED: The pound in free-fall, full employment flushed down the drain, the city in meltdown, the Bank of England teetering on the...

OSCAR: Just a blip.

BERTIE: It'll all be fine.

ELDRED: It will not be fine, you stupid little man!

BERTIE: Who are you calling little?!

SOSHA: He called you stupid.

ELDRED: This guy is a cannibal. He'll eat you for lunch!

A punch gets thrown. The two sides are soon embroiled in a life or death struggle.

TALIA: *(into mic)* Motorcade entering Downing Street.

HEATHER: Gentlemen! Think of the Prime Minister!

ELDRED: Stuff the Prime Minister! Who got us into this mess?

OSCAR: History.

SOSHA: The people.

BERTIE: Europe!

ELDRED: Arse! Total arse!

BERTIE swings a punch. ELDRED ducks and grabs him by the throat.

ELDRED: Whoever heard of a *referendum*?!

SOSHA: Fine legal instrument.

OSCAR: The party was divided.

ELDRED: It still is!

BERTIE swings another. ELDRED grabs him again.

OSCAR: The country was for it. So was the then PM.

ELDRED: That stupid bugger!

SOSHA: 'Bugger' is not strictly speaking...

OSCAR: *(interrupts, mildly)* Oh come on he's an Etonian.

SOSHA: That's why he resigned.

ELDRED: And as for this one...

He shouts contemptuously at someone lurking in the bowels of Number 10.

ELDRED: Can you hear me?!

HEATHER: Quiet! The Prime Minister is suffering!

ELDRED: Not enough! When will we finally get some leadership?!!

TALIA: *(into mic)* Motorcade drawing up.

ELDRED tightens his grip on the BERTIE's throat.

ELDRED: Now will you belt up and see reason?

BERTIE's eyes are starting from their sockets.

BERTIE: *(gurgles)* The voice of the people must be respected!

The demo noise swells from outside as the downstairs door opens.

ELDRED: Then listen to 'em, will you? That's what they sound like!

ELDRED loosens his grip. BERTIE miraculously revives and grabs him from behind. Hostilities renew. Outside car doors slam. Heavy footsteps crunch on pavement.

TALIA: *(into mic)* Ambassador entering downstairs.

HEATHER: Oh my God. Gentlemen! Ministers!

The grand double doors upstage centre are flung open, their guest enters with a confident, purposeful stride but recoils in the doorway at the pandemonium within.

Wearing a smart Alpine suit with high green collar and carrying a bulging leather briefcase, BENNO is the epitome of formal, traditional European diplomacy.

The warring parties abruptly disengage and straighten their ties.

HEATHER: Welcome to Number Ten!

OSCAR: *Soyez le bienvenu!*

ELDRED: He's German. Dolt.

OSCAR: Don't call me a dolt.

ELDRED: Cretin.

OSCAR lashes out. ELDRED ducks.

ELDRED: Imbecile.

BENNO frowns, disapproving. HEATHER smiles, wanly.

HEATHER: Welcome, Your Excellency.

BERTIE: Excellency?!

OSCAR sails forward to offer BENNO his hand.

OSCAR: Hi there Benjamin, how' ya doin'? Didn't I see you at Davos last year?

BENNO stiffens slightly. OSCAR wheedles.

OSCAR: Or was it the G20? The G7?

SOSHA: We're not in it.

BERTIE: Good riddance.

OSCAR: Security Council?

ELDRED: Way back when.

BENNO: *Guten Tag. Grüß Gott.*

HEATHER: I beg your pardon.

BENNO: *Jawohl!*

He looks round, warily. They stare, a new horror dawning on them.

HEATHER: Anyone here speak German?

Blank glances. BERTIE massages his neck, vindictive.

BERTIE: They tried French on me. The swine.

TALIA shyly raises her hand.

TALIA: GCSE.

OSCAR: It's a trick. They wouldn't.

SOSHA: Oh the fiends, the fiends.

HEATHER: Speak to him would you?

They ease TALIA forward, as if he might go off.

TALIA: *Wie geht's?*

BENNO: *Ausgezeichnet danke, und selbst?*

TALIA isn't sure she's got this.

HEATHER: An interpreter.

TALIA: We laid them off Ma'am.

ELDRED: I told you austerity had gone too far.

BERTIE: Kick him. It's all they understand.

BENNO pompously flourishes his English.

BENNO: You are ... pleased ...

OSCAR: Ah. Now we're getting there.

BERTIE: Blighter was shamming.

BENNO: ... to see me?

Wry smiles, some writhing and wringing of hands.

HEATHER: Did you have a good flight?

BENNO: *Wunderbar!*

He makes gliding gestures. HEATHER obligingly imitates.

BENNO: But the cars, the bikers... *Wa wa, wa wa...*

He makes a siren noise, waves his hand dismissively.

BENNO: *Sehr freundlich.*

TALIA: Very kind.

BENNO: But quite unnecessary!

HEATHER: Protocol.

BENNO: *Besonders mit dem Gedränge.* How you say... crowds?

ELDRED: Ah you noticed.

BENNO: Demonstrations, no? Very unhappy people!!

He laughs. They don't.

BENNO: So...

HEATHER unconsciously checks her watch.

HEATHER: Well... since you mention it...

BENNO holds up his briefcase.

BENNO: You were fighting, *ja*? To see this!

Pale laughter. He dangles it.

BENNO: You want to know what I've got!

HEATHER: Coffee?

Coffee is poured. BENNO helps himself to biscuits. Diplomatic niceties resume.

ELDRED: Milk?

BENNO nods, stirring the jug.

BENNO: *Vollmilch, oder...?*

HEATHER: So, may I introduce... I'm Heather Willis, the Cabinet Secretary.

She offers a perfunctory handshake and goes through the introductions.

HEATHER: Overseas Secretary, Homeland Secretary, Commerce Secretary, Britannia Secretary...

BENNO: All secretaries! Where's the Boss?

They stiffen slightly.

HEATHER: Not to be disturbed. This stays between ourselves.

TALIA: *(laboured)* *Boss ist nicht...*

HEATHER: *(quckly)* Thank you Talia.

They sip. OSCAR offers the sugar bowl.

OSCAR: *(sullen)* Zucker?

BENNO: Ah you speak German!

The others eye each other. BENNO munches and slurps.

BENNO: German is the ... mother tongue... of Europe!

TALIA: He's trying to say more Europeans speak German than any other first language.

BERTIE: They would. They're European.

OSCAR: And this is why we need a global trade deal. With people who speak English.

TALIA: *Und das ist warum...*

OSCAR: I've never quite understood why you chaps don't get it.

BERTIE: Well how can they? They don't have the lingo.

SOSHA: It took India several centuries

Exasperated, ELDRED seizes the initiative.

ELDRED: *Wir wollen ein Deal machen!*

BENNO: Ah, a deal! So I'm here!

HEATHER: *(purrs)* Good. Good.

ELDRED: *Ohne Barrikaden!*

TALIA: Without barricades.

HEATHER: Barriers.

BENNO: *Genau! Aber... (to TALIA)...*you speak the most wonderful English!

He beams, faintly lurid. TALIA smiles politely.

HEATHER: Shall we get down to business?

BENNO takes out a large bunch of keys, which he explores.

BENNO: The scans? *Die gescannten Dokumente!* You received the scans?

An alarmed exchange of glances. BENNO rattles the keys.

HEATHER: What scans?
TALIA: No idea Ma'am.
OSCAR: First I've heard.
BENNO: Yesterday. We discussed it.
OSCAR: We did?

BENNO lifts thumb and finger in phone mode.

BENNO: *Hallo, hallo? Hier spricht...*

HEATHER: With whom?

BENNO: *Mit mir!*

HEATHER: No no! With whom?!

TALIA: *Mit... er...*

ELDRED: Who... did... youspeak to?

BENNO takes a deep breath, makes an ample gesture.

HEATHER: Oh my God.

BENNO returns to his keys. None fits.

BERTIE: Security breach.

OSCAR: Wrong hands.

SOSHA: I keep saying to Cobra...

TALIA re-replaces her headphones and flicks a switch.

TALIA: *(into mic)* Communications....?

ELDRED: You *sent* your proposals?

HEATHER: Very considerate but...

OSCAR: Unorthodox. I love it.

TALIA: *(loud)* What e-address?

A list of dreaded faux pas leap to mind.

OSCAR: Not PM@...

TALIA: *(shouts into mic)* Communications?

ELDRED: Not Number Ten@...

TALIA: *(into mic)* Communications.... ?!

BENNO: *Nein nein, es war...*

He wracks his brain.

OSCAR: *(helpful)* Overseas Office@...?

ELDRED: Exchequer@...?

BERTIE: Britannia@...?

TALIA: *(shouts into mic)* For Christ's sake just give me the post room!

BENNO: *Ach was...* forget it!

He waves his hand dismissively.

HEATHER: Forget it? Leaking round Whitehall?

The key turns. He raises the briefcase.

BENNO: *Die Originalien!*... The or-i-g-i-nals!

His hosts circle cautiously around this explosive object.

BENNO: Ah! You are curious, no?

OSCAR: No. Er... Well...

BERTIE: No, dammit. So what's in it?

BENNO raises an eyebrow, playful.

BENNO: But first the story so far. Yes? You say that in the movies?

HEATHER: *(squirms)* It's true things went a little quiet. After...

BERTIE: I won't apologize.

OSCAR: He really shouldn't've. I mean... what a terrible...

BERTIE: How was I to know he'd shoot himself?

OSCAR: Not your fault Bertie.

BERTIE: Pretty bloody over the top.

ELDRED: Such a waste.

SOSHA: A shocking end. And illegal.

HEATHER: We were making such good progress.

A perfunctory silence. BENNO isn't sure he understands but agrees anyway.

BENNO: Progress!

BERTIE: So you're next.

BENNO taps the briefcase.

BENNO: Much work. Many years. But first...

He winks conspiratorially.

BENNO: *Lange Reise...*

They don't get it. He crosses his knees, grimaces.

BERTIE: What's wrong with him?

HEATHER: Talia?

ELDRED: Arthritis.

OSCAR: Knee trouble.

SOSHA: He should try mine.

TALIA: I think he needs the loo.

HEATHER: Oh good God how on earth is he going to last till midnight if he can't make it through the hypocritical banter all right then I suppose you'd better show him.

TALIA waves to BENNO who grips her hand as they move to the downstage r door. She opens it, upstage-wards, masking them from the others.

BENNO: *(whispers)* No, no... *ich wollte nur fragen...*

He whispers in her ear. The others are casing the briefcase.

OSCAR: Idiot! He's left the goodies!

SOSHA: Terrible security. What's in it?

HEATHER: Why *must* they send us the office junior *just* at this moment.

BENNO: (*whispers to TALIA*) Could you please explain me why...
He glances back. The others leap aside. He double takes. TALIA masks them.

BENNO: ...why...

TALIA: Ah, the morning routine. Aerobics. Yoga. Karate!
She performs an amazing martial arts routine on him. He freezes, gob-swiped.

BENNO: ...why is everyone so strange here?

TALIA: Strange?

BENNO: Is this usual behaviour in your country?

TALIA: Only in cabinet.

BENNO: (*vaguely*) Cabinet? Ah yes...
He glances back at the WC. She nods.

TALIA: Very close.

BENNO: Please show me...
They go. The others creep back to the briefcase.

HEATHER: Really the calibre of their people goes down with every round.

BERTIE: Idiot. Total arse.

SOSHA: 'Arse' is not technically...

BERTIE: I mean look at this. Just lying around.

SOSHA: Terrible.

OSCAR: As if he *meant* us to...

SOSHA: Destroy it.

HEATHER: Destroy it?!

SOSHA: Controlled explosion.

HEATHER: The Brussels peace offering?!

OSCAR: *(carelessly)* ...open it?

ELDRED: I see no possible reason to anticipate...

Ignoring his moral high ground they seize the case.

ELDRED: ...but then again perhaps...

He slides to join them.

BERTIE: Careful. It might go off.

SOSHA: So you open it.

BERTIE: Why me?

OSCAR: Bomb-disposal, wasn't it?

BERTIE: *(sniffing round the lock)* I'll have you know I served my country in mine-infested mountains and booby-trapped plains but nothing exceeds the treachery of a Brussels bureaucrat.

ELDRED: You watch out. It's all an act.

HEATHER: Nice cop, bad cop. You wait.

OSCAR: Well then...

They wrestle insanely with the briefcase, jemmying the clasp with bottle opener and corkscrew, shaking and pummelling. The downstage r. door opens on a loo flush.

TALIA: *(entering, over her shoulder)* There's a shower if you feel like freshening up....

BENNO: *(off)* Really? *(Shower noises follow)* Maybe later...

The others throw the briefcase one way then another and finally back where it was. BENNO returns brushing drips from his jacket. They split, straightening ties.

HEATHER: Back again? So soon?

BENNO: *Ja...* something in the water...!

They all laugh, ingratiatingly. HEATHER seizes BENNO hands, gushing.

HEATHER: Let's try and make a new start Benjamin. May I call you Benjamin?

BENNO: Benno, please! Benno!

HEATHER: Let's put it all behind us and face the future together!

BENNO: You work very fast in this country.

ELDRED: Only when we have to.

HEATHER drapes herself round BENNO.

HEATHER: (*purrs*) I can see we're going to get on fine.

BERTIE: Just fine.

OSCAR: Well then we're all fine.

BENNO admires the pictures to disguise his unaccountable unease.

BENNO: Nice place you have here.

They simper, accommodatingly. His real passion starts unwittingly to surface.

BENNO: Nice pictures. Valuable.

HEATHER: Aren't they *fine*.

OSCAR: Our recent Prime Ministers.

BENNO: Originals?

OSCAR: Weren't they just.

BERTIE points them out.

BERTIE: Churchill... Churchill.... Chur...

BENNO: Insured, *ja*?

He fumbles in his pockets.

BENNO: I can recommend a very good...

HEATHER: No no really...

BENNO: All for sale, *ja*? Going, going...

He mimes an auction hammer coming down.

HEATHER: (*blanches*) Well I don't think we're quite that...

ELDRED: How much?

BENNO: I collect, you know, in my spare time.

HEATHER: But how wonderful!

ELDRED continues the picture round.

ELDRED: Eden. Heath. Bargain basement.

BENNO explores behind one of them. An alarm goes off.

OSCAR: Thatcher.

BENNO: I can see!

ELDRED: She comes with a price attached.

OSCAR passes over two frames covered with black drapes.

OSCAR: Blair. Brown.

ELDRED: Any use?

Their eyes have moved to the fourth wall but they seem to run out of steam. A sigh.

HEATHER: Least said, soonest mended.

ELDRED: They come. They go.

BENNO: I knew Margaret Thatcher.

A sharp intake of incredulity.

BENNO: Yes, yes, Thatcher loved a good joke

He laughs uproariously, re-examining the alarm. The others observe.

ELDRED: We sometimes forget that Mrs Thatcher created the Single Market.

BERTIE: Not everyone's perfect.

ELDRED: We should protect her legacy.

BENNO nods knowingly as the alarm gives off a bleeping sound.

SOSHA: You don't imagine this place is bugged, do you?

BENNO: Bugged? What is bugged?

HEATHER: Nothing. Nothing at all.

TALIA: (*helpful*) It means listening devices, surveillance, hidden microphones.

HEATHER: Thank you Talia. *Bugs*, that's all.

ELDRED: My colleague has had a nasty outbreak of...

SOSHA: I beg your pardon?!

ELDRED: I wouldn't get too close.

HEATHER: Let's talk about Europe, shall we?

BENNO starts dismantling one of the bug devices. They peer anxiously.

BENNO: Yes, yes. Europe is a good joke.

The bug delivers a hefty dose of static and a puff of smoke. He flicks his fingers.

BENNO: This bug does not meet EU safety standards.

SOSHA: I should hope not.

BERTIE: We can burn things down on our own thank you very much.

ELDRED: (*discursive*) Fire of London. Guy Fawkes. A few martyrs.

BENNO: Ah, history! You see? My English gets good!

HEATHER: Better. My English gets better.

OSCAR: Is getting better.

TALIA: Improving.

BERTIE: No it's not.

SOSHA: It leaves room for amelioration.

BENNO's mobile phone goes. He taps his pockets.

BENNO: I know, I know. I did Abitur in English! Excuse me.... (*into phone*)... *Ja, gut angekommen. Alles bestens...*

The others watch him warily, exchanging glances.

OSCAR: Brussels.

BERTIE: So bloody like them.

HEATHER seizes the opportunity to regroup and ushers the others out.

HEATHER: HQ calling? We'll leave you to it!

BERTIE: Busybodies. As if this was anything to do with them.

HEATHER: Talia? (*nods at BENNO*) South Bank. Codebreakers!

TALIA nods and replugs some switches.

TALIA: Sparrow to Golden Eagle can you hear me...

The ministers lag behind, eavesdropping. TALIA sighs with frustration and leaves by the upstage l. door behind her, muttering.

TALIA: Why do I always have to ask three times...

HEATHER: Gentlemen? Some courtesy to our guest?

BERTIE: Courtesy?

She waves them out and comes back for SOSHA in her wheelchair.

SOSHA: You said 'gentlemen'.

HEATHER: Yes Sosha that's what's known as a euphemism.

SOSHA: I am *not* a gentleman!

HEATHER: And nor are they.

She flicks off the brakes and trundles her out. OSCAR creepily waylays her in the door, leaving SOSHA stuck and craning round to eavesdrop.

BENNO: (*on phone*) *Ja hinter der Tür... genau, wie üblich...*

OSCAR: (*murmurs*) You do the deal, I'll sell it.

HEATHER stares at him, icy. He is all sweet reason.

OSCAR: You can't do this without me Heather and you know it. Chancellor. Deputy PM. Name your price.

HEATHER: I don't have a price.

OSCAR: Now don't play hard to get.

HEATHER: And don't try that one! If you dare so much as to...

OSCAR: *(nostalgically)* Remember that time...

HEATHER: You wouldn't. Not even you...

But OSCAR has sidled off, taking SOSHA with him. HEATHER lingers, faintly insecure, to watch the end of BENNO's call.

BENNO: *Ja, sehr positiv... Ja ich ruf sie an! Versprochen! ... Muss mal gehen... Ja ja ja tschüssi!*

He hangs up. A moment's pause.

BENNO: My wife!

HEATHER nods, unconvinced.

BENNO: Women! You know the way they...

He fights off a fit of the giggles. HEATHER doesn't. He waves it aside, snaps out of it.

BENNO: *...darf nicht vergessen...* I have a niece in London, I promised to phone her.

HEATHER stares in complete disbelief. BENNO spells it out.

BENNO: My wife. My niece.

TALIA: *(in upstage l door)* Ma'am? Golden Eagle says...

With a coy smile she's gone, dragging out TALIA with a venomous hiss.

HEATHER: Didn't they teach you anything?

BENNO abruptly finds himself alone. He takes out his phone, humming to himself, slightly puzzled at the turn of events but prepared to play things his way, muttering under his breath as reads a number from a scrap of paper and dials.

BENNO: *Vier vier... das ist ja England... dann...*

He jabs the dial button and waits, then grunts, disappointed.

BENNO: *(into his mobile, rather flat)* Hallo you don't remember me, I am your uncle. Uncle Benno. From Austria. I am in London. Auctions. You know, antiques and bla bla bla...

He hangs up, cut off, disgruntled, and stares at his phone.

BENNO: Beep! Beep! Beep! No network?!

He returns towards the loos downstage r., searching for a line and dialling again. TALIA and HEATHER re-enter upstage l. in a heated whisper. The others re-enter from midstage l. and upstage r. to conspiratorial huddle.

TALIA: They're baffled, Ma'am. Never had a code like it.

HEATHER: What do they expect, a lexicon?

TALIA: He keeps speaking about his wife, they think that might be Brussels, and a niece, that could be the German Chancellor but they're really not sure at all.

HEATHER: This country cracked the enigma code and now look.

BERTIE: Too many immigrants. Last call I made I had to...

SOSHA: Bertie that was a call centre in Mumbai.

From the loos comes the sound of frustrated German muttering.

SOSHA: Oh the fiends, the fiends...

BERTIE: Devilish clever.

OSCAR: Stuck without intelligence. At a moment like this.

ELDRED: Oh surely you're used to that.

A loo flushes off.

OSCAR: There goes the evidence.

HEATHER: Into battle then...

BENNO re-emerges from the loos downstage r., shaking his head.

BENNO: No connection. Only my wife.

HEATHER: So...

OSCAR: Let's talk turkey.

BENNO: My wife?

HEATHER: No no... that just means...

BENNO: Turkey? Ah Ottomans!

OSCAR: Not Ottomans.

BENNO: Not otto notte ..not tutto ?

He jolts himself out of it.

BENNO: Nice people. You like them?

OSCAR: Not much. Not here.

BERTIE: Not on your Nellie!

BENNO: Nellie?

BERTIE: *(roars)* Fanny!

BENNO: Who are these girls?

HEATHER takes a deep breath.

HEATHER: Shall we start again?

ELDRED: You've come with a new brief.

SOSHA: A sweetener perhaps.

BENNO nods enthusiastically and fingers the clasp of his briefcase.

OSCAR: Immigration?

BENNO: Ah. How did you know?

Taken aback, he surveys the triumphant glances round the room.

OSCAR: Just a hunch.

BENNO: You know something about me?

BERTIE: Immigration controls.

BENNO: *(dismayed)* Yes but I try to keep that secret.

HEATHER: A secret codicil. Interesting.

BENNO: Documents are my hobby.

SOSHA: *(spells it out)* You make stricter... immigration... controls!

BENNO: Yes and no. Yes in theory but no in practice.

A fractional hesitation.

OSCAR: Shouldn't that be the other way round?

BERTIE: Theory? We're still on *theory*?

SOSHA: (*shouts*) Border controls. You've come about border controls!

Delighted to digress, BENNO forgets the briefcase.

BENNO: No, my rule is, always let them in. I mean, why pretend? They'll get in anyway and they're just poor bastards doing no harm so why not?

HEATHER: (*shaken*) This is not what...

SOSHA: (*severe*) Not the way we do things in this country.

BENNO mimes the routine of stamping forms.

BENNO: It's just a piece of paper! What difference where the stamp goes, what the name is, they need to go somewhere.

BERTIE: Complete freedom of movement?

BENNO: Don't you like freedom? This is the home of freedom!

ELDRED: (*open-armed*) At last!

OSCAR: You can have too much of a good thing.

BENNO: Your country is the land of the free!

BERTIE: That's why we're taking back control.

BENNO: Forget it. Just have fun.

BERTIE: *Fun?!*

OSCAR: Down boy.

ELDRED: So we can stay in the Single Market?

BENNO: Double, twice double market!

His hand goes back to the briefcase but he decides to lecture instead.

BENNO: Fruit and vegetables - market. Washing powder - supermarket. Beer - hypermarket. Housing...

His hand waves to and fro, considering.

SOSHA: Property market.

ELDRED: City of London. Has privileged access.

BENNO: Of course. Of course. London is London.

ELDRED: Our finance sector has been suffering terribly.

BENNO: So has mine!

He laughs uproariously. His hosts pale with affront.

OSCAR: He's laughing at us.

BERTIE: At us? Why?

ELDRED: Inexplicable.

HEATHER: Negotiating tactic.

SOSHA: Oh the fiend, the fiend...

BENNO calls himself to order and takes the briefcase.

BENNO: Now... *mal schauen*...

But his phone goes again. He snaps it. ELDRED quietly collars HEATHER in seductive mode.

BENNO: *(on mobile) Aber nein, vor der Tür... vor, hinter, schau mal nur!*

ELDRED: *(murmurs)* It's going our way. PM will be out by tonight.

HEATHER: Name your price. Chancellor. Deputy Prime Minister...

ELDRED: *(laughs, suggestively)* Come on you know I'm the one.

HEATHER: Not the only one...

BENNO: *(into mobile) Da siehst Du...?*

He hangs up with an exasperated sigh and finally undoes that clasp.

BENNO: Even simple things need explaining!

They warily agree. He waves it aside.

BENNO: *Ja endlich.* Now...

Out comes a clutch of dusty documents. As if he had personally conjured them.

BENNO: *(portentous)* You see!

OSCAR: What?

BENNO: You don't know?

Blank, suspicious glances.

OSCAR: Oh get on with it man!

BENNO: Documents! History! *Archive!*

He blows at the collection. A cloud of talcum powder rises. They cough.

BENNO: I love libraries. Don't you?

BERTIE: No.

OSCAR: Only the Bodleian.

BENNO: These have been forgotten for centuries...

He lifts one parchment with infinite care, as if addressing a class of wayward children

BENNO: The Marriage Contract between Queen Mary Tudor and Philip the Second of Spain.

A Pause.

HEATHER: Yes?

BENNO: Beautiful, no? Worth the price?

ELDRED: What price?

BENNO: It gives Philip the crown. King Felipe of England.

BERTIE: King Felipe? A Spaniard?!

BENNO: Philip and Mary. You see...she signs.

OSCAR: Bloody Mary.

HEATHER: Good idea.

She turns to the drinks cabinet with shaking hand.

BENNO: Funny, *ja*? Their kids take the throne!

OSCAR: Mary had none. If memory serves.

BENNO: But Felipe did!

SOSHA: Are you saying...

BERTIE: Are you *implying*...?!

BENNO: Yes, yes! The Armada...

He makes extravagant noises of naval combat.

BENNO: Big mistake. Philip was right!

OSCAR: The *Armada* was *right*?

SOSHA: Under maritime law no power may....

BENNO: You English! Rebellious subjects! Your Queen Elizabeth was a bastard!

BERTIE: A *bastard*?! *Queen Elizabeth*?

He hurls himself at BENNO, who has turned back to his briefcase just in time, leaving BERTIE flailing with his colleagues, trying to get at him.

BENNO: Funny, *ja*? England belongs to Spain!

BERTIE: *Spain*?!!

BENNO: Like Catalunya!

He creases with laughter. OSCAR holds onto BERTIE.

OSCAR: Steady. Steady!

BENNO: Not just Gibraltar. That's Arab anyway.

OSCAR: Arab?!

BENNO: Saudi. You like Saudi?

BERTIE growls, hackles rising. OSCAR tries to soothe.

BENNO: (*waves dismissively*) *Ja ja*... they own London already.

He hoots with laughter, wipes his eyes apologetically.

BENNO: Only joking.

OSCAR: I'll teach you...

BENNO: Nice neighbours.

OSCAR launches into the fray but ELDRED blocks him and BENNO has already turned away.

ELDRED: Down boy.

BENNO: Now... *was kommt jetzt*.... what have we here?

He rummages delicately, with a collector's fingers.

BENNO: Ah! Mary Queen of Scots, her marriage to the French Dauphin. Scotland given to the French. When she dies.

BERTIE: The *French*?

BENNO: Amusing, no? Elizabeth cuts off her head. How dumb is that?

BERTIE: The *French*?!

He throws himself at BENNO just as he turns away and has to be equally restrained.

OSCAR: All right old boy.

BENNO launches into a jolly rendition of the Marseillaise. BERTIE attempts God Save the Queen but can't get past the second line. They run out of breath.

SOSHA: But India is still British! Britain is still India!

BENNO: No no. The Mughals give India to Vasco da Gama. Portugal!

He rummages, as if in search. HEATHER wipes Bloody Mary from her mouth.

HEATHER: And is this your negotiating position?

BENNO: These documents are priceless!

OSCAR: Five hundred years of British history? Wiped?!

BENNO: Funny, no?! Big sell!

He beams broadly. They're too exhausted to react.

SOSHA: The fiend. Oh the fiend.

ELDRED: Well I'll be damned.

SOSHA: You are. You are.

OSCAR: They wait till now and pull this one on us.

BERTIE: They think we're down. They think they've got us on the ropes. We'll show'em!

OSCAR: Attaboy.

BERTIE: We saw off the Blitz.

OSCAR: Ah the Blitz.

BERTIE: It'll all be fine!

It clearly won't be. An exchange of glances.

HEATHER: What do you want?

BENNO strolls round, twiddling his thumbs.

HEATHER: Are you saying... Europe *owns* these islands...

BENNO: Read the documents!

OSCAR: You're selling us historical fiction!

BENNO: No no! Fact! Not fiction! *Authentisch!*

HEATHER: As if the United Kingdom never existed...

ELDRED shimmies up to him, knowingly taps him on his Alpine collar.

ELDRED: Does this mean we can't leave Europe at all?

BERTIE: Traitor!

SOSHA: Thwarting the will of the people!

ELDRED: Does this mean...

HEATHER: ...it might be *illegal* for us to leave?

OSCAR: Don't put words in his mouth.

ELDRED: Let the man speak!

BENNO: The documents speak for themselves.

HEATHER: Tell us, please. We're interested to hear your *personal* view...

BENNO: Ah my *personal* view...

HEATHER: (*warily*) Your *personal* view...

BENNO: As a *private* citizen...

OSCAR: As... *private* citizen...

ELDRED: Of our current politics.

BENNO: Your *politics*? Really?

HEATHER: You can be quite candid.

BENNO is rising to the idea.

BENNO: On your *plebiszit* for instance...

OSCAR: Plebiscite.

TALIA: Referendum.

They nod, encouraging. BENNO draws a breath, then suddenly senses a trap.

BENNO: No harm, ok? We make a deal!

HEATHER: No no no no. No harm at all. The deal is still....

OSCAR: ... miles away.

BENNO nods, draws a breath, his hand shoots out.

BENNO: No revenge!

HEATHER: Nooo...

BERTIE: Depends.

HEATHER: Well not yet anyway.

BENNO searches for a good opener but fails entirely and instead appears to be suffering a spasm of laughter that gradually overcomes him, with all the spluttering gesture that entails.

The others watch, stony-faced, uncomprehending. He waves them away.

BENNO: Ok ok... *ich erzähl mal...* Do you know the one about...

He corpses again. Then tries afresh.

BENNO: There was once a Briton and a European in a lift.

He suppresses giggles.

BENNO: Except they didn't know which was which. Until the Briton said: 'I have to get out.' What floor? asked the European. But the Briton had already jumped.

He falls silent and wipes away a tear.

BENNO: That's so sad. So sad!

Then he slowly dissolves again in laughter.

BENNO: They were on the twenty-fourth floor! And he... he...

He makes the relevant plunging gestures.

BENNO: And you know what's really tragic?

His interlocutors do not grace him with a reaction.

BENNO: They were going up.

They shift from foot to foot.

BENNO: The lift was going up. Right to the top. Great view, nice restaurant...

He blows out.

BENNO: But he jumped. No reason. He jumped.

He wipes his eyes and starts to collect his documents.

BENNO: So you want a deal or not?

His audience is suddenly galvanized.

HEATHER: Don't go. It's so nice to see you.

BENNO: Yeah yeah it's nice but waste of time. You haven't even made an offer.

HEATHER: Please.... please wait just a moment...

BENNO: Why?

HEATHER: I think we should maybe consult the Boss.

This triggers a default alarm bell somewhere in them all.

OSCAR: Is that wise?

SOSHA: I thought we had a truce.

ELDRED: Events, dear boy. Events.

HEATHER: Maybe ... if we give ground...

BERTIE: Never!!

The HEATHER backs out to the upstage r. door, the others pile after her. OSCAR holds her at the last moment.

OSCAR: *(hisses)* We have a pact, Heather. Don't forget it!

HEATHER: All depends.

OSCAR: Secrets, remember? That closet...

ELDRED looks back, suspicious. OSCAR makes to go but hangs around in the doorway.

ELDRED: What does he want?

HEATHER: Nothing you need to know about.

She eases him out, with a winsome wave at BENNO.

HEATHER: Back in a jiffy.

BENNO waves, unconvinced. ELDRED makes a last play.

ELDRED: Wouldn't check the markets would you?

HEATHER finally drags him out. OSCAR sticks his head back in.

OSCAR: *A tout à l'heure!*

BENNO considers his documents, consults his mobile, observed by TALIA.

TALIA: Can I offer you some refreshment?

BENNO: *(distracted)* No, no thank you.

He strolls round, weighing up the art works.

BENNO: I am having a very strange day. It must be jetlag.

She smiles sympathetically.

BENNO: A curious sense of unreality.

TALIA: Like a dream?

BENNO: Yes, yes. For instance, are you there? Really there?

TALIA: That's very philosophical.

BENNO: Ah, you agree. Disturbing. Now that will be a Gainsborough.

TALIA: Reynolds.

BENNO: Reynolds. I said Reynolds.

TALIA: And that's...

BENNO: Reynolds

TALIA: Gainsborough.

BENNO: Gainsborough. That's what I said.

She smiles. He bristles.

BENNO: Do you take me for an amateur?

TALIA: Shouldn't think you have much time for art.

BENNO: Quite the contrary. I keep my hand in.

TALIA: You paint?

BENNO: Draw, sketch, print, copy...

TALIA: You must be very talented.

BENNO: Are you calling me a forger?

TALIA: No of course not!

BENNO: I can tell a fake when I see one... For instance...

He glances round, searching, his forefinger comes to rest pointing at TALIA.

BENNO: You.

TALIA takes a step back.

TALIA: What can you mean?

BENNO: You do not belong here.

TALIA: Well it's true I'm actually from Estonia but...

BENNO: Ah. I have family in Estonia.

TALIA: ...but I haven't been there for years!

BENNO: Never mind. They will send you back. Whoosh. Just like that.

TALIA: That's ridiculous. They've trained me, promoted me...

BENNO tuts, waves a finger.

TALIA: I hold valuable state secrets!

BENNO: Such as?

TALIA: The Downing Street pin number and

She abruptly stops, shocked at herself. BENNO leans in, suggestive.

BENNO: Write them down, that's my advice. Throw in some new ones, just to keep them thinking. Get a signature, go to Ecuador. That reminds me I must phone my niece...

He pages through his mobile, his brain slightly scrambled.

BENNO: *Wie heisst sie nun...*

TALIA: You don't know her name?

BENNO: Niece! Niece is her name! *Nichte, nicht, nicht? Nichte!*

He's about to dial when a side door opens and the HEATHER hastily dives back in.

TALIA: Ma'am can I have a quick...

HEATHER: I have discussed the whole situation with the ...

She twitches slightly. BENNO catches the bug. HEATHER snaps out of it.

HEATHER: ... the Boss ...

BENNO: So who is in charge here, exactly?

HEATHER: Good question. Can't say. May take a bit longer. The Boss is pretty stubborn. How would you fancy forgetting about the whole affair?

TALIA is desperately hovering.

TALIA: Ma'am may I...

BENNO: The whole...?

HEATHER: The whole thing. Never happened. No hard feelings. You go home and tell them we're quits. You win. Return to the *status quo ante*.

BENNO stares incomprehending.

HEATHER: That's Latin.

BENNO: I know it's Latin. That's what worries me.

HEATHER: No Article 50, never triggered. You never came here. We never had this conversation. You take your dusty old documents and you can put them anywhere you like.

BENNO: You mean...?

HEATHER: That's exactly what I mean.

BENNO: You're telling me...

HEATHER: Well not *telling* exactly....

BENNO: To go stuff my documents...

HEATHER: No no.

BENNO: What then?

HEATHER: Not in so many words.

BENNO: How many then?

HEATHER: None, really. Just...

BENNO: Yes?

HEATHER: Just go! With the documents!

BENNO: No! You pay me for the documents!

HEATHER: Pay? Why should we *pay*?

BENNO: After all this?! After all my travelling and the costs and the *Wa Wa Wa* you're saying I just *go*?

HEATHER: Well why not. You don't belong here.

BENNO: This is war!

HEATHER: What?

BENNO: I said war!!

HEATHER: That's what I thought you said.

BENNO draws himself up to his full height.

BENNO: On your own heads shall it land!

HEATHER: No, oh my God no. Our fighter jets are down and Trident's in dry dock and the troops haven't been paid and...

BENNO: You should have thought of that before insulting me!

HEATHER: A European war is a very nasty business, you're too young, you wouldn't remember...

BENNO: Well now I can find out!

He starts scrolling up the documents in a fury.

TALIA: Ma'am I need a word. Like now!

HEATHER: Oh my God what've I done. No please don't...

She spreads out the documents again, brushes down BENNO's smart suit.

HEATHER: We love your documents, we love you too! Look I'll go back to the Boss, ok? Bit temperamental but I'll see... Don't go, ok?

She scuttles out backwards through upstage r. door, where TALIA catches up.

TALIA: Ma'am something's wrong! He's not behaving....

HEATHER: Well do your duty girl!

The door slams. TALIA turns, shocked.

BENNO: With people like that what chance you'll have a pension?

TALIA: Why shouldn't I?

BENNO: Look what they did to Mary Queen of Scots.

TALIA: They wouldn't!

BENNO tuts, turns her face to profile, winces and turns away again.

TALIA: What?!

BENNO makes a chopping gestures, leans on her shoulder to hide his eyes.

TALIA: You're making this up as you go along...

She backs away, suddenly wary.

TALIA: Are you trying to *turn* me?

BENNO: Turn? Well... I... not yet, anyway, but if you're free this evening I could always find a ...

TALIA: That's just what they warned me!

BENNO: ...a nice little hotel and...Who? Who warned you?

TALIA: MI...

She breaks off.

BENNO: Five, six, seven...?

TALIA: Not telling!

BENNO: So how can I persuade you?

TALIA: Oh my God this came up in practicals...

BENNO: Seeing we're alone...

TALIA: We're not. Where's the manual?

She flings open the storeroom door, downstage l. and rummages.

TALIA: What do I do now...?

There's a commotion from behind the next door mid-stage l. and BERTIE charges in, pushing the storeroom door shut on her.

BERTIE: War then, since that's how you want it!

BENNO leaps backwards across the table.

BENNO: War?

BERTIE: Now. Let's settle this right here.

He flourishes two épées. BENNO backs away, aghast.

BERTIE: Why waste millions of lives when one rapier will do the trick?

BENNO: No no....

BERTIE: Hector and Achilles. Sorab and Rustum. Abdullah Bulbul.
We have all day!

BENNO: I apologize. I apologize!

TALIA: *(stuck inside storeroom)* Help! Let me out!!

BERTIE: I'm going to stick you to that cabinet along with your documents...

BENNO: I know you are but you'll regret it!

BERTIE: However I'm an Englishman. I'll give you a fighting chance...

Breathing hard, he throws BENNO one of the épées. BENNO reflexively catches it.

BERTIE: Then I'll stick you to that cabinet along with your...

BENNO: No! Don't spoil the furniture... and please mind my documents!

BERTIE lunges, BENNO shuts his eyes and waves his sword. TALIA bursts from the storeroom and has to take cover. She reaches for her mic, but one sword stroke cuts the wire in two. She ducks. BERTIE gives chase, BENNO swings blindly and pinions BERTIE by his sleeve to the cabinet.

BERTIE: Ah!!!

BENNO: Oh my goodness I'm so terribly sorry...

He runs to the loo door downstage r., screaming.

BENNO: Murder! Murder!

A loo flushes, ELDRED emerges.

ELDRED: Is nothing sacred?

BERTIE wrenches free, leaving much of his shirt behind, and advances wildly.

BENNO: Oh thank God I thought you were dead.

BERTIE: Dead? I'll give you dead!

He's just about to skewer BENNO to the mid-stage l. door when it opens on OSCAR, crushing BENNO behind the door and nearly skewering OSCAR instead.

BERTIE: By God sir I nearly killed you.

OSCAR glances at the blade quivering beside his ear.

OSCAR: By God sir so you did.

ELDRED: Try again?

OSCAR slams the door, flattening BENNO behind it.

OSCAR: We've got a plan. The Boss will love it. Once it's done.

He drags BERTIE back out again, upstage r.

ELDRED: Oh no you don't...

He chases them out. The door closes. Abrupt quiet. Bar the heavy breathing. TALIA emerges from under her console.

BENNO: Is everyone mad?

TALIA: Pretty much. This has been going on for months.

BENNO: But I only just got here.

TALIA: Too late!

BENNO weighs up his chances of escape and backs towards the double doors.

BENNO: Strange, I've just remembered...

TALIA: Not so fast *signor!*

BENNO: *Signor?*

TALIA: I've rumbled your game...

BENNO: Game? You call this a game?!

TALIA: You're going nowhere!

BENNO: Help! Help!

BENNO tries beating his way out with his documents but TALIA responds with her martial arts skills. The upstage r. door bursts open, narrowly missing them both.

HEATHER: It's looking good. The Boss is having a rest so I phoned the Palace myself and they're thinking about it. Frankly they've never been keen on the job and might be grateful for a rest. More anon!

TALIA attempts an appeal but HEATHER dives out again, by the same door.

HEATHER: Loved the story.

She's gone. BENNO turns to TALIA with a hapless stare. What's going on?

TALIA: The House of Windsor.

BENNO: Ah. The biscuit tins.

TALIA throws him a startled glance. BENNO drifts into traumatized prattle.

BENNO: You know, the Duty Free when all you want is to get the hell out and the path keeps waving through stinking perfume and legal highs and then the bloody biscuits with Windsor Castle. Huge piles of them. Mounds, like the castle. Castles of Castle. You don't belong here....

He tries to remember her name.

TALIA: Talia.

BENNO: Talia. From Ecuador.

TALIA: Estonia.

He mouths 'Estonia'. Frowns. And checks his phone.

BENNO: My niece is working in London...

He starts dialling. From the mid-stage l. door SOSHA glides in.

SOSHA: Just wanted to say any deal is better than no deal on one condition.

BENNO: Condition?

SOSHA: India.

She gazes at him meaningfully. He looks round, tries to help.

BENNO: Now you want India.

SOSHA: Included.

He distractedly fingers his documents.

BENNO: Another document.

SOSHA: Europe is India. India is Europe.

BENNO: It'll take some drafting but I don't see why not.

SOSHA: Mughal's the word!

Sensing an interruption, she reverses out. OSCAR sidles from upstage r.

OSCAR: Now look here old boy no hard feelings but some of this is frankly a bit steep. I mean Scotland... no problem, please help yourselves... But...

He's interrupted by BERTIE erupting through the opposite door behind TALIA.

BERTIE: Never!!

BENNO recoils in fright. TALIA ducks.

BERTIE: The Kingdom is sacred and indivisible since 1707!

OSCAR takes BERTIE by the arm and drags him through the downstage l. door.

OSCAR: I'll work on him.

The door closes. Howls of pain are heard from the storeroom. BENNO trembles. ELDRED makes a brisk, business-like entrance from upstage right.

ELDRED: All clear. Cash no object. We can manage sixty.

BENNO glances at his documents and back again.

BENNO: You're joking. Sixty?

ELDRED: Euros if you prefer.

BENNO: Sixty euros?

ELDRED: All right then dollars. Pounds. You drive a hard bargain!

BENNO: That doesn't cover the expenses.

ELDRED: Yes it has gone on rather long.

BENNO: The work that has gone into...

ELDRED: Seventy then. But in return...

BENNO: Yes?

ELDRED: Single market. Customs Union. No free movement. We'll reverse that of course as soon as I'm the Boss. Wide open borders.

BERTIE eavesdropping from storeroom hisses to OSCAR

BERTIE: Traitor!!

BENNO: You scrap my border post?

ELDRED: *And....*

He minces, grimaces.

BENNO: Yes?

ELDRED: We have certain profound attachments. To the monarchy for instance.

BENNO: Ah. You want my documents destroyed.

ELDRED: No no!

BENNO: Too compromising?

ELDRED: Not at all. I was wondering if you'd like to propose anyone else.

A thunderous silence. BERTIE goes silently apoplectic.

BENNO: Someone else.

ELDRED: Some innocuous German dynasty. Done it before, worked jolly well. On the whole.

BENNO: Well I have this cousin... he's a Habsburg, lives in Estonia...

ELDRED: There you see. Let's forget this whole silly business. I'll get you the cheque now.

BERTIE weeps, thumping OSCAR on the chest. OSCAR drags BERTIE back inside. ELDRED heads upstage right again. BENNO almost makes to stop him.

BENNO: Now that I think about it...

ELDRED: Loved that story.

Too late. He winks and is gone.

BENNO: ...I'm a Habsburg too. *(shakes his head)* Family disaster. *(suddenly remembering)* *Darf nicht vergessen...* My niece. 'Niece'!

He finds the number, dials his mobile. TALIA bears down, then backs off.

TALIA: I've just seen through you. Oh my God, you're a... you're one of those... where's the hell's the panic button... my mobile...

Distracted, she grabs, stares and stabs at it.

TALIA: Yes?! This is an emergency!

BENNO: *Hallo?* My name is...

TALIA: I'm sorry I don't take cold calls on this line!

BENNO: *Nein warte doch ich bin Dein Onkel! ...I am your uncle! Du bist in London, nicht? Ich auch!*

TALIA slowly forgets the panic button and turns to stare at him, at her mobile.

BENNO: *Oder bist Du schon wieder in Estonien? Hallo? Hallo? ... Ich bin der Onkel Benno!*

TALIA: *(finally)* Hallo Uncle.

BENNO gets her in stereo, turns to wave. Then gets the shock of his life.

TALIA: *Ich spreche kein Deutsch mehr.*

BENNO: You are my niece?

TALIA: Talia! I have a name!

BENNO: London. This place is crazy.

Impeding the reunion, happy or unhappy, the cabinet reassembles from different doors and moods, ELDRED and HEATHER relieved, SOSHA resigned, BERTIE furious with OSCAR.

HEATHER: Now Benjamin the Prime Minister agrees we should settle this here and now. I have a cheque in my hand. We need your assurance that this whole matter is terminated.

BENNO suspiciously holds out his hand. HEATHER warily hands it over.

HEATHER: Seventy. That's our best offer.

BERTIE: (*roars*) Sell-out!

OSCAR gags him. BENNO frowns and appears to be counting.

BENNO: Why the zeros? No cents!

HEATHER: No sense?

BENNO: No cents! Why the zeros?

HEATHER: Well those are the billions. Seventy billion.

BENNO: Billion? (*to TALIA*) *Das sind mal Milliarden...*

HEATHER: Pounds as agreed.

He gets out a calculator. All wait, suspended in time.

BENNO: Seventy billion?

HEATHER: Please don't ask for more.

ELDRED: The economy is struggling as it is.

BENNO: For my documents?

OSCAR: You can take them with you.

BENNO takes deep offence.

BENNO: You offer me seventy billion and you won't even take my documents?

All rally to dispel any discourtesy.

BENNO: Are you out of your mind? This is outrageous! I bring you my documents all this way, I teach you your history....

HEATHER: We *love* the documents!

BENNO: ...and you won't even *keep* them?

OSCAR: Of course we'll keep them.

ELDRED: We'll frame them...

SOSHA: File them...

OSCAR: Burn them...

BERTIE: Shred them.

BENNO seems appeased and stares again at the cheque, murmuring to himself.

BENNO: Seventy billion. So where do I cash this?

Wry laughter.

HEATHER: Such wit.

OSCAR: *Très drôle.*

BERTIE: European humour.

ELDRED: I'm sure the European Central Bank will accept a cheque from Downing Street.

BENNO nods, then frowns, as if he hasn't heard right.

BENNO: Downing Street?

HEATHER: Colloquial for the Prime Minister. If you glance at the signature.

BENNO does so. His eyes bulge.

ELDRED: It won't bounce.

BENNO: The Prime Minister?

HEATHER: Lives here.

SOSHA: Never leaves the place.

OSCAR: Well not till I'm...

BERTIE stamps on his foot, OSCAR hobbles away. BENNO stares round at TALIA.

BENNO: Downing Street?

HEATHER: Not the Elysée, I confess, but better than Bellevue!

BENNO stares round again and bursts into laughter.

BENNO: You British! I love it!! Jokers, always joking!

HEATHER: That cheque is no laughing matter.

BENNO waves her away with his hand.

BENNO: No no, don't be so stupid! This is Sotheby's, right?

They gape. None can grasp the question.

BENNO: Like: Going, going...Gong!! You buy things cheap and sell them expensive. Family silver. You buy my documents!

HEATHER: No. It's not true.

BENNO: Oh not more time wasters.

ELDRED: This is not Sotheby's.

BENNO: You can't get out of it that way. What have I been doing here for the last four hours? Seventy billion?! Just make me an offer!

HEATHER: Herr von Baldur...

BENNO: Von Baldur?

HEATHER: Why do you think you are at Sotheby's?

BENNO: I phoned. Yesterday! I mean, who do you think you are?

HEATHER: We think we are the British Government.

BENNO stares and dissolves in laughter. That's ripe, that's a really good one.

HEATHER: You are Benjamin von Baldur. From Germany.

BENNO: No, you can't wriggle out! I am Benno from *Baldow, aus Oesterreich*, from *Austria*. Benno Bauer, *von Baldow!* Near Graz. The Steiermark. Hills! Mountains!

He gestures how big.

BENNO: You should come to the *Kirmis!* Great dancing, drinking, *ja?*

He launches into an Austrian folk dance with a yodel here and there.

HEATHER: How did you get here?

SOSHA: Who let you in?

BERTIE: Northolt is a military airport!

HEATHER: He's a terrorist!

BERTIE: He might go off!

HEATHER: Talia!!

They take cover.

HEATHER: Do something!

TALIA slowly leaves her screens.

TALIA: Don't shoot, don't shoot him...

He clutches the documents to his chest.

TALIA: Hand over your weapons, Benno.

BENNO: No, no!

TALIA: Don't make me hurt you.

She suddenly looks mean. BENNO is starting to sweat.

BENNO: You can't! You're nice!

TALIA: Who are you really?

BENNO: I just stamp passports, right? OK sometimes the queue is too long and I don't bother but it's only to get them through. They look so sad and you know, when two big flights arrive at once...

TALIA: You're an Immigration Officer?

BENNO: Please! I am an antiquary. A collector!

He gestures to the documents strewn across the table.

BENNO: I shouldn't be stamping passports all bloody day.

HEATHER: For God's sake disarm him!

TALIA: I don't think he's dangerous Ma'am.

SOSHA: Not dangerous?!

BERTIE: He's busted military security.

OSCAR: He's an impostor!

BENNO: No no. I am Benno. You are the impostors. Why did you say you were Sothebys?

ELDRED: We didn't.

BENNO: Don't be crazy, with the *Wa wa wa wa!*

They close in on him. He clutches his parchments, as at straws.

BENNO: You liked my documents!

SOSHA: Why did you come through Northolt? How did you get in?

BENNO: Ah that was Arnie! You know Arnie? Schwarzenegger. Should've been President but they won't let him 'cause he's Austrian. Anyway he has an airport. '*Arnold Schwarzenegger Airport*', Graz, that's where I work. Sometimes he flies in, I mean, it's his airport, why shouldn't he? And I say 'Arnie, if you ever have space...' and he says 'Sure thing Benno', and this morning I was out on the tarmac with my thumb out, doing auto-stop, you know, what do you call it 'Hitchhiker's Guide' anyway I had my thumb out 'cos I'd lost my passport, too many documents, and he was taxiing past and he says 'So where now, Benno?' And I say 'London, Arnie' and he says 'Jump in' and off we go...

He gestures poetically into the skies.

BENNO: Higher and higher. Just me and Arnold Schwarzenegger.

HEATHER: Phone Northolt.

TALIA: On the line now Ma'am.

BERTIE: He's a fantasist. A dangerous fantasist.

ELDRED: Ah you recognize him, do you?

BERTIE: Never met the man.

SOSHA: An immigrant. An illegal immigrant!!

She screams, goes into hysterics. OSCAR is going wobbly.

BENNO: No no, I just love Europe!

OSCAR: Oh my God, oh my God.

BERTIE: You *love* Europe?!

ELDRED: Well so do we all!

BENNO: Holidays! Beaches! Sun! Mountains!

He offers the first bars of The Sound of Music but dries at their horror.

TALIA: *(on mic)* Ground control? There was a private jet, this morning. Carrying Benjamin von Baldur. Who was the pilot?

She listens, relays with her usual deadpan delivery.

TALIA: *(to the others)* Northolt Police say: ‘He arrived with the Terminator Ma’am.’ *(into mic)* Yes, Chief Superintendent, Barbarian, Destroyer I don’t need all his credits I can find them on ImdB

HEATHER finally loses it, grabs the headset.

HEATHER: Idiot! Nincompoop! Wally!! You let in the wrong man!

She dissolves in howls and thrusts the headset back at TALIA.

TALIA: *(into mic)* Have you booked any leave?... This might be the moment.

HEATHER: Wait! Wait!!!

TALIA: *(into mic)* Stay on the line.

They stare at BENNO, then at each other.

HEATHER: If he’s not von Baldur, who is?!

BERTIE closes menacingly on BENNO.

BERTIE: Come on then, what’ve you done with him?

BENNO: The Terminator got him.

A gasp. BENNO’s eyes widen.

BENNO: Thirty kilometres up. Bye bye Benjamin. Whoosh...

He opens his hands and stares down, waves a little wave.

BENNO: You know, like Tintin. *Ottakar's Sceptre*. Now there's a good story, that documents guy who's really a spook....

ELDRED: Shut up! Shut up shut up! I can't take any more!!!

BENNO: We all need role models.

TALIA: *(on mic)* Who else arrived today?

They wait, panting for breath.

TALIA: There was another private jet this morning.... How long?... half an hour later...

All fall silent.

TALIA: With only the pilot on board.

HEATHER: Oh my God they said something about an air ace. I thought they said arian race.

SOSHA: What's the difference?

ELDRED: He's a German war hero.

BERTIE: No such thing!

BENNO: *(correcting)* Goering! Goering!

TALIA: *(into mic)* Gone?

HEATHER: Well get him back!

TALIA: *(repeating for the others)* 'He did not have his pilot's license, he had no permission to land. He was carrying no identity papers. Only a large briefcase.'

ELDRED: Who instructed Northolt?

SOSHA: I did. I thought...

She hesitates, defensive.

SOSHA: The briefing paper said he was being parachuted in.

Pause.

OSCAR: Sosha that's what they call a metaphor.

HEATHER: Never mind, never mind! So where is he now?

TALIA: *(into mic)* Where is 'Red Baron'?

She listens.

TALIA: *(into mic)* Well done Chief Superintendent. I'm sure you did.
(She covers the mic) They charged him with several counts of flying without a license, unlawful ingress into a military zone, landing without permission... *(into mic)* ...I'm sorry I've forgotten the rest... *(covering mic)*...oh yes, illegal immigration.

A stunned silence.

HEATHER: *(squeaks)* Where.. is...he?

TALIA: *(into mic)* And where is he exactly?

She listens, they wait.

TALIA: Detention Centre. Awaiting deportation.

The gasps of aghast incredulity are audible and prolonged.

HEATHER: Well bring him here!!

TALIA: *(into mic)* Chief Superintendent his presence is required.

HEATHER: Now!!

TALIA: *(into mic)* With all due diligence.

ELDRED: Precious little of that been done.

SOSHA: *(riled)* Well how was I to know...

ELDRED: You're Homeland Secretary, that's how! M15, MI6, Cobra, the Met, Europol, the Royal Cavalry, the Women's Institute. Can't you add up?

SOSHA bursts into tears. HEATHER hurls a last dart.

HEATHER: Or I'll have his guts for garters!

TALIA: *(into mic)* Mmn? Oh just the dress code.

They pause for breath. BENNO edges towards the door.

HEATHER: Not so fast...

OSCAR: Where d'you think you're going?
BENNO: Sotheby's? They said I would be met. *Wa Wa Wa Wa....*
SOSHA: Will someone stop him making that stupid noise!!
ELDRED: D'you realize what you've started, little man?
BENNO: Me? No. What?
ELDRED: A major international incident!

BENNO laughs, waves his hand.

BENNO: You're making it up.
OSCAR: Sixty years of peace! Flushed down the drain!

BENNO makes another attempt to squeeze out.

BENNO: Well it's been very nice meeting you. *(to TALIA)* *Schöne Grüße an Deine Mutti...*

They trap him.

SOSHA: Who put you up to this?
BENNO: Put me up? You have a bed?
SOSHA: Arggh!!
BENNO: I promise we just hold hands.
SOSHA: Will someone just throw him out?

OSCAR and BERTIE seize him by the scruff of the neck.

BENNO: Even a floor, that's fine...
OSCAR: Not the floor. Defenestration!
BERTIE: Whapping good idea...

OSCAR and BERTIE frogmarch BENNO downstage and lift him by the seat of his pants.

TALIA: Don't hurt him, he's harmless!
OSCAR: Really? How d'you know?!

TALIA: Not telling!

HEATHER: You're meant to be Intelligence!

They push up an invisible casement on the fourth wall. The crowd noises swell. They swing him to and fro.

OSCAR/BERTIE: One! ... Two!

TALIA: All right he's my uncle.

ALL: Your...?!

BERTIE and OSCAR drop BENNO. The crowd bays for blood.

BERTIE: Are they everywhere?!

OSCAR: I'll give you Schwarzenegger...

They hoist him again by his pants and swing him towards the audience.

BERTIE: One! Two! And...

HEATHER: Stop! No!! Are you mad?! The crowds down there!

She pushes down the invisible casement again. The crowds dip.

ELDRED: The minute he leaves this room, it's all over.

HEATHER: The papers.

ELDRED: All over. The papers.

TALIA: (*desperate*) Social media. Facebook. Snapchat...

BENNO: *Wiener Zeitung!*

BERTIE: Military gazette.

They stare at BENNO. TALIA too, her heart in her mouth.

HEATHER: He mustn't leave this room.

They drop him again. BENNO dusts himself down.

HEATHER: And as for you young woman...

BENNO: No really, I can find my own way. No need for *Wa Wa Wa Wa....*

SOSHA: Argh!!!

HEATHER: You don't understand, little man. It won't be *Wa Wa Wa Wa*

SOSHA: Argh argh argh!!!

HEATHER: It's *Bong... Bong... Bong...*

ELDRED: And not Big Ben, Benno!

OSCAR: Ask not for whom the bell tolls...

HEATHER: Talia, phone special ops!

TALIA: Special Ops? For Uncle Benno?!

TALIA's eyes swivel from her to BENNO, who gazes round like a trapped mouse.

OSCAR: It tolls for thee!

An instant's freeze. Tableau. Blackout. Curtain.

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

The Downing Street Cabinet Room. Late afternoon. The day is wearing on, the daylight not quite so bright. The clock is at 6 o'clock, the hands crawling faster.

ELDRED is nervously polishing the silver, adjusting flowers. BERTIE is paging a racing magazine, TALIA her monitors, cool as a cucumber but not quite as composed.

HEATHER and SOSHA enter mid-stage l. in hushed exchange.

SOSHA: ... but really you can't just get rid of him...

HEATHER: Watch me!

SOSHA: He has diplomatic immunity.

HEATHER: Diplomatic....? He's a fraud!

SOSHA: Mistaken identity does not yet carry the death penalty.

BERTIE perks up.

BERTIE: Did I hear you mention...?

HEATHER: We can't just leave this hanging!

BERTIE: Well since you raise the subject...

He reaches for his inside pocket.

SOSHA: Take my advice: ignore the whole thing. Like in India.

BERTIE: ...I've drafted a little White Paper and once we're free from foreign controls....

TALIA: *(into mic)* Black Maria entering Downing Street.

HEATHER: Black Maria?

ELDRED drops a vase of flowers. HEATHER consults mobile.

BERTIE: *(hurt)* ...I say chaps...

HEATHER: PM tweets: 'EU demands abolition of monarchy'. *(wild-eyed)*
Who told the Prime Minister?!

Sheepish glances.

OSCAR: Our guest.

TALIA: (*blurts*) He asked for the Gents, Ma'am. How was I to know there was a drainpipe?

HEATHER: You let him out of your sight?!

ELDRED: Well you can't expect the girl to...

TALIA: European Human Rights, Ma'am. No extraordinary or unusual punishment and he was bursting so...

BERTIE: Human Rights? Repealed!

ELDRED: Not till midnight.

TALIA: It seems the outside window was open.

Her eye follows the line from downstage r. to upstage r.

TALIA: He climbed along the drainpipe and sat by the sick bed.

OSCAR shakes his head, as at some mystery.

OSCAR: I've never seen the Prime Minister so resigned to the inevitable.

HEATHER: I've never been so humiliated! Kill him, will you?

SOSHA: Too late.

HEATHER: Just kill him!!

TALIA: Shan't!

HEATHER: Insubordination...?

TALIA: (*leafing hectically*) Geneva Convention Article Number...

SOSHA: You'll need the PM's signature.

HEATHER: (*grim*) That could be arranged. (*askance at TALIA*) I've had my doubts about that girl.

SOSHA: I'd kill him if he were my uncle.

HEATHER breathes heavily, an Attila emerging from inside the twin set.

HEATHER: So where is he now?

TALIA: Guided tour, Ma'am. PM's idea.

HEATHER: A guided tour?!

TALIA: The last time I saw him he took me to Disneyland, so I thought...

She shrugs, kicks her toes. A bleep. She lunges back to her monitors.

HEATHER: This isn't happening. I'm having a bad dream.

TALIA: *(into mic)* Prisoner exiting Black Maria...

HEATHER: Prisoner?!

They rush to the fourth wall front windows and peer down.

HEATHER: The Ambassador Plenipotentiary?!

From outside the strains of 'Deutschland über Alles' reverberate and an officer calls the cavalry to attention. A rattle of sabres.

HEATHER: A brass band?

TALIA: You said to show him all possible respect, Ma'am.

HEATHER: The Household Cavalry?!

ELDRED: Oh no. Oh no.

HEATHER: *(agonized)* Couldn't they have used the back door?!!

OSCAR: You've done it now old girl...

She turns on him, outraged.

HEATHER: Me? He was your idea!

OSCAR: But you issued the invitation.

HEATHER: You scorpion! You snake in the grass!

She takes a swipe. He ducks.

OSCAR: You take the wrap and I'll have you back in a matter of months.

HEATHER: Impertinence.

She pinions him over the cabinet table and thrashes him with a bundle of documents.

TALIA: (into mic) ...prisoner entering downstairs.

ELDRED: Heather do we have to? Right now?

SOSHA: (vaguely) I've a birch in my office if memory serves...

BERTIE: Fine technique, Heather. Where d'you learn?

HEATHER: Well not Eton!

The double doors swing open and BENJAMIN VON BALDUR lurches into the room, eyes wild, wrists handcuffed. His clothes are dishevelled, his tie undone. He appears to have been a bit roughed up. The Cabinet recoil in horror, straightening clothes.

BALDUR: Is this your idea of a joke?!

His English is perfect, his bearing aristocratic, even in adversity.

HEATHER: Good God what a terrible mistake.

BALDUR: They told me in Brussels it would be rough but...

HEATHER: Please allow me...

She tries to brush down his clothes and haplessly offers a handshake.

HEATHER: Cabinet Secretary. Heather Willis. How d'you do?

His hand performs the necessary reflex but handcuffs impede.

HEATHER: Oh no, of course not.

BALDUR: How do I do? You dare to ask me how I do?!

He shakes his bound wrists at them.

BERTIE: Only being friendly.

BALDUR: Do you know who I am?

OSCAR: Well not really. And we didn't with the last chap.

BERTIE: Too late now.

OSCAR: Who are you? Actually?

BALDUR: (roars) I am Graf Benjamin von Baldur!

The Cabinet imperceptibly closes ranks but ELDRED takes a back seat.

HEATHER: Are you sure?

SOSHA: It's easy to be mistaken.

BALDUR: Mistaken?!

OSCAR: Well we were. Why shouldn't you be?

SOSHA: Just one or two checks.

OSCAR: Border stuff.

BERTIE: Taking back control.

BALDUR: So *this* is what you have in mind! Arbitrary arrest! Human rights in tatters! Fascism on our doorstep! Next, no doubt, the death penalty!

BERTIE: Ah well there we might have something in common, now by chance I've drafted...

He's taking out his White Paper when HEATHER kicks him in the shins.

HEATHER: We have no extrajudicial execution in this country.

SOSHA: With rare exceptions.

HEATHER double takes. SOSHA nods to the wings, r.

OSCAR: It's a bit rich, though, you chaps lecturing us on fascism.

BALDUR: Will someone kindly remove these things?!

SOSHA: Your mother's maiden name please. First and fourth letters.

BALDUR: (*splutters*) My mother's... er.. B.... then *esszet*...

SOSHA: That's not a letter.

BALDUR: Yes yes in German we have two S's written...

He tries to write in the air but he's handcuffed.

SOSHA: In English please. Or Hindi.

BERTIE: You're not in Germany now.

HEATHER: Sosha do we really...

SOSHA: No one calls me negligent!

BALDUR is in tears of rage.

BALDUR: Will someone take these off me!!!

ELDRED: For God's sake. Talia?

TALIA removes the offending handcuffs, which HEATHER furtively pockets.

BERTIE: I think I should warn you that unless you agree with every word I say you will bring chaos on this country and your own... as well as all the others. How many does that make?

OSCAR: Twenty-something, isn't it?

SOSHA: That's not a number.

BERTIE: Well no wonder it didn't add up.

BALDUR rubs his wrists.

BALDUR: I have never been so insulted in my life! Do you know my family is descended from the Teutonic Knights?

OSCAR: The ones with the pointy helmets?

BALDUR: *(baffled)* The what?

OSCAR: That's why the Schlieffen Plan went belly-up.

BALDUR: The Schlieffen Plan?!

OSCAR: They couldn't see out. Took the wrong turning.

BALDUR: The Teutonic Knights were a Christian Order of the Middle Ages. In better days I would have had you dismembered between four horses!

HEATHER: Happy times.

BERTIE: *(intrigued)* Might spruce up the fox hunt.

ELDRED: Good old-fashioned family values.

BALDUR: Do you always treat your visitors like this?

SOSHA: Certainly. It discourages the oth...

OSCAR kicks her in the shins. She yelps and wheels away.

HEATHER: Our detention centres are second only to our hospitals.

ELDRED: People come here to die in them.

BALDUR: You call that a detention centre? I wouldn't put my dog in there!

ELDRED: Ah well *you* weren't meant to be there.

OSCAR: I love dogs. Huntin'n'shootin'. What breed do you have?

BALDUR: What... what kind...?

OSCAR: I mean the one you wouldn't put in a detention centre. Personally I love the Alsatian. Good tough breed. Comes from Alsace, don't'cha know. The Americans call it the German Shepherd. Bet you chaps would like to get your hands on Alsace, eh?

BALDUR: What do you...

OSCAR: Well the French haven't always been that obliging.

He punches BALDUR mildly on the shoulder.

OSCAR: Done it before, do it again!

BALDUR: Are you insinuating...?

OSCAR: Never too late to row back on Versailles. Maybe we could cut you a deal.

BALDUR: The Treaty of Versailles? Are you living in the past?

OSCAR: Better no treaty than a bad treaty, eh?

They laugh uproariously. BALDUR does not.

BALDUR: I think that is enough now.

He summons his remaining self-respect and turns to go.

ALL: No!!

They drag him back.

BALDUR: This behaviour was *not* a mistake!

OSCAR: Bit of banter to break the ice.

BERTIE: Absolutely no sense of humour.

BALDUR: Take me to your leader! At once!!

A sickening silence.

BALDUR: My orders are to deal with no one except the Prime Minister!

ELDRED: Ah now that could be tricky...

OSCAR: You see...

HEATHER: The PM is indisposed.

BALDUR: Indis...?

OSCAR: Ailing.

BERTIE: High fever.

BALDUR: At a time like this?

SOSHA: In quarantine. I can't possibly allow it.

BALDUR: What is the point in...

They ease BALDUR aside, lower their voices.

HEATHER: Between ourselves...

OSCAR: The Prime Minister is on the way out.

ELDRED: We are the Committee.

HEATHER: With full powers.

BALDUR: So who is in charge?

HEATHER/OSCAR/ELDRED: (*simultaneously*) I am.

BERTIE/SOSHA: (*ditto*) We are. She is. Well that depends...

BALDUR grips his heart, trying to assess this new reality, when the upstage r. door opens and BENNO comes in gushing to someone unseen.

BENNO: Nice place you have here. Some good antiques. And I don't mean your Prime Minister!

He slaps his knee, hooting with laughter, and closes the door with a cheery salute.

ALL: No!

They swoop like flocking birds. TALIA rushes from her console to intercept him.

TALIA: Uncle Benno I told you to go *down* that drainpipe not *along* it...!

BENNO: *Ja ja* but someone called for help... (*he grimaces, shakes his head*) Too ill to get down there. So I told the one about the archivist...

HEATHER: (*to BALDUR*) Coffee?

BALDUR: (*panting*) Water. Just give me water.

BENNO: Ah, coffee, did I hear you say?

ELDRED: Below stairs for you.

BENNO: Stairs?

ELDRED: Downstairs!

BENNO: But it's there!

ELDRED: Yes but no.

BENNO: And the biscuits...

ELDRED: No biscuits.

BENNO: I can see them!

TALIA: (*in a loud hiss*) I told you! Special Ops!!

BENNO: But I have a message from the Prime Minister...

Too late. He is frogmarched out mid-stage r. BALDUR anxiously feels his pockets.

BALDUR: Where are my pills? Who is that man?

HEATHER: No one.

BALDUR: What do you mean no one? There was a man there.

HEATHER: There wasn't.

ELDRED: That means you are mistaken.

BENNO: *(shouts off)* The biscuits!

BALDUR: Who said that?

SOSHA: Nobody.

BENNO erupts through the door but is surrounded again.

BENNO: *(calling)* The Prime Minister told me...

BALDUR: What is this?

ELDRED: Just an interloper wandered in off the street.

HEATHER laughs, or tries to. ELDRED echoes her, wanly. BENNO pushes harder.

BENNO: I take the biscuit!

SOSHA: *(loud)* It's all right, cleaner! You can take the whole tray!

They shove the tray at him and force him out mid-stage r. At the last moment he remembers his mission and quotes

BENNO: ...the Prime Minister says: 'Lords is a washout!'

HEATHER: *(quickly)* The House of Lords.

ELDRED: *(with a bland smile)* Flooding.

BENNO: '...and we'll have to declare very shortly'.

The door slams. SOSHA smacks her lips.

SOSHA: Nothing like Indian bowling.

BALDUR gestures after the silenced BENNO.

BALDUR: Is this how you treat your staff?

SOSHA: He isn't staff. He's illegal.

BALDUR: Illegal migrants, at Downing Street?

From outside rises the clamour of impatient media. OS glances down.

OSCAR: Prime Minister's idea. Prime time television.

SOSHA: We interview them, then deport them.

BERTIE: Celebrities for a day. Can't say fairer than that.

BALDUR: And where is he from?

ALL: Africa. Middle-East. Balkans. Ukraine.

TALIA: He's Austrian.

BALDUR: Austrians are not immigrants!

BERTIE: Wait till midnight.

The OS kicks him in the shins.

TALIA: *(at console)* Unauthorized ingress downstairs.

The noise of camera crews pounding upstairs. The media arrive outside the double doors, clamouring to be admitted. HEATHER has turned the key and now shoots the bolts.

HEATHER: Have'em flung out would you?

TALIA: *(into mic)* Evict. Evict.

The loud noise of journalists being flung downstairs, from upstage centre.

BALDUR: So, you are ready to declare!

SOSHA: Second innings.

OSCAR tosses a coin.

BERTIE: Heads.

They check.

OSCAR: *(to BALDUR)* Fire away.

BALDUR: Very well. We must get down to business.

BENNO bursts back in mid-stage r.

BENNO: Business? You have a buyer?

ELDRED: Yes yes downstairs!

BENNO: Television?

He's flung out. Distracted, BALDUR rifles through his pockets.

BALDUR: Where are my pills? They confiscate my medication!

SOSHA: I dare say that was for your own good.

BERTIE: Last feller topped himself. Don't want another.

BALDUR: I need my pills. Every hour.

ELDRED: ...or else...?

BALDUR: Or else there is hell to say!

OSCAR: To pay. We pay for hell in this country. No idea why.

All quiet outside. HEATHER turns back to the group with restored composure.

HEATHER: Talia? Find Herr von Baldur's pills would you?

TALIA: *(into mic)* Sparrow to Golden Eagle....

ELDRED hovers in the door upstage r, as BALDUR unloads his briefcase. Outside the day is wearing on, the light fading, the clock turning faster. Protests rise from downstairs.

BALDUR: Now. To the matter in hand.

ALL: Ah yes. Business. A trade deal. The single market. The border!

BALDUR: One at a time! First, we agree the divorce bill!

OSCAR: Wait a minute...

BERTIE: *(groans)* Not this again...

ELDRED calls from the door upstage r.

ELDRED: The Prime Minister... they've called for a priest...!

HEATHER: Oh thank God.

BERTIE: Finally, a decision!

SOSHA: It's a miracle.

They rush past him through the door, FM holding back HEATHER.

OSCAR: *(hushed)* This is payback, Heather. Remember those skeletons? And I don't mean the Prime Minister...

They dash out. TALIA remains at her station. ELDRED smiles sheepishly at BALDUR.

ELDRED: Just kidding.

He seizes BALDUR by the elbow with a glance over his shoulder.

ELDRED: I need a word in your ear. All this is much worse than you think.

BALDUR: Impossible.

ELDRED: Europe is only a pretext.

BALDUR: You don't say.

ELDRED: Certain 'elements' are preparing to seize power. On the stroke of midnight. The moment you fail.

BALDUR: I shall not fail. You shall.

ELDRED goes into courtship overdrive in the evening gloaming.

ELDRED: It doesn't have to be like this. We can be friends, just like before. We'll call a second referendum and put an end to all this cheating.

BALDUR looks faintly alarmed. ELDRED draws him into a passionate clinch.

ELDRED: Benjamin, it goes like this: you refuse to negotiate with anyone else.

BALDUR: Why you?

ELDRED: Because I will be Prime Minister! I will be the one to lead us out of this mess and back to our senses!

BALDUR: But the current Prime Minister...

ELDRED: Is dead in the water.

BALDUR: Dead?

ELDRED: In the water.

BALDUR: Do they know?

ELDRED: No no. Not yet!

The door re-opens. ELDRED whisks away from BALDUR. The others return.

HEATHER: Cosy chat, Eldred?

ELDRED disarmingly glances up from his mobile phone.

ELDRED: Markets in tailspin. How's the PM?

OS: False alarm.

ELDRED: Oh no.

BERTIE: Six wickets down.

SOSHA: *(reading from her mobile)* 'Prime Minister watching cricket in bed'.

ELDRED: Fake news. Disgraceful.

HEATHER: Someone is briefing from inside this room!

Arms shoot out, fingers are pointed.

ALL: Not me! It's him! It's her! Don't listen it's all disinformation!

Another punch gets thrown. HEATHER blows a whistle. They split. BALDUR moans.

BALDUR: I want my pills.

TALIA: *(into mic)* Any advance on the medication front?

BALDUR: I am now overdue.

TALIA: *(into mic)* Thank you Chief Superintendent.

HEATHER: Well?

TALIA: They've been dumped in the classified drugs hoard.

BALDUR suffers a new horror.

BALDUR: Classified drugs? You mean with heroin, cocaine, tobacco?

SOSHA: You seem very familiar with our customs regulations.

TALIA: I'll send for some more.

BALDUR: But those pills are custom-made!

SOSHA: Specialist medication requires an import license.

TALIA: *(into mic)* Thank you Superintendent. *(to BALDUR)* They've found a secret stash but it might be the Viagra.

BALDUR: I'll take my chances.

A fire alarm goes off. They look a bit startled.

ELDRED: Fire drill? Today?

HEATHER: Well what are you waiting for, a terrorist?

TALIA: Ministers...

TALIA starts shepherding them out, BALDUR starts packing up. The clock has by now reached 9 o'clock and is picking up speed. TALIA has lit a few candles.

BALDUR: I have heard of the nanny state but really fire regulations when all of Europe is burning...

HEATHER holds him back, bending backwards across the cabinet table.

HEATHER: Don't go, don't leave me Benjamin. All this is so sad, so desperately sad. And there's only one person who can get us out of it.

BALDUR: You.

HEATHER: How did you know?

BALDUR: You called.

HEATHER: And you came!

BALDUR: They sent me.

HEATHER: *(hoarse with passion)* The PM can't last long. The Government's on its last legs.

BALDUR: The Prime Minister's legs are no concern of mine.

HEATHER: Hobbled. Crippled. Castrated.

BALDUR: Is this your normal procedure?

HEATHER: As soon as you leave, we act!

BALDUR: Too late. The Government must resign. And maybe we have a chance.

HEATHER: The army's on red alert. Police reserves are called up. Terras let off their reins.

BALDUR: A reign of terror?

HEATHER: The Cabinet is being hung out to dry, Westminster is on tenterhooks, Downing Street on the rack. Long knives are out in Whitehall...

BALDUR: None of these are permissible under European Law.

HEATHER: That's why we *mustn't* leave! To protect our jobs! I mean where will I be without all the freebee trips to Brussels and Strasbourg to come and see you again?

BALDUR: Again?

HEATHER: Don't tell me you don't remember, you'll break my heart!

She stifles a sob. A side door is flung open and BENNO enters, stormily.

BENNO: Doing deals behind my back?

They jump with fright. He circles the table. HEATHER straightens her ruffled clothes.

BENNO: Now you sell my documents without me?

TALIA: Uncle will you behave?!

BENNO: I always thought the British were honourable!

BALDUR: Who is this person?

TALIA: They're not trying to sell your documents!

BENNO: Not even trying?!

TALIA: It's not about documents!

BENNO: Just giving them away?!

TALIA: *(of BALDUR)* This gentleman is from Germany!

BENNO: *Noch einer. Ich bin der Benno. Wie heisst Du?*

He offers his hand. BALDUR isn't sure he wants to shake it.

BENNO: *Ach komm mal Du hast einen Namen oder...?*

BALDUR: My name is confidential.

BENNO mouths 'Confidential' with a frown.

BALDUR: I am not here.

BENNO: *Aber...*

He checks, just to make sure. The alarm bell falls silent. The Cabinet hurries back.

ALL: Fire drill? No drill this evening Heather! Having fun...?

They freeze in the doorway at the scene now unfolding.

BENNO: I must warn you, this man is an impostor. *Der ist nicht da!*

BALDUR: Not here?

BENNO: You see? This man is not here!

BALDUR: Balderdash!

BENNO: See, no German! This man is not who he says!

BALDUR: *Mein Name ist Benjamin von Baldur!*

BENNO: Yeah yeah you learn that in first grade.

BALDUR: *Und was machen Sie hier?!*

BENNO: Okay he's making progress.

BALDUR draws himself up to his full height.

BALDUR: *Ich bin Professor Doktor Doktor Freiherr Benjamin von und zu Baldur!*

BENNO: But you said you're not here!

BALDUR: I travel with an alias!

BENNO: So where is she?

BALDUR: No no... I am on a top secret diplomatic mission!

BENNO does a 'Now I get it!' routine, thumping his forehead, pointing at BALDUR, slapping his knee, dancing on the spot...

TALIA: Uncle have you quite finished...

BENNO: But are you sure? They thought that was *me!*

BALDUR: You?!

BENNO: *Ja sicher!* Did they give you the *Wa Wa Wa Wa?*

SOSHA: Arggh!

BALDUR: The what?

BENNO: Did they tell you they were Sotheby's?

BALDUR: Certainly not!

BENNO: So maybe *they* are the impostors? Is this Downing Street?

BALDUR: I thought so but now I have my doubts.

HEATHER: Talia unless you remove your uncle I shall be obliged...

TALIA: *Onkel komm mal jetzt... oder ich schiesse Dich...*

She gets out a James Bond type pistol and starts fitting the silencer.

BENNO: Me?

TALIA: Or I shoot you.

BENNO: Do I have a choice?

TALIA: No.

BENNO: But you give me back my documents, ok?

She muscles him out. The door closes. A dull shot resounds. They flinch. BALDUR casts a disparaging eye at the documents littering the table.

BALDUR: And what are these?

HEATHER: Oh I don't know. Just... just...

ELDRED: Just documents.

BENNO bursts back in. TALIA levels her pistol. All duck.

BENNO: A buyer! You liars!

TALIA: How can I fake your death when you won't keep still!

She drags him out again.

BALDUR: What are these documents?

HEATHER: *(uncertainly)* Well...

OSCAR: Henry the Eighth Clauses. Just re-enacted.

They gather round, staring at the musty parchment. OSCAR lifts one carefully.

OSCAR: This is the Marriage Contract between our sovereign lady Queen Mary Tudor and Philip the Second of Spain. It cedes all rights to the Spanish Kingdom to the English Throne in perpetuity.

BENNO: *(off)* No! No! *(suffocated gurgles)*

OSCAR: *(coolly continues)* This is the secret protocol between the French King and the Scots on the marriage of Mary Stuart to his son the *Dauphin*. It bequeaths the Kingdom of France to her offspring. In other words King James the First of England. And his successors. Forever.

BALDUR: You can't be serious.

OSCAR: France and Spain belong to us.

BENNO: *(muffled, off)* No!

BERTIE: Give'em back. Now!

BALDUR: Give them back?!

OSCAR: I can offer you assurances that there will be no retaliation and no revenge for this historical injustice.

SOSHA: A truth and justice committee will hear evidence on how the UK has been cheated for the last five centuries. Reparations will of course be assessed and...

BALDUR: Reparations?!

SOSHA: ...and half of it channelled to India and...

BERTIE kicks her. HEATHER and ELDRED stare at their opponents in disbelief.

ELDRED: So now we have it.

HEATHER: Naked ambition.

OSCAR: The army's at Dover.

He checks his watch.

OSCAR: The next ferry's at...

BALDUR: You mean to invade?!

OSCAR: Our fishing fleets and tall ships are standing by, Cutty Sark has loosed its moorings. We can export a hundred thousand disgruntled citizens in a matter of hours. Dunkirk in reverse!

BALDUR reaches for his mobile and stabs.

BALDUR: Very well this demands action. *(into phone)* Fisheries?

SOSHA snatches it away and sits on it.

BERTIE: It's D-Day! All over again!!

BENNO bursts back in, pursued by TALIA with her gun.

BENNO: No, no! Not with my documents! No armada!

TALIA: I'll count to five. One....

BENNO takes cover behind BALDUR who refuses to flinch.

BALDUR: You thought for one moment this clown was Benjamin von Baldur?

BENNO: Clown? I'm a Habsburg!

BALDUR: And I am a Hohenzollern!

TALIA: ...three, four...

ELDRED: Here we go...

HEATHER: A continental war. All over again.

OSCAR: Exactly. So we can sort it out.

TALIA: ...five!

She closes her eyes and fires. A chandelier comes down. BENNO and BALDUR grip each other. All dive for cover.

TALIA: Missed!

She closes her eyes and swivels. There's a furious banging on the double doors.

HEATHER: Thank you Talia. That's quite enough of that.

TALIA: But I thought...

HEATHER pats her on the head, not unaffectionate.

HEATHER: Yes yes. Maybe later.

TALIA: Later, Ma'am...?

HEATHER suddenly checks the clock - 23.00 – and screams at the double doors.

HEATHER: We're not coming out till midnight. Bust the doors and you'll get it!

The banging abruptly dies. HEATHER checks her make-up. BENNO and BALDUR emerge from under the cabinet table. BERTIE inspects the sideboard bar for any damage.

BENNO: *(to TALIA, still shaken)* You tried to kill me. Not bad. You really tried

BERTIE: Now come on let's talk about this sensibly over a couple of drinks. You're too excitable, you dagos, get worked up about nothing...

He swirls a decanter and pours stiff brandies, nodding at BENNO and BALDUR.

BERTIE: You're saying one thing, and you're saying another. Now I don't pretend I get it all, I'm a simple man and I'm best off propping up the bar but no one gets the better of me and I'll take the deal I like best...

He offers the glasses.

BERTIE: You first.

He waves the decanter at BENNO. BALDUR chokes on his brandy.

BENNO: I say you can have your cake and eat it. Lots of it. I've seen it done.

OSCAR: Ah hah!

BERTIE: Always said so!

SOSHA: I have seen this mystery performed in India but never....

BENNO: I've eaten my cake and had it all the way up to here and I'll eat my hat too if you want...

BERTIE: I like what I'm hearing.

BENNO: ...but please tell her to put the gun away.

BERTIE: No no God-given right, carrying a gun. Go back to the hat.

ELDRED: (*compassionate*) Bertie you don't understand...

HEATHER: This man is not a negotiator!

BERTIE: I'm a fair man, I'll negotiate with anyone I want. Now you.

BALDUR: I can't take any more of this. You live in a madhouse, you are all madmen, you need a shrink...

He takes out a cheque book and scribbles.

BERTIE: Had your chance. Missed it. Anyone else?

BALDUR: My orders were to reach an agreement or sign off. I'm signing off!

He signs with a trembling hand.

BALDUR: Sixty billion! But just go away!!

HEATHER: Sixty billion?!

BERTIE: I say that's jolly rude.

SOSHA: 'Go away' is not technically an insult but...

BALDUR: For four years and much much longer you have been making our lives a misery. We don't want you! Scram! Push away!

OSCAR: Off.

BERTIE: I'd say.

OSCAR: You mean 'Push off.'

BALDUR: Stop telling me what I mean! Just vanish!

OSCAR: I think you mean vamoose.

BALDUR: No I mean vanish! Take your little island somewhere else. There are virtual realities to be found where you may find some

ghastly avatar but in this world and on this continent you are no longer welcome!

He pauses for breath, holding his chest. HEATHER grips him in a desperate embrace.

HEATHER: Don't say that, Benjamin, don't let this be our last goodbye!

BALDUR howls with pain. She turns him round and squeezes.

HEATHER: Tell me you still love me, even though it hurts.

BENNO stares, appalled, as BALDUR tries to force out some words.

ELDRED: Don't worry son you should see her in cabinet.

BALDUR is expiring in ELDRED's love embrace and finally wheezes:

BALDUR: I love you. I love you.

HEATHER erupts with orgasmic joy... and takes a limp BALDUR on her knee.

BALDUR: *(barely coherent)* Only please...

HEATHER: *(hoarse)* There there now let mummy make it all better...

BERTIE weighs up the odds, turns to OSCAR.

BERTIE: I think I preferred the other one.

OSCAR: The impostor?

BERTIE: Remind me, which is which?

SOSHA: Interpretations may vary.

OSCAR: Is that deal still on the table?

BENNO coyly raises his documents. OSCAR surveys them. BALDUR wobbles to his feet.

BALDUR: Please take our money and never, never come back!

OSCAR: We haven't gone yet.

BERTIE: I say this is rather irregular, you can't go inviting us out of our own continent as if we were some...

BALDUR: I can! I have! I shall!!

OSCAR: *(cheerful)* Veni, vidi, vici? But he hadn't, you see, Julius Caesar, he hadn't conquered at all. It was all fake news. For the Senate.

BALDUR is foaming at the mouth.

ELDRED: Good God the man's unwell...

OSCAR: *Post-coitum triste?*

HEATHER: Get him some water.

TALIA comes running. Water pours down BALDUR's chin, to her consternation.

TALIA: *(reads label)* Lowland Marshes. Still.

BALDUR: Now just let me leave!

He staggers to the double doors and bangs in a tantrum of despair.

ELDRED: Ah. A closet leaver.

BALDUR: Let me out! Let me out!

ELDRED: You can always tell, somehow...

HEATHER: *(murmurs)* So sweet, so sweet...

TALIA: I'll see if we've got any fizzy...

She disappears into the storeroom. From outside comes a renewed hubbub. BALDUR lurches back downstage, staring at each one as he passes.

BALDUR: Who... do you think ...you are?

He grabs his heart in pain and collapses on the floor. Silence.

ELDRED: Another one.

OSCAR: Good question though.

SOSHA: Who do we think we are?

BERTIE: He's shamming!

He nudges him with his foot. BENNO kneels beside the inert BALDUR and looks up.

BENNO: This man is dead!

BERTIE: Will they stop at nothing?

TALIA hurries back in, waving a little box.

TALIA: Herr von Baldur. Your medication!

She pauses over the corpse and screams.

TALIA: Uncle Benno?!

ELDRED: Oh dear God.

HEATHER: He can't be dead. This is not acceptable behaviour.

ELDRED: Call an ambulance.

HEATHER: No! Imagine if this gets out...!

TALIA dashes to her console, where lights are flashing.

TALIA: *(into mic)* Downing Street.

She listens. OSCAR rounds on BENNO.

OSCAR: See what you've done?

BENNO: Me?

TALIA: *(into mic)* I'll see if he's available.

She waves to the others but they're in full swing.

OSCAR: You and your stupid documents! *(mocks)* *Orig-in-alien!*

BENNO: Ok, maybe they're *not* the originals. But I'm a good copy.

HEATHER: Not original?! ... You mean...

SOSHA: *(helpful)* Facsimile. Photocopy. Attested likeness.

BENNO: No, no. Very kind, I'm quite proud of them in fact. No, all my own work.

OSCAR: Your own....

ELDRED: Forgeries?!

BERTIE: Fake?!!

BENNO: A masterpiece, no? The archives are stuffed with rubbish like this but only I can create them!

HEATHER: But this is a crime!

BENNO: Who cares? Could you tell the difference?

SOSHA: A capital offence, in those days.

BERTIE: Never revoked.

BENNO: So shoot me. You've tried once already. *(suddenly wild)* Just teach her how to use that thing! We send them over here to steal your jobs and you can't even train them properly?

OSCAR: If you hadn't come here, touting your fake marriage contracts and your forged protocols...

BERTIE: I never trusted those Spanish onion sellers.

OSCAR: ...this fine young German diplomat would still be alive!

HEATHER turns to the sideboard, stifling an outpouring of grief, and pours a drink.

BERTIE: You'd better have some good alibis!

BENNO: Alibis?!

He glances round the room. Everyone turns away.

TALIA: *(from her console)* Excuse me Ma'am...

HEATHER waves her away, too tear-laden to speak.

SOSHA: False witness. Identity theft. Incitement to murder...

BENNO: Murder!?

HEATHER: Very cute, Sosha.

SOSHA: No one leaves this room!

Press hubbub rises again from the staircase. The men barricade the double doors.

TALIA: I have Brussels on the line for Herr von Baldur.

All swing round, freeze. And turn back to the corpse.

TALIA: They're concerned for his safety.

From somewhere HEATHER summons a widow's composure.

HEATHER: Quite unnecessary. He's safe now.

A moment's reflection. Some throat clearing.

ELDRED: Anyone remember the Lord's Prayer?

TALIA: *(into mic)* Yes Brussels, I can hear you. Your ambassador is here.

Their frantic wavings to desist go unheeded.

TALIA: *(into mic)* I'll see if we can raise him.

HEATHER: Only one person can do that.

ELDRED: And He is not here.

TALIA: *(into mic)* Paging Herr von Baldur. Come in please...

The page echoes upstage on an unseen PA system. More banging at the double doors.

BERTIE: Come on chaps we can't perform miracles.

OSCAR: I feel strangely alone.

SOSHA: Karma.

TALIA: *(into mic)* He's not responding. I think he may be in transit.

HEATHER: Tell them he's left on a long journey.

TALIA: *(to the others)* They're insisting he come to the phone.

Desperate glances finally alight, as one, on BENNO, HEATHER's with some distaste.

HEATHER: So my man you have been blessed with the means to atone.

BENNO: Me? What do you mean?

SOSHA: Perhaps we can overlook your earlier ... misdemeanours...

ELDRED: It won't work.

HEATHER: There's a call for you.

BENNO looks over his shoulder and back at the corpse.

HEATHER: From Brussels. Just tell them it's going fine.

BENNO: *(squeaks)* Me? But I'm only...

HEATHER: Graf Benjamin von und zu Baldur. Ambassador Plenipotentiary.

TALIA: *(into mic)* He's just on his way.

BENNO: But I'm not... I'm not German! I mean, German isn't Austrian and Austrian isn't German... and Beethoven wasn't...

BERTIE: Don't bandy words with us. You're guilty and you know it!

TALIA: Try it, Uncle. Please try!

BENNO backs off to the phone, reluctantly takes it, clears his throat.

BENNO: *Ja, hier von Baldow!*

He involuntarily stands to attention.

BENNO: Yes, I am from Baldow!

All stare as gabble comes down the line. BENNO finally flips.

BENNO: *Von Baldow!* Can't you understand? Don't they teach you English in Brussels? I am on a vital mission why am I being interrupted?!

He stamps his foot. The company judders slightly.

BENNO: Yes yes it is going well. Why otherwise would my Chancellor the friend have sent me? My friend the Chancellor!

Getting into his stride he steps over the corpse, entangling the headphone wires.

BENNO: Results? You expect results? May I remind you that I am Ambassador Pleni...Pleni...

HEATHER: ...potential!

BENNO: ... potentially and I take orders from no one!!

Cringing apology at the other end of the line.

BENNO: Well see you don't do it again!

He's about to hang up.

BENNO: And get a message to Arnie!... Schwarzenegger, who else do you think I'm talking about?... I want him at Northolt in two hours time! ...

He's about to hang up but animus finally gets the better of him and he yells

BENNO: And while you're there you can tell my wife the milk is in *front* not *behind* the front door! *Ja, vor der Tür, nicht hinter der Tür!!*

He flicks the headphones back at TALIA, transformed.

BENNO: Now let's get down to business.

HEATHER: But you are...

BENNO rejoins them, stepping over the corpse. The clock is racing.

BENNO: It is ten to midnight, I am Benjamin von Baldur and I am in charge.

TALIA: *(into mic)* Yes Northolt?

HEATHER: But this is....

TALIA: *(to others)* Royal Family is on the runway. Request permission to take off.

HEATHER: The Royal Family?

TALIA: Caymans.

ELDRED: Well they deserve a holiday.

BENNO: Let'em go!

OSCAR: I say, we've only just refurbished Buck House!

SOSHA: Prime Minister must sign.

HEATHER: That can be arranged.

She heads upstage r. as if sleepwalking. Another line rings out.

TALIA: *(into mic)* Downing Street.

BENNO: Plenty more where they came from.

TALIA: German Chancellor for you Herr von Baldur.

BENNO: Ah, my old friend...

He reaches out for the headphones again.

BENNO: *(into mic) Ja meine Liebe...*

He seems to have taken on BALDUR's voice along with his identity. The others circle round him, rather as if he were a dangerous animal.

BENNO: *(into mic) Ja ganz in Ordnung! Wir kriegen es sicher hin!*

He beams at the others, changes self-consciously to English.

BENNO: *(into mic) Yes yes. The usual suspects.*

He roars with laughter, clearly echoed at the other end.

BENNO: *Nicht? ... die blöden Kuhe!*

He hoots, hangs up, winks. The line rings at once.

TALIA: *(into mic) Downing Street.*

She wearily hands back the headphones.

TALIA: French President for you.

BENNO: Ah my young friend...

He seizes the headphones with an extravagant Dab and inadvertently hurls them across the room, then gets entangled in them and finally clamps them to his ears.

BENNO: *Monsieur le Président! Oui je suis très heureux de vous entendre...*

OSCAR: Well the jammy dodger.

BERTIE: Told you he was queer.

BENNO: *Oui je suis fier de vous dire que le Bréxit n'aura pas lieu...*

SOSHA: What's he saying...?

BERTIE: I've heard that somewhere before!

He makes a grab for the phone. BENNO beats him off.

BERTIE: No Brexit?!

HEATHER: *(grim-faced) Brexit. No going back on it. Boss is adamant.*

BENNO: *(into phone) Oui tout le monde est d'accord!*

ELDRED: Well thank mercy for that.

BENNO: (*covering the mouthpiece*) He's heard you're now a republic.

Gasps. Outrage. Fingers of accusation pointed. BENNO waves reassuringly.

BENNO: (*into phone*) *Non non, c'est pas ça du tout....* They have a new dynasty!

BERTIE: New...?

ELDRED: New start. Why not?

SOSHA: Constitutionally speaking this requires...

BENNO: (*into phone*) No no of course *you* are the monarch, nothing changes. But the Emperor of Europe! *Vous n'auriez rien contre un Habsbourg? Ah oui, un Bourbon d'ailleurs! Oui oui, chose faite. C'est moi!*

He turns to his stunned audience with open arms.

BENNO: France welcomes a new European Emperor!

ALL: You?!

BENNO: We need identity! Unity! I have some Habsburg and a very little Bourbon!

HEATHER: Good idea.

She takes to the drinks cabinet with shaking hand.

BENNO: (*into mic*) *Mais quoi?*

He listens intently, nodding. The clock is at three to midnight.

SOSHA: It should really be a Mughal but for now I suppose...

OSCAR: No no. We need an election!

BERTIE: A referendum!

SOSHA: No second vote. PM won't have it.

HEATHER: No need. No need.

Shaking with fury, HEATHER heads for the door upstage r. with dark purpose.

BENNO: *(into mic) Oui oui, je comprends. (To the others) My friend is ravi but your Prime Minister is still a problem...*

ELDRED: I'm sure the Prime Minister can be made to see reason.

From the bowels of Downing Street comes a blood-curdling scream. The other freeze or clutch at each other, their hair stands on end.

BENNO: *(into mic) C'est réglé.*

The upstage r. door re-opens and HEATHER returns carrying a butcher's knife dripping blood, wild-eyed, demented, every inch the lady from the play. They gasp, back off.

HEATHER: The Prime Minister has had a nasty accident.

BERTIE: I say mind the carpet.

SOSHA: That was new last year.

Banging and shouting from the double doors. ELDRED is the first to pull himself together.

ELDRED: I shall tell the nation.

OSCAR: Excuse me I shall tell the nation!

ELDRED: Cretin.

OSCAR: Who are you calling a cretin?

ELDRED: Dolt.

OSCAR takes a swipe. ELDRED ducks. BERTIE joins in. HEATHER raises the knife. They scatter.

HEATHER: I shall announce the Prime Minister's sad demise. We got us into this mess and we must get us out of it.

BENNO: And as reigning monarch I appoint *you* to succeed!

BERTIE: You've not heard the end of this!

He backs off to the double doors with a threatening wave.

BERTIE: I shall do such things... don't know what they are yet...

He reaches the door midstage l.

BERTIE: But you'll be hearing from my local!

The door slams. The others sigh. SOSHA thoughtfully gathers up her files.

HS: (disabused) Law. But there's a future in catering...

She wheels in reverse to the midstage r. door.

SOSHA: I must be going. So nice to know you.

The others help her out and attempt to salvage the wreckage.

OSCAR: I say Heather is the Exchequer still going?

ELDRED: He can't add up.

OSCAR: No but to be fair I've no idea of world affairs either.

BENNO: Put him in charge of immigration! Stamping passports every day!

OSCAR: Stamping passports?!

ELDRED: Churchill went back to the front, you pay for your own Dardanelles!

BENNO: See the world. Flowing past you...

He mimes the stamping and the swivelling eyes.

OSCAR: A border guard?

BENNO: Isn't that what you wanted? More border guards?

OSCAR splutters with fury. BENNO throws him an official stamp from his briefcase.

BENNO: Try stamping passports. Your hand drops off, the baby's wail, the mother's swear, the grannies die...

TALIA: (into mic) Thanks, Chief Superintendent. (to others) Northolt awaits you sir.

OSCAR gazes round, waving a savage finger.

OSCAR: I'll be revenged for this!!

BENNO: Yeah yeah...

OSCAR turns tail and stalks to the door mid-stage r, where he swings round grandly.

BENNO: Nothing we're not used to.

OSCAR: On your own heads be it!!

He trips over the threshold and bashes his head.

OSCAR: Arrghh...

He slams the door on his toes. BENNO glances round the survivors.

BENNO: Now, Prime Minister...

HEATHER: Very kind of you but I think I shall go on a long journey, far from these islands. Polynesia perhaps. These last few years have been upsetting, I have lost many friends, especially across the Channel, and including strange as it may seem the outgoing Prime Minister.

She wipes her bloodstained hands on the first thing that comes to hand.

HEATHER: A strange fever has gripped us these recent years and it may take time to heal.

She checks her fingers for the remaining flecks.

HEATHER: I doubt whether I am best placed for that task. But then, I wouldn't know who is.

An entirely different person, she slopes off sadly past TALIA upstage l.

HEATHER: Farewell, Albion. Fare well.

BENNO draws a deep breath, perplexed.

BENNO: First too many come, now too many leave!

TALIA: Uncle Benno you should join them! It's not safe for strangers here!

ELDRED: It will be. Once we piece things back together.

BENNO packs his documents back in the briefcase.

BENNO: Maybe I will be Emperor of somewhere else. Did Arnie call?

TALIA: He's on his way.

BENNO: Ah!

He tiptoes to the double doors and gestures at TALIA.

BENNO: *(hisses)* Estonia!

She takes a couple of steps, then hesitates, then decides.

TALIA: No. This is my country.

BENNO shrugs, waves to them both, and eases himself out. ELDRED beckons TALIA.

ELDRED: Let's get to work.

They stare into the future...

Tableau. Blackout. Curtain.