

AN EYE FOR A TOOTH

by
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CHARACTERS

SIR WILLIAM PETHERTON - Secretary of State for Trade

PETER ANGEL - Minister for Trade

GILLIAN ROTH - Personal Assistant to Peter Angel

JOANNA PILGER - Director of Pilger Systems Ltd

CLAUDE PILGER - Managing Director of Pilger Systems Ltd

TOM AITKEN - Newspaper Reporter

SHEILA ELLIOTT - Photographer

JACK LUNDY - Publican

ACT I

SCENE 1

The Commons at Westminster. MP's and officials, wearing coats and carrying briefcases - symbols of office - are leaving at the end of a late night debate. We hear a miscellany of farewells: "Good night, Charles." "...back again tomorrow", "... off for a couple of days." , "...let's get out of here, for God's sake."etc. "...tough for William tonight," "...carried it off though...". The exodus thins and then ceases, leaving the stage apparently empty. SIR WILLIAM PETHERTON, Foreign Secretary, emerges alone. He is tired.

SIR WILLIAM

(To himself)

Thank God that's over.

For the first time we notice PETER ANGEL, Minister of State for Trade, and his personal assistant GILLIAN ROTH. They have been standing in shadow in quiet discussion, oblivious to the bustle; but they react to the sound of SIR WILLIAM'S voice. GILLIAN has a bundle of papers under one arm.

PETER

Is that you Bill?

SIR WILLIAM

Peter? You should learn your way out of here.

PETER

Just following your lead Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM

I've had a rough evening. Feeling a bit mauled.

PETER

I thought you came out of it very well. The PM obviously thought so too.

SIR WILLIAM

I think I gave the opposition as good as I got.

PETER

My PA, Gillian Roth.

GILLIAN

Pleased to see you again, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM

Thank you.

(Admiringly)

Likewise. Are you new to Westminster?

PETER

Ms Roth has been with my office for nearly two years now.

SIR WILLIAM

You've taken to us?

GILLIAN

I believe in what we stand for as a party.

SIR WILLIAM

Right.

(Suddenly serious)

Peter, perhaps we could have a quick word.

PETER

Of course.

SIR WILLIAM

I mean..in private.

PETER

Yes, of course. Gillian would you mind?

ROTH withdraws to a safe distance.

SIR WILLIAM

This issue of arms sales to so-called “repressive” regimes.

PETER

Those on the blacklist?

SIR WILLIAM

You’ve been handling some of the awkward details, am I right?

PETER

Tricky business.

SIR WILLIAM

You question our approach?

PETER

It’s far from comfortable.

SIR WILLIAM

These things never are. Still, we can’t afford to let scruples get too much in our way. The French are only too ready to step in and scoop the market. They couldn’t care less who they sell to.

PETER

Nor the Russians for that matter.

SIR WILLIAM

Quite. The legislation is too strict. Covers too many products that are readily available on the world market. However, we have an official policy. And for once, it’s popular with the public.

PETER

With the press, anyway.

SIR WILLIAM

Without the press, the public doesn’t have an opinion. But you get my drift. The point is we’re quietly backing a good deal of arms business with some of the less ethical regimes;

and so far we've got away with it, with the help of one or two minor prevarications in the House. However, the Home Secretary tells me we may now be in trouble. Some fool in the export licensing office has decided to prosecute a British firm for illegal arms exports. And we may not be able to keep the lid on. You understand what this means?

PETER

Potentially serious public relations damage.

SIR WILLIAM

A bit more than that. If there's any suggestion of government complicity, the Opposition will have field day. There could be resignations. We're under siege right now as it is. Our position in the polls.... We simply can't afford another scandal. I've discussed it with the PM and with my colleague at Trade. We'd like you to look after this, Peter. Without involving any one else. You've been stick-handling the details anyway. Superbly well if I may say so.

PETER

Right.

SIR WILLIAM

It probably won't be easy. But you have a reputation for probity, particularly with the press.

PETER

Not undeserved, I hope.

SIR WILLIAM

We're all honourable men, Peter. But there are plenty out there who spend their time trying to prove otherwise. I can speak not only for myself but for the prime minister too in saying that a good effort on this one will not go unrewarded. Don't quote me, of course, but there's likely to be a reshuffle before the next session. and you'll be well placed.

PETER

What, exactly, do you want me to do?

SIR WILLIAM

Take a look at the files and make sure that nothing gets out that might embarrass the government. Have a word with the Attorney General about Public Interest Immunity Certificates, in case you need to bury some evidence.

PETER

Isn't this a little dangerous?

SIR WILLIAM

I prefer to call it 'cautious'.

PETER

But if the press gets wind that we're hiding something, there'll be an outcry.

SIR WILLIAM

It's your job to see that the Press doesn't get wind of anything. We're not just talking about reputations. Lives are at stake here.

PETER

What do you mean?

SIR WILLIAM

Let me just say that some people involved in this business will be in danger if they are exposed. I'm talking about patriots who take enormous risks to sustain our influence and our markets in dodgy areas of the world.

PETER

For example?

SIR WILLIAM

I can't say more.

PETER

Whyever not?

SIR WILLIAM

I'm talking about highly classified information. It's not to be talked about in a public place.

PETER

But...

SIR WILLIAM

No, Peter. You'll have to take my word for it on this occasion. One of the burdens of high office is that information finds its way to you that on the whole you wish you hadn't seen.

PETER

I understand.

SIR WILLIAM

Now it's up to you, Peter. Remember: this conversation never took place. It's not just the country that needs you now, Peter. It's the party too. We'll be relying on you.

PETER

I'll do my best.

SIR WILLIAM

Excellent. Go to it then. Your poor PA has been patiently waiting. You'd better make it up to her. She looks top notch. Good PAs are hard to find. Someone will poach her if you're not careful. Now I really must be off.

(He makes a show of noticing
GILLIAN, who is still watching
from a distance, and raises his voice
so that she can hear)

Good heavens, is Miss Roth still here? We'll be in trouble with the union.

(Quietly)

Good luck Peter. If you can avoid reporting to me on this, so much the better.

(Calling)

Good night Miss Roth.

Exit SIR WILLIAM with renewed vitality. GILLIAN rejoins her boss.

PETER

I'm sorry, Gillian. I should have let you go home.

GILLIAN

Waiting's part of the job, isn't it?

PETER

You didn't overhear our conversation?

GILLIAN

Of course not. I wasn't supposed to, was I?

PETER

No. But I'll have to tell you something about it because I'll need your help. In strictest confidence, of course.

GILLIAN

Sounds exciting.

PETER

Actually, the whole thing's bloody awful.

GILLIAN

You don't like him.

PETER

He's insufferably pompous. He's blackmailing me to get the government out of a hole: promotion if I succeed; the back benches if I fail. And to add insult to injury, he's rather taken with you.

GILLIAN

Can't be all that bad then, can he?

Exeunt.

SCENE 2

Bar of the Scribblers' Inn, a pretentious but down-at-heel drinking house patronised by journalists and lawyers. Behind the counter, JACK LUNDY , proprietor. SHEILA ELLIOT is propping up the bar. TOM AITKEN enters.

JACK

Mr Tom Aitken, I presume. Some time since we've had the pleasure of your company.

TOM

Too busy, Jack.

JACK

When you're too busy for the Scribblers' Inn , they say you're not doing your job.

SHEILA

So this is where the news comes in, is it?

AITKEN turns to ELLIOT in surprise.

JACK

Right enough.

SHEILA

(To AITKEN)

I'm Sheila Elliot.

JACK

And that's Tom Aitken your speaking to. One of the best reporters in the business.

TOM

I'm a journalist, if you don't mind, Jack.

JACK

Whatever you say, squire.

(To ELLIOT)

Told you, didn't I? Spend time in here and you won't go far wrong.

TOM

What's that supposed to mean?

SHEILA

I'm just out of the cage and looking for work. Film, stills, portraits. I can do it all.

TOM

I'll have a scotch, Jack if you don't mind. What about you, Sheila?

SHEILA

Cheers. I'll have the same.

JACK

You'll go down well here, you will.

TOM

So what's the latest, Jack?

JACK

Matter of fact, I did hear something today. Bloke called Pilger's been arrested.

TOM

Pilger? Never heard of him. What is he? A celebrity?

JACK

Something to do with illegal arms sales and the Middle East or Africa or something. Fellow I heard talking about it was real chuffed. Young freelancer who comes in here sometimes. What's his name? Getting senile, I am. Gone right out of my head. Anyway, he got the tip from his father who's a police sergeant and sold it to the Herald. They'll have a spread on it tomorrow.

SHEILA

What's so special about it?

JACK

That's the right question. You'll go far, Miss. There I go. Your name's gone.

SHEILA

Elliot. Sheila.

JACK

Well Sheila. You'll be teaching Mr Aitken soon. He could do with a few lessons. Just kidding, Mr Aitken.

REGGIE ELWORTH enters.

JACK (cont'd)

Look who's here.

He pours a glass of red wine and hands it to REGGIE as the latter reaches the counter.

REGGIE

(To JACK)

Your health.

(Spotting TOM)

Oh Lord. I escape from chambers after a busy day only to find the bar occupied by one of the least fastidious representatives of the media. What are you doing here, Aitken?

TOM

(To ELLIOT)

Reggie Elworth, Queen's Counsel, literally and figuratively.

REGGIE

That will do nicely as an introduction, thank you.

SHEILA

Sheila Elliot.

REGGIE

You're not with Aitken, are you? Keep away from him. He corrupts.

TOM

What's made you so cheerful?

(To ELLIOT)

When Reggie Elworth dishes out the insults, it's a sure sign he's had a good day in court.

REGGIE

True as a matter of fact. I got the better of one of my least favourite judges today. And all because I rubbed my eye as I was speaking and lost a contact lense in the process. Had to ask the court's permission for time to replace it with a new one and while I was busy with the mirror, the learned judge thought to have his little joke at my expense. "Our sympathy goes out to the learned counsel for the defence," he says, "Perhaps a replacement lense will enable him to see the evidence more clearly." Laughter in court. I fiddle with my eye just long enough for the mirth to subside. "Your Lordship is most kind," I replied, "But down here, the case is perfectly clear anyway. From a more lofty distance, of course, lenses might indeed be of assistance." There was a moment of silence, and then everybody roared. Shouldn't have said it , of course. Thought I might get a dressing down afterwards. But he took it on the chin.

JACK

Full of stories, as usual, Mr Elworth.

SHEILA

You won the case?

REGGIE

What case?

SHEILA

The one you were talking about.

REGGIE

Not over yet. Can't discuss it.

TOM

That's a relief. Perhaps now we can resume our interrupted conversation.

REGGIE

If it's your turn, Aitken, I'll have another.

TOM

More of the same, Jack, if you don't mind. And one for yourself.

JACK

Very kind.

TOM

Jack was telling us about an arrest. Who was it, Jack?

JACK

Fellow called Pilger. Runs an arms factory.

SHEILA

Why is it such a big deal? If you don't mind my asking.

JACK

According to what I heard, somebody up top's involved. Could even be the Prime Minister.

REGGIE

What's the problem?

JACK

Been breaking the law. Selling to crooks and terrorists, and corrupt dictators - you know - who kill their own people. Apparently, this bloke Pilger's been doing it with ministerial approval. So he says.

REGGIE

Wonder who's pursuing the case?

SHEILA

Customs and Excise?

REGGIE

Could be.

TOM

One arm of government getting another into trouble.
Sounds like the real thing.

JACK

It's the real thing all right. Why else would that
freelancer have been so excited?

REGGIE

Could be nothing more than opposition stir-fry.

JACK

Not this time Mr Elworth. Take my word.

TOM

At least we know where learned counsel's
prejudices lie.

REGGIE

There's too much hypocrisy in this country. Selling
arms may not be politically correct. But it brings
money and jobs into the country. We'd do well to
remember that.

TOM

Jobs and money for lawyers anyway.

SHEILA

The weapons industry certainly employs a lot of
people. I wrote an article on it when I was a
student.

REGGIE

Glad someone sees it my way. Thank you very
much, Sheila.

REGGIE'S telephone rings.

SHEILA

Didn't say I approved.

REGGIE

Damn. Must be my chambers.

(He covers the mouthpiece).

Chambers!

(Using the telephone)

Can't it wait until the morning? What about his solicitor? No. I see. Don't think I'll be able to get a judge at this hour. All right. I'll come straight over.

(Pocketing the telephone)

Interesting coincidence, gentlemen. Might as well tell you, since you'll know about it soon enough. Small matter of an alleged illegal export of weapons. A tip for you Aitken. If you're alert and vigilant, you might for once out-scoop the Herald.

TOM

Reggie. Wait a minute.

REGGIE

Can't stop. It's a bore, I know. But there we are.

TOM

At least tell us where he's being held.

REGGIE

Sorry.

JACK

Bye Mr Elworth.

SHEILA

Is it worth going after him?

TOM

Could be. Want to come?

(He places a banknote and some coins
on the counter)

Keep the change, Jack.

TOM and SHEILA leave hurriedly.

JACK

Keep the change, he says. That's the last scoop I'm giving him.

SCENE 3

An interview room in what is obviously a prison or detention centre. Bare walls and a single institutional table with two chairs. CLAUDE PILGER sits forlornly in one of the chairs. REGGIE enters briskly carrying a briefcase and joins CLAUDE at the table.

CLAUDE

You must be Mr Elworth.

REGGIE

Mr Pilger.

CLAUDE

I'm told you're one of the best.
That's what I need. I should never be here in the first place. It's a bloody disgrace.

REGGIE

Perhaps you'd tell me what this is all about.

CLAUDE

What do you know already? Do you know anything about my company?

REGGIE

Little beyond its name, Pilger Systems Ltd. Went public two years ago. I managed to get hold of an annual report.

CLAUDE

We're in the arms business. Highly specialized. Top of the line. There's world-wide a demand for our equipment. We even sell to the Americans, though they like to keep it quiet.

REGGIE

What kind of equipment are we talking about?

CLAUDE

Can't really give you specifics. The information's classified. Let's just say it's efficient and deadly. None of the significant stuff gets sold without a green light from on high.

REGGIE

I understand you're being prosecuted for breaking government export regulations.

CLAUDE

Listen Mr Elworth. Our products go all over the world. Or did, until they closed us down two days ago. About 10 per cent of our exports are to countries where standards are not as high as they might be.

REGGIE

You mean countries on the prohibited list.

CLAUDE

In those case, they don't usually go direct, for obvious reasons. We sell to middlemen.

REGGIE

I need hardly remind you that's illegal. Do I take it you're admitting guilt?

CLAUDE

Do you honestly think I'd risk my livelihood, my family and all my employees for 10 per cent of our export business? I'd have to be crazy. I never even sought most of those contracts. The government found them for us. Mostly our embassies abroad. We'd never risk selling to a middleman on our own bat.

REGGIE

Are you saying the government broke its own regulations?

CLAUDE

Persuaded me to, anyway. And told me how.

REGGIE

We're not talking about a minor bureaucrat I assume?

CLAUDE

Try Sir William Petherton.

REGGIE

The Foreign Secretary?

CLAUDE

His office anyway. I'd be surprised if he didn't know about it himself. And I'm certain Peter Angel does.

REGGIE

Angel...?

CLAUDE

Trade Minister. He's a friend of mine.

REGGIE

Are you telling me that a government minister encouraged you to break the rules?

CLAUDE

I spoke to Peter a couple of hours ago. They let me use the 'phone so I got through to him at home.

REGGIE

What did he say?

CLAUDE

Fobbed me off. Said he was sorry for my predicament but didn't know what I was talking about. Which is a lie because he knew we were circumventing the law right from the start.

REGGIE

Have you any proof of what you're saying?

CLAUDE

Thought you might ask. Two weeks ago our offices were burgled and they took all the documents, including a letter from the Foreign Office, and several from Peter. All gone. Not a scrap of paper left to support our case. The thieves emptied a couple of filing cabinets, and trashed our computer records. And now this.

REGGIE

You reported the thefts to the police?

CLAUDE

I gather, they're in there right now, looking for clues. They've sealed the place off. Look can you get me out of here?

REGGIE

Yes of course. There should be no difficulty with bail. But I need to see the charges. The papers have to be prepared. It can't be done this evening, I'm afraid. Your solicitor...

CLAUDE

I want you to deal with this. Bring in whatever help you need. Never mind the expense. Just get me out of here.

REGGIE

Of course. I'm bound to say this is not an easy case.

CLAUDE

Thirty years of hard work. Nearly five hundred employees. Millions of pounds in export orders. Do you know what that means? If they put me out of business, the whole fucking lot will do down the drain. Get me off, Mr Elworth. I'm too old to start again.

REGGIE

Right.

CLAUDE

One more thing. My wife, Sheila, is...well... she's vice-president of Peter Angel's constituency association. That's why we know him. It might be worth... She's been spending a couple of days at her mother's, so she didn't see the arrest, thank God. Didn't have to put up with the neighbours gawking at me in handcuffs.

REGGIE

What does she know about the business?

CLAUDE

Claude I...never told her about the under-the-table contracts. Not in so many words. But I think she knows what's going on. She's a big shareholder, with a seat on the Board. I thought I'd be out of here in a couple of hours...

REGGIE

You'd like me to call her?

CLAUDE

If you wouldn't mind. It would reassure her to know that I have good legal representation. I've written down the number for you. She might want to have a word with Peter. I suppose there'd be no harm?

REGGIE

Let me think about that.

CLAUDE

She's quite a bit younger than I am. I don't want anything to be misunderstood.

REGGIE

Why should it be?

CLAUDE

No reason, I suppose. She was a model before we married. The media could get excited.

REGGIE

Not much we can do about that, I'm afraid. I'll be in touch tomorrow morning you about the bail.

CLAUDE

Money won't be a problem, Mr Elworth.

REGGIE

Then compared with many, Mr Pilger, you're a fortunate man.

REGGIE leaves.

SCENE 4

Parkscape (or bare stage). PETER and GILLIAN together. She takes his arm. He releases it. She tries again, and again he breaks free.

PETER

We could be seen.

GILLIAN

That never used to worry you.

PETER

It always worried me. I lost control of myself when we met. Took risks. Stupid. Of both of us. I could have lost my position and you your job.

GILLIAN

At least we were happy. It's nearly a month since we've seen each other.

PETER

We meet every day.

GILLIAN

In the office, where we have both have to be on our best behaviour. You know that's not what I mean.

PETER

It's been difficult, Gillian.

GILLIAN

Has your wife been at you again? Telling you to spend more time at home?

PETER

For all intents and purposes, she and I are separated, as you know full well.

GILLIAN

Then why won't you get a divorce?

(Sarcastic)

Or is it the children?

PETER

No it's not the children. They're practically grown up anyway. It's just that I can't divorce at this juncture. The press would have a field day nosing into my private life. Sooner rather than later they'd find out about us. A man in my position has to lead a hidden life. That's all there is to it.

GILLIAN

For how long?

PETER

I'm in line for a cabinet position, Gillian. You must realize.

GILLIAN

I do realize. But don't imagine I'm prepared just to be a bit on the side. That was never part of our arrangement.

PETER

Arrangement?

GILLIAN

I've always trusted you.

PETER

And now suddenly you don't? After what I've done for you?

Where would you be without my patronage? A part-time secretary, perhaps? An office clerk? Jobless?

GILLIAN

I see. You're talking about the government's woeful inability to tackle unemployment.

PETER

I mean that thanks to me you're personal assistant to a minister of the crown.

GILLIAN

That's not why we're together. Or is it?

PETER

Let's agree it's the icing on the cake.

GILLIAN

I can't believe what I'm hearing.

PETER

Alright. Calm down. I apologize, I shouldn't have said that. We're both overwrought. It's a tense time. I'm on a knife-edge. If I don't get into the cabinet in the reshuffle, there'll be no chance for me before the next election. And then, as likely as not, we'll be in opposition. Now, to cap it all, I have this bloody arms business on my back. Is it too much to ask that you give me a little breathing space? That you help?

GILLIAN

I suppose not.

PETER

You know how important you are to me. How much I need you.

GILLIAN

Couldn't we, at least, snatch a cuddle?

PETER

Nothing I'd like better. But we're too exposed here.

GILLIAN

Then at least take my hand for a moment. There's something I need to tell you. It's important.

As their hands touch there is a flash of light. SHEILA appears wielding a camera.

PETER

What the....Who the devil are you?

SHEILA

Sorry about the surprise. Sheila Elliot, Globe International. Saw you as I was passing by and you looked such a nice couple. Peter Angel, isn't it? Trade Minister? I remember that fantastic speech of yours at the Freedom Institute, about the global of the family? Great stuff. And this must Mrs Angel. Would you like me to send you a print?

PETER

This is not Mrs Angel, as you are no doubt well aware. You had no permission to take this photograph.

SHEILA

I don't think permission is needed, is it?

PETER

You know perfectly that photograph could be misconstrued.

SHEILA

Surely not.

PETER

(Menacing)

Give to me.

He takes a step towards SHEILA.

SHEILA

Come off it, Mr Angel.

PETER

How much do you want for the film?

SHEILA

What?

PETER

The film in your camera. I want you to take it out and give it to me. I'll pay you for it.

SHEILA

Pay me for it? I'm a journalist, Mr Angel. This is my work. I can't just open the camera and lose a whole roll for the sake of one picture. Look, if its that important to you, I'll send you the negative and you can do whatever you want with it.

PETER

How do I know you won't take a copy?

SHEILA

You don't. But listen, it's not so serious. Nothing really compromising. I'd forget it, if I were you. Anyway, I must be off. Good evening to you both.

SHEILA leaves hurriedly before PETER can react further.

PETER

Damn and blast it! I told you that we couldn't meet in the open. Not ever. Do you understand? Do you know what it means to have a reputation as clean as mine is in parliament? People believe in me. You have no idea.

GILLIAN

I'm sorry Peter. I really am. But I must talk to you, and there never seems to be an opportunity. Please. I beg you. When can we meet?

PETER

Meet? We can't meet at all after this. Except in the office in front of other people. That's it. Until further notice. Or do you want to ruin us both?

You don't want that, do you? Then keep away from me. Are you listening? Right away.

PETER marches off.

GILLIAN

Peter. Wait. Give me a moment at least.

Exits in pursuit. The following dialogue is heard off-stage, as if receding.

PETER

No Gillian.

GILLIAN

Peter, please.

PETER

Not here and not now.

SCENE 5

Drawing room at the home of CLAUDE and JOANNA PILGER.

JOANNA

(Serving coffee)

How do you like it?

REGGIE

Your husband will be out on bail by tomorrow morning at the latest. I think I can assure you of that. Black, if you don't mind. One sugar.

JOANNA

Can we get the factory open?

REGGIE

I don't know yet. You see, the company may have been breaking the law. Quite deliberately as I understand it.

JOANNA

But we had permission to make those sales. The government knew all about it. We didn't do anything in secret.

REGGIE

Perhaps not. But we need proof and, apparently, there isn't any. Or it's been stolen. I've tried already to get something from Trade and Industry, and Defence. Nothing. The whole issue is classified and they won't let me see anything.

JOANNA

Don't you have a right to see it?

REGGIE

Under normal circumstances, yes. But if ministers issue PIICs or simply deny the existence of certain documents, then there's not a lot we can do. Judges can press for the disclosure of classified evidence but they don't have to.

JOANNA

They protect the politicians?

REGGIE

Especially the senior ones.

JOANNA

Then we're in serious trouble.

REGGIE

It's still too early to say.

JOANNA

God help us. What's to be done?

REGGIE

There's a long way to go yet. There is something you could help with. I gather you know Peter Angel, the Deputy Minister of Defence.

JOANNA

Yes. Very well. He's our MP

REGGIE

He could be central to the whole case.

JOANNA

He certainly is. If it weren't for him we would never had got some of those contracts. He made me vice-president of our constituency party. Well, I was voted in, but he put the pressure on. I'm not really that much of a political animal.

REGGIE

Perhaps you should go and see him. He could be a great help. I think with a little persuasion, he could unlock some of the documents. Enough of them, or parts of them, to get your husband off the hook.

JOANNA

If you think it will do any good then of course, I'll talk to him.

The doorbell rings.

JOANNA (cont'd)

Excuse me.

She opens the door and TOM bursts in.

TOM

Sorry to barge in like this.. You're Mrs Pilger?
Please to meet you. I was wondering if your husband...

(Noticing REGGIE)

Reggie. What a surprise. Perhaps, with your permission, Mrs Pilger, I can kill two birds with one stone.

REGGIE

I advise you not to let him in, Mrs Pilger.

TOM

I'm already in, Reggie. And there's no need for you to be pompous.

(To JOANNA)

Tom Aitken, Globe International. I'd simply like to ask you a few questions.

JOANNA

Get out.

TOM

Mrs Pilger. It was the Herald that broke the story. Not us.

JOANNA

Yes. Bad luck. They got there before you.

TOM

It's not quite like that. We're not all after sensationalism. If the press can do damage, it can also protect.

REGGIE

That's a good one.

JOANNA

I don't want to talk to you. Now will you please leave.

REGGIE

I think you'd be well advised to go, Tom

TOM

Wait. I ask you to listen to me for one minute. Only one minute. That's all I need.

REGGIE

Is this really worth while?

JOANNA

Can you help us or not?

TOM

I think so.

JOANNA

You have your minute.

TOM

We think the government has known all along about the arms sales.

REGGIE

That's hardly news to Mrs Pilger.

TOM

If we can prove it, we have a major scandal on our hands. And your husband will have a good defence.

JOANNA

The government did know.

TOM

Excellent. Do you have any details? Can I record this conversation?

REGGIE

We have no details. So you can put your tape recorder away.

JOANNA

But Mr Elworth, perhaps the press can help.

REGGIE

I advise you to say nothing.

TOM

Don't be a ponce, Reggie.

REGGIE takes JOANNA aside.

REGGIE

(To TOM)

Excuse us for moment.

(To JOANNA)

You can't speak to Angel privately if you expose him to the press. He'll simply shut the door.

JOANNA

What if he refuses to help.

REGGIE

The press won't go away. You can try using them as a last resort.

(To TOM)

That's it, Aitken. You'll have to leave. Unless you want me to call the police.

JOANNA

I'll see you to the door.

She opens the door. Camera flashes from outside.

JOANNA (cont'd)

Go away. You should be ashamed of yourself.

TOM

(Leaving)

Sorry about that. One of my colleagues. I hope we meet again soon, Mrs Pilger. Farewell, Reggie.

TOM leaves. We follow him outside the house, where SHEILA, camera in hand, is waiting.

SHEILA

Did you get anything?

TOM

Not much. Reggie Elworth was there protecting her.

SHEILA

Maybe we're wasting our time.

TOM

No. There's a story here that isn't getting out. She's vice-president of her constituency party. Peter Angel is the MP. There must be something.

SHEILA

I didn't tell you about my photo session with Angel, did I?

TOM

No.

SHEILA

Could be a good piece of gossip. I'll tell you over a drink.

TOM

Is there money in it? Or at least a kiss?

SHEILA

Who for?

SCENE 6

Angel's office. ANGEL alone. He is pacing back and forth hold a sheaf of papers the contents of which he is trying to memorize. GILLIAN enters hurriedly.

GILLIAN

Peter?

PETER

Yes, Gillian?

GILLIAN

Just to remind you that your press conference on the arms affair starts in half-an-hour. Oh and Mrs Pilger will be here in five minutes.

PETER

This arms case is tricky. If there were a way of avoiding the prosecution, it would make things a lot easier

GILLIAN

Couldn't you have a word with the Attorney General?

PETER

Ask him to drop the case? Out of the question. We can't be seen to sanction law-breaking.

GILLIAN

But we did agree to the arms sales.

PETER

There's no proof of that. We may not have pursued wrong-doers very carefully, but then we have more important matters to deal with. We're trying to run a country.

GILLIAN

Is this what you'll tell the media?

PETER

Probably.

GILLIAN

But it isn't true. We encouraged this firm to go ahead. I mean, you did.

PETER

Did I? I don't think so.

GILLIAN

There's plenty of documentation in our files. Letters back and forth. Your trip to the Balkans last year. You had a meeting with that Russian arms dealer. Don't you remember?

PETER

I meet hundreds of people. As for the files, just make sure they're classified.

GILLIAN

What about questions in the House?

PETER

I'll tell the truth. As always. According to my own recollection of events. If my memory's at fault, I'm not to be blamed.

GILLIAN

Peter, an innocent man could go to gaol over this.

PETER

He'll only be gaoled if he's found guilty. Even if the government had encouraged him to break the law, that wouldn't make him innocent, would it? But we haven't encouraged him, have we?

GILLIAN

Rather depends on who you ask.

PETER

Does it? Why would we give out different stories?

GILLIAN

I seem to remember things that you don't.

PETER

It's my recollection that matters.

GILLIAN

Is it? What makes you so sure that my memory, the common memory is of no account? That the only version of events that matters is yours? Where's the truth in all this, Mister Angel? Because I seem to remember a lot of things that somehow you've managed to forget.

PETER

Don't put me on one side of the fence and you on the other. Gillian.

GILLIAN

Note the change of tone.

PETER

I was trying to be friendly. But this is not a personal matter.

GILLIAN

I think it is.

PETER

Then you're making a mistake.

GILLIAN

A woman wouldn't understand?

PETER

(Suddenly impatient)

You seem intent on picking a fight with me.

GILLIAN

You made promises.

PETER

I promised nothing and neither did you. I was going to leave this 'til later, but I might as well tell you now. I've arranged for you to be transferred. To Sir William's office. It's a promotion..

GILLIAN

I don't understand.

PETER

There's no time to discuss it now.

GILLIAN

When am I to go?

PETER

As from next week, I believe.

GILLIAN

You think you can get away with this?

PETER

There's nothing to get away with..

The telephone rings.

PETER (cont'd)

Angel. Yes, send her in.

(Replacing the receiver)

Mrs Pilger has arrived.

GILLIAN

Do you want me here?

PETER

No. I won't be needing you.

GILLIAN

Thank you Mr Angel.

GILLIAN exits , exchanging glances with JOANNA PILGER as the latter enters She is dressed smartly but with a hint of practised daring.

PETER

Joanna! Looking magnificent as usual, even in such difficult circumstances.

JOANNA

You know all about our problem? That Claude's under arrest?

PETER

Do sit down. I've heard, naturally, though I don't know the details. Is he out on bail yet?

JOANNA

There's been a delay. He expects to be let out tomorrow morning.

PETER

That's something at least.

JOANNA

Why has this happened?

PETER

I gather you've been selling to the wrong people.

JOANNA

Claude was doing his job. For the good of the country. You always said that, didn't you Peter?

PETER

I did. Excuse me for a moment.

(He goes first to the door, which has been left open, and closes it, then engages the speaker 'phone on his desk.)

Hello. Miss Roth. Please see to it that I'm not disturbed. Yes. In twenty-minutes. I'll remember. I beg your pardon, Joanna. Where were we?

JOANNA

With Claude, in prison. Peter, I wouldn't have come to see you if the situation weren't so serious. It's not just that Claude's in gaol. They've stopped us trading as well. The police are all over the plant. Our staff are barred from entering. We have orders to fulfill, and salaries to pay. I'm not an expert, but I know we can't just survive this for long. Claude's out of his mind with worry. He says we'll be bankrupt in a matter of weeks unless we can get back to work.

PETER

Surely it can't be as bad as that.

JOANNA

It's desperate. And the worst is that Claude's entirely innocent.

PETER

You mean he didn't arrange to sell weapons illegally.

JOANNA

I don't really know what he sold. But he wouldn't do anything illegal.

PETER

One hopes not.

JOANNA

You approved of those orders we were fulfilling in the Middle East and Africa. You said so.

PETER

Look. We are old friends. I've always been your supporter, you know that. But to say....Do you realize... No minister would... It's preposterous. I didn't even know about it. How could I? Orders for sensitive equipment don't come through my department.

JOANNA

But there are letters from you, documents from the ministry.

PETER

Where are they?

JOANNA

We don't have them. But you must have evidence, Peter. Help us, please.

PETER

Dear Joanna. It's not so simple. All the material relating to defence contracts is classified. We have to protect everyone involved. That includes people in sensitive positions overseas. We can't expose them to risk, can we?

JOANNA

(Puzzled)

No of course, not.

PETER

So it's not at all easy for me to get involved in this without jeopardizing someone else. Do you see?

JOANNA

(close to tears)

Yes.

PETER

Still, for the sake of our feelings for each other, I will try to do something.

JOANNA

I'd be so grateful to you Peter.

PETER

I'll take a look through the files to see if I can find something that might have led Claude to believe he was being encouraged to break the law when, in fact, he wasn't. If I can find a scapegoat, say, in the civil service that would be even better. I'll need you help, though.

JOANNA

Of course. Whatever you ask.

PETER

I'll take some documents to my flat and...well I can't show them to you, .but you can help me...with coffee and comfort perhaps.

JOANNA

Coffee and comfort? Well of course.

PETER

We can begin this evening if you're free. We'll have dinner together, work as long as we can, and then take it up again in the morning over breakfast.

JOANNA

Over breakfast. But I'd have to come across London. I'm not sure I can make it that early.

PETER

You'll be my special guest.

JOANNA

I'm not sure I understand.

PETER

I have a charming pied-à-terre in Pimlico. It's tucked away in a side street, and very private.

JOANNA

Peter, I have to be at home for Claude when he's released.

PETER

You will be, I promise. I'll order you a car. You can pick up Claude at the prison and then be driven home.

JOANNA

You're asking me to spend the night with you.

PETER

I've always wanted it Joanna. Ever since Claude introduced us.

JOANNA

I don't believe what I'm hearing.

PETER

Why do you think I made you vice-president of the local party? So I could be near you.

JOANNA

I was voted in.

PETER

Under my influence. Don't be angry, Joanna. It was you who made me do it. I couldn't help myself. I can still remember sitting beside you at the dinner after your election. You were wearing a green silk dress, and a wonderful, maddening perfume. You're a very beautiful woman.

JOANNA

Peter, I came here to ask for your help. Claude's your friend.

PETER

And I said I'd help. For you I'll do anything, Joanna. Even at the risk of my own career. That's how strongly I feel. You'll come to me, won't you?

JOANNA

I really don't know.

PETER

Let me put it this way. I can't do this alone.

JOANNA

Can't or won't?

PETER

I need your help.

JOANNA

Yes.

PETER

You do understand?

JOANNA

What if I were to march out of here and tell the world what you've just said to me? That you're blackmailing me to sleep with you so that I can rescue my husband.

PETER

That's unfair. I've just spread my dreams under your feet. Don't tread on them.

JOANNA

Oh I see. Your dreams. Then it's just a coincidence that my family is in trouble, my husband in gaol, and I'm desperately in need of help? The press are already badgering us. Perhaps I should tell them about your latest proposal.

PETER

Joanna don't do this. Would anybody believe your word against mine, knowing that your husband's already under a criminal charge? You'll simply slip into further disgrace. I understand your reaction, but I also know that we both want the same thing. Don't deny it, Joanna.

We want Claude out of this mess; and we want each other. God knows you've flirted with me long enough.

JOANNA

Help Claude first, and then perhaps....

PETER

Why not do everything at the same time? That's what I'm suggesting. There's no risk attached. I give my word.

JOANNA

Your word?. What do I need your word for? Or anything else? You could easily save Claude if you wanted to.

PETER

Not without inflicting serious damage on the government and the party.

JOANNA

And on your career? You're not going to risk that. It's written all over your face. I might have considered a fling with you. I did think about it once or twice. But now you can, forget it. I'll never sleep with you Peter. Not with a blackmailer.

PETER

Joanna!

JOANNA

Keep away from me. I can show myself out

PETER

There's no need to take this attitude. We don't live in the middle ages. Joanna! Please don't go like this. Think about what I've said.

JOANNA

God help this country.

The door opens before JOANNA reaches it, and GILLIAN enters. JOANNA and PETER freeze. GILLIAN looks from one to the other and draws her conclusions. JOANNA breaks the spell by hurrying past her and out.

GILLIAN

Sorry. I interrupted. Your voices carried. I heard.

PETER

You're leaving this department. Why don't you take the rest of week off, or something. And now if you don't mind. I have a lunch meeting. The cabinet Secretary. It'll probably be a long lunch. Some tricky issues to discuss. Warm for the time of year, isn't it? Think I can go without a coat.

PETER leaves. GILLIAN watches him go and then emits a howl that might be rage or anguish.

SCENE 7

Morning in the kitchen at the Pilger home. The remains of breakfast on the the table.

JOANNA

There's a journalist coming round this morning.

CLAUDE

Oh no. Where's he from? What's his name?

JOANNA

He told me but I don't remember.

CLAUDE

For heaven's sake Joanna....aren't I in enough trouble without having one of those drivelling smut-rakers on my back? Couldn't you have turned him down?

JOANNA

He said he could help.

CLAUDE

And you believed him. How could you be so naive? There is somebody who can help: Peter Angel. He who got me into this mess in the first place. Now he can get me out. Did he you manage to get hold of him while I in gaol?

JOANNA

In a manner of speaking.

CLAUDE

(Mimicking)

”In a manner of speaking”. What’s that supposed to mean?

JOANNA

I can’t talk to you when you’re like this.

CLAUDE

I find myself locked up for a couple of days and on a serious criminal charge, and what happens? My bloody wife and friends dither and pither like a bunch of old farts in a nursing home. Meanwhile my staff are locked out of the plant, my files and papers are nicked by the police, my customers are running off, and I still have to pay the wages. What the fuck is going on?

JOANNA

Stop it, Claude. Just stop. You’re not doing yourself or anybody else any good. No. Don’t shut me up. Because if you do, I’ll walk out. I know you’re under pressure. What do you think it’s been like for me? A garden party? I’m supposed to be your wife. It’s a word I can do without if all it means is taking stick from you.

CLAUDE

Okay. I’m sorry.

JOANNA

You haven’t so much as put an arm round me since you got home.

CLAUDE

I just don't understand why you haven't done something. You're vice president of the constituency party. Why haven't you contacted Peter?

JOANNA

I've not only contacted him, I've seen him.

CLAUDE

Why the devil didn't you say so? What did he say? He won't let me swing, that's for sure.

JOANNA

That depends.

CLAUDE

On What?

JOANNA

There's a price.

CLAUDE

He wants money. I don't believe it. He's a wealthy man. He hasn't gone bankrupt, has he?

JOANNA

It's not money, he wants. It's me.

CLAUDE

You?

JOANNA

He wants to sleep with me.

CLAUDE

I don't believe it.

JOANNA

He says he's always wanted to. And that we both owe him.

Without him, you wouldn't have made your export contracts and I would just be a pretty face instead of vice-president of the constituency party.

CLAUDE

It's a filthy lie.

JOANNA

A lie with more than a grain of truth in it.

CLAUDE

So he helped us both. That's what friends are for.

JOANNA

And now he has us in his hands.

CLAUDE

Like hell he does. What did you tell him?

JOANNA

The truth.

CLAUDE

Go on.

JOANNA

That I belong to another man, body and soul. Isn't that what you always wanted to hear? Stupid of me, wasn't it? I told him he was lucky to get close enough to me to shake my hand.

CLAUDE

Joanna, I'm sorry.

JOANNA

So you should be.

CLAUDE

How did he take it?

JOANNA

He thought I'd change my mind if I didn't want to see you with a long gaol sentence.

CLAUDE

Which proves he can get me out of this. The correspondence; the contacts all over the world. It must all be in ministry files. I can't believe he'd do this to me. And we call this a democracy. Doesn't he realize we're not the only ones involved? What about our staff? The families who depend on us for their income?

JOANNA

Didn't seem to occur to him.

CLAUDE

What does he want with you? A night? Two nights? A permanent relationship.

JOANNA

I didn't let him get that far.

CLAUDE

If it was just a one night stand...

JOANNA

So you think that would be okay?

CLAUDE

I didn't say that. But if the worst came to worst?

JOANNA

I could play the hooker for a day or two.

CLAUDE

Would it be that much of a sacrifice if it saved the firm - and kept me out of gaol? It would be worse for me than for you.

JOANNA

Yes, you'd be lending out a prize possession. Marriage is a bit passé anyway. All that nonsense about fidelity and intimacy. Nowadays, it's perfectly all right to fuck anyone you need to fuck. So why don't I just go ahead.

Afterwards, I'll have a blood test to make sure I haven't picked anything up so that you'll be completely protected. That's my job, after all. To protect my husband. No matter what. God I don't know whether you or Peter is the bigger sod.

CLAUDE

Maybe I am a sod. I'm in unknown waters, and I feel as if I'm sinking. Do you think I want you in the arms of a shit-head who's supposed to be my friend? The thought of it makes me sick. Come here.

They kiss, roughly. The doorbell rings.

CLAUDE (cont'd)

Damn.

JOANNA

It'll be the journalist.

JOANNA opens the door to TOM. Behind him, hidden at first, is SHEILA.

TOM

Mrs Pilger? You remember me? Tom Aitken.

JOANNA

From the Globe? Come in

She goes to close the door and sees SHEILA.

TOM

My colleague Sheila Elliot.

SHEILA

Hi.

CLAUDE

I'm not exactly thrilled to see you people.

TOM

We weren't responsible for the bad headlines, Mr Pilger.

CLAUDE

You never are, right?

TOM

I wouldn't say that.

CLAUDE

What would you say?

TOM

That we're here to report on a matter of deep public concern.

CLAUDE

I can't say much. It's all sub judice.

TOM

You can tell us what you think. And you, too, Mrs Pilger.

CLAUDE

Leave my wife out of it.

JOANNA

Isn't that up to me?

CLAUDE

Let's get it over with. If you want to know whether I'm guilty or not, the answer is no. Will I fight the charges? Yes. Anything else?

TOM

Did you ever sell weapons illegally?

CLAUDE

I'll answer that in court.

TOM

Well has your firm ever sold arms to developing countries?

CLAUDE

Of course we have. Along with every other manufacturer in the western world.

TOM

What about to authoritarian regimes, dictatorships?

CLAUDE

Occasionally.

TOM

Countries where the people are at war, or starving.

CLAUDE

At war? You bet. Starving? Never thought about it.

JOANNA

Shouldn't you have thought about it?

TOM

You took the words from my mouth, Mrs Pilger.

CLAUDE

Joanna, please stay out of this.

TOM

Shall I repeat the question?

CLAUDE

The answer's no. What people do or go through in their own country is not my responsibility. I don't make people starve or blow each other's brains out.

TOM

But you sell them the tools to do it.

CLAUDE

That's right. And my family and 500 employees have made a good living out of it. Our 250,000 shareholders have been pretty happy too. They're the people I care about, Mr Aitken. That's how capitalism works.

TOM

You're not concerned with the morality?

CLAUDE

Meaning?

TOM

Selling weapons in the certain knowledge they will be used to kill innocent people?

CLAUDE

I can't know that. And neither can you. I don't have my finger on any trigger. You can kill someone with a kitchen knife if you use it the wrong way. That's isn't a reason not to sell them.

SHEILA

Kitchen knives are for cooking, aren't they?

CLAUDE

(Noticing SHEILA for the first time)

Who are you?

TOM

Sheila's one of our photographers.

CLAUDE

I'd stick to snapshots if I were you.

SHEILA

Right. I will. If you don't mind, that is.

She sets to work with the camera.

CLAUDE

You people may not like what we do, but your comfortable lifestyle depends on firms like Pilger.

SHEILA

Could we have a shot of you standing together? Holding hands or something? That's right.

JOANNA

Would you like a tear or two? Should I get out a handkerchief?

CLAUDE

Cut it out Joanna.

(To SHEILA)

Get it over with, will you..

TOM

So you're innocent?

CLAUDE

Of course I'm innocent, Mr Aitken. But what's innocence got to with it? The law isn't about justice.

TOM

What is it about?

CLAUDE

Screwing people, covering your arse, and making money. That about sums it up.

TOM

Is that what's happening in your case?

CLAUDE

The politicians knew what we were doing. They encouraged us.

TOM

Who, exactly, encouraged you?

CLAUDE

You can work that out for yourself.

JOANNA

Why don't I tell him about what's just happened to me?

TOM

Go ahead Mrs Pilger.

CLAUDE

Absolutely not. We've only your word for what happened.

JOANNA

Isn't that good enough?

CLAUDE

For me, yes. But not for the papers. You'll say nothing. It may be our only hope.

JOANNA

Our only hope? That I should....

CLAUDE

Shut up, Joanna. I'm warning you. Unless you want me in jail for the next ten years.

JOANNA

That might not be such a bad idea.

CLAUDE

(To TOM)

That's it. We've said enough. Now will you please leave?

TOM

Mrs Pilger?

CLAUDE

I said enough.

TOM

Thank you both for this. We'll keep in touch.

JOANNA

We don't deserve this, you know.

TOM

Surely not.

JOANNA

Will the press help us? Or make it worse.

TOM

If it weren't for you, Mrs Pilger, I could guarantee we'd make it worse. As it is...? So Long.

Exeunt TOM and SHEILA.

JOANNA

You really are a bit of a shit.

CLAUDE

You want to see me go down?

JOANNA

Of course not. But there's another kind of price to pay for having no morality.

CLAUDE

If you were facing a sentence....

JOANNA

I am facing a sentence, Claude. Please don't make me despise you.

SCENE 8

Scribbler's Inn. TOM and SHEILA are seated at a table.

TOM

It looks as if we're stuck. Pilger's on a charge and his firm's closed down. He says he's innocent, because the government had given him a green light. The government is saying nothing. His wife's involved in some mysterious way but she won't talk.

SHEILA

Or rather her husband won't let her talk.

TOM

There's certainly more of a story. But where is it?

SHEILA

Joanna Pilger's quite something. More than a pretty face I'd say.

TOM

Vice-President of her constituency party. Must know Peter Angel pretty well. Maybe there's something in that.

SHEILA

Talking about Angel, his assistant may show up in a few minutes. Called me last night and asked for a meeting. Wouldn't say what it was about. Probably that photo I took of her and Angel in the park. Wants it back, I expect. I told her to meet me here for a drink this afternoon.

TOM

What's her name?

SHEILA

Gillian Roth. She's Angel's PA. About to be transferred though, apparently.

TOM

A broken affair?

SHEILA

That's your department. I just take the pics.

GILLIAN enters shyly.

JACK

(At the bar)

Come in dear. Everybody's welcome here. What'll it be?

SHEILA

That's her.

(Calling)

It's on us Jack.

JACK

Someone respectable comes in and ends up with you lot.

SHEILA

It's our charm, Jack. Isn't that right, Miss Roth? May I call you Gillian? This is my colleague Tom Aitken of the Globe International.

TOM

Pleased you meet you.

SHEILA

Take a pew.

TOM

What would you like? Not even a coffee?

SHEILA

You want the photograph, right?

GILLIAN

What?

SHEILA

The one I took of you and Peter Angel in the park.

GILLIAN

I'd forgotten all about that. I was expecting a private meeting.

SHEILA

Anything you say to me, you can say to Tom.

GILLIAN

You're not a friend of the government, Mr Aitken?

TOM

Only of the truth.

GILLIAN

How elevating.

TOM

The Globe's a serious newspaper.

SHEILA

You did ask for this meeting.

GILLIAN

Yes. Here goes then. I suppose you know I work for the Ministry of Trade. Peter Angel's PA. Was until last week, that is.

SHEILA

You've left?

GILLIAN

Transferred. He wants me out of the way.

TOM

Why is that?

GILLIAN

Apparently, I know too much about the Pilger case.

TOM

Go on.

GILLIAN

Can we keep this confidential?

TOM

You want this off the record.

GILLIAN

Peter - Mr Angel - has been involved with the Pilger company for a long time.

TOM

Involved?

GILLIAN

He helped them get contracts from overseas.

TOM

What's wrong with that?

GILLIAN

Sometimes the contracts were with dealers who then sold the goods to regimes on the black list. One shipment even got to the IRA, though that was a mistake.

TOM

Angel knew where the hardware would end up?

GILLIAN

Yes.

TOM

If that's true, it's dynamite. Are you sure about this?

GILLIAN

I dealt with all the correspondence. And the private telephone calls. That was my job.

TOM

Who else knew?

GILLIAN

Apart from Peter? Sir William Petherton, I'm fairly sure.

SHEILA

Big fish.

TOM

What did they get out of it?

GILLIAN

I think the company gave money to the party. I don't know all the details. But I do know that something's still going on because Mrs Pilger came to see Peter yesterday.

TOM

Did you pick up any of the conversation?

GILLIAN

As far as I could make out she was there as a...woman. If you see what I mean.

TOM

You'll have to be a bit clearer.

GILLIAN

They were discussing the release of certain papers in return for sexual favours. Mr Angel made a proposition.

TOM

And?

GILLIAN

Mrs Pilger looked very flushed when she left.

SHEILA

Why are you telling us this, Gillian?

GILLIAN

I think it's my duty. Mr Pilger should never have been accused of everything. He had the green light from the word go.

TOM

Do you have any proof? Copies of documents? Papers? Letters showing the government's involvement?

GILLIAN

No.

TOM

Could you get them?

GILLIAN

Yes. No. I don't know. I'm not supposed to be working in Peter's department any more.

I've already cleared my desk. I suppose I could try to get in.

TOM

Forget it. Unless you want to end up in court alongside Pilger. You have a good story, and we'd like to take your word for it. But without evidence, we'd be sitting targets for legal action ourselves.

GILLIAN

I'm telling you the truth.

TOM

How do we prove that?

GILLIAN

I've work in Peter Angel's office for the past two years.

A brief, negative silence.

SHEILA

Isn't there something else, Gillian?

Pause

SHEILA (cont'd)

You've got to tell us.

GILLIAN

I'm carrying Peter's child.

TOM

Oh shit!

SHEILA

Shut up for once, Tom. Go on Gillian.

GILLIAN

It wasn't just a fling, We are...were serious.

SHEILA

Isn't he married?

GILLIAN

He told me it he was going to leave his wife. And I was stupid enough to believe him. I know it's the oldest lie, but it worked.

SHEILA

I'm sorry.

TOM

We can't use any of this. You have a motive for ruining Angel's career, and not a shred of hard evidence against him.

SHEILA

(Warning)

Tom!

(To GILLIAN)

Are you after some kind of revenge?

GILLIAN

I hope not; but I realize I don't come out of this very well. Peter's highly thought of in the party. They say he has a brilliant future. I think I fell as much for the glamour as for him.

TOM

None of this gets us very far. Your affair with a junior minister might make the front pages of the tabloids; but it hardly amounts to a conspiracy to break the law.

SHEILA

Perhaps it can help us to flush one out.

TOM

What?

SHEILA

With Mrs Pilger's help, we could catch Angel in all sorts of difficulties.

(To GILLIAN)

You don't know if she agreed to Angel's proposition?

GILLIAN

No. And I don't want to.

SHEILA

What if she agreed to a rendez-vous? She could be a lead in for us. She could tape their conversation and then, at the right moment, we could confront him with everything.

TOM

What good would that do? We're not the gutter press.

SHEILA

We could force him to come clean. About you Gillian. And about the Pilger case as well.

TOM

Blackmail! Very impressive Sheila. And how will we get Mrs Pilger to agree? We were practically thrown out of her house, remember? My guess is she's not going to jeopardize her husband's defence and the family business just to give us a scoop.

TOM (cont'd)

I could have a word with Reggie Elworth.

SHEILA

The lawyer?

TOM

My guess is she'll consult him. Reggie won't object to anything that helps his case, so long as he isn't implicated.

SHEILA

Let's try it.

TOM

Jack, how much do I owe you?

JACK

You've been 'ere over an hour. If all my clients were like you lot, I'd go bankrupt.

SHEILA

We'll make it up to you, Jack. We promise.

JACK

So you're on the game now, are you? Smarmin' round me. This place is supposed to be a pub not a private meeting room.

TOM

If we get through this one, Jack, it'll be drinks on the house.

JACK

I'd be happy if you'd have even one. Get out of here all of you.

Exeunt.

SCENE 9

REGGIE's office.

REGGIE

You say that Angel propositioned you? It's a serious charge under the circumstances. I assume you're telling me because you turned him down.

JOANNA

Of course I did.

REGGIE

But he does have the evidence to exonerate your husband?

JOANNA

He must have. He even said as much.

REGGIE

And he'll release it?

JOANNA

If I spend the night with him.

REGGIE

He must be very sure of himself. And of you.

JOANNA

If I denounce him, nobody will believe me. They'll think I'm just trying to rescue Claude. He knows that.

REGGIE

Still, the government would get a bloody nose. I'm surprised that the evidence can be sold so readily.

JOANNA

In return for my body? Is the price so low as all that? That's what Claude thinks. Sell yourself, he says. It's nothing.

REGGIE

I didn't mean to imply...

JOANNA

It's all right. I'm not so prudish about fidelity, Mr Elworth. But to be used as a commodity of exchange is another matter. People say I used my feminine charms to become vice-president of our local constituency party. They're right, in a way. But we have to choose our own levels of prostitution. No one in this world escapes it entirely. Not if they want a decent living. I never offered to sleep with Peter Angel, though. Just flirted from time to time. And I don't want to do it now, either.

REGGIE

Something has to be done, Mrs Pilger.

JOANNA

I realize that.

REGGIE

By which I mean that unless we can get some supporting evidence, the defence case remains rather weak. Very weak, I should say, given the power of the adversary.

JOANNA

Are you suggesting that I have no choice but to sleep with him?

REGGIE

Certainly not. There are always choices of some kind. You have mentioned one such. Another is to reveal what you know and trust to the unsavoury prurience of the national press. The media have a better chance of unearthing a scandal than a mere barrister. The downside is that publicity can splatter anyone standing near the cesspool. You might be accused of blackmailing a public figure in order to secure the release of your husband.

JOANNA

And then?

REGGIE

You could be facing a jury yourself.

JOANNA

What do you recommend?

REGGIE

We lawyers never recommend, Mrs Pilger. Our job is to identify the consequences of whatever you choose to do. But if you want to test the journalistic waters, you might try contacting my friend Tom Aitken.

JOANNA

Tom Aitken?

REGGIE

You know him?

JOANNA

He came to interview Claude. I didn't much like him.

REGGIE

Few people do. They sense, not without justification, that he'll ride over anybody to get a story. But he's a real professional. Thoroughly unscrupulous. If he's on your side, you couldn't have a better ally.

JOANNA

What if he's not on our side?

REGGIE

Oh he will be. He can't stand the government. One more thing, Mrs Pilger. If you do decide to see Aitken, please avoid saying that I sent you to him.

JOANNA

Isn't that a bit hypocritical?

REGGIE

Where would we be, Mrs Pilger, without that particular vice? Good luck with whatever you decide to do.

SCENE 10

Sir William Petheron's office in Whitehall.

SIR WILLIAM

Release the Pilger documents? After the issuing them with PIICs? I can't believe you're serious.

PETER

With respect, Sir William. We surely have a duty to the accused. In particular to the Managing Director, Claude Pilger. The fact is, we encouraged him to sell arms to..er...certain buyers.

SIR WILLIAM

What the devil do you mean by ‘certain buyers’?

PETER

Dealers who buy for countries on our banned list.

SIR WILLIAM

Encouraged, you say? Who encouraged? This government? Nonsense Peter. An occasional order may have got slipped through before we could take action. But to suggest that the government has systematically ignored its own legislation. Really!

PETER

If you recall, Sir William, we discussed this at some length two years ago, when I was still a back-bencher. And then again last year when I was brought into the government. Your own minutes will doubtless show...

SIR WILLIAM

I don't need to look at my minutes. I remember very well how you impressed me with your enthusiasm and knowledge the very first time we spoke. Indeed I said as much to the prime minister. There aren't many people, even in cabinet, whose judgement the PM wholly trusts. But I flatter myself I am one of them. You're not going to spoil my score-sheet now, are you Peter? Not when you are obviously poised for further success.

PETER

My intentions are honorable, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM

Of course they are.

PETER

When one sees the possibility of an injustice towards a British citizen, one is surely forced to act. Whether we encouraged the Pilger company to sidestep the rules or simply turned a blind eye, the fact remains that we knew what was going on.

SIR WILLIAM

Who knew, exactly?

PETER

I did.

SIR WILLIAM

Ah!

PETER

Also Stephen Titchfield, your predecessor. And I certainly wrote to you about it, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM

My dear Peter, Stephen Titchfield is regrettably no longer with us; and as for me, had I been advised that we were turning a blind eye to illegal arms exports, I would assuredly have intervened. I'll have my files trawled to make sure I haven't missed something, but I don't recall anything about the Pilger company.

PETER

I thought prime minister also knew. Wasn't it was discussed in cabinet?

SIR WILLIAM

Many things are discussed in cabinet. That doesn't mean they are approved. The fact is we can't and won't accept any suggestion of government complicity. Look. This is not about shielding a few ministerial backsides. It's about protecting our international position. We can't allow the release of material that would call our entire arms control policy into question. Imagine what that would do to our credibility in Washington.

Not to speak of the risk to our undercover agents overseas whose lives could be put at risk.

PETER

But I thought all that agent business was..well...bunkum, an excuse for hiding some of our activities from public scrutiny.

SIR WILLIAM

What makes you think that?

PETER

Didn't you say so yourself the other day?

SIR WILLIAM

How could I have done? For heaven's sake, Peter, this isn't getting us anywhere. You're not going to hear a confession from me either about the government's involvement, or my own, in breaking the law.

PETER

But we did sanction Pilger's activities. We can't just ignore that.

SIR WILLIAM

That's precisely what we're going to do.

PETER

And if the news gets out anyway?

SIR WILLIAM

We'll deny everything. Judges can apply pressure for PIICs to be lifted, but if lives are threatened, I think they'd desist. Ultimately we decide what can and should be revealed. And in this case, we're not even admitting the existence of any embarrassing documents, let alone PIICs.

PETER

What about the possibility of a leak?

SIR WILLIAM

There may be a rat in the wood-pile, I grant you.
The public service is no longer what it was.

PETER

There you are!

SIR WILLIAM

There I most certainly am not.

PETER

A leak could do untold damage to the government.

SIR WILLIAM

A junior head or two may roll if things get too hot.
Enough to satisfy the press. But as for the
cabinet...we'll just deny all knowledge and wait for
the storm to blow over. The public soon forgets.

PETER

Do I take it that it's my head you're talking about?

SIR WILLIAM

It's the law of the jungle, Peter. The place where we
all live. I don't want to see you out in the cold. But
there are circumstances in which even I couldn't
protect you. If it's a question of making a sacrifice,
of cutting off a limb to save the body, so to speak.
You get my meaning? Your job is to handle this
issue, and to keep the party out of it. In your own
interest, as well, of course.

PETER

Sounds like an ultimatum.

SIR WILLIAM

Not at all. But the matter's in your court. Always
was. Always would be. Juniors have to look after
seniors. No different from school really. Once you
become a senior, you'll find yourself in the reverse
position. So cheer up. And now, if don't mind....
Good Lord, just look at the time. I'm supposed to
be at lunch with the Chancellor in ten minutes.

Useful practice for you, this Pilger business. Like all men of good will, you're concerned about our integrity and honesty and so forth. I understand, believe me. But in government we have to deal with the real world. And unfortunately, it's never as pure as we would like. Anyway, keep in touch. Let me know how you get on.

PETER

Right.

SIR WILLIAM

By the way, I owe you a word of thanks. Yes. About, Miss Roth.

PETER

Gillian?

SIR WILLIAM

Your old PA. Can't understand why you let me poach her. She's seems first rate.

PETER

(Aghast)

Yes. She's very competent. Just thought it was time for a change.

SIR WILLIAM

My good fortune then.

PETER

I'll...er...speak to you again, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM

Very attractive, too.

SCENE 11

The Pilger sitting room.

CLAUDE

You're saying my case is hopeless.

REGGIE

Nothing is hopeless. Difficult- yes.

CLAUDE

My chances?

REGGIE

Depends to some extent on whether the trial judge would be willing to challenge the government over the documents. If the answer is yes, and the government refuses to budge, the case against you would probably collapse.

CLAUDE

So how do we persuade the judge?

REGGIE

First we have to convince him - or her - that the documents actually exist. We only have your word for it.

CLAUDE

For fuck's sake.

REGGIE

We need evidence to support your story.

CLAUDE

There is my wife.

REGGIE

I don't follow.

CLAUDE

I might as well tell you that Peter Angel made her a proposition.

REGGIE

Ah!

CLAUDE

You already know?

REGGIE

She hinted as much to me.

CLAUDE

It could be our only hope.

REGGIE

I really can't comment.

CLAUDE

Do you have a better alternative? From what I can see, either it's that, or my company goes under and I spend the next five years in the lock-up. To put it crudely, Mr Elworth, how much is a fuck with my wife worth?

REGGIE

I can't even begin to answer such a question. In any case, would your wife agree to it?

CLAUDE

She said no, when I asked her. But she could be persuaded. If she thinks it's for the firm.

REGGIE

And for you presumably.

CLAUDE

Yes. But she knows the firm's at stake too - and she's a big shareholder.

REGGIE

That's pretty cynical.

CLAUDE

Just realistic. Trouble is she doesn't fancy him. If she did, the whole thing would be a cinch. Maybe you could help?

REGGIE

I don't see how.

CLAUDE

If I tell her to talk to you.

REGGIE

I couldn't think of persuading her to anything.

CLAUDE

I realize that. Just paint a black picture of our chances. That's all. Tell her there's no hope. It's true anyway, isn't it?

REGGIE

I'm prepared to tell her that the case is not an easy one.

CLAUDE

Good enough, Mr Elworth. Let's have a drink on it. Scotch?

REGGIE

No thank you.

CLAUDE

A good-looking wife can be a real asset.

REGGIE

Doubtless.

SCENE 12

The Scribblers' Inn.

GILLIAN

Thanks for agreeing to see me. I was afraid to say anything on the 'phone because - to be honest - I didn't know who might be listening at your end or overhearing at mine.

JOANNA

Look there's a lot on my plate at the moment. I've no time or inclination to play cloak and daggers.

GILLIAN

Until last week I was Peter Angel's personal assistant at the Ministry.

JOANNA

Yes.

GILLIAN

I know about his proposition to you.

JOANNA

What proposition?

GILLIAN

When you came to see him the other day.

JOANNA

If you're hoping for confirmation...?

GILLIAN

This is just as hard for me as for you. Perhaps harder.

JOANNA

I don't understand.

GILLIAN

Peter Angel and I were lovers. Until very recently. When he came in he'd just told me that he'd arranged for me to be transferred to another department. You looked so beautiful and I suddenly felt jealous.

JOANNA

You needn't have worried, I have only ever had a formal, working relationship with Peter Angel. Constituency work. I'm vice-president of...

GILLIAN

I know about that. And about your husband. And about what Peter said to you. Peter left the intercom on by mistake. I'm afraid I eavesdropped

JOANNA

What did you hear?

GILLIAN

Everything. Until I couldn't bear to listen any more. Then I switched it off.

JOANNA

I'm sorry for you. My concern is with the fate of my husband, our business and our employees. I don't buy Peter Angel's saintly public image. But if your problem is just a broken love affair, my sympathy is rather with Peter Angel's wife whom you, presumably, supplanted.

GILLIAN

Peter told me he wasn't really with his wife any more. And I'm pregnant with his child.

JOANNA

I see. He does seem to be rather a...

GILLIAN

Shit?

JOANNA

If that's what you've come to tell me. Thank you. But I've already discovered that for myself.

GILLIAN

There's something else. In return for whatever he wanted with you, Peter said he'd arrange for you to have copies of documents showing that the government had encouraged your company to sidestep the arms control regulations.

JOANNA

We're not talking about morality, are we?

GILLIAN

Aren't we? It's okay to sell arms to oppressive regimes so long as it's kept secret?

JOANNA

If you want me to reassure you about what action I'm going to take, I won't do it. There's too much at stake. And now I really must go.

GILLIAN

Please hear me out, Mrs Pilger. I should have told you straight away. But I wanted you to understand me. The documents won't be released, at least not by Peter.

JOANNA

What do you mean?

GILLIAN

I've been transferred to Sir William Petherton's private office. Peter was with him yesterday. Sir William told him flatly not even to think of releasing anything. It was out of question.

JOANNA

Did you eavesdrop on this conversation, too?

GILLIAN

I didn't have to. Sir William told me the contents of the discussion and instructed me to make a note of it. For his confidential files. Apparently he records everything.

JOANNA

You mean Peter can't help even if he wanted to?

GILLIAN

I don't think he'll go against Sir William. If they even suspected a leak from him, it'd be the end of his career. His career's the only thing in the world he truly loves.

JOANNA

I've already agreed to meet him. I wasn't going to; but there seemed to be no option. And Claude - my husband - doesn't seem to give a damn anyway. If I sound bitter, it's because I am.

GILLIAN

When are you seeing Peter?

JOANNA

Tomorrow afternoon.

TOM and SHEILA enter.

TOM

(At the counter)

Jack? Where are you?

JACK appears.

JACK

Mr Aitken. Miss Elliot.

TOM

Two double scotches, Jack. It's been a rough few days.

JACK

Sorry to hear that. So what's the problem? Chasing news and not finding any?

SHEILA

Something like that.

JACK

Maybe I can help.

TOM

(Sceptical)

Great.

JACK

Wouldn't be the first time I'd given you a tip, would it?

TOM

True, but I'm not holding my breath.

JACK

You won't have to. If either of you'd like to turn round discreetly, like, you might see something interesting. Remember that young woman you brought here the other night? Go on, take a peep. No, the other way. That's right. See her? Been in here for an hour with that other woman. Bet you there's something going on there.

SHEILA

Gillian Roth and Joanna Pilger.

TOM

We owe you one, Jack.

JACK

I daresay you'd have seen them for yourselves. But who knows? Sometimes you can look at somebody and if your mind's somewhere else....

TOM

Yes. Excuse us, Jack. Mrs Pilger, Miss Roth. This is an usual surprise. You know each other? What a small world. May we join you for a moment? Have I said something wrong?

JOANNA

This is a private conversation, Mr Aitken.

TOM

Which could surely only be about one thing.

JOANNA

I'll be off.

TOM

Please, Mrs Pilger. We're not as bad as that.

JOANNA

(To GILLIAN)

You'll keep our discussion confidential?

GILLIAN

You're still not convinced, are you?

JOANNA

How could I be anything but confused?

GILLIAN

I can't keep this to myself. It's in nobody's interest not even yours.

JOANNA

How can you possibly know that?

GILLIAN

Anybody would think you're on his side.

JOANNA

That's absurd. I want an acquittal.

GILLIAN

You won't get it with silence.

TOM

True enough, if I may say so.

JOANNA

What do you know about it?

GILLIAN

Joanna, please. We're both under strain.

JOANNA

The press doesn't need to know.

GILLIAN

Well I'm going to tell them.

JOANNA

What?

GILLIAN

With or without your permission.

JOANNA

You promised.

GILLIAN

It's not a question of promises. Neither of us has any chance of justice unless the story is told.

JOANNA

The press can't be trusted to do what you want.

SHEILA

We're not all liars, Mrs Pilger.

JOANNA

Just vicarious flashers.

Pause.

JOANNA (cont'd)

I suppose I should apologize.

TOM

May we sit down then?

GILLIAN

Yes.

JOANNA

It's too simple really. Peter Angel has offered to release documents that Claude needs for his defence.

TOM

Sounds like story over for you and major trouble for the government. Why would he do that?

JOANNA

He wants an affair with me.

GILLIAN

But he can't deliver because he's under instructions from above to deny that any such documents exist.

TOM

Can you prove he propositioned you?

JOANNA

Not really.

GILLIAN

Didn't you say you had arranged to see him?

JOANNA

Tomorrow.

GILLIAN

Couldn't we use that meeting in some way?

TOM

Trap him, you mean? You'd make a good investigative reporter, Miss Roth.

SHEILA

You could carry a small microphone.

TOM

And at the right moment , we could turn up at the door and confront him. Sounds like fun.

GILLIAN

That's not what we would call it, Mr Aitken. Joanna and I both want justice.

Scene 13

Peter Angel's London flat.

PETER

An odd business. Desire, lust. Whatever you call it. Turns you into someone else, a stranger to yourself. Like fear. I've made promises that'll ruin me if I keep them. And if I don't keep them? She'll have only contempt for me. Even though she wants it as much as I do. She's caught me in a trap. Months, years of flirtation, of beckoning with her little finger.

Without me she'd be nothing, a bikini girl with a rich husband she secretly dislikes. And no future. I put her where she is. She owes me, damn her. Now, finally, when she's ready to pay her dues, it seems I can't keep my side of the bargain. What if I take the cheque anyway, without giving her the documents? Not unreasonable. I've done enough favours for her. And deep down I know she wants me. She's made that clear enough. I shouldn't think like that. Not politically correct for a respected member of Her Majesty's etcetera. But all it means is that, like every politician, I have a private face beneath the public mask.

The doorbell rings.

PETER (cont'd)

That'll be her. I should really tell her the truth, that I can't release the documents, apologize, and send her away. It would be the safest course.

He opens the door and JOANNA enters. She is dressed provocatively.

PETER (cont'd)

Joanna. Wonderful to see you. Make yourself at home. You're looking spectacular, as usual. Can I get you a drink? A little white wine, perhaps? I've a rather good Chablis on ice. Your favourite, if I remember right. Coming up, courtesy of the house. Do sit down. The sofa's comfortable. New as a matter of fact. Finally got round to furnishing the place. Though I've been alone now for...How long? Over two years. Effectively alone. Not much fun for a man as busy as I am. As you can well imagine.

(Handing a glass of wine to Joanna
and retaining another for himself.)

Cheers. Welcome to the Angel pied-à-terre. How is it?

JOANNA

Sorry?

PETER

The wine?

JOANNA

Oh. It's not really the time...

PETER

I'm so excited that you're here.

JOANNA

About the documents, I've given it some thought.

PETER

Of course. I understand. God you're beautiful.

JOANNA

Can you help? Will you help?

PETER

You know how tricky this is for me.

JOANNA

For all of us. Well?

PETER

I'll do everything I can.

JOANNA

About the Public Interest Immunity Certificates?

PETER

I can make sure the judge knows about them. At the trial.

JOANNA

That's not enough, Peter. If it comes to a trial, we'll be ruined anyway. We can't keep the firm closed down for months and then expect to start up again. You must let us have the documents. That is the agreement, isn't it?

PETER

Certainly that's part of our understanding. The other part...

JOANNA

I'm here Peter. Just as you asked me to be.

PETER

Yes. I can hardly believe it. After all this time.

JOANNA

But what about the documents?

PETER

How could I resist you? I'll give you anything you want. Just say the word.

JOANNA

So where are they? Do you have them here?

PETER

Of course not. I couldn't...wouldn't dare. They're highly confidential. I'll have to photocopy them, quietly, in the office.

JOANNA

When?

PETER

Tomorrow. You have my word. Now let's talk about something else. You've never looked so provocative. Do you know that? Let me look at you.

JOANNA

Peter, our arrangement...

PETER

Don't worry. You can trust me. Have I ever let you down? Come here.

JOANNA

No Peter, not before I have the documents.

PETER

A kiss at least. You can't deny me a kiss. A taste of happiness.

He lunges at JOANNA.

PETER (cont'd)

Don't worry. Don't worry about a thing. I'll look after you.

The doorbell rings.

JOANNA

Somebody's at the door.

PETER

You beautiful creature. I'm so hungry for, you can't imagine.

Insistent ringing.

JOANNA

Peter. The door.

PETER

Damn. Alright I'll deal with it.

(Into the intercom)

Who is it?

(To JOANNA)

A delivery.

(Into the Intercom)

Okay, come up.

(To JOANNA)

From the department. Relax. I won't let anyone in.

A knock on the door.

TOM

Just a minute.

He opens the door. TOM, SHEILA and GILLIAN burst in.

PETER

What's going on? Who are you people? Gillian?

What the devil are you doing here? Stop that

camera. I'll call the police.

SHEILA

Just a couple more.

PETER

Get out. All of you. Joanna, I do apologize.

JOANNA

It's for me to apologize, Peter.

TOM

This is an orchestrated gathering.

PETER

Who are you?

TOM

Tom Aitken. Globe International.

PETER

Do you realize this is a private house? And that your presence here is an intrusion? Your editor is going to hear from me. What do you want?

TOM

We know everything, Mr Angel. Your conversation with Mrs Pilger has been recorded and she is a witness to your attempts to blackmail her.

PETER

I've no idea what you're talking about.

TOM

You tried to make a deal with Mrs Pilger. You would give her the necessary government documents to clear her husband and the Pilger company from accusations of illegal trading. And in return she was to keep your bed warm. That's the first count against you. The second....

PETER

There's a second?

TOM

The second is that you conducted a clandestine relationship with your PA Gillian Roth, as a consequence of which she is now expecting your child.

PETER

Gillian? What is this?

GILLIAN

You never gave me a chance to tell you, Peter. You threw me out.

TOM

In other words, Mr Angel,. we have enough evidence to ensure that your political career comes to a rapid end.

PETER

You're going to publish all this?

TOM

Exactly what we publish depends to some extent on you.

GILLIAN

I dont want a public scandal any more than you, Peter.

PETER

What do you all want me to do?

JOANNA

Announce publicly that the Pilger company is innocent and the trial unnecessary.

PETER

I can't do that.

TOM

It's your best course. If you refuse, we'll paint your activities in the harshest light.

Your career will be ruined, and the truth will eventually come out about the arms deals because we'll force the government into the open. That won't save the Pilger company though. Only you can do that, by acting quickly. If you do act, let's say by making a statement to me that I can publish tomorrow, then you might well receive praise for placing honesty in public life before government self-interest.

PETER

I'm under strict instructions not to reveal anything.

TOM

We know about that, too.

PETER

How could you know? Oh, I see. Through Gillian. Ratted on us did you Gillian? No doubt you eavesdropped on my meeting with Sir William, too. A fine way to repay all the help I've given you.

GILLIAN

Peter, I never wanted a parting. It was you who forced it.

TOM

Oh yes, that is the other condition for our offer to rescue your position. You must fully support Ms Roth in her pregnancy and thereafter. It is the only course for an honest man, isn't it?

PETER

I can't deny that.

TOM

The details can be worked out between the two of you. But Ms Roth will let doubtless let us know if she feels that you are not keeping your part of the bargain.

PETER

This is blackmail.

TOM

Yes. Something you must be familiar with.

PETER

Joanna, I don't quite know what to say.

JOANNA

Nothing, I suggest.

TOM

I need a statement from you that the government was wrong in allowing the Pilger company to be prosecuted.

PETER

I shall be in deep trouble with Sir William Petherton, not to say the Prime Minister. Whatever happens I'll lose my job.

TOM

Not necessarily. Rather Sir William may lose his. Or, knowing the government's ability to blame its own failings on others, there may be no resignations at all. That's the new way of things, isn't it? Close ranks and tell the world to piss off?

PETER

We're not that dishonourable.

TOM

Of course not. And now, if you don't mind, we'll take down a statement.

GILLIAN

I, for one, don't want to hear it.

JOANNA

I'll come with you.

GILLIAN

Good-bye, Peter.

TOM

He'll be in touch with you. Won't you Mr Angel?

PETER

Yes. Yes, of course. With you, too, Joanna.

GLLIAN and JOANNA leave.

TOM

Ready when you are. The recorder is running.

SHEILA

Could I have a photograph with you smiling. A grim smile would do it. Square-jawed; somewhere between relaxation and determination.

SCENE 14

The Scribbler's Inn.

JACK

No names no pack drill. Know what I mean? You can't be too careful. In this case, though, it concerns you Mr Elworth.

REGGIE

Really?

JACK

When you stand behind a counter all day, you learn a few things. One of them's discretion though. If you don't want me to say nothing, then I'll mind my own business.

REGGIE

I'm all ears.

JACK

I'll have a drink while I'm about the telling if it's all the same to you.

REGGIE

Please, Jack. On me.

JACK

Very kind. Your good health.

REGGIE

Cheers.

JACK

Well now. You're defending in this Pilger case, am I right? I heard from impeccable sources that they're going to drop the case.

REGGIE

Is that so?

JACK

I had a feeling you didn't know. News arrives here first, like I always say. Anyway, the government's going to admit it was wrong to prosecute, see. Because they were up to the eyeballs in it themselves.

REGGIE

What was the government supposed to be up to?

JACK

Letting Pilger sell weapons where they shouldn't. All on a nod and a wink. You can't put somebody in gaol for doing something you're helping them do, can you?

REGGIE

I think you must have misheard, Jack.

JACK

Fancy a side bet on it, Mr Elworth?

REGGIE

Who did you get this news from?

JOANNA enters.

JACK

Now you know I don't give my sources away. And here's somebody looking a bit more chirpy too. She'll confirm what I've told you.

JOANNA

Mr Elworth. I was told you were here. You've probably heard the news.

REGGIE

Our esteemed proprietor has just informed me.

JOANNA

Mr Lundy? How on earth did you..... It doesn't matter anyway.

REGGIE

I should congratulate you. And your husband, of course.

JOANNA

I haven't told him yet. I thought perhaps you could call him.

REGGIE

I'll have to seek verification first. But surely he would like to hear the news from you.

JOANNA

I wonder if you'd excuse us for a moment, Mr Lundy?

JACK

I'm here when you need me.

REGGIE

You must be delighted, Mrs Pilger.

JOANNA

That's not what I want to talk to you about. I have another problem. Less serious for the world, perhaps. But important to me. I want to divorce my husband. Immediately. Can you help?

REGGIE

Help? Certainly, Mrs Pilger. This does seem rather sudden though. I assume you've thought carefully about it.

JOANNA

Please don't call me Mrs Pilger. Joanna is my name.

REGGIE

Shall we walk over to my chambers?

(Calling)

Duty calls Jack.

JACK

Always busy, Mr Elworth, you are. No wonder lawyer are all rich.

SCENE 15

Sir William Petherton's office.

SIR WILLIAM

What in heaven's name do you think you're up to, Peter? The Prime Minister's beside himself. You've blown your chance of a cabinet seat, I can tell you that. Whatever possessed you to release those papers?

PETER

I had no choice.

SIR WILLIAM

No choice? What the devil do you mean?

PETER

My former PA - your new one if I'm not mistaken - decided for reasons of her own to spill the beans.

SIR WILLIAM

Miss Roth?

PETER

Gillian Roth. Yes.

SIR WILLIAM

She went to the press?

PETER

That's what it amounts to. Yes. She seemed to think our position was immoral.

SIR WILLIAM

Did she?

PETER

She'd seen the original papers effectively authorizing Pilger to ignore our own arms control legislation.

SIR WILLIAM

That's the problem with the bureaucracy. No loyalty any more. No standards. Sacking's hardly enough for this kind of incident. I'll talk to the attorney general about a formal prosecution.

PETER

No, Sir William. She's....I think we'd be well advised to drop it. If this thing came out into the open, questions would be asked about the burglary at Pilgers and the disappearance of all the evidence useful to their defence.

SIR WILLIAM

You're not suggesting the government authorized a burglary?

PETER

Organized is too strong a word. We might have let it be known that certain materials at Pilgers office might be inconvenient.

SIR WILLIAM

What you're saying is that a prosecution of this Roth girl is too risky.

PETER

Yes.

SIR WILLIAM

I trust there is no ulterior motive in your recommending no action, Peter?

PETER

Sir William?

SIR WILLIAM

You're not involved with this girl, are you?

PETER

Certainly not. I'm very happily married. I simply think we shouldn't prosecute.

SIR WILLIAM

I can't have her in my office any longer. Not if she can't be trusted.

PETER

You could make her redundant. You're a director of several companies. Could one of them take her on.

SIR WILLIAM

Perhaps you're right. A prosecution could come to haunt us. Pity about Roth, though. Attractive girl. Smart too. Not many of those around.

PETER

About my position with the prime minister.

SIR WILLIAM

I'll do my best to smooth the waters. The whole matter is acutely embarrassing, of course. There are bound to be questions in the House.

PETER

Will I be blamed?

SIR WILLIAM

The Opposition and the media will go for bigger fish. It's the Prime Minister who'll be first in the firing line. If he's angry enough, he might want a scalp or two - in which case one of them could be yours. I can't make any promises. On the other hand, it doesn't do much good for the party to blame our own. We've another eighteen months before the election. Tomorrow there'll be another crisis, and people will forget this one. That's how it usually goes. The best thing would be a row with the French. Or a terrorist scare. Something sensational to focus attention and make people rally round the flag. The public is dreadfully absent-minded, fortunately. I think it's time for a drink, don't you?

END