

A play by Simone Spiteri

WOLF/SHEEP

Translated into English by Ramon Zerafa

Pipelines Project
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WOLF/SHEEP

Characters:

NUMBER 1	A woman , younger than 40.
NUMBER 2	A man, same age as 1, her husband
NUMBER 3	A man, lives in the apartment block penthouse .
NUMBER 4	A man, NUMBER 1's work boss/superior .
NUMBER 5	A young woman in her twenties, lives in the apartment block.
NUMBER 6	A woman of around 70, NUMBER 1's mother .
NUMBER 7	A non-binary person in their twenties – they live in the apartment block.
NUMBER 8	A woman - loitering in the street.
THE CHORUS	The entire cast apart from NUMBER 1 .

A note on the characters and the setting.

The characters don't have names, and each individual in the play is referred to as a number. As the scenes unfold nobody refers to anyone else by name (except Joseph).

The chorus is made up of the entire cast but never includes Number 1. Generally speaking, the CHORUS has Number 3 as its leader. Other actors can make up the Chorus (that are not 2- 9) if the director would like a bigger chorus.

The play takes place in various settings: the common area of the apartment block, Number 1's house, the penthouse, in the street, workplace etc. However the transition (the way in which one setting segues into another) from one setting into another is rapid and fluid which allows for a more open interpretation on the part of the director when it comes to introducing each setting.

Other peripheral characters that are not 1- 8 make up part of the chorus as indicated.

A note about language

The Maltese Islands are affected by a very complex phenomenon of linguistic code-switching. Often, people will easily switch between Maltese and English, peppering full sentences in Maltese with English words (or vice-versa) and syntax and grammar structures of both languages are frequently melded into one another. Some others choose to speak fully in English with a specific type of accent as do those who speak fully in Maltese. The latter is often a marker of status or social class. For example upper class speakers will often rely heavily on the use of English, while working class people will not. There is however, another phenomenon which is the practice of embellishing one's speech with English to either show or aspire to social mobility, give the impression of a sophisticated intellect or ... as is increasingly the case, the English version of a word is easier to remember due to the language's visibility than its Maltese counterpart.

While the above is difficult to reflect in a linguistic sense within a translation, the three characters that are mostly affected by the above are NUMBER 4 (the boss) who would be the type to use English as a reflection of his upward social mobility and NUMBER 3 (the architect) would have been born and bred in a social strata that would hardly ever employ Maltese at all. The (physically absent, albeit for the voice of) the neighbouring woman who hollers dictation words to her children would be a working class woman trying to come across as cultivated despite her bad structural use of English. This is not a necessary - if at all possible - quality to infuse in the translation from a language point of view but it might be something the director and actors would want to explore through character interpretation and how each character views their place in society and how they want to project themselves to others. Directors and actors are also more than welcome to explore any parallel reality within their cultural fabric that, similarly, evokes this phenomenon.

It never troubles the wolf how many the sheep may be.

Virgil

1

A

A light dawns in the centre of the space.

A woman sitting on a toilet. She's holding a pregnancy test. She's staring into space, waiting. A perfect silence. For a long time.

CHORUS *(in an almost ghostly sibilant whisper)...* tikk-tokk. Tiiiiikk-tooooookk.

The solitary ticking of a clock can be heard in the background.

A single figure from the chorus emerges. He/she/they casts a glance at Number 1, who is transfixed.

Chorus **(one person)** We start in the crapper. And we'll end in the crapper. Actually, we start where we end and end where we start. For this tale is meant to be heard backwards. **(beat)**. Because that's where we're headed. **(beat)**. Crap. **(beat)**. The crapper. **(beat)** Why's that? This aversion, this shame towards something that – well, cleanses us after all. Could it be because in order to cleanse ourselves we need to reveal the ugliest and dirtiest part of us? Who knows? **(beat)** Anyway. She, however **(towards N1)** is not here for all that. Let me warn you: this tale is about a trifle. A little thing ... 'In thee graander scheme of things', as they say. Don't expect dramatic stuff. After all, the chain of life is made up of many little

and insignificant things. But before we get to that, this woman's sitting here contemplating how she ended up here after one rash, innocent 'Oh well!' followed by another: she's waiting to see if she'll let another offspring into a world that only makes you say 'Oh, fuck!' when you look at it. **(beat)** Oh well.

A super-fast medley of sound clips recorded, in quick succession, almost overlapping:

"After a journey of less than two months, the tanker docks in Malta-"

Sounds of a laptop keyboard.

"The pipeline project between Malta and Sicily seems to have got a positive response from the public-"

Sounds of cymbals, whistles and drums: voices shouting OUT!

"...he underlined the fact that this is a key project for the Maltese population and that he has a mandate for it -"

Sounds of cymbals, whistles and drums: voices shouting OUT!

"The institutions are working ..."

Sounds of cymbals, whistles and drums: voices shouting OUT!

"...under my watch this case will be closed ..."

Sounds of cymbals, whistles and drums: voices shouting OUT!

"... the highest political standards in Europe, we will not tolerate any corruption -"

An explosion.

Silence.

Chorus **(solitary figure – he/she continues)** You can also decide not to believe anything. After

all, this is all ... *smoke and mirrors*. And this is a story about a trifle. Don't believe a word the wolf says. What he chooses to say is just the tip of the iceberg. Smoke and mirrors. *Smoooooke and mirroors*. Right?

CHORUS (other figures – aside)

Bloody hell, what a view you've got here!

Damn, look at that belching chimney. Does it always do that?

Of course it does, houses are all lit-up and buzzing tonight!

Looks nice eh. Every window flickering with light. Everything blurred.

CHORUS (Single figure) For it's New Year's Eve today. And there's only one thing you should do on New Year's Eve to get warm - *daaaance*. Because tomorrow is a blank new page. Ready. Waiting just for you. So you can slowly start to pollute it once more.

SEGUES INTO:

B

All of a sudden, from somewhere the music from a party in full swing in the building penthouse explodes into being. The party's coming alive. We switch back and forth between 3 settings: the party, outside on the street and the woman: NUMBER 1, still on the toilet, still transfixed.

Organized chaos.

The quality of the party music changes according to where we're hearing it: in the penthouse, in the toilet, on the street.

Another woman - **NUMBER 8** - in the corner, a streetworker. Clinging to a man from the Chorus's neck. She slips him a small bag containing some powder.

NUMBER 8 That's from the lawyer. The one with curly hair. **(She attempts to pull him towards her)**. Off to the party, handsome?

CHORUS **(MAN)** Hands off me, what the fuck! Yuck, where's the sanitizer ... **(rummages in his pocket)**.

NUMBER 8 Off to the penthouse party, then? Do I wait for you after it's over pups? Ten with a rubber, twenty without.

CHORUS **(MAN)** Ugh, I said don't touch me. **(looks down at his shoes)** Damn this bloody mud **(starts walking in the direction of the party)**.

NUMBER 8 **(shouting after him)** Fifteen! Discount.

CHORUS **(MAN)** What garbage.

He takes a few steps back to extricate himself from her and unwittingly bumps into **NUMBER 7**, a nonbinary person, sat on the ground besides an electricity pole. Cardboard placards are tied to their hands and also scattered around them, bearing the legends: **STRIKE AS A PROTEST! WE WANT LIGHT! WHEN DO WE OPEN OUR EYES TO TURN AWAY FROM THIS DARKNESS?**

NUMBER 5 Watch where you're going!

CHORUS **(MAN)** Hey, what the fu-

NUMBER 7 You stepped on my foot darn you!

CHORUS (MAN) What the hell - This guy's lost it or what?

NUMBER 8 (corrects him) *These*.

CHORUS (MAN) What do you mean *these*? He's alone right?

NUMBER 8 *These*. Not this guy. Or this girl. Neither him nor her.

CHORUS (MAN) Do you mean to say this is a she-male?

NUMBER 7 You moron.

NUMBER 8 Neither nor, pups darling. Take a while for you to get it.

CHORUS (MAN) Claptrap and muck. Ugh.

NUMBER 8 (sarcastically) You'll forget everything up there honey ... you'll come out sparkling like a clean glass. Not like our lot here, coal-black all of us. And for after, for dessert ... I'll still be around, mind. If you're a good boy, it'll be just 12.50.

THE MAN ignores them and crosses the street.

NUMBER 8 (shouts after him). Mind the ditch handsome!

NUMBER 3 (at the party) Does everybody have a drink?

NUMBER 3 in the penthouse leads the revelry: the architect.

CHORUS (dancing) Yeeeeesssss!

THE MAN from the CHORUS that we saw on the street joins the ongoing party. The sound of the music is now a bit muffled, as if we're hearing it from a few floors below.

NUMBER 1 on the toilet, still unmoving.

Her husband's voice from OFFSTAGE: NUMBER 2.

NUMBER 2 (offstage) *Do they bloody know that there's folks who are putting their kids to bed!! Every Friday it's the same. So what if it's New Year's Eve. **(changes tone of voice)** Joseph, I won't say it again, EAT your damn dino chicken nuggets! Where's your mother gone off to?*

NUMBER 3 *What are we all going to collectively forget tonight?!*

CHORUS (at the party - dancing) *Bills, bills, bills!*

NUMBER 3 (at the party -dancing) *- Holy shit, this party's on a roll, man!!*

NUMBER 2 (offstage) *- Otherwise no ipad. In the corner, time out!*

NUMBER 3 *And what are we going to dream about instead?!*

CHORUS (at the party - dancing) *A facial. Holiday. Luxury farmhouse. Loan!*

The sounds of a boy of around TWO, running, screaming and laughing. Naughty, hyper.

NUMBER 2 (offstage) *Hey, can you believe this - the woman from across the street has taken out her twins to the balcony to make them pass the school revision test. On fucken New Year's Eve! Some people are just obsessed. Listen to her!*

THE WOMAN FROM ACROSS (NEIGHBOUR OPPOSITE)

(VO - woman) *If you don't get full marks in the test no more ballet and football for you. Let's start again: PIPELINE.*

(VO - two kids of around 7 - mantra/ repeating like parrots) *A line conveying liquids, gases or finely divided solids.*

NUMBER 2 *Now just look at what you've done. Oh God, Joseph. Ok hey, it's clean up time. (changes tone) Where has she gone to?*

Cut to:

In the Penthouse/ the woman's house/ Out in the street.

CHORUS **(The Man we saw earlier - shouting on the phone)** Hello ...?
Hello ... ? Yes ... out in the street... Hey hang on ... a sec let me just check
which street on Google Maps.

NUMBER 2 (off) *Are you coming or not? The countdown is on soon.*

NUMBER 3 (at the party - they're dancing - singing) *You ain't got nothing on ...*

CHORUS (singing) *Our very own architect !!!!!*

NUMBER 3 (singing) *You ain't got nothing on ...*

CHORUS (singing) *Up your motherfucking arses!*

CHORUS (a woman - aside) *Ooooooh, it's so crass but SUCH. FUN. OMG!*

Music and merriment.

NUMBER 2 (off) *They're starting soon ... ten minutes to go! What's that she's wearing?
Swell choice for a presenter eh, looks like a lump of lard.*

NEIGHBOUR OPPOSITE

(VO - woman) *One more word out of you, pay attention or no crafts, let
me see: KICKBACKS.*

(VO - kids - mantra/ repeating like a parrot) *A percentage given to a
person in a position of power for having made the income possible.*

In the street.

CHORUS **(POLICEMAN - in the street, to NUMBER 8)** Hands up against the wall
please -

NUMBER 8 Hold on Sir -

CHORUS **(POLICEMAN)** One more word from you and you'll spend tonight at the
depot.

NUMBER 3 **(at the party)** *Are you all ready for the countdown?*

CHORUS **(dancing at the party)** WOOOOAAAAHHH!

NUMBER 8 Just a second Sir! And you say nothing to them?

CHORUS **(Policeman)** Them? What do you mean *them*? He's alone right? Are there
others? **(to Number 7)** Do you have a permit?

NUMBER 8 **(about to explain once more)**... Nooooo, *them* because -

NUMBER 7 **(frustrated, they interrupt 8)** Don't bother, it's not worth it.

CHORUS **(POLICEMAN - to 8)** C'mon, let's get a move on!

NUMBER 8 Not fair ... but aren't they here too -

CHORUS **(POLICEMAN)** Can you even articulate? You high on something eh?

NUMBER 3 **(at the party)** *Let's goooooooooo!*

NUMBER 8 Are you serious! I'm not high on anything doll. You can do the tests and
see for yourself. My pee will come out all water. But they **(to N7)** -

NEIGHBOUR OPPOSITE

(VO - woman) *The last one or no playstation: IN-TER-CON-NEC-TOR.*

(VO - kids, mantra/repeating) *A feeder that interconnects two substations.*

CHORUS **(blows his top)** I've already told you if he's alone it's not a protest. I have
to obey the law. If there were more people they'd need a permit. But he's
alone. Now get a move on!

CHORUS **(dancing at the party)** *Ten ...nine ... eight-*

NUMBER 8 Really, everything is bent here, you just pick on someone for no reason.

CHORUS (dancing at the party) ... *seven ... six ... five ... four ...*

POLICEMAN The moment I find him loitering like you are I'll bust him too. ID card.

NUMBER 2 (off) *I'm gonna open this here bottle - this fake champagne - you coming or not? You're gonna miss it!*

CHORUS (dancing) ...*three ...two ... one - HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!!!*

The lights start flickering like before a power cut as soon as the countdown is over and amidst all the merriment. One blink, two, then it goes off. Disgruntled voices at the party. The mobile alarm goes off and it's a cue for NUMBER 1 to come alive again. The time for waiting for the pregnancy test results has run out. Now, calmly, she takes the pregnancy test. Looks at it. Stays still. Looks at the result.

SEGUES IMMEDIATELY INTO:

C

NUMBER 2 steps inside, with her, her husband.

NUMBER 2 (joking) You missed it! Did you want to start a new year in the loo? You know what they say eh? **(laughing)** You end it the same way you begin. What goes around comes around (**with his mobile flashlight pointing at the glass of prosecco**) Happy New Yeeeeear!

NUMBER 1 inhales. She says nothing.

NUMBER 2 Come on, you staying here? The little one has gone back to sleep. You missed the champagne.

NUMBER 1 Oh, well.

NUMBER 2 (still not realizing she's serious - carries on joking) What are you hiding from, a ghost or what?

NUMBER 1 (inhales) From everything.

She raises the pregnancy test in the air, reveals it. They speak almost at the same time.

NUMBER 2 (pause) Is this true?

NUMBER 1 It appears so.

NUMBER 2 How long?

NUMBER 1 Three or four weeks.

NUMBER 2 That day when ...

NUMBER 1 That wretched inflatable jacuzzi.

NUMBER 2 (in jest) One thrust and I hit the jackpot. I got able swimmers, hon...
Godaaaamn.

NUMBER 1 (annoyed) Well done.

NUMBER 2 Aren't you happy?

NUMBER 1 (beat) I don't know.

NUMBER 2 (beat) Is it because of the promotion?

NUMBER 1 No.

NUMBER 2 Coz you'll be on probation?

NUMBER 1 After I gave them what they wanted.

NUMBER 2 (correcting her) After you told the truth.

NUMBER 1 (dismissive) Oh well **(beat)** God forbid there should be an issue.

NUMBER 2 Ok so that's sorted then, no!

NUMBER 1 **(takes a deep breath)** The expenses, right.

NUMBER 2 Oh come on. My granny had nine.

NUMBER 1 **(sarcastically)** And didn't she enroll them all in some posh, fancy school.

Beat.

NUMBER 1 **(hyperventilating)** Schools, bills, family of four - that's a lot on our plate.

NUMBER 2 Hey, the Lord will provide.

NUMBER 1 Since when do you two have a direct line?

NUMBER 2 **(laughing)** My mother made a votive promise to Our lady of Ta' Pinu church when they suspended you.

NUMBER 1 Better if she'd made it not to gossip about people.

NUMBER 2 Hey thanks and you're welcome.

NUMBER 1 **(lost in thought)** She's got five.

NUMBER 2 What's that?

NUMBER 1 That **(beat - from below)** whore ... One time she came in to help me carry the shopping. Said she has five kids. A couple being raised by grandparents, looks like a couple who ended up in some orphanage. What she earns goes towards them.

NUMBER 2 **(mumbling)** That lot always uses kids as an excuse. Why don't they find a goddamn job like the rest of us! I mean fuck - the powers that be go on about prosperity right? and I pay taxes like I'm their fucking slave.

NUMBER 1 Can't even bring myself to imagine I can't feed my kids.

NUMBER 2 She's messed up the whole street.

NUMBER 1 The street was already in a state, when all is said and done.

NUMBER 2 And on top of that we have the guy from Flat 2 tying himself to a pole. On

blessed New Year's Eve too. I mean, is he a moron or what?

NUMBER 1 Awareness, apparently. And, as I already explained, it's *them* not *him*. Non-binary. There's no *him* or *her*. So don't go blurting out '*him*' if you run into each other in the common landing or wherever.

NUMBER 2 I just get so confused. Just don't get this. Frigging '*them*'. I must be getting older.

NUMBER 1 Just don't embarrass me.

NUMBER 2 So much for the damn posters. Sure got the newsmen swarming all over it right! Everything's gone to the dogs.

NUMBER 1 'Unbelievable - it all starts from a damn light pole. So much for the Architect always promising he'll talk to someone, all he cares about are penthouse parties, that one. And us poor sods hanging on to his every word coz he's an architect. You know what - none of us had the balls to do something except -

NUMBER 2 Oooh ok darling let's just tie ourselves to the pole then. For me, it's all a big farce.

NUMBER 1 Two whole years. They mugged a woman here just a fortnight ago.

NUMBER 2 That too? They've turned this place into a jungle. You know what I'd tell that agent - luxury apartment my ass. I have no idea who got scammed for 300K for this flat, I tell you. Some poor sucker. Fat chance of me giving him that sum.

NUMBER 1 Can't wait for the deed to reach closure so we could just get outta here.

NUMBER 2 Anyway. Listen I just realized we've just wasted ten minutes talking about a lot of shit when we could talk about the *baby* instead?!

NUMBER 1 says nothing.

NUMBER 2 This is where we're at now. Don't you worry. You got a pay raise. Plus mine - we'll get by.

NUMBER 1 But you never know what's coming with them that call the shots. Change of political party in government, some other chump comes along, all it takes is a transfer -

NUMBER 2 **(laughing)** Yeah right, when the Antichrist rolls into town. The political parties in power will stay put darling.

NUMBER 1 Dunno.

NUMBER 2 With this lot - as long as they're comfortable. We're just numbers you know. As long as you don't get on their tits, what do they care.

Pause.

NUMBER 1 **(changes the subject)** You left Joseph sleeping on his own?

NUMBER 2 I left Peppa Pig on, on the tablet. He'll find it there if he wakes up. If only he obsesses on something else, goddammit. Pigs wherever you look.

1 says nothing, places her head in her hands. Inhales.

NUMBER 2 Listen up darling - what's done is done. Everything's turned out fine.

NUMBER 1 I'm not so sure.

NUMBER 2 Just put a lid on those two years. Dead and buried. Case closed. Everyone's forgotten about it, so you just do that too. Whatever needed to be put right, was put right. All's behind us. Look to the future. A new year. And soon, a new life too.

NUMBER 1 Every time the lights go off ... Don't laugh at me, I just panic. I remember.

NUMBER 2 You don't have to. It's not like you cut off all the lights throughout the

Maltese islands.

NUMBER 1 Sometimes I try to imagine what would have happened if I'd insisted and not signed anything. Fuck it, I'd have been sacked. You reckon it would make a difference. Foolish but happy.

NUMBER 2 (emphasizing) *You know* what happened. The lights went out like a million times before. So what if you lied a bit and said you were there when it all happened. Sometimes just actually doing something to prove a point is just pointless you know.

NUMBER 1 (inhales) They tell you to 'question the system'. Yeah and then? And then what? Nobody tells you what the next instruction should be.

NUMBER 2 It's all *over* now. Do you understand me? Everything is serene now.

NUMBER 1 Serene. **(she laughs)** What word is that, who uses it? Serene.

NUMBER 2 (almost snaps at her) *Everybody* would have done the same thing.

NUMBER 1 (beat). No, you're right. I keep telling myself that. I've racked my brains.

NUMBER 2 That's good then.

NUMBER 1 I didn't do anything wrong. I mean, it wasn't such a big deal after all... I mean - I did my best but certain things are out of our hands.

NUMBER 2 You did nothing wrong.

NUMBER 1 *I did nothing wrong!*

NUMBER 2 You told the truth.

NUMBER 1 I told the tru- **(stops)**

Beat.

NUMBER 2 And soon... there'll be two.

NUMBER 1 (touches her belly) I have two.

NUMBER 2 We have two.

They smile.

NUMBER 1 Can you just imagine Joseph huh. When he finds out.

NUMBER 2 Imagine everyone!

NUMBER 1 Joseph'll be almost three when he's born. Or she.

NUMBER 2 Hell, give him a break, poor thing, he just turned two less than a month ago.

NUMBER 1 (laughing) Finally something nice.

NUMBER 2 You earned it.

NUMBER 1 We earned it.

NUMBER 2 Listen up ... this time we'll choose a name that's not so common.

NUMBER 1 As long as it's not some footballer's weird name!

NUMBER 2 They'll all be here for dinner tomorrow, we'll tell them.

NUMBER 1 We'll tell them.

We hear the screams of the boy who has just woken up. They stand up and advance while the Chorus surrounds them. Everybody breaks into a lot of 'Cheers/congrats, out-of-key singing of Auld Lang Syne and ad libbing of the people gathered during a celebration.

CHORUS (singing) *For auld lang syne ... me dear ... for auld lang syneeee*

NUMBER 2 Shall we tell them?

NUMBER 2/1 Pregnaaaant!!

Everyone congratulates them. The Chorus gets back into the music and party moves that we'd seen them do during their entrance. SHARP LIGHT CHANGE that takes us to:

INTERMEZZO (1) IN THE PENTHOUSE

Party in the penthouse - dancing. Everybody except for NUMBER 1.

CHORUS We change.

The music stops. Everything stops. Everybody 'normalizes'.

CHORUS Oh hello. We woke up. And you thought this was a party? *This is not a party.* This is not a house, this is not a toilet. This is a room. That's a chair, that's a light. But just *imagine* this is a party. Don't forget, OK? It's important that you don't forget. Like we agreed: *smoke*.

Light change.

CHORUS Shall I remind you again? This one here, look ... a hell of a hassle it took her to get dressed and come here: a bit of a struggle with the zip to zip up right? Because your ass grew and grew even though you paid for that gym membership isn't that right, dear? Show them. **(beat)** This one? A proper spat with the wife in the car. Loads of traffic. Cussing and cursing to find a parking space ... Dodged a huge dog turd on the sidewalk coz he was running late ... This one ... What's your name doll?

Eeeeeeeqqqqq.

Oh, sorry. There are no names here. Because we are:

Nuuuuuumbers.

A heeerd.

Anyway, this one here , nearly tripped over a man curled up under the archway because that's where he's sleeping tonight. But there's no poverty amongst us - is there darling? And do you know why?

Because this ... is all *make-believe* ...

(their fingers stopping their ears) *Make-believe! Make-believe! Make-believe!*

The music can be heard again, faintly from a distance. They stop and listen.

CHORUS Except for the music ... that is real. That *we're re-a-ll-y fe-el-ing ... mo-vi-ng* with it. It invigorates us. For when we dance ... we're all equal. It doesn't make a difference who you are and what you can do, how much money you have, who you slept with, who you fucked over or backstabbed.

All the saaaaaammme.

So let's dance ... for the rest is all irrelevant. And because when we dance we forget the -

Bills! Bills! Bills!

And we think only about

Wealth! Wealth! Wealth!

The music is gradually getting louder.

And we see nothing, we hear nothing, we say nothing. Because we're afraid of everything. We just claim we're not afraid. But we're actually pissing ourselves. But ... as we already said ... all is make-believe. Aaah what a great beat. What *energyyyyyyyyyyy*.

The music is almost the same as before.

CHORUS Music puts everyone on an equal footing. And don't forget, just like we said. Nothing is real. Did you hear me? Hey, concentrate. Concentrate. Because this herd here is not going forward. But backward. We're going *back*, to understand what lies *ahead, later*. Concentrate. Everything's important, but at the end of the day, nothing's gonna matter or prolong anything. For everything is -

Make-believe! Make-believe! Make-believe!

They dance, lost in the rhythm and - BLACKOUT

2

A

Number 1 is standing in front of a mirror, trying on a blazer that's a tad too tight. She takes it off, puts it on, takes it off. She looks on edge, jittery.

Elderly woman: NUMBER 6, NUMBER 1's mother, sprawled in an armchair watching TV. She blends in with the sofa and the remote control - they're one unit everytime we see her. One of her hands is in a cast. She barely takes her eyes off the screen. In the background, the sound of TV commercials and a tablet with cartoons on somewhere.

Number 1's mobile rings.

NUMBER 1 (answers) Hey babe? What's that ... inflatable jacuzzi!?! Whaaaaat? And what spot has your genius brain chosen to put this thing in then? ... yeah right and you think our courtyard is a palace then? What, you're bringing it now? You took an hour off for that!? ... I'm leaving soon. No ... Mom's here with Joseph, he doesn't have playschool today. No, the birthday cupcakes are for next week. Nothing too grand - just 4 wretched cupcakes forming the shape of 2, no! It's like that nowadays, a billion rules, you can't have a bit of fun and careful with the sugar. And he's not even two yet, poor boy. **(beat)** Yes the meeting is in an hour. Yes. Yes ... **(sulking)** yeah, ok. Christ, I know what to say. What do you take me for, an idiot? Ok. Yeah ... I'll tell her to chaperone him ... he woke up with a tantrum, what did you expect!

The terrible twos are here, God forbid ...Yeah, Christ Ok I'll tell her to stop him from getting near that goddam modem of yours. **(She loses her temper)** Ok ok so tell you what, next time, you can tell your mom to come babysit him right. **(she hangs up)**

She looks in the mirror one last time.

NUMBER 6 Do you have a biscuit to go with the tea?

NUMBER 1 Why don't you just get it yourself, can't you see I'm in a rush?

NUMBER 6 Won't have anything then.

NUMBER 1 Where's Joseph?

NUMBER 6 He's where he puts his toys, watching Pippa Pig my child, as usual -

NUMBER 1 Peppa-

NUMBER 6 Pippa, Poppa, it's the same.

NUMBER 1 Don't forget, around 11 to warm up his food, bottle, try to get him to sleep. Everything's in the fridge, all labeled - I made you a list. Don't give him sweets, Mom, they'll just make him more excitable. Did you hear me?

NUMBER 6 (turns up the TV volume) Yes ok, enough now I can't hear what he's saying. Mother of God you hear nothing with this Pippa Pig, he's worn me out.

NUMBER 1 (calls out) *Joseph, give meee the tablet and come near nanna.* Turn it down a bit mom.

NUMBER 1 walks away and takes a spot where no one can see her. The boy (off) is complaining and crying, throwing a tantrum.

From the TV **(male voice)** ... *he said that plans to finance the gas pipeline using European Union funds, two years after big protests that took over the streets of the capit-*

From the tablet (off stage - signature tune) *Peppa Pig signature tune playing.*

NUMBER 6 Turn it down I can't hear anything!

NUMBER 1 (off stage) Nanna wants to watch TV, Joseph, you're getting time out alright!

FROM THE TV ... *they also underlined the fact that if the funds were actually provided, they would be given to the person who is actually being accused of the murd-*

FROM THE TABLET (off stage - signature tune) *Peeeeeeppa Pig!*

All of a sudden, the tablet is switched off, Joseph bawls even more, petulant.

NUMBER 1 reenters the room, tablet in hand.

NUMBER 6 Mary, Mother of God, he just swore he won't let me hear a word! He's doing my head in.

From the TV *And now that Christmas is upon us and today we kickstart the first day of December, let's move on to a story on the biggest Christmas tree ever to be set up on our islands, in the little village of San Lawrenz in Gozo, and it's made from used socks.*

NUMBER 6 Always coming up with more nonsense this lot. They'll be making one with underwear next.

NUMBER 1 (reenters) Jesus, just when he sees I'm in a rush. Messes with my head even more. What's in the news?

NUMBER 6 How should I know honey, do you think I heard anything? They're always moaning about this and that, better if I see nothing. Just misery.

NUMBER 1 (sarcastically) How do you know it's just misery if you heard nothing?

NUMBER 6 Oh come on!! They keep dragging it on. Just give it a break and let's get on with it, for God's sake. They have to stick her in, everywhere. Now it's a tanker, and then it's one of those wind thingies that go round. Even they themselves don't know what they're saying. As long as they stir shit up. It's obvious they've never handled an electricity bill this lot! And no wonder, for they're just rolling in it. And it looks like they think everyone's like them, instead of just thanking him for cutting the costs.

Doorbell rings.

NUMBER 1 What now, who's this? Mom, could you open it.

NUMBER 6 (without taking her eyes off the TV) *Breakfast with Josette and Gaetano* is starting now. She said she's making the trifle today.

NUMBER 1 huffs and goes to open the door to find NUMBER 7.

NUMBER 7 Hi.

NUMBER 1 Hi, Good morning. Alright?

NUMBER 7 Yes. Sorry to bother you -

NUMBER 1 No, no ... tell me ... have to leave soon -

NUMBER 7 About the pole outside -

NUMBER 6 (from inside - watching TV) Who's that?

NUMBER 1 We already called them -

NUMBER 6 (from inside - watching TV) Who's that? Is it the man who dresses up as a woman? I saw him on the landing this morning.

NUMBER 1 Mooomm!! **(to Number 7)** I'm sorry just ignore her.

NUMBER 7 Yes I know, we called them, but we're getting nowhere with the petition so I'm doing the rounds in the block. I'd like us to organize a protest.

NUMBER 6 (prattling on in front of the TV) Wooooah Jesus wept!!! Look how they decked out Gaetano for Christmas, pretending he's Missus Santa Claus. Isn't that something! Nice pair of legs he's got, darn him!

NUMBER 1 A protest?

NUMBER 7 It's symbolic. We chain ourselves to the electricity pole and lie there holding placards until they come and do something -

NUMBER 1 (scoffs) *We chain ourselves?* I got better things to do hon-

NUMBER 7 It's two years they've been winding us up -

NUMBER 1 And we're gonna sort things out chained to a pole holding placards!?

NUMBER 7 Hang on a second, hear me out. The pole is not an issue anymore, these guys are taking us for a ride.

NUMBER 1 And when we're chained to the pole, they'll take us for an even bigger ride.

NUMBER 7 Isn't that your job? With the electricity company, you should know about -

NUMBER 1 (panicking) No, hon. Don't drag me into this -

NUMBER 7 You know the architect is in on it. He's had his fill of coming and going and lying to our faces. His wife is the daughter of the asphalt contractor. Did you know that? No wonder they resurfaced it four times -

NUMBER 1 No I didn't know that. You go ahead and report him then. We already called once. But listen, sorry, be patient with me but this is not the best time and I need to be-

In the meantime, NUMBER 5 makes an appearance. A smartly-dressed girl holding a briefcase.

NUMBER 5 Hi.

A somewhat awkward moment for the three characters.

NUMBER 5 Hi. I haven't seen you in a while.

NUMBER 7 Hmmm.

NUMBER 6 (from inside - in front of the TV) Who is it? It won't be the upstairs neighbour who does nails, by any chance ... tell her I saw her on Facebook, she's so sweet. Pretty as a picture, God bless.

NUMBER 5 No, I'm not doing online content anymore. Did I come at a bad time?

Silence.

NUMBER 5 I didn't want to disturb, but I overheard you speaking as I was going down the stairs. Because of the light 'difficulties'.

NUMBER 7 Difficulties ... as if it was some schoolboy with homework problems! You know that it's still not working!

NUMBER 5 (completely ignoring her tone) Because now I'm the lawyer's election campaign manager -

NUMBER 6 So he's running for office again in this district?

NUMBER 5 I dropped by to ask you if you need anything?

NUMBER 7 (with sarcasm) So, say even if I ask for a lollipop, you'll give me one?

NUMBER 5 (keeps on ignoring) I don't know if you'd heard that I've become campaign manager -

NUMBER 7 We know what you had for breakfast on Tiktok, and you think we don't know that?

NUMBER 5 If you need anythi-

NUMBER 1 (interrupts the passive-aggressive drama taking place between 7 and 5) Yes. I really needed to be stuck in the traffic around fifteen minutes ago and I'm late. Sorry I can't stay with you, hope you understand.

And she closes the door on the visitors outside.

NUMBER 1 (to her mother) Mom, I'm out of here.

NUMBER 6 (looking at the TV) My how she's filled out that one ... so much for all that diet powder on the teleshopping channel.

NUMBER 1 Keep your eyes on Joseph. If something comes up, call.

NUMBER 6 (without looking at her) Wait, how do you send from Whatsapp so I could buy that electric broom?

However, the woman is in a hurry. She grabs her handbag, inhales. The sound of a slamming door. Silence. She stops as if she's heard something. The sound of whistles and drums playing in the distance, phantom noises that *sound* like they're faraway. Barely comprehensible voices repeat a word that sounds like the word *Oooouut. Oooouut.*

NUMBER 1 sways her head a couple of times, as if to empty it and-

B

The light changes and she finds herself in front of a long table, corporate, staring at her.

A Board, consisting entirely of men. The woman seems very nervous. **NUMBER 4:** her Boss, chairs. The rest of the Board is made up of the **CHORUS**.

NUMBER 4 The report is ready. Do you have anything you'd like anything to add?

NUMBER 1 No, I don't think so.

NUMBER 4 So, to recap ...we're stating that you can confirm that the technical breakdown is mentioned in its entirety in the report. Correct?

NUMBER 1 Hmmm.

NUMBER 4 That you agree with the conclusions of the investigation.

NUMBER 1 (nervously) Yeah ... erm ... mmm -

NUMBER 4 And signed off on the internal investigation.

NUMBER 1 That's right.

NUMBER 6 And you, in your position, you can confirm this as a final document?

NUMBER 1 (remains silent, looks animated)

NUMBER 4 Mrs -

NUMBER 1 Maybe I can have a glass of water, please?

NUMBER 4 Help yourself.

NUMBER 1 (trying not to show that she's shaking) Sorry ... but ...

NUMBER 4 Relax, it's all between friends here.

CHORUS (as board members - laughing)

NUMBER 1 (drinks) Thank you.

NUMBER 4 Welcome. **(beat)** Sleepless night, the boy, right?

CHORUS (as board members - laughing)

NUMBER 1 No, just -

NUMBER 4 (aside) Time of the month? (laughs and the Board/CHORUS laugh with him)

NUMBER 1 (drinks) ... I apologize, my son had a fever ... feeling a bit hot ... I'm really sorry. Now, it's ok, don't you worry. Sorry. Let's proceed.

NUMBER 4 Ok, back to it? So you can confirm this report?

NUMBER 1 Erm ...

NUMBER 4 Will you confirm it? (beat) We haven't got all day.

NUMBER 1 Oh ...Yes ... YESSS. OK.

NUMBER 4 Right ...that concludes this meeting then. Case closed. Thank you for your time.

Silence.

NUMBER 1 That's it then? Can I ... I can go?

NUMBER 4 Yes.

NUMBER 1 (awkwardly) Erm ...OK.

NUMBER 4 Monday, come to my office.

NUMBER 1 Monday? (nervously) There's more ... I mean, does it have to do -

NUMBER 4 There's a department I want to discuss with you. Tough job, needs a little organization, completely different ball game but I think you can do it.

NUMBER 4 (bewildered) Erm ...

NUMBER 4 Women organize things better in my opinion. Do I sound less of a feminist? Fuck it.

NUMBER 1 (confused) So I mean -

NUMBER 4 Monday, darling. You did great. Say hi to your husband. Tell him Milan will win the league this year!

NUMBER 1 Erm ... yeah, OK.

She looks at him for a while. She stays there alone, perplexed. She looks for her handbag by her feet, stands up. She punches some numbers on her smartphone, in a robotic manner. She waits, speaking like a robot.

NUMBER 1 (on her phone) Hey mom ... listen if you make the chicken nuggets, he only eats the dinosaur ones ... yeah, won't be long.

The light changes. She takes a step forward and remains lost in thought. For a few seconds we hear, again, the sounds of whistles and drums that we heard earlier until one of the rabble yells *CORRUUUUPPTT!*

C

The light changes, NUMBER 2, her husband brings her back to the present moment.

NUMBER 2 Right, and then?

NUMBER 1 (snaps out of her daze) ... Eh?

NUMBER 2 And then?

NUMBER 1 Nothing ... They just stood up and left.

NUMBER 2 But the meeting on Monday is about the promotion, then?

NUMBER 1 I don't know.

NUMBER 2 And they left?

NUMBER 1 I already told you, yes. Didn't take longer than fifteen minutes... after two years of hassle ... gone in fifteen minutes. They were done.

NUMBER 2 You're not drinking the wine?

NUMBER 1 Don't feel like it.

NUMBER 1 Think he'll pay you more?

NUMBER 2 How should I know.

PAUSE.

NUMBER 1 Sorry. I'm not myself.

NUMBER 2 You should be glad. It's all over.

NUMBER 1 If only every *should* was a real should.

NUMBER 2 Tell you what we'll do. You put the little one to sleep and I'll turn on the jacuzzi and we can celebrate.

NUMBER 1 **(laughing)** Any excuse is good for you.

NUMBER 2 The ordeal is over, a promotion, what is there not to celebrate?

NUMBER 1 But just how did you get it in your head that it's a promotion -

NUMBER 2 Just you wait and see -

NUMBER 3 And hey steady on ... is the jacuzzi sturdy enough? I don't trust inflatables, some idea you had for this itty bitty yard -

NUMBER 2 It's only until we find a penthouse with a big terrace right?

NUMBER 3 Like that's gonna happen in a jiffy -

NUMBER 2 No, wait, this is true ... if you really get promoted, now's the chance. My agent friend said we'll get a decent sum but we have to be quick cos this neighbourhood is not doing well -

NUMBER 1 It's a hassle just to move out -

NUMBER 2 Today she had five clients, the woman across. All this before noon. Five, get it. Trash like her is coming here. I tell you this - We tarry some more and we won't even get the mortgage's worth.

NUMBER 1 Can we discuss this tomorrow, please? My head's about to split.

NUMBER 2 Ok. But only if you join me in the jacuzzi. **(pulls a face)** Your headache will clear in no time, it will melt away with the bubbles, just you wait and see.

NUMBER 1 **(laughs)** And you'll clean up the mess right?

NUMBER 2 **(as he walks away)** Only if you do a striptease.

He leaves the room and NUMBER 1 is left by herself. The smile vanishes. She feels a certain panic, sits down and takes a few breaths. Then she spots the glass of wine nearby, that she hadn't touched before and knocks it down in one swig.

NUMBER 2 comes back.

NUMBER 2 Come on, you game? **(beat - laughs)** Alexa ... *play something seeeeexy.*

Alexa obeys and as the music blares, the sound of a hot tub and fizzing bubbles increases in volume, whistles from the protest that change into party whistles: the focus on sound and light immediately switches to SHARP CHANGE TO:

INTERLUDE (2) IN THE PENTHOUSE

Everyone's dancing. Everyone except NUMBER 1.

A girl right in the thick of the group is dancing in a provocative manner. The people around her egg her on.

CHORUS We're still here ... dancing the night away. What fun we're having ... how lost we are. Lost in daaaancing ... Ahhhh! The ecstasy! HOT HOT HOT!
(towards the girl dancing provocatively) And my oh my, some can really dance! For that's the way of the world isn't it ... it's not what you have, but how you use it. How you exploit it. Or else they exploit you. Right, right? And who are we to pass judgment ... especially when it's something that gives us pleasure? Let me tell you a story - and don't you forget ... It's all make-believe, make-believe make-believe ... ok?
So anyway, this girl ... let's call her Lamb, for she's a mere slip of a thing. And we don't use names here. **(beat)** She bought a huge bag of groceries for her mother - they needed a delivery van to bring it. Her mother rejoiced ... all that *bounty, bounty, bounty*.

She bragged with her neighbour, baked a cake - and the heady smells filled up the whole street. And she went from door to door to give everyone a slice, telling them that her little girl bought the groceries. And she hadn't baked a cake like that in a long time. And how mouth-watering it was! These instant cake packages we get nowadays, they're just like the real deal!

The girl's dancing becomes more frenetic, everyone applauds her.

Yep, true that ... nowadays there are -

Jobs! Jobs! Jobs!

She told them, with chocolate smeared all over her mouth and on her apron.

"If only God gave me strength and her age ... I'd turn the world upside down, me, that's what I'd do," she carried on.

Nowadays, it's not like in my day, nowadays there are -

Opportunities! Opportunities! Opportunities!

A group of men attempt to grope the dancing girl.

Why shouldn't we be like the others, right? Right?

"What do we lack that the others don't huh. If you can, just take your fill, daughter. The night shifts are very hard, true that. You have to sweat blood. But there's a place for everything. You'll become a little rich lady. That's what I always tell her."

The girl curls up into a ball for a while.

Lamb arrived home totally knackered yesterday. Scratches everywhere. Consumed. Bloated. Spent. But even so she promised her mother that she'd do another shopping errand the following week.

"This time, mom, try using icing on the cake," she said.

"Eeeeh, my little one just knows what she wants. She puts in a proper shift.

And between you and me, Work gives you -

Dignity. Dignity. Dignity!

Have another piece of cake, darling. There's enough to go round, and there's more on the way. God bless all this bounty, and don't you say otherwise, seriously, this here is

The best of times! The best of times! The best of times!"

The girl is dancing again and everyone's showering her with bank notes.

BLACKOUT.

3

A

The sound of heavy rain from outside. An occasional flash of lightning. **NUMBER 1** is mopping the common area floor with a squeezer because a lot of water is seeping in. She seems flustered, panicky and dejected. She makes these mewing sounds like she'd been crying some time before. From indoors Joseph is heard making various sounds like he's playing.

NUMBER 1 (addressing the front door of her flat) Joseph, stay ...Don't come here or you'll have a big ouch.

NUMBER 8 appears in the corner. It looks like she's stepped just inside the landing. **NUMBER 1** grabs her mobile phone, tries to call, no answer.

NUMBER 1 (frustrated) Jesus, will they ever answer. (carries on mopping)

She notices **NUMBER 8**. She looks at her, says nothing.

NUMBER 8 Just sheltering a bit here, it's pouring down outside ...

NUMBER 1 It's a disaster.

NUMBER 8 Do you have another rag - give it to me, let me help you mop up.

NUMBER 1 No, there's no need, thank you -

NUMBER 8 Oh, just hand me the thing, darling, two hands are better than one.

NUMBER 8 walks towards the bucket, takes another squeezer and starts helping her. A flash of lightning. The kids opposite scream/laugh.

NEIGHBOUR OPPOSITE

(VO the mother) *Get in here you two, you're getting the water inside!*

Revision for the test - get set!

NUMBER 8 Boy, she really gets on my nerves. I know I'm loud, but she wins hands down.

NEIGHBOUR OPPOSITE

(VO the mother) *Mastermind!*

(VO KIDS) *A person supplying creative intelligence of a project!*

NUMBER 8 I bet those kids don't know what they're babbling about. They're like parrots. Jesus, you got a lot of water hon. These semi-basements are fucked up like that - a downpour and water gets in everywhere. They're selling rubbish houses these days, is what. Sorry hon, but it's true.

NUMBER 1 There's mud that's got in from underneath the door. It was driving me round the bend.

NUMBER 8 And this is no weather for September right!

NUMBER 1 The street was already a mess now it's turned to mush.

NUMBER 8 I'm no expert on this stuff but for the life of me I can't figure out how we ended up with a cordoned-off street coz of an electricity pole not working.

NUMBER 1 Don't start me on that. My mother slipped this morning. In all that rain, it was like soap. You just slip. Landed on her hand. My husband wound up taking her to hospital. She probably broke it.

NUMBER 8 Oh my God!

NUMBER 1 I couldn't go with her. My boy needs me and I'm cleaning up this mess. I swear if I see the architect who lives in the penthouse, I'll give him a proper talking- to, mark my words.

NUMBER 8 Fat chance you have of seeing him. Last night, they were up till 4 mucking around, or should I say 'fucking around', excuse my language - but you're the well to do type.

NUMBER 1 **(laughing it off)** Yeah right!

NUMBER 8 Up on the terrace, moaning like some cat in heat. He's still snoring away, that one.

NUMBER 1 I know I know, they woke up my little one, twice.

NEIGHBOUR OPPOSITE

(VO the mother) (Kids screaming) *Look what a MESS you've done! All these footprints. Punishment I give you.*

NUMBER 8 Listen to her, pathetic. How old is the little one now?

NUMBER 1 One year nine months.

NUMBER 8 God bless him.

NUMBER 1 Especially for the hard work he gives me to put him to bed.

NUMBER 8 Go and report the guy upstairs then!

NUMBER 1 You think we never reported him? His brother is some big shot. I mean, a snowball's chance in hell of that happening! And you think they'll stop him.

NEIGHBOUR OPPOSITE

(VO mother) *Tell me this one: Rule of Law!*

(VO KIDS) *When the laws of a country are obeyed by everyone!*

The sound of a radio blaring songs drifts down from the floor above, followed by the news jingle. The newscaster's voice, a young girl's, somewhat forced, as if she's trying to sound sensual while reading serious news. She sounds ridiculous.

VOICE of N5 (off, on the radio) ... *during a meeting the Primmme Mmminister continued to underline the fact that thanks to his party's leaadershiiiiip the country is continuing to benefit from further progress thanks to the competeeeeencce of the team -*

NUMBER 8 This one's in love with her own voice right? I bet she listens to herself.

NUMBER 1 Full blast, all day long.

NUMBER 8 She's so absurd.

NUMBER 1 Just bear in mind that until a few days ago she was a nail artist influencer, or whatever it is they call them. Sold nail polish and make up. Some people sure are fast social climbers though.

NUMBER 8 God bless her soul. Clearly coz she shacked up with some insider big shot. My clients told me so you know.

VOICE OF N5 (off, on the radio) ... *he weent on to say that money isn't everything in liiiife and that peoples' lives shouuuld not be measured only by their maaaaaterial wealth...*

NUMBER 8 Well of course. Spot on. Who needs money right! This lot just report what they want. She didn't mention that magistrate, the one who bailed out that guy, what's his name, he sent the order to blow her up. They said he bought the guy's yacht. Someone like him doesn't care about money then? Seriously, everyone's wetting his beak, and that's no lie. And then you get that helpless immigrant, left to die on the street, did you see that? Worse than a dog.

NUMBER 1 stops and looks at her as if amazed to find that she has this type of information.

NUMBER 1 Say, aren't you well updated with the latest.

NUMBER 8 I overheard them talking at the convenience store. **(beat)** I'm no fool you know. I won a prize once, at school. **(beat)** for religious studies, of all things ... **(she laughs)** If only Sister Fleur de Lys could see me now, she'd have a heart attack, poor thing! Always fiddling with her mustache, she was!

NUMBER 1 laughs along.

NUMBER 1 You made me laugh a bit there.

While they're laughing NUMBER 3 walks past at a brisk pace, leaving footprints exactly where they had been mopping.

NUMBER 8 Hey you clumsy oaf! You're making a mess all over again!

NUMBER 3 (in a hurry) Tell my cleaner, she'll clean it up. She's supposed to be coming later.

NUMBER 8 (to NUMBER 3) So you just leave prints everywhere till the cleaner comes? Where's the respect? **(to NUMBER 1)** Tell him something, you.

NUMBER 1 Mr Architect Sir???? Just for how long are we going to put up with this mess? Look how much water has come in.

NUMBER 3 I just got a call this morning. Have some friends in high places at the Infrastructure Ministry. Bad news eh. Back to the drawing board, a hell of a lot of fuck ups. Some wires weren't run properly -

NUMBER 1 We're starting from scratch then? You've been saying that we're about to conclude for ages now. Not even the gas delivery truck can pass through, it's been closed so long -

NUMBER 3 Not in my hands -

NUMBER 8 What are you on about, of course it's *in your hands*. If not, what kind of architect are you?

NUMBER 3 Roads are not my concern, not worth my time. Peanuts. We specialize in high-rises. Listen, this is not my remit, I'm just trying to help. I make a few calls here and there trying to pull some strings. I don't have to do it.

NUMBER 1 But we can't go on like this -

NUMBER 3 This is normal procedure, yes. Call them yourself and they'll tell you the same thing. I'm just trying to help.

He steps outside.

NUMBER 8 Help my ass, there I said it!

NUMBER 1 ignores her and goes to wipe his prints but slips.

NUMBER 8 What a clown. You're not afraid of him are you?

NUMBER 1 What am I supposed to tell him? He's hardly ever here. He's got a luxury farmhouse in Gozo or he's on his boat. If you have getaway places to escape to it's easy to see no evil hear no evil if there's nothing to bother you.

NUMBER 8 And we suck it up because we got nowhere to hide. All I see from my window is a concrete wall and a lot of damp, not like him. When I was little,

you stuck your head out the window or the rooftop and you saw the church belfry. Nowadays all you see are high towers.

(pause, quiet) Oh well, we just replaced God with another.

Lying on the floor she lets go of her pent-up frustration and the tears she held back and starts crying.

NUMBER 8 Mary Jesus!! Mind you hurt yourself! **(she helps her back on her feet)**

What's the matter dear, is it because of that rogue! Take no notice of him you -

NUMBER 1 No, no, it's not because of him.

NUMBER 8 What then?

NUMBER 1 Nuthin nuthin, just going through a bad time.

NUMBER 8 Did you lose your job dear? God, we're all in the same boat.

NUMBER 1 No. Not exactly. **(pause)** When I was pregnant with the little one ... the day of his birth in fact, there was a power cut all over the island. In actual fact I skived work a bit and left early during that half hour when the lights were out. That massive nationwide blackout, remember? And so when I was on maternity leave they wanted me to sign the damage report ... and because I wasn't there, well you know. I didn't want to assume responsibility. And now they're hassling me to sign it. **(beat)** I'm sorry, I don't know why I'm telling you this.

NUMBER 8 As if I mind dear. Everyone's got his own shit darling. Yesterday I had a client with his ass smeared with shit. And he wanted me to satisfy him. From shit to shit in the truest sense of the word, hon.

NUMBER 1 **(laughs a little, stops)** Sorry I'm laughing.

NUMBER 8 (laughing too) A little laughter never hurt anyone, honeybunch! **(beat)**

Everything passes you know.

NUMBER 1 I hope so. By the way, the rain's let up, don't let me hold you up.

NUMBER 8 And you'll be ok on your own right?

NUMBER 1 Sure.

NUMBER 8 Ok take care now.

NUMBER 1 Thanks for helping me. I offered you nothing, not even a cup of coffee.

NUMBER 8 Don't you worry, sweetie, it's the thought that counts.

NUMBER 8 steps outside.

B

NUMBER 1 is alone, peering through the door to check on the boy. The cartoons are still on in the background. She takes out her phone. Makes a call.

NUMBER 1 (on the phone) Hi ... yes, erm... I'm calling ... you told me to call again in a week's time. I called last week and you said ... just to check about the appointment ...can you help me please? Joseph. My son. The appointment is for him. Joseph? Yes ... Yes ... you said to call back next week ... yes but Miss, this is the third time already. Ok ... Ok ... yes I understand ...Ok.. So I should call again right? Ok thank you. Bye. Same to you.

She hangs up and hums something under her breath in frustration, knocks the squeezer to the ground.

C

She remains there for a while, her husband comes in eventually: NUMBER 2.

NUMBER 2 What are you doing there, not contemplating your sins, are you?

NUMBER 1 (says nothing)

NUMBER 2 What happened? Joseph?

NUMBER 1 He's inside. I have no idea how he stayed put while I was washing outside. I was checking on him all the time though.

NUMBER 2 Why, what happened then?

NUMBER 1 Nothin'. **(beat)** I called that number that my friend gave me. To fix the appointment. For the little one.

NUMBER 2 Oh.

NUMBER 1 Nothin'. They told me to call again next week.

NUMBER 2 (is about to say something, then refrains)

NUMBER 1 We'll have to wait six more months unless he lets us skip the queue.

NUMBER 2 (blows out his cheeks)

NUMBER 1 Watch your step, you'll slip. **(beat)** You're not gonna say anything?

NUMBER 2 (angry, blurts out) What am I supposed to say? That I was right? That they're picking on us?

NUMBER 1 Picking on us? Picking on us through a little boy?

NUMBER 2 Their kind will do whatever it takes to intimidate you.

NUMBER 1 I have nothing to be afraid of. Why should they intimidate me because of some trivial thing?

NUMBER 2 Nothing to be afraid of? You definitely should be afraid. This lot can fuck up your life if you don't toe the line.

NUMBER 1 How do I toe the line if I'm not to blame for anything? Hey, I did nothing special. I've written loads of reports in my life.

NUMBER 2 Whether or not you're to blame now is not the point. They've made up their mind. They've dragged you into this business and you have to pay lip service to get out of it. If I'd been in the room that day -

NUMBER 1 I fucken went to take a shit alright? If you want it straight and plain. I went to take a leak cos your son was pushing on my fucking insides, nine months and on the brink of giving birth and it just was too much for me.

NUMBER 2 It takes you half an hour to take a shit?

NUMBER 1 It takes whatever it needs to take. That's what I get for continuing to go to work until the moment I fucken give birth to save up all the maternity leave for later.

NUMBER 2 (says nothing)

NUMBER 1 It was the end of the shift, ten minutes to go when I left and I just headed home, like anyone else would do for that matter. *Ten. Fucken. Minutes.*

NUMBER 2 'Anyone else' could accompany you to the board meeting then.

NUMBER 1 If only 'anyone else' would skive off for just ten minutes, right? Yeah, dream on!

NUMBER 2 All I know is that 'anyone else' is not being put through the fucken wringer to put them in their place, though. That's what I know.

NUMBER 1 Sometimes I think that there are people who are so miserable that they just take it out on others.

NUMBER 2 And you actually believe that this ride they're taking you on is just cos you shirked your duties for 10 minutes? How naive you are.

NUMBER 1 Do you even know what you're saying? Do you have any idea what you're saying? That they're willing to get back at me through my son, my son who's probably autistic, because I refuse to give them what they want?

NUMBER 2 Yeah, that's what I'm saying. Don't be a fool.

NUMBER 1 But I did nothing wrong! Am I allowed, on principle, not to sign for something for which I wasn't present? And anyway, if it's true, that it's all routine, what difference does it make to them?

NUMBER 2 But what are you going to lose if you tell them they're right and agree with the report?

NUMBER 1 *Because I just wasn't there and I cannot swear an oath!*

NUMBER 2 Oh come on they're just details. What did you expect to happen? James Bond barging in and turning everything off on purpose or what? You're being a stickler.

NUMBER 1 A stickler you say? Listen, I know I have to break my balls to work there everyday. A WOMAN. Do you know all the shit I have to take because I'm the only *woman* in there? Always there ready to pounce, their eyes on me, scrutinizing my every move, waiting for me to make an error and then pander to their every whim!

NUMBER 2 And that's exactly what you did.

NUMBER 1 *I did not make an error! I. Was. Not. There. I'd pander to them if I signed the report.*

NUMBER 2 So you fuck up your family and your son in order not to pander to them.

NUMBER 1 What now, you're blackmailing me with my son?

NUMBER 2 I'm reminding you, as it appears you forgot.

NUMBER 1 Very well then, so I don't give a flying fuck about him now, is that it? And I don't work my ass off looking after him and on top of that I work just for him and I get to do all the housework on my own here.

NUMBER 2 Today they're pestering you for a silly queue you have to skip to make Joseph's autism screening appointment and tomorrow or after that it'll be something worse.

NUMBER 1 I'll say it again, I cannot lie and state that something happened or didn't happen when I wasn't there.

NUMBER 2 They're not asking you to lie.

NUMBER 1 They're asking me to agree. To something about which I'm not 100% sure. Isn't that a lie?

NUMBER 2 So just go ahead and lose your job, right, what do you want me to say?

NUMBER 1 Do you think I'm gonna fall for that - so ten minutes of skiving is the same as a blackout throughout Malta and Gozo?

NUMBER 2 I don't give a toss whether the lights went out in bloody Sicily too. That is all over, the lights came on again. And since that day they have gone out a million times in a million places.

NUMBER 1 But it wasn't my shift then. And it wasn't *that day*. During all that madness.

NUMBER 2 So just stay stubborn. **(laughs sarcastically)** Pretty rich coming from a family of hardcore political die-hards eh.

NUMBER 1 What's that got to do with it?

NUMBER 2 Is that what you told them when they sorted out the vacancy for you? Didn't your father vote for them in a flash? What's that got to do with it, you say? You get to be party supporters when it suits you then?

NUMBER 1 You were the first who didn't exactly protest when they took me on. So much for all those principles you embraced then. You enjoyed the pay raise.

NUMBER 2 Thank God your father isn't alive to hear about this sideshow.

NUMBER 1 And thank God your father's not alive to hear you singing their praises. Let's just drop it, shall we - he was just another fairweather supporter. Facebook chock-full of posts typed from the terrace of the penthouse that he got after knocking down a house for five people and stuffing that space with nine minuscule apartments.

NUMBER 2 Oh so you're twisting my words now?

NUMBER 1 But no, poor thing, cranes bugged him and he used to love the environment. May God rest his soul.

NUMBER 2 Keep on having it your way then, and drag my father into it. All your words won't help you find a solution to your situation and sooner or later you'll have to put a lid on it anyway. You've been fooling around with this for more than a year. If -

NUMBER 1 If what?

NUMBER 2 (remains silent)

NUMBER 1 If what? **(beat)** Go ahead, say it? If what?

A protracted silence.

NUMBER 2 I'm off to bed.

And he goes inside leaving NUMBER 1 alone and visibly shaken, venting her spleen on the squeezer once more and breaking into sobs.

INTERLUDE (3) IN THE PENTHOUSE

As NUMBER 1 continues sobbing, she's accompanied by a different sobbing, this time male, coming from a member of the Chorus in the penthouse. Both can be heard sobbing in unison for a while until NUMBER 1's sobbing fades and our attention is completely drawn to the penthouse. The man sitting down is sobbing while the party (without NUMBER 1) carries on around him.

CHORUS Yoooo-hooo! Party's in full swing ... swinging ... the joints are now supple, in sync and bending ... to the music. For this is the party that has no end eh, if it ends then what are we left with? From up here we're cut off from the earth, from problems, from dirt and filth. From up here we are Emperors sprawled supine and the gladiator is down there, beaten to a pulp. Up here, my friend ... *Eveerrrrythinnng is posssssibbble.*

The man is still weeping.

CHORUS All this does not mean, however, that woe passes us by eh ... Woe is a fiend with fetid breath, with long fingers and nails that scratch and tries to impale whoever he chooses to. Take this one, for instance. **(indicates the sobbing man)** ... I won't reveal his identity to you, because, lest you forget - this is all -

Make-believe! Make-believe! Make-believe!

And we're just -

A number! A number! A number!

But I can assure you that you know him, or if not him, then someone like him. **(they dance)** *Poor guy*, this morning they broke into his house. *Poor guy*. It was the cops eh. Not burglars. *Poor guy*. What's more, *he* is the burglar. That's what they're saying. **(shock)**

MarymotherofGodHelpUsAll, as if!! No way!

(They keep on dancing) Everyone knows him around these parts. Everyone loves him. *Poor guy*. He's done a lot for the needy eh. *Poor guy*. Always with pockets bulging with sweets that he hands round. *Poor guy*. Always finding a way to place another sweet on the table. After all, a sweet today and another tomorrow -

- *makes little rich men of us all and no more sorrow.*

But - *poor guy* - his eyes are bigger than his stomach, and with a hand plunged in the belly of the big cake all the way up to his elbow ... he's got such a sweet tooth. And he ended up looking like a sweet shop on two legs, sick with diabetes. *Poor guy*. The cops noticed he'd grown fat recently. And so they wanted to know whether he was hoarding sweets at home. Chocolate wrappers underneath the bed: you get the picture. How much money he splashed out on all those sweets he ordered on his moooooobile. *Poor guy*. The news broke out with a *nu-cle-ar* impact.

And everyone, obviously, has his own opinion.

SHARP CHANGE.

For me, it's a sticky mess, through and through, whoever made it.

Such cruelty, if you ask me.

Poor guy.

The fittest and healthiest person in the country! He's never touched so much as a toffee in his life!

What are you on about, why are you so sweet on him!

OOOOH well, whatever had to happen, happened! Doesn't he deserve a few extra sweets, poor guy?!

So much good he's done.

Poor guy.

I bet if you were him you wouldn't refuse that, right, if someone stuck an éclair chock full of cream under your nose!

Not fair, no. They should have warned him in advance.

A lot of larks and foolishness is what this is, you know.

Poor guy.

But hang on, they must have been looking for something.

A crying shame that, with all the good deeds he did for all the street.

And they decide to go check on him now, after he'd probably dumped all the sweet wrappers? They sure took their time.

Poor guy. Poor guy. Poor guy.

CHANGE light.

But the wheel needs to keep on turning. And a friend in need is a friend indeed, isn't it so my friend. **(aside)** Poor guy, you'd think he was brave as

a lion if you saw him around people ... but if you can't get burned and fall to pieces around your friends, where else can you? But we - by hook or by crook -we're here to stay. We're the guardians of today and tomorrow ... and of each other. Isn't that so, boys and girls? And today it's our turn to be the guardian of our friend here ... because hey, after all, hey, today it's you ... and tomorrow it could well be me. So all together now: *one, two, three ...*

LIGHT CHANGE. A few partygoers bring out an ENORMOUS cake full of icing. They sing for him. The man recovers on seeing the cake.

CHORUS *Haaaaaaaappy birthday to you! Happy birthday tooooooo youuuuuuu!!!!*

The man is himself again. Content.

CHORUS So dig in and take your fill my friend. Feel the sugar coursing through your veins and try not to think about those who feel only the acid burn of trouble brewing. If the wolf in sheep's clothing is still a wolf, why fight him? Shovel in shovel in, there you go handsome. And you know what I'll say next ... in the meantime, carry on -

Dancing. Dancing. Dancing.

BLACKOUT.

4

NUMBER 1 is alone, sat on a chair in the middle of an open space. She gazes ahead into nothingness. The muffled sounds of drums and cymbals ... a rumble as if from underground is heard from somewhere in the distance. A babble of barely comprehensible voices sing chants. Gradually we start to comprehend what they're chanting - *Filth! Filth! Filth and Swindlers!*

Suddenly a barrage of ringtones of platforms like Zoom, Teams, GoogleTalk start ringing.

NUMBER 1 snaps out of her reverie, looks ahead and puts on earphones.

In this scene she tries to manage three things - a work meeting (with **NUMBER 4**), a meeting of the building cooperative (with **NUMBERS 3, 5, and 7**, with her husband attending) and what's taking place in the kitchen of her own home (with **NUMBER 2** (on her tablet) and her mother, **NUMBER 6** - who's watching TV). Everybody's online. Everybody talks *practically* over each other. A frantic scene, orchestrated.

EVERYBODY Hello? Can you hear me?

NUMBER 1 Yes, yes I can hear -

NUMBER 4 Right, so let's start straight away. In the other screens you can see all the other members of the board. Names and positions appearing below.

NUMBER 5 (completely disregarding the cooperative meeting, looks in another direction towards a mobile phone propped up on an influencer light stand - TikTok trend music is heard) Let's go and shoot some content guys!

FROM THE TV ... *The Energy consultant declared today that he saw nothing wrong in the fact that people in high government positions and who are close to key individuals in this case were attending meetings about the gas services plant -*

NUMBER 1 (from below) Mom, turn it down!

NUMBER 3 Let's make it quick guys, some people from the Owners' Association management were supposed to come but they can't today - they're too busy and can't make it. So, they told me to chair the meeting instead and if there's a problem we let them know. I don't see any problems honestly, I mean maybe it's time to get a cleaner for the common areas but I can tell my maid to take care of everything. At 5 euros per hour, worth it -

NUMBER 2 (aside) The woman in Flat 3 didn't even turn on the camera.

NUMBER 6 Who? The one who does nails who appears on Facebook? She's shackled up with some big cheese eh. When I'm watching over Joseph I see him come in his car and his driver parks on the corner and waits for him. She was on I think four political party station programmes, talking about nails, I saw her. She's drop-dead gorgeous eh.

NUMBER 7 (to **NUMBER 3**) You can't see any issues? Are you blind or what Mr Architect? When was the last time you looked out your window at that mess of a street? Or maybe you enter your front door in pitch darkness?

NUMBER 6 God bless these drivers the bigwigs have nowadays eh. All decked out, like

they're going to a queen's ball. Back in my day they didn't bother. But mind you, you didn't want to get on their wrong side eh? They were terrifying just to look at.

NUMBER 2 Oh and if they come across all shiny with their smartphones, suits and gelled hair, they still know everyone's dirty linen. Everyone's.

NUMBER 4 So basically we wanted to have a bit of conversation on the issue that - let's face it - we've been dealing with for more than a year and time that we best face it head on, don't you think?

NUMBER 5 (She doesn't like the first one, tries a different tonality) Let's go and shoot some content guys!

NUMBER 1 There is no issue, in actual fact. I just, as I've always said, wasn't there.

NUMBER 4 Because you skived off.

NUMBER 1 I punched ... **(beat)** ... they punched out for me, 10 minutes before. And because of it I got suspended, and I said nothing because it's policy. Even though others do it, and worse. But a policy is a policy and I never said that was an issue.

NUMBER 5 (tries again with a different tonality) Let's go and shoot some content guys!

NUMBER 4 So what's the issue?

FROM THE TV (in the middle of a talk show debate - agitated voices) *No, that is not the issue! We could easily have had land storage for the fuel but you went for floating storage because you made unrealistic electoral pledges that's why -*

NUMBER 1 You know what the issue is.

FROM THE TV (another voice in the debate) *Nooooooooooooo, the pledge was to reduce*

the tariffs. Primarily for you, and for the entire population especially the downtrodden who have suffered enough under your government's watch! As if you didn't enjoy the cheaper bills!

NUMBER 7 Well done, you go and tell him straight!! He's getting riled up, you're gonna burst a blood vessel man! He's one of them, whatever he claims, **(towards TV)** Why don't go and find a job and clean yourself up, you clown!

NUMBER 1 **(from below)** Mom can you please turn it down I'm in a meeting! **(towards the screen).** Sorry, as I was saying there was no issue -

NUMBER 4 You're on mute.

NUMBER 1 Sorry ... Sorry ... as I was saying, there's no issue on my part about the suspension because I'd punched out early. But yes I have an issue with the report. I wasn't there, so I can't be held responsible for a report that my colleague made on my behalf as well.

NUMBER 4 It's a clean report.

NUMBER 5 **(tries again with a different tonality)** Let's go and shoot some content guys!

NUMBER 1 That is so. But you want me to sign for a nationwide blackout that happened at a time when I wasn't there. Not just that day - the three months after that too. As I was on maternity leave. I'm not doubting anything or anyone, but I don't see it as ethical.

NUMBER 4 Let me remind you, Missus, that it's also not ethical to finish work before your shift is over.

NUMBER 3 This is a cooperative meeting and does not concern the street. In that case you can call the minister.

NUMBER 7 You think I didn't try. But he only replies to the likes of you.

NUMBER 3 Do you agree with what this guy's saying? Do you agree with him?

NUMBER 7 **(they correct them)** *Them.*

NUMBER 3 What do you mean?

NUMBER 7 *Them. Them.* I identify as non-binary.

NUMBER 2 **(twitters to NUMBER 1 under his breath)** Did you hear the guy from Flat 2? What is he then, if he's not a fag anymore? I don't understand.

NUMBER 4 Ok let's cut to the chase. We have to conclude this and you, as an employee on shift duty have to sign it too. Now ball's in your court, but -

NUMBER 1 But *what*?

NUMBER 3 Flat 3, hello? Do you agree?

NUMBER 5 **(tries again with a different tonality)** Let's go and shoot some content guys - eh ... sorry ... erm **(unmutes)** ... I agree with everyone, yes.

NUMBER 4 But nothing. Just making a statement. Everything in life is a statement. The report is a statement. Not signing it, is another.

NUMBER 3 What do you propose then?

NUMBER 6 I'm taking this petition to the Ministry.

NUMBER 3 Petition with whose signatures - the few cats on the streets?

NUMBER 7 I'll get more signatures if I have to.

NUMBER 6 **(her smartphone rings)** Hello? Hello?

PHONE **(voice)** *Madam this is the office of the Notary for the Ministry calling. We'd like to wish you Happy Birthday for tomorrow and ask you if you need anything?*

NUMBER 4 How old is the baby?

NUMBER 1 What do you mean what does that have to do with anything?

NUMBER 3 And signatures for what? The work has started, your signatures won't remove the dirt from the streets or repair the electricity pole and light it up you know.

NUMBER 6 **(on smartphone)** Congratulations to the Minister, OK! What a skilled

orator, saw him on TV on Sunday. I don't understand half of what he says but my goodness he's so talented!

NUMBER 4 (innocently) Just seems to me that the baby is too young to be without his mummy ... you took a lot of leave this year because of him.

NUMBER 1 These past two months. Not year. Maternity leave is my right. Two months ago he started childcare, they are often sick when they start. After all, he's a year and a few months old.

NUMBER 6 At this point that's not the point. We have to show them that we won't take it lying down.

NUMBER 3 Believe me, you're not taking it lying down, they're taking it elsewhere, they're not going to waste time on some street like this one. Or on you. With all due respect.

NUMBER 1 Engineer, I don't feel comfortable that you got me involved in this matter -

NUMBER 4 What matter? There's no 'matter'. This is all your paranoia. That something's 'the matter'! This is procedure.

NUMBER 1 So why would you need my signature after all? Just go ahead without me no?

NUMBER 4 Because your name is on the roster! That's why! Hear me out Missus. These things happen, faults that are common for an interconnector system.

NUMBER 1 Exactly.

NUMBER 4 But there is a bit more heat about this report. You know why. It's all about the timing. And like anything else in this world, timing affects everything.

(beat) Now you've been with us since you graduated. First woman on the job. We never had any problems with you. You've used your time with us well. You have a lot of options you can take. If you wish. Time will tell. However, sometimes, well ... a timely intervention is necessary that doesn't cost you anything but can make things just ... how shall I put it. Smoother.

The world has enough hassles as it is. For everyone. You too. I hear your boy is giving you a hard time, no? Why make it worse?

NUMBER 7 So we just continue to keep our mouths shut, is that it?

FROM THE TV ... *the gas plant shareholder invoked the right to silence in court this morning when questioned about the possibility of foreign companies being involved with the plant's projects and whether he himself owned any-*

NUMBER 6 (switches channels) I've had enough of them. They're so depressing.

NUMBER 3 Noone's stopping you from speaking out. Goodluck with that.

NUMBER 4 I expect a reply in the near future.

NUMBER 5 (tries again with a different tonality) Let's go and shoot some content guys!

All laptops/tablets/TVs on Zoom etc are switched off simultaneously and NUMBER 1 finds herself alone at the centre as we found her at the start of the scene.

The muffled sounds of drums and cymbals ... a rumble as if from underground is heard from somewhere in the distance. A babble of barely comprehensible voices sing chants. Gradually we start to comprehend what they're chanting - *Filth! Filth! Filth and Swindlers!*

CHANGE LIGHT.

The echo of *Filth and Swindlers* becomes more audible. The CHORUS (everyone except NUMBER 1) are all twittering the same words. The volume increases gradually, and all of a sudden reaches a peak - the austere and gloomy tone that we had started with transforms into revelry and shouting that take us back to the penthouse party. CHANGE TO:

INTERLUDE (4) IN THE PENTHOUSE

Everyone except NUMBER 1 who stays there, takes out her smartphone and starts searching and typing on it. She disregards the party.

CHORUS Did you think that we got tired of roistering? You're mistaken, friend! The party is just starting to peak now. All the initial niceties, when everyone was still in control of their senses, have passed and we've entered the phase where the madness, explosions and *reeaal* pleasure start. That moment when every inhibition unravels and all becomes permissible, where the things that lie beyond the gates that imprison us in the shackles of a normal day and that set our teeth on edge ... are seen in a different light, and become the norm. For the muuusiiic, the liquor and the powders have worked their magic and made your temperature rise and the new gleam in your eye is making your vision rose-tinted. And we keep on dancing ... dancing ... dancing ...

The CHORUS is lost in a miasma/orgy of debauchery. Someone with his trousers pulled down to his ankles is dancing, he is ridiculed and ignored. Someone else has his head down and legs in the air while a big bottle of liquor is being poured into his mouth - he is ridiculed and ignored.

CHORUS A round for everyone?
Yeeeeeeesss!
Who are we then?

Brothers in arms!!

What's he like? (**referring to the upside-down man**)

The village idiot! The village idiot! The village idiot!

(**member of the CHORUS**) Look what I got! Look what I got! To the next room, pronto!

He shows them a smartphone, everyone gathers around him. Sounds of some footage taken undercover of a woman moaning and mewling during intercourse.

CHORUS (laughing) Dig how she really wants it!

Olè!!! (they down a shot)

(the smartphone makes a hissing sound/ white noise) What's wrong with it?

Shake it a couple times! (he shakes it)

(from mobile phone) ... *the court was told she was killed for what she was about to reveal about the gas deal not what had already been reported -*

Olè! (they down a shot)

(more noises of the woman panting) Fuck, check out her ass, it's huge! Clearly on a hardcore diet!

Olè! (they down a shot)

(the smartphone makes a hissing sound/ white noise) Shit, it's playing up - (shakes the mobile)

(from mobile phone) ... *in the period leading up to her assassination she had been investigating an email leak ... connected with the energy plant deal ...*

Olè! (they down a shot)

(more noises of the woman panting)

(hissing - from smartphone) ... *less than a year after his resignation, he was interrogated under caution but downplayed the affair -*

Olè!! (they down a shot)

(more noises of the woman panting)

(hissing - then from the smartphone) ... *it was concluded that the accused should remain under arrest in jail. News from the court of justice has revealed that he had allegedly received tip offs about raids from very prominent individuals -*

Olè!! (they down a shot)

(more noises of the woman panting)

Olè!! (they down a shot)

(more noises of the woman panting)

Olè!! Olè!! Olè!! (they down a shot)

CHANGE OF LIGHT. A doorbell rings that immediately takes us to:

5

The alarm on NUMBER 1's smartphone goes off. She's herself again. Nervous. The scene, generally speaking, flows.

NUMBER 1 The sterilizer! Mom can you check it, it's past the hour!

NUMBER 6 I'll go during the commercials. Jesus! What doesn't break you makes you stronger!

NUMBER 6 is sprawled in front of the TV as usual, from outside the sound of a jackhammer piercing and breaking - the sound stops and starts intermittently during the scene. A pushchair with its back towards the audience.

The doorbell rings again. NUMBER 1 opens the door, NUMBER 5 with a bag in hand.

NUMBER 1 Hi, come in, come in. **(slings the smartphone against her ear)** Thanks for making the effort but he fell asleep and for me to come to the salon I'd have to move him and wake him which means another hassle. **(on the phone)** ... hi, hello, yeah... for the pediatrician please ... yes, I'll wait ...

NUMBER 5 Never mind hon. House visits suit me just fine, don't have to declare their earnings.

NEIGHBOURS OPPOSITE

(VO MOTHER) *The final revision before catechism class: Carte Blanche!*

NUMBER 5 (complaining) Oh God here we go again. Doesn't cut them any slack.

NEIGHBOURS OPPOSITE

(VO kids) *Unrestricted power. You do what you want.*

(VO MOTHER) *Just don't write that in the exam eh!*

NUMBER 1 Do you have time to do my mother's as well?

NUMBER 5 Of course.

NUMBER 1 Come here under the aircondition, God, the heat, this heatwave just won't let up. It's always on, I'll probably run up an enormous bill.

NUMBER 5 **(over the din)** Whaaat?

NUMBER 1 **(raises her voice a bit)** It's always on!

NUMBER 5 Whaaat! Oh well, you gotta have it on a bit. Mine is running all day long. The bills are not getting any cheaper are they!

NUMBER 1 **(checks her phone again - frustrated)** ... they run you ragged before they put you through.

Laughter and noise from the TV.

NUMBER 1 Mom, can you turn it down a bit or you'll wake up Joseph. As if the racket outside wasn't enough, they're destroying everything. The manicurist is here.

NUMBER 5 Mary Mother of God, what are they doing they've been digging since quarter to seven?!

NUMBER 1 No idea, two guys came along to inspect and scribble something on the ground and today they came with a digger and jackhammer.

NUMBER 6 Looks like they'll pull out the light pole by its roots to fix it.

NUMBER 1 Don't even try to understand. At least the little one managed to sleep, no idea how.

NUMBER 6 But this one's obsessed eh. She wants to do everything by the book. How different we were in my day. They fall asleep when they're tired, simple as

that.

NUMBER 1 So next time he gets cranky because he's sleepy you deal with him ok?

NUMBER 5 Just put Peppa Pig on love. Does the trick for my sister's child.

NEIGHBOURS OPPOSITE

(VO MOTHER) *Stop jumping on the sofa. One more, or no ice cream:*

Success Fee!

(VO KIDS) *Commission paid for successfully completing a transaction!*

NUMBER 1 (on phone) ... eh.. yeah hello ... hello ... the pediatrician please ... yes ... I was on hold ... ok ... I'll wait ... Mom, move the pushchair a little when you feel he's moving ...

NUMBER 5 (to NUMBER 6) Where do I set up? And do you mind if I take a video, I started putting them online. You know I've got a thousand followers already.

The jackhammer drills.

NUMBER 6 Whaaat?

NUMBER 5 (loudly) A thousand followers!

NUMBER 6 So what's this Facebook business then?

NUMBER 5 They sent me a box this week. Of products. Free, you know. And I pretend to use them and say how good they are in the video.

NUMBER 6 My, my good for you. Well done.

NUMBER 1 (to NUMBER 5) I think you can start with mom ... **(phone)** ... yes with the pediatrician please ... because my son is slightly hoarse ... yeah but he's supposed to take 32 ounces of milk but yesterday he had 29 ... yes I know...

NUMBER 6 (to NUMBER 5 in a low voice) She obsesses ... always counting and measuring and crying... we weren't like that ... but today everyone wants to keep up with everything ... and they want to go to work, and they want this and that. I'm against all that.

NUMBER 5 I'll start with a base coat. They sent me an invitation, you know. They're opening a salon. Some big shot's wife and she actually saw my videos. And she's invited me. Exposure, right. I heard that a minister will be there too.

NUMBER 1 (phone - panicky) ... but at seven months he should be drinking 32 ounces ... my friend's is six months old and he already drinks more ... bear with me ...

NUMBER 6 (to NUMBER 5 in a low voice) She was suspended you know. Three days suspension they gave her. She'd left the office and someone else punched out her shift for her. The one who punched got nothing eh, go figure. An insider with connections, they're all the same, that lot.

NUMBER 5 I have no interest in politics. I don't even like talking about it in the salon. It's not like I'll make a difference.

NUMBER 6 (over the drilling jackhammer) Whaaaat?

NUMBER 5 (shouts) It's not like I'll make a difference!

NUMBER 6 Oh I don't know. My daughter seems to think she will. Why did she start working with the boy barely three months old, she should have stayed here, in peace and quiet -

The doorbell rings. NUMBER 1 is still glued to her smartphone while she takes us from an analogous situation back to her mother and NUMBER 5. We see what NUMBER 6 is saying. NUMBER 1 opens the door.

NUMBER 6 (conspiratorially) She didn't tell me but her boss came to talk to her.

About two weeks ago.

NUMBER 4 Hi, I was just passing by -

NUMBER 1 Erm ... is anything the matter? I'm on leave today ...

NUMBER 4 It's ok, I know, I know. They told me at the office -

NUMBER 1 **(phone)** ... *yes ... I'm still on hold ... for the pediatrician ...* **(to NUMBER 4)**
erm ... Do you want to come in -

NUMBER 4 No, No, there's no need, this will only take two minutes.

NUMBER 6 **(to NUMBER 5)** Say what you will but it's all about money these days. She certainly didn't need this hassle. Back in my day we had nothing and we'd dream we had money to make us happy because we knew it could never happen to us. Nowadays everyone has everything and everyone's miserable.

NUMBER 5 And so what, what's wrong with wanting to feel comfortable?

NUMBER 4 **(to NUMBER 1)** After the ... *conversation*, our last one. Just a friendly word ... we're friends. We've worked together for years. It came to their attention that on the last day before maternity you left earlier without letting anyone know.

NUMBER 1 *Came to their attention?* You mean, came to yours?

NUMBER 4 **(beat)** Take my advice ... sign the report.

NUMBER 1 Or else?

NEIGHBOUR OPPOSITE

(VO MOTHER) *Put your darned shoes on! The one before last: Consortium!*

(VO KIDS) *Groups working together to achieve a common goal!*

He says nothing. And leaves. NUMBER 1 stares vacantly and closes the door, looks at the closed door. Her phone snaps her out of it.

NUMBER 1 (phone - still staring vacantly - still more nervous and panicky - a voice from her phone brings her back to her normal self) ... yes ... *hi hello doctor ... yes, I've read that he's supposed to be teething and doesn't sleep well ... but ... no he's sleeping ... I mean he never was an easy baby ... but this teething business is worrying me a little ...*

NUMBER 6 (to **NUMBER 5**) Sometimes I find her in the corner of the room, crying, she doesn't see me, mind. I think she's having anxiety attacks. She refuses to take anything. I told her, take something, daughter. A couple of sedatives won't kill you. Her husband, he's a good man you know but he's sometimes a bit dopey. Look, the news are about to start ... I follow them all. Don't ever miss one.

The doorbell rings. NUMBER 1 opens. NUMBER 2 is here.

NUMBER 2 Straight to the shower with me. I stink to high heaven. We spent four hours without electricity in this heatwave at work, can you imagine that?
Unbelievable.

NUMBER 1 Don't be long. Don't forget Joseph's visual stimulation exercises, which you forgot yesterday.

NUMBER 2 How long do you think I need to shower?

NUMBER 1 Don't forget them ok? (phone - increasingly nervous) ... *hi, hi ... yes the pediatrician please. He knows who I am.*

FROM THE TV *Court news - the compilation of evidence connected with the energy plant scandal continues -*

NUMBER 6 (switching between channels - to **NUMBER 5**) ... look at this ... the bank froze all his stuff - the guy who they're saying killed her. The more they

have, the more they want, those guys, there's no two ways about it.

(jackhammer digging - she repeats loudly) I said the more they want!

NUMBER 2 Is it true that your boss came over this week?

NUMBER 1 How do you know?

NUMBER 2 Your mom told me.

NUMBER 1 **(breathes rapidly)**

NUMBER 2 What did he want?

FROM TV ... *meanwhile he denied that the information issued by the court was designed to harm his image and all that he's done -*

NUMBER 6 **(switches to another channel)** And now this takes the cake!!! I bet the court is making all this up. You mean to tell me the guy's getting information from everyone!! I don't believe them, no way.

NEIGHBOUR OPPOSITE

(VO MOTHER) *One more: Impunity!*

(VO KIDS) **(playing and laughing)**

NUMBER 6 They do so much good for the country and next thing you know when the people around you deceive you this is what you get. Poor guy. Better let it go and get on it with.

NUMBER 1 He called me into his office this morning. They gave me three days' suspension because I skived work for ten minutes the last day before I started maternity.

NUMBER 2 Seriously, just for that?

FROM TV ... *with allegations of relationships that went beyond -*

NUMBER 6 **(switches channel)** On top of thaaaat!!! Because the accused and the politician went on holiday together? Everyone's digging up the dirt now! So much for the case being about a gas scandal!

NUMBER 1 **(bitter)** The secretary who punches in half an hour late and is always

taking breaks to set her hair during working hours ... no, not her.. She does what she wants.

NEIGHBOUR OPPOSITE

(VO MOTHER) *I'm warning you you go to bed at seven ok! Impunity!*

NUMBER 5 (to NUMBER 6) And anyway, whatever happens in private is nobody else's business, I mean, seriously!

NEIGHBOUR OPPOSITE

(VO MOTHER) *Don't let me say it one more time: Impunity!!!!*

NUMBER 6 (laughing) Everyone's got his nose in someone else's business that's all I know. No skin off my nose.

NEIGHBOUR OPPOSITE

(VO MOTHER) *IMPUNITY!!!!*

(VO KIDS) *Freedom from punishment, harm or loss!*

NUMBER 6 Everyone was and still is sitting pretty right? After all, he who fucks people up steps up, and he who doesn't fuck up gets fucked up. **(sound of the electricity going out)** Holy moly now there's a power cut too? God almighty, just open that window because I get flushes even under the aircondition let alone now!

The doorbell rings again. NUMBER 1 goes to open the door, again.

NUMBER 5 So how are things with your daughter?

NUMBER 1 (on phone) ... *But doctor isn't he supposed to have started babbling vowels at this age? He makes noises, true, but to me they don't seem normal.*

She opens the door to find NUMBER 8.

NUMBER 8 Hey listen, it's not my business but the shopping deliveries service dropped a bag at your front door and the food could all go off in this heat.

NUMBER 6 (to NUMBER 5) Same as before darling. Where in God's name is that fan? She did those three days and went back to work, but now they're giving her a hard time eh. **(jackhammer stops)** Sweet relief, it stopped, my head was pounding. If her father had been alive she would have driven him mad with worry. And it was him who had fixed things so she could start working there. Is that the gratitude, that's what he'd have told her. She's so hard-headed.

NUMBER 8 Here let me help you.

NUMBER 1 (on phone) ... *I know nothing's wrong with him ... but doctor, put my mind at ease ...no, no I'm ok what could be wrong with me ... it's the boy that's worrying me, that's all. I call him by his name, and nothing, he ignores me. Aren't they supposed to respond to their own name at this age?*

NUMBER 8 (carrying the bags) Kids recover when they decide to, right. They have their own rhythm. Me, I got five of them. They're all different. The older ones are in a childrens' home, the young ones at my mom's. What I earn goes to them! From time to time I go and visit them.

NUMBER 1 (to NUMBER 8) Thanks love. I'll take over from here, appreciate it.

NUMBER 5 If it ain't broke, don't fix it right? When I opened the salon, they started mouthing off about this and that, unless I toed the line. What's the point of fighting them? You have to find a compromise. They never got on my case again.

NUMBER 1 (on phone) ... *ok then Doctor, I'll do what you said ... yes ... right ... ok.*
(near the pushchair) Joseph! Joseph! Joseph! ... *nothing doctor, it's like he doesn't recognize his name ...*

NUMBER 6 You try to fit a square peg in a round hole and it just gets worse love!
Things have always been the way they are since the beginning of time and
that's how they'll stay.

NUMBER 1 (insisting) *Joseph! Joseph! Joseph!*

NUMBER 6 (to NUMBER 1 who brings her back to the present moment) Girl, what
are you doing?

NUMBER 1 I'm waking him up. He's not supposed to sleep longer. Otherwise he won't
sleep at night.

NUMBER 6 Why don't you give the little boy a break and let him sleep more if he
wants to!! Christ, It's not the end of the world!

Joseph starts crying.

NUMBER 1 See what you've done. He's woken up all cranky because of all the noise
you made ... *Joseph Joseph Joseph!*

**Dumbfounded, she keeps repeating the boy's name who in turn is emitting wailing
sounds that children make on waking up. Her voice saying *Joseph* keeps echoing
and we stay with it until suddenly we start hearing two kinds of noises: the
jackhammer drilling away out on the street, the cymbal who we've got used to and
the whistles of protest as well as the bullhorns one hears at political rallies. Words
like *filth, number 1, swindlers, king* ... are heard in a babble, merging into each
other ... in the aural background of NUMBER 1's *Joseph Joseph Joseph*. When the
cacophony reaches a peak NUMBER 1 collapses in a heap - light only on her.
Perfect silence. She's squatting with a phone against her ear.**

NUMBER 1 *(into the phone, almost twittering) ... doctor please ... I don't know what it is I'm feeling. They're saying I should take something. To ... alleviate. To settle down. I'm just trying to do what's right, understand? I know I'm making a big deal about nothing ... go figure, it's trivial stuff. Sometimes you just have to let go of the trivial stuff and everything will fall back in place, by itself. But ... I just can't bring myself. Whole nights I spend with eyes wide open, staring into space. (beat) You think it's just a matter of me calming down a little? But aren't you supposed to tell me what's wrong and help me fix it? I know ... I know ... sorry. But even if it's a triviality ... this is my responsibility and ... If I don't take care of what's mine, if I let everything pass ... if I say "oh well!" for this matter as well ... what else would I end up disregarding? (beat - she listens) ...eh? Very well. And I buy them at the pharmacy? (beat) Will they make me sleep a lot though?*

The lights come on again and the jackhammer starts drilling again.

NUMBER 6 Finally. Praise the Lord. Everything's back to normal.

BLACKOUT.

INTERLUDE (FINAL) IN THE PENTHOUSE

Dim light, heavy and intense music in the background. Most of the partygoers are spreadeagled on the floor, some sleeping, others blind drunk. Two of them are rolling over each other in a darkened corner, someone is swaying alone thinking that the dancing is still underway. Someone else is crawling on all fours like a dog - God knows what he's on.

CHORUS How often have we wound up here eh? The party in its death throes,
clinging on before the sun rises and everything turns to ash. Some did the
sensible thing and took off because it suited him. One, miraculously after
seeing God, on ingesting God knows what, suddenly finds Him. God. Who
tries to scrape the barrel for leftovers ... even though you try to sweep him
out in the nicest manner. And then you get those who are oppressed - out
of the blue - by an existential crisis. That fossilizes itself in you only in the
wee small hours of dawn when nobody's looking and nobody cares.

Hello.

Are you ok friend?

Miss you.

I'm proud to know you.

Are you ok?

Because you are important to me.

Miss you.

Miss you so much.

Hello?

Ok friend?

Ok? OK? OK?

The party animal on all fours starts howling Ahhh-woooooooo like a wolf. Someone silences him.

Cut it out you fool!

In the shadows of the darkest hour just before dawn, everyone looks hideous, polluted, everyone's haggard, with sunken eyes, a sick pallor, jaded. Perhaps it is also the instant when we show our true colours. No walls. No masks. No limits. In these moments there are no sheep in the herd but wolves. Only wolves.

The wolfman continues to whine and his cry starts to change, echoes. It seems to us to be the voices of a multitude of people, catcalls, the muffled words, *Swindlers! To the jailhouse with them! Lock them up!* Then slowly the catcalls start changing into merry clapping and a lot of Woooahhhhs! Until we cut straight away to:

6

Everyone surrounds **NUMBER 1** who's holding a baby sling across her chest and in it a baby of a few months is sleeping. Everyone congratulates her and sings *For she's a jolly good fellow!*

CHORUS So when are you back with us?

NUMBER 1 I go back on Monday.

CHORUS Since you've been gone, the light has gone too. **(laughing)**

CHORUS To fan the flames of the protests even more! **(laughing)**

NUMBER 1 Don't remind me, God knows how many times I ended up staring into space at home, with the boy crying and no electricity.

CHORUS Well it was you who abandoned us for maternity!

NUMBER 1 Yeah right, what a holiday it has been!

CHORUS We missed a proper cup of tea like only you can make it!

NUMBER 1 I can hardly make one for myself as the boss here **(indicates the baby)** barely gives me a second's rest. He's not even 3 months' old yet and already bosses everyone around.

CHORUS What's his name?

NUMBER 1 Joseph.

CHORUS How does that work then Joseph, love? Mummy sweats and slaves and you're living the life of Riley!

They all laugh.

NUMBER 4 (pulls NUMBER 1 to the side) Listen, before you leave. Can you sign something for me quickly, let's get it done before you return so you can slowly find your feet again on Monday.

NUMBER 1 (goes near him) Sure thing, of course -

NUMBER 4 (places everything she needs to sign in front of her, hands her a pen) ... just procedure. Also, so that when you return you can concentrate on the handover.

NUMBER 1 What's this?

NUMBER 4 A report

NUMBER 1 On what?

NUMBER 4 The blackout.

NUMBER 1 Whi-

NUMBER 4 On the last day you worked.

NUMBER 1 Very well.

NUMBER 4 Is there a problem?

NUMBER 1 No, just ... I wasn't here when the power went out.

NUMBER 4 It was your shift.

NUMBER 1 But I had ... left.

NUMBER 4 If you took an hour's leave, same shift anyway. Sign it.

NUMBER 1 Hold on a minute. Only me?

NUMBER 4 Whoever was here. Procedure.

NUMBER 1 And if I wasn't.

NUMBER 4 Roster says you were here. Normal procedure.

NUMBER 1 But if I wasn't?

NUMBER 4 Just sign it, no biggie.

NUMBER 1 stares into the distance, as if weirded-out. In the background the commotion of whistles that we've now got used to hearing and the shouting voices of the protesters. Everything echoey, everything distorted. All of a sudden the baby wakes up and starts to wail, bringing **NUMBER 1** back to the room and to her senses.

NUMBER 4 Is everything ok?

NUMBER 1 Yes ... Yes ... just ... it's time he drank, breastfeeding ... let me find a room, sorry, I'll talk to you on Monday.

NUMBER 4 Ok, I'll leave it on your desk. No big deal, it only takes two seconds.
Procedure.

NUMBER 1 sits and starts to breastfeed the baby. She keeps staring into the distance until we hear the child suckling and once again her staring reverie is intruded on by voices, whistles, drums and cymbals. **NUMBER 7** at the door.

NUMBER 7 Are you ok?

They're on the common area landing, **NUMBER 1** is still breastfeeding. She snaps out of her daze.

NUMBER 1 Yes yes. Just came in from outside and he was crying so much he didn't let me open the door to drink for God's sake and I had to sit here on the step.

NUMBER 7 Do you need any help?

NUMBER 1 No, no, thanks anyway. He'll sleep soon - look, his eyes are already half-closed. Once he's settled I'll go in.

NUMBER 7 Ok. **(beat)** By the way, don' know if you've been informed but there's someone moving into Flat 3. My friend is renting it out. She a nail artist. Really nice.

NUMBER 1 Oh OK. Better that than empty. Didn't even know that it belongs to someone. First they go and buy and for what.

NUMBER 7 And by the way, I called the local council this morning.

NUMBER 1 Why?

NUMBER 7 You didn't notice the temporary lightbulb they put up? Instead of the pole that doesn't work?

NUMBER 1 Oh, right. The light is very strong, don't you think? My husband is complaining. He said that a light like that brings out all the defects in the apartment.

NUMBER 7 Anyway, I'll call them soon. They said it's temporary. But it's either one extreme or the other.

NUMBER 1 Transitions, right.

NUMBER 7 **(slowly)** That's right. But sometimes you just have to spell it out to them clearly. For we often don't notice things that are right under our noses.

NUMBER 1 **(lost in thought).** That's right.

NUMBER 7 I'm off.

NUMBER 1 Bye, love.

NUMBER 1 is alone. The baby moves a little. The noises come back, less audible in the background. It seems like she finds them annoying, she can hear them.

NUMBER 1 **(staring and swaying - cradling- singing a lullaby)** *Sleep my son sleep ... in your cradle so soft and silky ... your father is baby Jesus ... your mother is the Virgin Mary ...*

NUMBER 2 comes in.

NUMBER 2 What are you doing here? What happened? Did you fall? Anything happen to Joseph?

NUMBER 1 Shhh. Nothin' nothin' he's feeding, don't panic.

NUMBER 2 Christ you gave me a hell of a fright.

NUMBER 1 No, everything's fine.

NUMBER 2 Did you see her across the street?

NUMBER 1 See who?

NUMBER 2 There's a woman across the street, under the electricity pole that's not working.

NUMBER 1 Oh yes. She helped me take out the buggy and the shopping bags from the car. God bless her. She noticed I was a bit distraught. He didn't want to stop crying. He was hungry. She still there?

NUMBER 2 A guy drove by and she stopped to talk to him, they talked for a bit, sorted something out and then she went up with him.

NUMBER 1 Maybe she knows him.

NUMBER 2 Oh come on didn't you see the way she's dressed. Sometimes you're so naive. How was work?

NUMBER 1 Ok. **(beat)** The boss wanted me to sign a report.

NUMBER 2 Not wasting any time, that one. Christ, he sure doesn't waste a second, can't wait a bit till Monday, no way.

NUMBER 1 Don't know what came over me. As I was about to sign ... my hand ... froze.

NUMBER 2 What kind of report is this then?

NUMBER 1 Oh nothing special. Just a routine thing. Procedure.

NUMBER 2 So. No worries then.

NUMBER 1 But it was like for a split second there. I ... I don't know. Didn't trust him.
(beat) I'm not trusting at all these days. Not even myself. My head feels full of cotton wool.

NUMBER 2 They told us this could happen in maternity classes.

NUMBER 1 Everything ... is more different than I thought ... than I hoped.

NUMBER 2 You need to rest **(glances at the baby)**. Look, he's asleep. Let me put him in the cot.

NUMBER 2 takes the baby from her lap and goes inside with it.

NUMBER 1 **(stays in the same spot as if she's talking with NUMBER 2 - but wrapped up in her own world)** I thought that everything would be like a bulb glowing with a golden light. With every kick I felt in my belly ... I'd feel such bliss, the bliss of things to come. Change. **(beat)** And change did come. But I don't know how I feel about it. **(beat)** Is that a horrible thing to say? It is a horrible thing to say, right? But no matter how much I try ... I can't seem to find the peace I thought I'd feel. The pounding in my brain just won't stop.

Whistles, drums, voices.

(continues) Do you remember when we got back from the hospital with Joseph? Do you realize that was already three months ago? Do you remember all the chaos there was outside when we got back home. He was so small, barely visible in the car seat.

IMMEDIATE SHARP CUT TO:

NUMBER 2 comes in with the car seat and a wisp of a baby. **NUMBER 6** in the armchair switching channels. **NUMBER 1** at the window. The protest noises are now real, right underneath the window through which **NUMBER 1** is looking.

NUMBER 2 He didn't wake up, even though we walked past all those people.

NUMBER 6 Everyone's had it up to here with them. I couldn't even pop into the grocery store, it had to close early. That's the Christmas business ruined for them.

FROM TV ... was released on bail after 48 hours ...

NOISES OF PROTEST - SWITCHES CHANNELS.

... rumours that he will resign are fictitious ...

NOISES OF PROTEST - SWITCHES CHANNELS.

... protesters causing a government crisis ...

NOISES OF PROTEST - SWITCHES CHANNELS.

... it's completely untrue that there is no support from the Cabinet members.

NOISES OF PROTEST - SWITCHES CHANNELS.

... along the chants of 'She was right'.

NUMBER 6 My oh my, how they exaggerate. Just let her rest in peace, you're taking it too far!

NUMBER 1 (looking out of the window) I don't know what to believe anymore. I don't want to believe anything. And I want to believe everything.

NUMBER 6 (cooing along with the baby) So who's the cutest one then? Who's the cutest one eh?

NUMBER 1 (continues looking outside) It's like we're in a movie.

NUMBER 2 (carries on pampering the baby) I'll tell you who's the cutest one, the cutest one is Baby -

NUMBER 1 (cuts him off abruptly) I don't like the name we chose for him!

NUMBER 2 Eh? **(beat)** Take your time to say so eh! Just as I was going to post it on Facebook.

NUMBER 1 I know sorry. I wanted that name too. As much as you did. **(beat)** But now ... now that he's here. Now that *he's real*. It doesn't suit him. Sorry. I know we wanted an original name and not a common one. But **(holds back the tears)** ... but I don't like it.

(long pause)

Joseph?

NUMBER 2 What?

NUMBER 1 Shall we name him Joseph?

NUMBER 2 But everyone's called Joseph!

Stillness.

NUMBER 2 You're still tired. You hardly slept. Go take a rest and we'll talk tomorrow.

NUMBER 1 No I don't want to leave him alone. Give him to me.

NUMBER 2 gives her the swaddled baby. He looks out the window.

NUMBER 2 Christ, what a crowd! Never seen anything like it.

NUMBER 1 Turn off the lights. I want to lie in the dark until he falls asleep.

NUMBER 2 turns off lights. NUMBER 1 remains alone holding the baby. The protesting noises outside seem to be coming from right behind the front door. FILTH! FILTH! FILTH AND SWINDLERS!!!!

NUMBER 1 (to the baby) Can I tell you a secret? This huge fear has me in its grip. Fear

that I won't take care of you the way I should. The possibility that I could mess something up, drop you, hurt you, get lazy, make a mistake ... these fears are stronger than the hope of doing everything the way it should be done. Will you forgive me once you grow older and realize that I let you down? Will you see that I'd have tried my best?

The protests become more vocal.

NUMBER 1 (continues - the baby purring contentedly) You like being in the dark, don't you. You rest better don't you, darling? Don't worry, I'll give you what you want. Darkness too, if you want it. Whatever keeps you warm and comfy I'll give to you. I promise. Because I want you to be better than me. Whatever you want, my love. And whoever disagrees, let them talk, what do they know?

NUMBER 1 continues to rock the boy in her lap. Shadows from outside are sneaking onto her and the boy. Now we can hear the voices and whistles and drums as if we are in their midst. The noise increases and increases, a voice shouting SHAME ON YOUUUUUUUUU.

While we're watching her cradle and the shadows shifting:

NEIGHBOUR OPPOSITE

(VO KIDS) *Mummy Mummy.*

(VO MOTHER) *I'm right here can't you see me scrolling through tablet.*

(VO KIDS) *Mummy, Mummy.*

(VO MOTHER) *Yes, what?*

(VO KIDS - giggling) ... tell her, tell her.

(VO MOTHER) *What? Not another rude word! Who are you hanging out with?*

(VO KIDS) (1) *What does corruption mean?*

(VO KIDS (2)) *And justice?*

(VO MOTHER) *That's not on the study list for the test. Go brush your teeth, or no dessert.*

People shouting, the noise is deafening. After the Woman and kids opposite sequence, the protesters (CHORUS) slowly begin to climb through the window that NUMBER 1 had just been looking out of, carrying placards, posters, cymbals etc. They fill up the room. Neither NUMBER 1 nor the baby are aware of them. The baby sleeps on, soothed in his mother's lap. During the story the CHORUS members surround NUMBER 1 and the baby with flowers and candles, as if they're a monument.

CHORUS (to the baby) Let me tell you a story about a flower, my dear. You're still young and perhaps you won't understand. But it's never too early to soothe babies with stories. **(beat)** It was an ordinary day. For extraordinary stories happen on ordinary days. An ordinary day. Until it wasn't. Around three pm I was going uphill towards my house when I noticed a flower making its way towards me. Just so ... ordinary. Then. I saw her decrease in speed, then it panicked and suddenly - this flower - exploded. It screamed. Have you ever heard a flower scream, my dear? They scream too, you know. And how! Then another explosion. The big one. I was afraid, I felt myself going backwards while the flower flew away from me. All this in a matter of seconds eh. I started running and it dawned on me what had

happened. Bits of petals everywhere. Leaves. Pollen dust. First a woman came near me. With her little one. 'What happened,' she asked? 'Here,' I told her, 'what happened was - '

But the lights started flickering and went out. A BLACKOUT for a long time. After that, the lights come on suddenly. A glaring light. Ugly. Immediately segues into:

FINAL INTERLUDE (... FOR REAL)

A figure pushing a maintenance and cleaning trolley enters and starts to remove the flowers and candles.

FIGURE Away with all this! Away!

The CHORUS do not protest or resist. They make room so everything can be cleaned.

CHORUS Did you think we're done here? Noooo waayy ... wait. That's no proper farewell note, right? The fuel has almost hit rock bottom, tank's running on empty ... but there's enough to splutter away for a while.

NUMBER 1 enters with an enormous nine-month old belly, she's on her phone. There is a toilet in the centre of the space. She's talking on her phone.

NUMBER 1 (on her phone - breathless) Have they come to repair the electricity pole? Light must have gone out during the night because yesterday it was working. The Council said it would be half an hour's work. **(beat)** And they said they'd come before noon. **(contorts herself)** God, he's pushing ... it feels like he's going to flop onto the ground soon. The doctor said we could start tomorrow, if all goes well. God, how tired I am, I can barely bring myself to breathe now. Let me sit for a bit, just a second.

Meanwhile, the CHORUS members start to carry the metal barriers inside to place them around the toilet with NUMBER sat on it.

NUMBER 1 (on her phone) Eh, they're saying there'll be another protest tonight. A load of resignations most likely. Jesus, all this confusion. Ouuchh God he's pushing. Hey, think I'll head straight home. Maybe they're contractions. So what, it's just half an hour. Oh well. They'll punch me out of my shift later, they've often done it before. Listen, got to go because my bladder feels like a chewing toy. Bye.

Carries on fiddling with her phone.

CHORUS ... Do you see how we've ended up at the same point where we started?
(beat) Are you a little disappointed? Did you miss that dash of *action*? Excitement? Passion? Because isn't that what we've been weaned on after all? To escape for a while ... if we don't have that little palliative of things that we don't have ... why spend money then? Not worth it, eh. That's it. That's it. You are right. But the wolf cannot afford to have excitable sheep, alert and awake. Right? Otherwise it won't be worth the price of that wooly costume that he had to put up with for so long to infiltrate their herd, won't be worth it for *him*, right! Understandable. Please understand. Otherwise everything will not unfold how it has just unfolded and how it's always unfolded.

NUMBER 1 stand up. Sound of flushing toilet.

NUMBER 1 (dials a number) Hey ... can you leave the office? No, nothing, right now I get anxious with every movement. See you at home? Ok. Bye, oh well ... what could happen? That which has happened since God knows when, that's what will happen. **(laughs)** I won't be the first and certainly won't be the last you know! Oh well.

CHORUS I knew you would get it. And after all, isn't that what it's all about? If life didn't make us sleepy, didn't make us pregnant, didn't make us distracted ... then, when that little taste of pleasure comes our way, how do we enjoy it and go gaga over it? Right, Right? Can you blame us? We're not to blame eh. So ... heed my words ... find that button and just press stop and come lose yourself in our herd and dance a little. For, don't forget what we said - this is all make-believe after all, *smoooooke and mirrors*. And, as I've told you time and again. The only place where we are really on an equal footing is when we're dancing ... dancing ... dancing. To be able to feel, escape, forget ... it's your choice.

The sound of a baby crying for the first time.

During this final sequence, the party music that we heard at the beginning has started to very gradually increase in volume, until, towards the final lines the party has kicked off again, everyone is dancing in the boxed space formed by the metal barriers. However, this time NUMBER 1 is dancing with them too.

We can also hear the frantic sound of typewriter keys clattering away simultaneously with the music.

The typing noises increase with the music.

Everyone is dancing ecstatically until suddenly –

-the sound of an EXPLOSION –

... the light flickers and we slowly see the figures in silhouette fade out ...

... but who carry on dancing regardless and didn't even hear it.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.