



DEATH  
of a  
NIGHTINGALE

Inclusion or Disillusion? and Other Heresies

—ALAN SHARE—

## DEATH OF A NIGHTINGALE

The “Nightingale” is Brighthouse School. It is a school where all the pupils have a physical disability and find learning difficult as well. You will meet some of its teachers and carers, some of its pupils and their parents. The play is about how the proposal to close it impacted upon their lives.

Its author could not have written it if he had not himself been the chair of governors of a very similar school for over 10 years. Indeed he would *not* have written it and probably would have written nothing at all. Instead, he would have fulfilled his ambition to retire early from a successful life in business, opting for a quiet, stress free life of travel, art, music, family and friends, some not very good golf, and helping to run a local care home.

The play is not about the school whose board of governors Alan Share chaired for over ten years. All its characters are all fictitious, and bear no relation to those he knew. Maybe some of the pupils do, just a little. More importantly that school still exists largely because of a campaign by the parents to keep it open. It does, however, relate to the 100 or so other schools that have been closed during the last ten years.

The policy to take more children with special needs out of special schools and place them in mainstream schools had, when it was initiated, all party support and international endorsement. The Conservative Party and the Treasury thought it would save money. The Labour Party identified it with Equality, here under the banner of Inclusion. The Lib Dems thought it would make the world a better place for children with and without special needs. Academia validated it. Local government helped Whitehall deliver it. OFSTED lent a hand or, when necessary, a fist. And lawyers were only too happy to assert the new rights that Parliament had created.

Did it save money? Which is it the better thing to do - to assert equal rights or to try to meet the very different needs of totally different children fairly? Is the policy making the world a better place for the generation of children affected? Did Academia work out the policy “in the library of their minds” or in the classrooms of the real world?

These are some of the questions the play asks. There are many others, not least in a music lesson. Should individual faiths continue to believe that each of them have exclusive access to God? Shouldn't Monotheism be seen more as asserting the Oneness of the creator of the universe open to anyone finding their way there, and not just a tribal God for a part of humanity? In case you think that faith is just a fantasy, you have a spokesman in Terry, one of the pupils, a younger version of Richard Dawkins. You will find that he is a good spokesman.

Alan Share has written this play against a background of law and politics, and having had an involvement in the affairs of the furniture industry, manufacturer as well as retailer. He invites you to share the insights he has had along the way, Life has always been “most interesting on the margins.”

Above all, he asserts that everyone has a choice. On the one hand you can stick loyally with the thoughts and opinions that you formed in your youth, treasuring anything that confirms them, binning anything that doesn't – he calls these people “Termites”. All they can do, all they can ever do, all they have ever done is to build and defend their own nests. They cannot move on. Alternatively you can allow life to teach you lessons, and you then go on learning as long as you have the breath to continue.

He argues that in a very fast changing world facing new and terrifying challenges, it should opt for the second, and move on.

## CAST

**Margaret Williamson** - Head teacher and School Governor – in her forties. She has experience, charisma, and all the qualifications to be a head teacher. She has a close and intimate relationship with the English teacher, Joan Errington. By and large this is out of school, but known within the school and accepted. She is committed to the School and knows its strengths “The one thing that we can give to our kids is time.” She also knows the way the wind is blowing, and she is mindful of her own future career. She suffers from bouts of depression and migraines, but these are managed with medication.

**Don Smithson** - retired head teacher - works for LEA during his retirement. He is in his sixties and he has a warm and friendly style. He is loyal to the system. He still cycles to work with a rucksack, keeping himself fit and active. He used to play cricket for the local club. He is a team man.

**Emma Kirk** - Music Teacher - black Caribbean extraction. She is charismatic, lively and full of fun. “You can keep your national curriculum. Just give me music. It’s for life and for living.” “This country’s far too cold, damp, grey and drab. Those banana boats from Jamaica didn’t just bring bananas. It’s colour, rhythm, vibrancy. It’s fun. It’s the Notting Hill Carnival. She is very big, and very huggable. Her laugh can be her cry.

**Joan Errington** - English Teacher and School Governor – in her thirties, very committed to her job and to the School. She takes a personal interest in some of the pupils and takes them to local theatres. She sees her work as a vocation. She loves and respects the head teacher. She prefers to appear studious with spectacles, rather than attractive with contact lenses.

**Wendy Robinson** - Non Teaching Care Assistant - warm and friendly middle aged woman. She is a salt of the earth type. Her job is to help those children who need toileting and help with eating. She has been involved with children with special needs for many years and loves it. She feels that kids talk to her more than to their teachers and to their parents, and she is probably right.

**Tracy** with cystic fibrosis, age 15. She is very bright and has been at the School since she was four.

**Terry** with Crohn’s disease, age 15. He has truanted from schools he didn’t like and which didn’t meet his needs. He does not appear disabled. He has lost over one year’s education trying to get into Brighthouse School.

**Johnny** with *liberator* voice box, age 15. He runs the school newspaper. He has been bullied in mainstream school with jokes about his mechanical voice. He has also been locked in a school cupboard.

**Philippa** in wheel chair, age 15. She has competed in the Para Olympics and won a Silver Medal. She has also competed in Great North Runs, and plays in the School Band.

**Harry** with brittle bones, age 12. He arrives with arm in plaster. He has slipped in the corridor of a mainstream comprehensive school in rush and tumble. He, too, has been bullied. He has been tripped on the stairs which caused him to break his leg, but no-one could prove anything, and the bully got away with it. Parents kept him away from school for his safety.

**Anwar Fawzi** - Parent Governor - a Sikh and father of Harry. His wife is Caucasian. He is a taxi driver. He is very worldly, with a keen sense of right and wrong.

**Judith Fawzi**, Anwar's wife. She is a nurse at the local hospital. She is concerned about her son's repeated fractures. "People should remember that the very first thing a mum asks when her child is born is whether it is OK."

**Eileen Winterton** - Chair of Governors - is middle aged and a retired law lecturer. She is also a magistrate. She has in her time supported Greenpeace, Anti apartheid, and CND, but she is now not quite such a firebrand. But she has a great sense of right and wrong.

**Frank Jones** - Chair of Finance - owns a small firm of printers and he is very trusting of people. He is a Rotarian. He has a nephew with profound and multiple learning difficulties. He feels that society must look after those most vulnerable. He has two sons going out into the world. He is Yorkshire born and a firm believer in value for money and personal integrity. He always wears a suit with a Rotary badge in his lapel.

**James Harrington** - National official from DfES - is a mandarin, he exudes quiet authority, and he smiles through cold teeth. He was educated at Balliol College, Oxford. His father was a district commissioner in the Punjab during the Raj. He watches his own back very carefully, as well as the backs of others. His job is to deliver policy as quickly as possible. Nothing happens otherwise. Hence *ends justify means* sort of person. His suit, shirt and tie, Savile Row. You would not expect to see him on the Clapham Omnibus. Not the ordinary man in the street.

**Judy Fotheringham** - Regional Official – in her forties, is very purposeful and ambitious. She wants to deliver official policy. She focuses on outcomes not needs. She is somewhat irritated by those who get in her way. She has a teenage daughter, Rebecca, who she is putting through university. She is a single parent. Her husband died of prostate cancer. She is somewhat overweight.

**David Harding** - Director of Education - over 40 - is knowledgeable, and has reservations about the policy of Inclusion but knows he has to go with the tide and the Party line. He has a conscience, but he keeps it under strict control. He is a kind man that you can't help liking and respecting, even if he is doing things you don't approve of.

**Gerry Thompson** - Special Needs Coordinator - is young, ambitious, and idealistic, but a little naive. He will do what he is told. He is quite amoral when it comes to methodology.

*Music in the background – Ladysmith Black Mambazo – “Music knows no Boundaries”.*

## **PREAMBLE**

### **TRACY**

*(in a wheel chair)* Hi, my name is Tracy. My friends call me Katy .. Katy. You see I had a dream. I wanted to become an actress. I love the theatre. Kate Winslet, yes. I dreamt this dream at Brighthouse School. I started there when I was four. It helped to make me who I am. Before the play begins let me describe it to you. It was my “hero”. What happened to my school is what the play’s about.

So picture in your mind my school, a small, modern school, all on one level, and with a nice playground with noisy kids. I bet other schools don’t have wheelchair races. All of us here had health problems of one sort or another, and learning things wasn’t all that easy for any of us. There were just over a hundred of us, some as young as four or five, and others right through to school leaving age. Some people didn’t like an all age school, but it worked.

We had a treatment room with our school nurse, Babs, - she was always kept pretty busy. We had physio’s. There was Bunty. She massaged my legs between lessons. It was lovely. Babs and Bunty were quite a team. Some of my friends got help with speech and language.

We had hydrotherapy pool. I loved our pool. We called it our duck pond. Johnny once wanted to see how long he could hold his breath under the water. He was under for ages. I shouted for help. They think I saved his life.

I adored Joan Errington who taught me English. She gave me my love of drama. She once took me to the RSC. That's what gave me my dream of going on the stage. And I love singing. I sang *Annie*. You know "Tomorrow, Tomorrow, I love you Tomorrow." That's why I liked our music lessons. We had a wonderful teacher, Emma, Caribbean sunshine. You will meet them. We loved them. Then there was our head teacher, Margaret Williamson. I called her Mummy Margaret. Then all my friends did too. You see we were one great big family. Our motto was "All for One". She really cared about each one of us. I'd have cleaned her shoes for her if she'd let me. I loved our ethos ... when Joan explained to me what the word meant.

All sorts of people gave their time to the school, especially our mums and dads.

I was in Wesborough's Amateur Dramatics. Joan Errington encouraged me to join. I thought they wouldn't want me. Johnny was in the Scouts. Got the Duke of Edinburgh award. And absolutely everyone wanted to hear our steel drum band. It seemed to be performing somewhere every other week. Our parents had to ferry them around

Despite all this some people wanted to close us down. They thought we should all go to mainstream schools. I wanted to stay at Brighouse. Our mums and dads asked me to help their campaign to keep the school open. I even went on the telly. I did.

Those people thought they were helping us, putting us in mainstream schools. I often used to wonder whether they really understood what it was like to have cerebral palsy like Pete, or spina bifida like Jesse, or cystic fibrosis like me. – you need a medical dictionary here - Johnny had a speech problem, Terry had Crohn's. Harry had brittle bones. We've also had kids here who'd been in a fire or in a traffic accident and had to spend a lot of time in and out of hospital. My friend Tommy Dixon died. He was only thirteen. All the school went into mourning when he died.

He was only thirteen. It was so sad.

And did they begin to understand what it's like to be bullied on top of everything else? Did they? Most kids like us are for ever being bullied in mainstream schools. Did they know? And did they know what it was like for our mums too, especially our mums when we came back home, you know just like "fluff" my pussy cat after a little boy tossed a bucket of water all over her for a bit of fun.

Did they know about all the other quite different needs? Other schools catered for them. Children with really big learning difficulties, with emotional problems, children who can scarcely see or hear or speak at all.

We're like a big fruit shop. There are apples, pears, peaches, grapes, bananas, little cherries.

I'll tell you something. Lawyers and politicians just love to give us our rights. Rights. I call them buttercups and daises. Buttercups and daises. And we are those little white dandelion heads, you know, they blow away in the wind.

## **Act One**

### **Scene 1**

#### **Head teacher's living room**

*The room is dimly lit. Margaret Williamson is stretched out on couch, her arm touching the floor. She is semi-comatose. A glass and an empty bottle are beside her. Joan Errington lets herself in, but leaves the door ajar. She switches on the light. She suddenly sees Margaret. She thinks she is dead. She immediately thinks that Margaret has taken overdose. She thinks that she may have herself have contributed*

*to this by walking out. She may even have been a bit selfish in arguing with her.*

JOAN (*Screaming and shaking Margaret*) Oh my God, Darling, what have you done. (*picks up 'phone*) .... Ambulance quickly .... Joan Errington ... I'm at 12 Oakley Way, Westborough, ... You want the postcode. I think it's W13 5 NX... (*dashes back to Margaret*) Darling wake up. Wake up. (*Back to the phone*) Sorry 07524 39102 ... A lady here ... Margaret Williamson ... seems to have taken an overdose ... please come as quickly as you can. I must try and wake her. (*Back to Margaret*) Oh my God, don't go (*back to the 'phone*) .... Yes ... she's still breathing but I can't wake her. ... Yes. Oh God she left me a note. Oh.No. Oh God. Oh No. Oh. I think she's gone. Oh No. Darling without you. Wake up. The School. Our lovely kids. Us. Darling wake up. Oh God, she's gone. Do wake up. A ship without a rudder. That's what we'll be. And me. (*scream*) Ah. What about us? (*Ambulance men enter.*)

## **Scene 2**

TRACY Mummy Margaret didn't deserve it. She really didn't. Where do I start? When the Fawzis brought their son Harry to the School to see if it was right for him. We were in the middle of a music lesson.

### **Music room – a new pupil arrives**

*The Music Room of Brighthouse School is set out with guitars and other instruments around the wall. There is also a TV, CD/DVD and speakers. Looking through the window, it is summer.*

*5 pupils are practising on steel drums for a local gig. Emma Kirk is sitting at an upright piano, shows them calypso rhythm.*

EMMA Johnny, lead us in with a calypso. You know whenever I hear a calypso I hear the sweet voice of Harry Belafonte singing it on his imaginary island in my homeland, in the Caribbean.

JOHNNY (*with a liberator*) Isn't this your homeland now?



EMMA This is my homeland too. You can have two passports. You can have two homelands. I am twice blessed. Actually me is three times blessed. God is also my homeland. I am just so sorry for those poor folk who don't have any at all..

TRACY Do you still think about the country where your family came from?

EMMA Sure I do. And I know what my folk must have felt when they came here.

JOHNNY What?

EMMA Wow, this country's wet and grey. Jamaica, oh fo' Jamaica, where the sun shines all day... and folk sing and dance all night long. Just what sort of a place has this banana boat brought us to?

TRACY Well, why did your family come here then?

EMMA ' Cos people stopped buying our sugar cane. Wasn't worth their while with sugar beet being made cheap here. Still like our rum tho'. That's where our rhythm comes from. Our rum. Come on let's have some rhythm in our music this morning. Imagine you're Trinidadians beating it out on their oil drums.

*They start playing "Island in the Sun".*

*Head teacher enters with a couple of parents Mr. and Mrs. Fawzi and Harry.*

MARGARET Sorry to interrupt you. This is Mr. & Mrs. Fawzi and Harry. I'm hoping that Harry will be joining us next term. This is where you can hear our sound of music.

EMMA You know, music for kids like ours is, I always say, like what God's leaven gives to bread.

MARGARET Mr. Fawzi knows us. His taxi ferries kids here.

EMMA I thought I recognised you.

MARGARET Harry's had real bad luck. You have only to look at his bones and they break. What have you done to yourself now, Harry?

HARRY I'd just mended my leg - broke it when a bully tripped me up on the stairs -

and now I've broken my arm. I slipped on some chewing gum.

ANWAR I'm afraid he's an accident waiting to happen. Kids tease him like mad. Say he's always "plastered."

EMMA He won't get teased here. Not so long as he lets us all autograph his plaster.

JUDITH Will Harry be able to join the band?

EMMA Not if he's got that plaster on. You know our Band won a Cup in the National Schools Band Competition. With a bit of luck he'll be able to join us when we defend our title next year.

MARGARET Can I introduce you to our Tim Pan Ali Band? (*Short beat on the drums by everyone.*) Give our guests a sample of your playing. (*Band plays for a couple of minutes.*)

This is Tracy. She knows more about the school than I do. Been here since she was four.

TRACY I can still remember feeling very lost when I came.

MARGARET We've got a highly skilled team here. They put in the groundwork in the early years. A lot of nurturing goes on then. It bears fruit later on. Look at Tracy's progress, and you'll see what I mean. She is doing really well.

EMMA That's very true. Kids start believin' in themselves. Then it's safe for them to go in the big wide world. That's where Inclusion really matters, isn't it?

MARGARET You see the young kids are helped all along the way, seeing what the older ones can do, being encouraged by them. The older ones say things we can't.

EMMA You see it happening in the playground all the time, or when they help wheel each other around. Very little bullying goes on here.

ANWAR You're dead right. I've seen how they all get on together on the school run.

MARGARET My philosophy is that there's nothing our kids can't do that mainstream kids can. We had some out abseiling just last week. Would you like to try that Harry?

HARRY I'd be really frightened to.

MARGARET Don't worry, we won't force you to do anything you don't want to do. It's amazing though what some of our kids do do. I must tell you about Tracy's great claim to fame. (*Tracy holds her head in her hands with shame at the memory*) At one of our Presentation evenings - you know we have lots of fun and entertainment as well as prize giving on these great occasions - well, she caught my predecessor full in the face with a custard pie... she was supposed to miss.

TRACY He was supposed to duck. I paid the price the following year. I was asked to be Jack in the Box. I was inside that box for ages. He said he forgot I was there. Do you believe that?

MARGARET Do you believe anything in this world Tracy? That's one of the lessons we teach you.

JOHNNY I was locked in a cupboard in my old school. Some classmates they were.

TRACY The cleaners let him out.

JOHNNY It was awful.

MARGARET Johnny had a hard time. His mum took him away from school. It was so bad. Finally came here. You wouldn't believe it. He wants to be a journalist. He runs the school newspaper, and the local paper has had him in the newsroom. In this school we believe that kids are capable of anything.

ANWAR I can believe that. Do you know about Fred Raffle? He's blind. You know he played cricket with dried peas inside the ball so you could hear it, a suitcase was the wicket.

TRACY Wow

ANWAR Yes, it's true. He was mad keen on cricket. He worked out how he could play the game with his pals at a school for the blind. And my goodness, he now commentates on international cricket. You know, I heard him commentate when India played England. There's guts for you.

MARGARET Fantastic. That's exactly what we find here, and what we encourage. I hope mainstream schools find the time to do the same. The trouble is I don't think

they always do, and certainly teaching assistants are not always trained to stretch kids. You need years of training and experience for that. But that's by the way. Here's our athletic hero, Philippa. Tell Mr. and Mrs. Fawzi what you did last year.

PHILIPPA Competed in the Athens Para Olympics, the wheelchair 800 metres.

TRACY And won a Silver medal.

PHILIPPA Gordon won a Gold in the 4 x 400 relay.

MARGARET We had a team of three out there. Gordon Davis did fantastically well.

Last but not least there Terry here. He lost one year's schooling while his mum and dad tried to get him in here. Tell the Fawzis about it, Terry.

TERRY I've got Crohn's. It's not very nice, but the physio's help here whenever I need it. It's great. The stupid local authority said there was nothing wrong with me.

MARGARET Don't say stupid, Terry. But it is what happens when an official of the Council decides these things. They should really leave it to experienced teachers and medics. The Council doesn't want the medical people in on the actual decision taking at all. They think it'll cost them money.

JUDY Well you know I am a nurse. Nurses are not allowed to suggest a suitable school to parents. Would you believe that?

MARGARET I would. Health and Education are two separate worlds even here. You know the Primary Care Trust won't allow school nurses and physio's to attend our staff meetings.

JUDITH Yes and those local authority officials don't really know anything about either of these worlds, if you ask me. They should remember that the very first thing a mum asks when her child is born is whether it's okay. They should remember that.

ANWAR They should remember a lot of things. By the way, do they still want to close this School down?

EMMA Look guys, I'm sorry but I have got my class to teach. Can you talk about that somewhere else?

ANWAR Oh dear, we've interrupted you. But I've enjoyed meeting you and

the kids too.

MARGARET (*Leading the Fawzis out of the door*) We'd better leave you to make some more of your music. (*Outside the classroom*)

ANWAR What is going to happen to this school? I don't want Harry to come here if they are going to close it.

MARGARET They certainly did want to, until our parents persuaded them not to. It was some campaign. They didn't know what hit them.

JUDITH I read all about it in the local papers.

MARGARET Well, they had been warned. They held a meeting at the school and tried to sell mainstream schools to our parents. The parents asked for a vote at the end of the meeting, and all the parents, every single one of them, put up their hands saying that they didn't agree. But, of course, they just went ahead.

ANWAR I thought they were supposed to listen to parents.

MARGARET Well you read what happened in the press. The Minister stopped the closure plan.

ANWAR So how does it stand now?

MARGARET As I said, the Minister threw out the closure plan. He pretty well had to. Apart from the public protest, the local medical profession also opposed it. GPs and the Consultants looking after kids in this school. They knew you see. The GPs had their patients here, and the consultants actually came to the School when they wanted to see their patients. They wanted to do it that way.

JUDITH Wow. That's really something.

MARGARET It works well. When the Consultants visit their patients everyone can come together here, you know, teachers, carers and Babs, the School nurse, and the physio's if they are involved, and the child doesn't lose any school time. The trouble is I don't know how long they'll be allowed to do that.

JUDITH I can see the way it's going in hospitals. Bedside nursing's on the way out. You know my mam was a sister at Barts. She's scathing about nursing today, she

says we've given up on the standards she set – you're giving your patients adulterated milk is the way she puts it. I keep tell her it's not as bad as that, but I know where she's coming from. We are processing our patients not nursing them.

MARGARET I hope our kids never get processed. Time and patience isn't a luxury for them. It's a necessity. Anyone who takes that away from them isn't doing them any favours. Every day we stay open that's what we give our kids. That's why if they close this school it will break my heart. Away from here schooling's okay for some kids, but is so depressing for others, especially kids like ours. If they close us down, it will be over my dead body.

### Scene 3

#### *Left Stage*

TRACY Unfortunately there were people who just took a different view of what was best for us. At about the same time we were having our music lesson, four of them were meeting up at the regional office of the Department for Education and Skills. I call them the execution squad. They thought that they were right. A lot of people did, and probably still do.

#### **Regional office, DfES – managing Inclusion**

*There is a desk and a round table and 4 chairs. On the desk there is a photograph of Rebecca, Judy Fotheringham's daughter. Regional officer Judy Fotheringham is first joined by a civil servant from London, James Harrington and then by Director of Education, David Harding, and head of Special Needs Gerry Thompson from Westborough City Council. After introductions and pleasantries, they discuss the closure of Brighthouse School. It has been thwarted by strong campaign by parents to keep it open. Over 15,000 reasoned objections persuaded the Minister to reject plan to close the school.*

JUDY (on the telephone) Yes, I did listen to the repeat of "Yes Minister". I do admire

Sir Humphrey.

*James Harrington knocks and enters*

JAMES Are you talking about me?

JUDY (*still on the 'phone*) God has just walked in. I'll ring you back later.

Bye (*To James*) Hello, good to see you again.

JAMES Nobody's ever said I had a divine presence before. Mind you they thought my father had when he was a District Commissioner in the Punjab. But people do turn to me for the occasional miracle. I don't object to being called Sir Humphrey, but I do have to correct you about Yes Minister. We only like to think we're wise and knowledgeable. I am not sure we always are.

JUDY Last night's programme was really cruel. Did you see it?

JAMES No, I missed it.

JUDY It was all about the Dome and Government waste, not the waste of £800m so much as the public view of it. Hacker said the problem was not so much its viability as its visibility.

JAMES I don't disagree with him. We paid a terrible price at the time.

JUDY And, Hadrian didn't say that twelve million people would visit his Wall in the year of its completion, and that that venture was a good deal more ambitious than the Dome.

JAMES You really mustn't allow yourself to be upset by the media. Whenever this arose my father – he was a wise old bird if ever there was one - he always said that the Pharaohs weren't put off their grand design for the Pyramids by carping criticism in the Alexandria Times. I'll tell you something else. Have you heard the Latin tag "Audi alteram partem"?

JUDY My Latin's not very good these days. Doesn't it mean something like "You have to listen to both sides of the argument"?

JAMES Pity you didn't have a classical education. In the civil service manual, "Audi alteram partem" is translated to mean that "you can drive your car on the wrong

side of the road. “ Politicians watch our backs and we watch theirs. They provide the safety valve for the system. If we get it very badly wrong, they lose their seats. It works. Mistakes self-correct ... in time.

*(David Harding and Gerry Thompson knock and enter.)*

DAVID I hope we're not interrupting.

JAMES Come in

DAVID Sorry we're a bit late. Can I introduce Gerry Thompson? He heads up our Inclusion team. You've met already haven't you, Judy?

JUDY Yes, last autumn.

JAMES We haven't had the pleasure. I'm so glad you've come. Can we get down to business straightaway? Tempus Fugit.

JUDY More Latin?

*(They all settle round James).*

JAMES Thank you Judy for setting up this meeting. The Minister suggested that I see you. He does think that this situation needs to be actively managed. He didn't like having to reject your proposals, David, but he really had no alternative.

DAVID I agree. I don't hold it against him.

JAMES And we don't hold it against you. But we certainly don't want other parents copying them. Fifteen and half thousand objections giving reasons why the school should not be closed, and two TV celebrities and a former international footballer.

GERRY We can do without that again.

JAMES Yes, We don't mind petition signatures. There can be millions of them so far as we are concerned. Ultimately we just shred them and recycle the paper. It's a great safety valve for the disgruntled. Objections with reasons - that's another matter. Each one of them is shred resistant.

DAVID You're dead right, but our political masters say that we have to consult.



GERRY They just don't realise how much time it wastes when parents take the offer seriously. Not just hours, days and days, nights and fucking nights. That's how long it took me and a couple of others to go through their written objections. And then we had to respond to them all.

JAMES That's one of the things that the Department is worried about. We just don't want it to catch on. This is the second time it's happened. It's getting to be a habit, one we can do without. We've now taken the Minister out of the firing line here and set up School Organisation Committees to deal with school closures. They can take the flak.

GERRY A really clever move, a gesture to local democracy. Makes it much easier for us to deal with.

JAMES But we still don't want the idea to catch on.

JUDY I did have a word with David about that.

DAVID Yes and I had a word with the Head. She understood.

JAMES Good. That's one of the things the Minister was very worried about. The other, of course, is how you get the show back on the road. We need that. You see I was at the UNESCO conference at Salamanca in ninety four. Nearly a hundred countries all saying that children with special needs had a right to mainstream education.

GERRY I wish I'd been there.

JAMES Well it certainly galvanised us into action. I've never seen Parliament move so fast, and so decisively. Don't think that the Minister doesn't realise that change can be a bit painful. He knows that in every good parent there is a Luddite trying to get out.

GERRY We've got a few of them at Brighthouse.

JAMES It's your job Gerry to illuminate them, to show them the way to truth and light.

GERRY I know. I had a really good grounding at my university, under Professor Hopwood. A real visionary.

JAMES I know him well. He has advised us a number of times. We really can make the world a better place if we push for it.

GERRY There's plenty of parents that feel the same way. Feel their kids should get an equal chance in a mainstream comp.

DAVID Of course not all parents agree. That's the basic problem.

JAMES People like Gerry will win them over. You just have to. You see the Treasury has made up its mind that there are savings to be made here if they invest in it. You know the figures. Three per cent of children have special needs but they gobble up eight per cent of the total spend on education. That really isn't equitable.

DAVID Between these four walls I don't think Inclusion is going to be a cheap option.

JAMES Well leading accountants advised us that we could make some real savings simply by reducing the number of Statements LEAs have to write for children with special needs.

GERRY And writing Statements is a real headache.

JAMES We'll have to keep some schools for kids with profound difficulties or very complex behavioural problems, but most can go.

DAVID Hm. Accountants. Some are just calculating machines on legs. They play with figures and talk about outcomes. They leave us to deal with people and try to meet their needs. They're just not street wise. They manage us when we should be managing them. The savings won't be there if we do our job. Mark my words. Teachers in mainstream schools won't thank us. You'll have to give them some help, you know.

JAMES You may well be right, especially to begin with. The Treasury has agreed to cough up millions to adapt mainstream schools, and we will obviously have to commit ourselves to training. We are currently trying to work out the actual cost now. It's not easy though. There's a major study just started.

DAVID Good luck to it. I look forward to seeing the results. I just hope you haven't provided them.

JAMES You're a cynic. Anyway, just you keep your doubts to yourself. It's an article of faith with the Minister, and money is where money needs to be is my motto. We can't go back now.

JUDY And we don't want to.

JAMES And that brings us back to Brighthouse School and its whingeing parents. What are you going to do?

JUDY I thought we could suggest to the Local Council that they bring in a consultant, you know one who would say the right thing, get his recommendations and put them to the School Organisation Committee. Of course, he'd consult first.

JAMES I am not sure that that is the best answer. You have got to win over the parents. I think you need something a bit more subtle. Look at it this way. They have a bird in their hands, and they like it. We are offering them, as they see it, two in the bush. Where's their next dinner coming from? Not from the bush unless we make their bird look a bit less appetising.

DAVID Well what are you actually proposing, James?

JAMES I am not proposing anything.

DAVID Suggesting, then.

JAMES I'm not suggesting anything either. This is a journey of exploration.

DAVID Or a safari where the wild beasts roam.

GERRY And vultures fly overhead ready to scavenge their next meal.

DAVID I've seen them. They're the parents of Brighthouse School.

JAMES Look, it's up to you how you manage this. Basically if a lot of the kids in this school go to mainstream schools this school is just not going to be viable.

You are just going to have to push things along a bit faster in that direction. Tempus fugit, you know. It'll be unpleasant, but really run the School down. When you finally deliver the message that the School has to close there'll be no great argument.

DAVID I hope you're right. There's a lot of support for the School in Westborough. Have you seen the local press? The Gazette's really anti. They've certainly had a

good war.

GERRY I'm sure we can turn that around.

JAMES Exactly. Just before you arrived I was saying to Judy that Pharaoh wasn't put off his grand design for the Pyramids by carping criticism in the Alexandria Times. Think of the Iraq War.

DAVID One difference. I'm not Pharaoh. The Leader of the Council is, and he's afraid of losing his seat. Look, it'll actually run itself down in time, as we admit fewer kids to it. Some redundancies will be unavoidable and they won't be able to deliver the national curriculum.

GERRY The bird's already beginning to look a bit sick. Their roll came down last year by nine pupils.

JAMES Tempus fugit, David. The key is to get the Head teacher on side. You really must try to do that.

GERRY To get the egg to accept the frying pan. You're right there. The parents have got a lot of time for her. They trust her. If she argues the case for closure it will be much, much better than if we do. And the staff will go along with it too. There should be no problem getting the School Organisation Committee to go along with the closure after that.

DAVID Easier said than done. I know Margaret Williamson. You don't.

JAMES She must know that virtue has its reward but definitely not otherwise. She will need another school when the School is closed. You do write her references, after all.

DAVID Yes, we do. But that's a trade secret. Governors might do it more knowledgeably, maybe more honestly. We do it more ...er purposefully. Okay. I guess you're both right. I'll go along with it.

JAMES Good, we're making progress.

JUDY I understand that her nick name is Queen Margaret?

DAVID So rumour has it.

JAMES Do you mean gossip?

DAVID I mean it's on the grapevine. It's what some call her - not to her face, of course.

JAMES Look, I don't want to be involved in the fine details of all this. But do keep me informed and we'll watch your backs for you. OFSTED won't cause you any trouble.

JUDY Can we all meet again to progress this?

JAMES I don't think we need a minute of this meeting.

DAVID Could you drop me a note just confirming that it has taken place? It will help with the Leader, too. He's not a happy Pharaoh at the moment.

JAMES I'll send you something suitable, a comfort letter if that is what you'd like. It won't be very explicit. Just stop worrying about the plagues. They don't apply to us. Purges very very occasionally. Plagues, never.

DAVID That's okay.

JAMES You are a cautious bastard.

DAVID Bastard today, war wounded tomorrow unless I am careful.

JAMES Come on, cheer up. All's fair in love and politics.

DAVID Where's the love?

JAMES Look, you are more than half way up the pecking order. You should be enjoying life.

DAVID You're near the top. You're one of the really lucky ones.

JAMES I've still got a few old scars, it's true. Not many people peck at me these days and of course my job is to see they don't peck the Minister either.

Oh, by the way, the Treasury has agreed to cough up some more grant aid for those authorities able to progress Inclusion.

DAVID I had already heard that.

JAMES We do everything we can to help. I must be off. There's a train at noon. Can you get me to the Station? A very good use of time today. Thanks again for everything ... and good luck.

JUDY Ask Susan next door. She'll book a taxi for you.

JAMES Will do. Thanks.

*(James Harrington leaves the room)*

DAVID *(with a smile)* You know, James Harrington is a total wanker. I bet he'll get home tonight to game pie washed down with a fine bottle of vintage wine.

JUDY He deserves it.

GERRY Well, for me it'll be pork pie washed down with Chateau plonk. That'll do me just nicely.

DAVID Tell me; is that a photo of your daughter?

JUDY Yes, Rebecca. Putting her through university.

DAVID What's she studying?

JUDY Bio-engineering. A chip off the other old block. Her father was a lecturer in chemistry. He passed away, last year. Prostate cancer. Took him early. He didn't have a PSA test until too late.

DAVID I'm sorry. I didn't know. It must have been difficult.

JUDY It was, but the job helped, and it's so much more important to me now. Of course I've got Rebecca. She's been wonderful, but she's left the nest

DAVID Bio engineering must be better than social engineering.

JUDY A bit more ambitious. Helping the Planet and all that.

GERRY Good on her.

JUDY Anyway, we've still got to deal with our little patch of it.

DAVID You're right. We've got a little engineering of our own to do, haven't we? I don't think that there's anything more to discuss at this time.

JUDY No, it's over to you now.

DAVID Gerry?

GERRY No, I think that's everything.

*(David Harding and Gerry Thompson leave to go.)*

JUDY And let's keep it that way. Keep in touch. By the way, there's a speed

trap on North Road just past the Golden Lion. You need to watch for it.

DAVID Thanks for that. I do try to be a law abiding citizen. Bye

GERRY Bye.

*(Exit David and Gerry)*

## **Scene 4**

*Left Stage*

TRACY Let's get back to Brighthouse School, should we? You'll remember that Mummy Margaret said she liked to stretch us. She said that some of us even went abseiling. Well, I was one of them. I was so scared at the time. I had butterflies in my tummy the size of pomegranates. Johnny told me to sing on the way down.

Tomorrow, Tomorrow, Tomorrow. And all my pals cried out Katy, Katy, Katy. Well, I'll tell you something. Next summer I'm going paragliding in Wales. Anyway, they stretched us, but we stretched them. I haven't mentioned our carer Wendy. We called her Poo Bah. You see she took some of us to the loo. We were sometimes closer to her than to our teachers. So, come into the staff room and meet her and some of the others.

### **Staff Room – a mood of unease**

*There are comfortable chairs around the room. A coffee machine is in one corner. It is shortly after 4pm. Joan Errington, Emma Kirk and Wendy Robinson are relaxing.*

WENDY You're the teachers. How do you explain to a ten year old what nanotechnology is?

JOAN Revisit Gulliver's Travels, Wendy, or visit Google. Then get him to explain it to you.

EMMA Compare it to "no-see-ums" when you're sunbathing on the beach in Jamaica, and they dance the Conga where you least want them. Who wanted to know?

WENDY John Turnbull, the boy who controls his wheelchair and his computer with a

wand attached to his forehead.

EMMA He is just so bright.

WENDY His mum was really chuffed to see his progress when she came in yesterday. My little flower was such a happy little boy.

JOAN He has such a lovely smile. The one thing we can give kids like John is time, and that's the reward. Anyway, coffee girls.

*(Nods all round as Joan pours out coffee.)*

*(Head teacher comes storming in.)*

MARGARET One for me too, Joan dear ... and strong. I need it. I wish I'd never got up this morning. Thank you for staying behind. It does help to share our thoughts about things now and again. God, that Terry James is impossible. How can you teach a class with him in it?

EMMA What's he been up to now?

MARGARET I asked him to describe an earthquake. Do you know what he said? "When my dad came home drunk." I then made a big mistake. I asked him what a volcano was then. And he said "My Mam, when my dad came home drunk".

WENDY It's not a joke. Have you seen his dad? He must be all of 20 stone.

MARGARET Mostly beer

WENDY If there's an earthquake in that family it'll be all of seven on the Richter scale. He's great when he is sober. Life and soul of the party. When he's had too many, he is the party.

MARGARET And you've seen his mum. When she blows her top, talk of molten lava. But he's still a terrible handful in class.

WENDY Isn't he just a naughty kid? I know more about him than you do. When you toilet kids they talk to you, and Terry talks to me more than he talks to you. I mean really talks. You know his home must be bedlam. I don't think his mother can cope.

MARGARET Neither can I. He's a bundle of mischief whatever the cause.

EMMA Same in my book, I'm afraid.. I've got everyone singing DO RE ME and he



goes ME RE DO.

MARGARET And he shouts. And never sits still for a moment.

WENDY Well, I do have to toilet him more than any other kid in the school.

I don't know where he gets it all from.

MARGARET He's probably a secret beer drinker - he'll take after his father mark my words - Beer's a diuretic you know. Anyway I had a word with nurse about him. She thinks he's a candidate for Ritalin.

EMMA There's far too many kids on that these days. It's getting like chewing gum.

MARGARET They need to be.

EMMA I'm not sure it's not because they haven't got a father.

MARGARET Or they've got two.

JOAN I hope you two are not getting a bit prissy about single parent families.

EMMA You're right. I do like the traditional family. I'm not judging folk when I say that. I'm not preaching. I'm just being practical.

WENDY I agree. I think the world would be a far better place if more folk were married.

EMMA Yes, Being married is setting out on a long journey. Why do folk have to get off at the first stop? I remember an old saying from the Onondaga Nation: with every decision you make, keep in mind the Seventh Generation of children to come. I don't think folk think properly about the first generation, never mind the seventh.

JOAN No, Emma, maybe you should do more to encourage marriage.

MARGARET That would take guts today, but the breakdown of the family doesn't fully explain Ritalin. The world that kids grow up in today is a very different from the one we grew up in when Ritalin wasn't even around.

WENDY Yes, nothing remotely like it.

JOAN Every generation has its own battles.

EMMA They've got no faith to guide them. That's the trouble.

JOAN Or to lead them up the garden path.

EMMA No sense of awe, Joan. It's a great loss.

JOAN And nothing seems to last. There's a brand new gizmo, and you've got to learn it all over again. EMMA Too true. I've just bought an iPod for my music.

JOAN Certainly jobs don't last. Downsizing. That's the word. Then they sack you? It's difficult to know what you are learning for.

MARGARET Sorry to interrupt you. We're supposed to be having a staff meeting tomorrow. I thought we could make it a little training session instead. Yes?

*(Everyone nods in agreement.)*

MARGARET Okay. Can we focus on getting our kids going, really going? We know they have a lot of anger, a lot of aggression. And not just kids. What do we do with it? Do we harness it, or do we suppress it? Would that be a good topic?

EMMA Yes, it would. Can I give you a story to tell them? It will make a good starting point. It comes from a book I've been reading. The story comes out of Africa. "Every morning a gazelle wakes up. It knows that it must run faster than the fastest lion, or it will be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows that it must run faster than the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle. When the sun comes up, you better start runnin'."

MARGARET I'm afraid Emma, that begs the question - just where do you run to?

EMMA Margaret, talk sport Most kids follow that. So where does Tiger Woods run?

MARGARET To the winning post?

EMMA Exactly, to the winning post. That man knows what it is to aspire - it's not about dosh - no way, and not just to be the best golfer on the day.

MARGARET Tiger a role model for kids?

EMMA He's flesh and blood like you and me. A few more birdies? Well, I let God judge people's morals. But I bet he'd still like to be the best golfer ever - and a black. Wow. That's where that man channels his energy.

MARGARET Not all of it, Emma.

EMMA He's got energy to spare, that man has. But getting' back to golf, he has no fear of failure, and he has no fear of failure. He's practiced the word 'failure' right out of his vocabulary. If you're afraid of failure you'll win nuttin'. The dustbins are full of the hopes of those who in their bellies were dead scared of failing. They couldn't zap their fears. Sisters, I tell you, if you cannot zap those gremlins, you'll win nuttin' in life.

JOAN Yes, you're right about using sport. I heard Navratilova explain why so many good tennis players come out of Eastern Europe. And we produce scarcely any. They have belief and determination, and they don't quit. That's where you run.

EMMA I know another part of the trouble. It's them folk that prattle on about the evils of capitalism and competition.

JOAN Oh come on.

EMMA Oh yes it is. That's why we don't win things. Why we have so few sporting heroes of our own. They don't like competition. Poor little things. Tell that to the Chinese. Today their students are keeping our universities going. Why? To compete. Competition's a part of life. Wanting to be somebody is part of real living. Earning and spending our dosh makes the world go round, now don't it? Those folk who moan on about these things are just running scared of life. They expect the State to tie their bootlaces for them. That's no good way to be. Now is it?

MARGARET I don't entirely agree. Some people like life without the spills and they don't mind missing out on the thrills. They don't think life should be about winners and losers. We have to play it both ways if we can. I don't think our lords and masters ever get it right either way. I'm sure that's why I have to dose myself with pills through worrying about it.

EMMA But we get it right, Margaret.

MARGARET That's the saving grace.

EMMA One way or another life is a battle for all kids.. Them folk that don't think it is, or don't think it should be, they're preparing kids for a world that don't exist. All kids need a horizon.

JOAN You know, I remember my mam saying to me that the sting of failure was a spur to glory.

EMMA Sure you feel the sting, but you're not running scared of it. If you don't like the sting at all, well don't look for the glory.

MARGARET That's one reason why we celebrate so many victories in this school, isn't it so? We compete. Our Para Olympian medallists for a start. Our Band....

JOAN Yes, there's real triumph when it comes out of adversity, especially if you have to suffer a little first. It sets kids up for life. Mollycoddle them, wrap them up in cotton wool, and everyone else will run off with the medals.

MARGARET Wasn't it Helen Keller who said "Security is an illusion. Life is either a daring adventure or it is nothing at all." She rose to a challenge didn't she?

JOAN Blind and deaf from early childhood.

MARGARET That's right.

EMMA Nannies should stay in the nursery, if you ask me. It ain't no good pretending that life's easy. The easy option is usually a dead end. For our kids it is.

MARGARET Well there are certainly no cheers for mediocrity. Great Britain wasn't great just because of the Maxim gun. Can I sum this up? Unless you find a mountain to climb, you'll never ever find out what you're really capable of. You'll miss out on an awful lot. For our kids all their mountains are just a little bit higher, and someone has to keep reminding them about the view from the top.

## **Scene 5**

TRACY I'd love you to see what some of our lessons were like. Emma , Caribbean sunshine, was a wonderful teacher. She'd have been a great gospel singer in the Caribbean.

## Music Room - a music lesson

*Looking through the window it is now autumn.*

*Emma Kirk is sitting in front of Terry, Johnny, Philippa and Tracy.*

*Lesson illustrated by CD and DVD recordings*

EMMA Our last lesson was all about mood and atmosphere created by music or captured in music. Can you remember any of it?

TERRY I remember *Mars God of War* from the *Planets*.

PHILIPPA Trust you to remember that one. I remember *Sinfonia Antarctica*.

It gave me the shivers.

EMMA Who was it by?

PHILIPPA Vaughan Williams.

EMMA Good, both of you. I'm really going to open up your ear drums this fine morning. The music I am going to play for you to today will reach parts of you that that well known beer won't reach.

TERRY Worth a try Miss. Give me one any day.

PHILIPPA Oh shut up, Terry

EMMA I'm talking about the thing that separates the human race from the animal kingdom. And, even more important, it's where all people can come together. I call it the spiritual side of music. The spirit of God is in this music, or the human spirit. Call it either. In my book they are the same thing. It's the music of joy and the music of sadness. You will sense triumph over adversity and, yes, discord as well as harmony. It's the music that carries the beat of life itself. We are going to start with harmony. You see the great thing about music is that it has no boundaries. It is universal. Listen to **Music has no boundaries** sung by **Ladysmith Black Mambazo**.

*(The music plays in the background during the rest of this scene.)*

Those guys won two Grammys, and performed at two Nobel Peace Prize ceremonies. That piece of music comes out of South Africa, but If you want to find your God, if there is a God, listen to good music from anywhere in the big wide world.

## Scene 6

TRACY I was enjoying my lessons at this time. I'd forgotten all about the threat to close the school. That was behind us. I was thinking about "Tomorrow." If the staff had any worries they did not share them with us.

### The Staff Room

EMMA Look, you three are governors, what's going to happen to our School now the Minister's thrown out the LEA's plans to close it? I need my job. I need a job.

MARGARET That's on our agenda for our next meeting.

EMMA What do you think is going to happen then?

WENDY I've a friend whose husband is a Labour Councillor. She thinks they've still got it in for this school ...even though they say they haven't.

JOAN They cannot want another battle with our parents, surely?

MARGARET I don't know what they are going to do. I don't think we're in their good books though. We've just got to stick together.

JOAN That's not going to be so easy if our numbers keep going down.

MARGARET True, but it'll reduce our budget.

WENDY And that means redundancies.

MARGARET Well - job losses in some form or other. That wouldn't be good for us.

JOAN Our parents will want us to make the best of it. I know what they think will happen to our kids if the school closes. They think that some will go to mainstream schools and may be okay, but they know that some won't be. They think that probably all of them will be bullied at some time or another, and that some will go to a different special school that won't be right for them, won't be anything like as good as this one in meeting their needs. That's what they think.

MARGARET I'm afraid you're dead right about the bullying. The problem is chronic.

JOAN Read William Golding's Lord of the Flies to understand. It's the dark side of

some kids ...and some grown ups too. I'm afraid it's the beast in them, and it's always going to be there. Putting our kids into mainstream schools simply gives them more kids to bully. It's getting worse.

MARGARET Not surprising some kids truant, is it? And their mums and dads are taken to court.

JOAN And if they don't truant they will have to manage with supply teachers who don't know them,

MARGARET And, teachers who haven't enough time for them, haven't been fully trained for them,

JOAN And teaching assistants who don't know how to stretch them.

MARGARET And at what cost? They don't come cheap.

WENDY I worry about whether the staff will know how to lift and carry? And you don't find a school nurse in every school, now do you? I can just see teachers wanting to give valium anally as nurse does here.

MARGARET Yes, or sucking out a tracheotomy tube.

WENDY The physio won't be full time, will she, like Bunty? Will she be there when you want her? Or will she be out training someone? And just who will give kids their medications at the right time?

JOAN Yes, the great thing here is that our kids can get what they need when they need it between lessons.

WENDY Just how much time do physio's and school nurses waste just travelling from school to school, the nurses two at a time I believe? There's not so many of either of them.

MARGARET I'll tell you another thing. Bunty was on a course at the Bobath Centre recently. It's a wonderful way physio's can help kids with cerebral palsy. She said it was a real plus for her professional skills. If you spread our kids around, how are they going to get it? Tell me that.

WENDY And, there'll be no-one like Mary Turnbull to show them how to bake tarts.

No domestic science in the national curriculum. That's the sort of education our kids need – how to manage when they leave school. That's what our kids need, isn't it?

JOAN I read an article recently by one of our clever, clever guys – far too many of them in education, and too clever by half for our own good, if you ask me. He said - children with special needs come in tens, scores, even hundreds, not one by one. He said you've got to give up the individualised approach, give up the individualised approach. Would you believe it?

MARGARET Yes, I know. And I am afraid that some academics just don't understand, and of course they go on to teach their students the error of their ways. Their students then have to repeat those errors to pass their exams. Ugh.

JOAN Yes, I read the same article. I wrote a letter to the paper saying that he should teach kids in special schools like ours not teach about them

MARGARET I share all your fears, I do, I really do, Oh yes, there'll be some success stories, some great anecdotes, they'll parade them like Lotto winners, but in today's world no-one will want to talk about the ones that have gone wrong, will they? Now will they? I can't sleep at night through worrying about it. I just can't. Insomnia at night and migraines during the day. Ugh. And pills to keep me company. The story of my life these days.

JOAN It's a worry for all of us, Margaret. How on earth can parents plan for their kids' future?

WENDY It's a fucking nightmare. And how can we plan for our mortgage repayments?

JOAN It's a nightmare, one you never wake up from, however hard you try. So what should the governors do if they still try to close us down?

MARGARET I don't think there's anything to be gained ending up on another collision course. No-one would thank us for that and no-one will win. But maybe we can play for time. Every day this school stays open is, as I always say, a victory for the kids who are here now. I hope the governors will keep telling the LEA the facts of life.



What our kids need. What they are entitled to. What their parents can demand. And we can keep the School in the public eye with another Open Day.

JOAN I agree. I'll back you there.

WENDY Me too. No bloody surrender.

MARGARET No, the governors mustn't just throw in the towel. That would be awful.

EMMA Oh come on, let's stop moaning. Moaning Minnies the lot of us. Anyway time waits for no woman. I've some lessons to mark. I must be off. (*singing*) "We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when, but I know we'll meet again some sunny day."

MARGARET So must I.

## Scene 7

### Music Room - a music lesson

*Looking out the window, it is now winter.*

*Emma Kirk is sitting in front of Terry, Johnny, Philippa and Tracy. Harry has now joined the class.*

*Lesson illustrated by CD and DVD recordings*

TERRY Do you really believe in God, Miss?

EMMA Well if she does exist, she wears many different costumes.

PHILIPPA I thought God was a "him"

TRACY "Hymns is what you sing to God."

PHILIPPA A "He" then.

EMMA God is whatever you want God to be: He, She or It.

TERRY My dad doesn't believe that God exists

HARRY My dad does. Speak for yourself Terry.

EMMA She doesn't if you don't believe in her. She does if you do. My folk believed in God and saw God as the Father. For me though God is a mother. I think today you've

got to bring religion a wee bitty up to date. After all, Mothers know all about the pain of creation, don't they? The Bible's a great book. But there's far too many men in it. Anyway I'm not sure that 'believe' is the right word. I know she's there. The spirit of God is in every living thing. You just have to listen out for her. But you can turn your back on her too. It's your choice.

TERRY I've chosen. *(He gives the thumbs down sign)*

EMMA When you listen to more music you may change your mind. I believe that the hand of God has actually touched the great composers and musicians, and made them great, and for certain not the hand of Charlie Darwin. I heard that great opera singer Placido Domingo say he believed his voice came from God. Music comes up from the earth itself - just listen to this – **Giving and taking by Tibetan monks of Garden Shartse & Corciolli.**

*(The music continues softly for a while while the lesson continues)*

Those voices come right out of God's good earth, don't they? They remind us, we don't just take from the earth; we have to give back to it.

HARRY I've heard that music at home. I've chosen Miss.

EMMA Sure you have. That music comes from deep down in the earth, but it reaches right up to those angels in Heaven –Can you tell me a piece of heavenly music?

TERRY 'Ave... a Bloody Mary

EMMA Now I'll have no blaspheming in my class. Say "Ave Maria" Terry.

TERRY Ave Maria Terry.

EMMA That's a little better. Another one?

PHILIPPA I heard Agnus Dei on Classic FM. I think by Faure. It was so lovely.

EMMA Very good. That's part of the Faure Requiem. You see, you guys, there's the joy of the human spirit and there's tragedy. You know the Holocaust, where millions of

Jews, gypsies, and kids just like you were murdered because they didn't belong to the master race. Listen to **John William's Schindler's List**.

*(The music continues softly until "I'm beginning to..)*

TRACY That's really sad.

PHILIPPA I don't think it's spiritual though.

TERRY And where was God Miss when all that murdering was going on? If he was a good God he would have put a stop to it.

EMMA The Bible gives answer, Terry. Folk remember Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They forget the serpent. God couldn't stop Adam and Eve listenin' to that serpent and then eatin' the forbidden apple. You see God had given them the choice of eatin' or not eatin'.

TERRY Why didn't he put a worm in it then?

EMMA Oh Terry. It wasn't God who had the choice. It was man. But God was there, yes right there in those terrible concentration camps, keeping the hope of alive of the tiny few who survived. That sure wasn't easy, keeping hope alive in that hell-hole amongst the huge piles of bones and carcasses and the stench of it. I know of one Jew whose his family were gassed but somehow he kept the candle of his faith alive with the oil of an empty sardine tin. He survived, and became a cantor in a synagogue in Glasgow. That's the power of faith Philippa. God was there, as I am here. And that's why God feels our sadness now. When I listen to that music I feel that sadness. Don't you feel it, Philippa?

PHILIPPA I'm beginning to.

*(Music ends)*

EMMA Close your eyes. Terry, close your eyes. You too, Come on you heathen. Imagine you're on my island in the Caribbean. Think of the ebb and flow of the tides lappin' the shore, the rippling streams that flow into the turbulent oceans. Harry imagine the world your dad comes from, the rocks and boulders that shape its mountains, all of nature – its unbelievable beauty, its incredible power, just its infinite

variety –nature’s awesome. These are for ever God’s gifts to you and to me, to all mankind, yes, and without distinction between believer and unbeliever, between rich and poor. And, you guys, they are for ever, for ever. (*Very softly then absolute silence*)

TERRY (*Drops drum stick*) Sorry. Miss.

EMMA Never mind. God’s just left the room!

## Scene 8

### Office of the Director of Education

*There is a desk and chair in one corner, and also a round table with 4 chairs.*

*David Harding is joined first by SEN Officer, Gerry Thompson.*

DAVID Come on in.

GERRY Many thanks.

DAVID I thought we should have a word first. This is not going to be easy,

GERRY I don’t think so. Margaret’s got to go with Inclusion. She has to. No career prospects at all if you row against the tide.

DAVID So you think she’ll cooperate.

GERRY If we play our cards right, yes.

DAVID But I’m going to have to rely on the two of you to work out the detail. That really is your job not mine. But I’ll back you up and you know the regional office will back you up too.

GERRY I’ll do whatever’s necessary to see it through. I do have some thoughts and I’ll talk to Margaret about them.

DAVID I’ll stay for the first part of our meeting and then leave you to.

*(Knock on the door and Margaret Williamson comes in. During this scene Margaret feels a tension headache coming on and puts her hand up to her right temple to try to ease it.)*

MARGARET Not too late I hope?

DAVID Not at all. Take a seat. I do hope that I haven't taken you away from anything important.

MARGARET Everything's important at Brighthouse.

DAVID I've asked Gerry to join us this afternoon.

MARGARET Okay.

DAVID . Your School is one LEA governor short. There's a retired NHS hospital manager, John Lavers, I think he will help the two of you.. He could fill the LEA vacancy on your governing body.

MARGARET That sounds really good. We've wanted a link with Health for a long time. I'll certainly go with that.

DAVID Can I come to the point of our meeting?

MARGARET Sure.

DAVID It's a bit – how should I put it? - delicate. Can I rely on your discretion?

MARGARET I suppose - how delicate?

DAVID Well, really very delicate.

MARGARET Oh dear. You had better break it to me then.

DAVID You know we need to close your school.

MARGARET I was hoping that the parents might have persuaded you to change your mind.

DAVID Their campaign wasn't a waste of time. It forced us to address the closure much more seriously. We do realise that we have got to work very hard to make sure that your kids don't lose out.

GERRY We can't afford to have a hundred angry parents on our back.

DAVID You think that more than half of your roll could do really well in mainstream schools?

MARGARET Yes, if you prepared properly for them.... trained the staff to take them... .put an end to bullying ... and give them the attention and the time they need.

DAVID We are going to do all of that, aren't we Gerry?

GERRY Yes that's in hand.

MARGARET You going to stop bullying? Have you read how much there is of it today? Nearly every kid with special needs is bullied in mainstream schools at one time or another? It's always the most vulnerable on the receiving end.

GERRY It is in hand.

MARGARET Do you realise that every time you fail, bullying may blight the entire life of one of our youngsters. Do you realise that?

GERRY It's in hand Margaret.

MARGARET Gerry, get real, For our kids it's not just a learning experience that they all have to go through, you know. It can be a life sentence. And when you know the number of attempted suicides in youngsters every year, it can be a short life too.

GERRY We are tackling it, Margaret. We know we have to.

DAVID We certainly do, for the kids' sake, and to persuade parents to go along with us. We have to have parents on our side, not on our backs. Believe me.

GERRY That's what we are talking about today. We have a sort of plan.

DAVID I'll come straight to the point. We want you to sell the closure of the School to parents and staff.

MARGARET Last time you asked me to back you up. Now you're asking me to do the whole job for you. The answer is no, definitely no. Why won't you take no for an answer?

DAVID Things have moved on since last time.

MARGARET What things?

GERRY We're better prepared. We've listened to your parents.

MARGARET Come on Gerry, you've written a few more concept papers.

GERRY That's not fair. Training for special needs has started in mainstream schools. And with teaching assistants we are giving one to one help to a lot of kids.

MARGARET One to point one, more like. Who's training who, Gerry?

GERRY Physio's are training teaching assistants and some mums too.

MARGARET Wonderful, and they'll have no time for their clients. It won't be hands on for them, it will be hands off. You can't mass produce professional skills, you know. Or do you think you can? Do you think you're a miracle man? Stop fooling yourself, Gerry.

GERRY Please don't be so negative. Head teachers say they are prepared.

MARGARET Negative, negative, they say what you want them to say. Look, I gave a lot of thought to this last year. I don't want to take sides in this. It's not my job. It's yours, not mine. It's yours. I'm just not prepared to do it for you. I can't betray my own school like that, not after the parents' campaign to keep it open. I can't and you shouldn't be asking me to.

DAVID Margaret, we are asking you to face the reality of the situation, and get parents to do the same.

GERRY How many did your roll drop by last year?

MARGARET Nine.

GERRY I hear its going to drop by another fourteen this year.

MARGARET It certainly will if you keep kids from being admitted.

GERRY We don't stop them. We help them go to mainstream schools. And it will get worse for you. With fewer pupils and our new banding scheme you are going to have to face some big budget cuts. There'll have to be redundancies. Or you'll simply lose staff as they look around for greater job security and advancement. And you won't be able to replace them. I don't know whether you've heard but your Music Teacher, Emma Kirk's her name, yes

MARGARET Yes

DAVID She'll shortly be leaving you, a regional appointment. It's a big step up for her.

MARGARET Something tells me you're way ahead of me here.

DAVID If we are, you'll soon catch up.

MARGARET The school is to wither on the vine?

GERRY Your words not mine. But it's got to happen anyway. You must see that.

MARGARET I do, all too clearly.

DAVID Will you help us? if you do, you'll end up with a much better chance of a headship elsewhere. There's one coming up in the next couple of years in Grovewood Comprehensive School. And there may be a job for your English teacher too. We do have a little influence in these things, you know.

MARGARET I really don't know whether I'm hearing you right. Are you seriously saying that you want me to betray my kids?

DAVID Not betray them. Look to their best long term interests.

GERRY We don't want another public confrontation between the school and the LEA. That's no good for anyone, is it? And it can't be good for you or your colleagues. It just sours everything when we are trying to pull together and get things right for your kids.

DAVID Sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind.

MARGARET You admit that you're being cruel.

DAVID But I am trying to be kind. Look, you have said that half your School roll would fit into mainstream.

MARGARET Yes, if you can get it right for them

DAVID That's what we have to do.

GERRY That's our job now.

MARGARET But you haven't really started it.

DAVID It's what we have to do. OFSTED will be on our backs if we don't.

MARGARET I thought OFSTED was interested in standards and wouldn't like what you are suggesting.

DAVID You misread it. They'll turn a blind eye to it. They won't put a black mark against you or your school while this is going on. And when they inspect us they're only interested in whether we are delivering government policy and meeting government targets. That's the way that things get done.



MARGARET And people get done, David.

GERRY Margaret, just look two years ahead. Fewer kids. Less money. Fewer staff.

Do you think you personally, never mind the School, can face an OFSTED inspection.

MARGARET I'll have to if that's what the parents want.

DAVID Look, we're all in the same boat. Can't you see that? If you lose half your school, do you really think that you can deliver the national curriculum to the rest?

MARGARET It wouldn't be easy.

GERRY It wouldn't be possible, Margaret. And meanwhile you'll have a battle royal on your hands. The parents will be on your back and on ours, and don't think you can escape the backwash. You'll still need another job sometime. You must see that you will have queered your own pitch. People will be looking for reasons not to appoint you. You must see the danger of that.

MARGARET I haven't much alternative then?

DAVID None.

MARGARET Tell me, am I a mouse in a trap or a rat leaving a sinking ship?

DAVID Neither, you're just doing the job you're paid to do, like everyone else. When you are employed by the State you're not paid to ask questions. In particular, you're not paid to ask yourself any questions. That's not part of your job description, and it's incompatible with Health and Safety Regulations.

MARGARET When you're employed by the State, you don't have to be brain dead but it helps. Of course this is how the Germans and the Russians learnt how to survive their little dictatorships. Can I have a glass of water please?

DAVID Are you okay?

MARGARET Yes, just a little problem I have to live with.

*(David fetches a glass and hands it over. It slips between them and spills.)*

MARGARET I'm so sorry.

DAVID No. it was my fault.

*(He refills the glass)*

MARGARET Thanks.

*(Margaret slowly swallows three pills)*

MARGARET These usually help. Would you excuse me for a minute?

DAVID Sure. Take your time.

*(Margaret leaves the room)*

DAVID I just hate doing this.

GERRY You know it's best for everyone in the long run, including Margaret.

DAVID I guess I'm just a bit old fashioned. The world's changing, not always for the better.

GERRY We are trying to change it for the better. I really think you did a great job there. She'll go along with us. You see.

DAVID I think I could do with a glass of water. *(Gerry fills a glass and hands it over)*

I wish it was a vodka. I could do with a stiff one! No pills, though

*(Margaret re-enters the room)*

DAVID Look, don't think I don't respect you. And don't think you're alone with this sort of problem. It's the same for all of us. The Minister puts it about that we are responsible for school closures, but asks OFSTED to make sure that we close them. Brownie points if we do, a bad report if we don't. It's the system. Now we need good head teachers like you. But I do need to make sure you stay within the system, don't work against it. Are you going to help us?

MARGARET Give me the weekend to think it over. Please. Please.

DAVID No, I'm not going to do that. For your sake. You'll only prolong the agony of making the decision you know you have to make. I'm sure we've said nothing you haven't already thought about, thought about a lot..

MARGARET *(under her breath)* Damn, your eyes.

GERRY Don't you see it. We don't just want your voice. We want your expertise too. You know the way its going. I've got a little working party to progress it. Join us. There couldn't be a better way to help your kids than that.

MARGARET Come on Gerry, if you really wanted me you'd have asked me before now. You only really like people on your committees who agree with you.

DAVID Please, Margaret.

MARGARET I register a protest on behalf of the Governors and the parents.

DAVID That will be for them, Margaret. But you'll go along with us?

MARGARET I will not give you the satisfaction of thinking you've persuaded me. I will not.... But, I'll go along with you I. You two have broken me David. That's what you've done.

DAVID You're making me feel ashamed.

MARGARET I hope that I am. Yes I hope that I am. Gerry, I bet you don't feel ashamed. You don't feel anything, do you? I'll do your dirty work for you. Yes. But in my heart you know I am saying no I won't. You understand that, don't you?

DAVID I do. Thank you. I know it goes against the grain.

MARGARET Against the grain. Against everything I believe in.

DAVID We'll give you some reinforcements. Can I invite John Lavers then to be one of your Governors?

MARGARET How can I object?

DAVID Good. I'll sort out the paperwork.

DAVID Look, I've got another meeting to go to. Long term all this must be good for everyone. I'll leave you and Gerry to sort things out. Do come back to me if you need to. Forgive me if I go.

MARGARET Yes, but I won't forgive you, you know. I'll walk alongside you, that's all I'll do. Heaven save me.

*(David Harding leaves)*

GERRY We do support our friends.

MARGARET I certainly know that.

DAVID It'll be alright. We'll make sure of it. And I think you will find the grass is greener on this side of the fence.

MARGARET Okay Gerry, come on, cut the schmooze. Tell me what you have in mind.

*(David Harding leaves the room)*

MARGARET This will be the death of me. I don't like to let myself down, never mind anyone else.

GERRY It's in a good cause. It is, Margaret.

MARGARET Oh stop. Just tell me what have you got in mind.

GERRY You know the arguments for Inclusion. Recite them ... with conviction.

MARGARET It sounds so easy. Good teachers are going to lose their jobs.

GERRY Oh, come on. If they are good we'll find them new ones, and their expertise with special needs will go to mainstream schools. That's where it needs to be now. It'll help your kids when they go there. There's a nice thought for you to finish with.

MARGARET Yes, I suppose it is.

GERRY Great.

MARGARET Just one final thought. What happens when the school is actually being closed? I just can't face that. Some of my parents are not going to like that.

GERRY A little sick leave perhaps?

MARGARET That will not be difficult.

GERRY Well, you heard the Director. There's an exit strategy for you all ready when you need it.

MARGARET I bet he won't put it in writing. I bet he won't put any of this in writing.

GERRY You can't expect that.

MARGARET What have I let myself in for?

GERRY A six month break, if you play your cards right.

MARGARET I must go and drown myself in porridge. That seems the right place for me to be.

GERRY Keep out of the soup.

## Scene 9

TRACY I suppose that's the real world. When you're at school it isn't there.

### **Music Room - a music lesson continued**

TERRY But God's gifts kill.

EMMA They also heal. You can't have a world just made out of sugar candy.

TERRY It's more like my mam's suet pudding.

PHILIPPA Do you pray to God?

EMMA Do I pray to her? Well I know that lots of folk don't, and they can tell me I am a nutter, but I talk to Her every day.

TERRY My Dad thinks that people who hear voices are bonkers.

EMMA He thinks what he thinks. I think what I know.

TRACY My Nana used to say that God was as near to her as a new born babe and as far away as the furthest star?

EMMA I like your Nana. She was a wise one, that lady. She knew, like I do.

PHILIPPA Do you pray for this School?

EMMA Sure I do. Every single day I pray for this school, and I pray for you.

TERRY My mam said you're leaving us.

TRACY No!

EMMA Gossip. I'll have no gossiping in my class. Some people have nothing better to do than wag their tongues. I'm goin' to tell you a little story. I remember my Daddy recounting how he heard the great Black American singer Paul Robeson deliver that same message in Peekskill, a little town in New York State, at a big open air concert. Now, not everyone likes being told that they are all God's children. There's always some that don't. And on that day those folk came out in force with their clubs, their rocks and their stones, and they rained them down on those peaceful concert goers, on little children too, as they made their way home.

TRACY No. Why did they do a terrible thing like that?

EMMA Well, some people just don't believe in a universal creator. They believe in their own tribal God. That's always making for trouble and suffering. Anyway, that's all half a century ago. I'm sure times have changed in Westchester County. But what Paul Robeson said about folk music fifty years ago is just as true today. Let's get back to it. You see, one of the earliest gifts God gave to mankind was music.

TERRY Was it a Christmas present Miss?

EMMA Oh for heaven's sake, Terry, it was a gift to Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, and to non-believer from that day to this; no-one any different. It was a gift then, and it's a gift today to every new born child.

Now let's round this lesson off with two pieces of fine spiritual music to help you understand this a bit better.

*(Paul Robeson singing Deep River starts up)*

The voices you'll hear carry the spirit of God in them or, if you want, simply the human spirit. Take your pick. Either way enjoy, enjoy. That's my childhood hero, Paul Robeson, singing that famous spiritual **Deep River**. And to finish, just listen to this:

**Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah.**

*( Deep River is replaced by the Hallelujah Chorus until the end of the scene)*

TRACY Wow

PHILIPPA I really don't know whether I believe or I don't. .... but I know that I'd really like to.

EMMA You guys will never be alone in life when you have found music. And one other thing. If you listen to spiritual music, really listen, you won't worship a tribal God, you'll worship God, the creator of everythin' and everyone. God that will heal the wounds of mankind.

**TERRY** That would be a fuckin' miracle.

**EMMA KIRK** Terry, don't use that word in my classroom. Don't use it ever again.... But, for once, I am agreein' with you. People shouldn't just pray together when they mourn their dead in war.

## **Scene 10**

**Head teacher's living room**

*There is a small couch and two easy chairs, CD player and a bookcase.*

*A bottle of wine is on the table with a glass.*

*Margaret Williamson is on her own to begin with. She is joined by Joan Errington who lets herself in.*

MARGARET Help yourself to a glass of wine.

JOAN Yes, I will

MARGARET It's been a hell of a bad week, one of my worst downers for a long time. Tommy Dixon died. He was only thirteen. What a great kid. Everyone knew he was on borrowed time. His friends were fantastic. Then Johnny Rutherford's mum wanted more speech and language therapy for her child, but just not available. You can't produce it out of the hat, can you? I lost my cool, and she lost hers. She said she'd report me to the Governors. I can really do without that. Then another parent, Terry James's father, said he wanted to report Emma to the Governors, and we can all do without that too.

JOAN Emma? I thought everyone loved our music teacher?

MARGARET Not this time. She's been propagating her Pentecostal ideas in her music lessons. That's what Mr. James alleges. He says he's an atheist and he objects. Then for good measure he said that if he was a Christian he'd also object. Emma believes God is a woman and he said that's heresy.

JOAN Poor Emma. She can't win either way. Did you discuss it with her?

MARGARET Yes, of course I did. She insisted that she was not propagating her faith, she was just describing it, and was entitled to her opinions. She said the Fawzis were very interested in her religion and dad's a Sikh. I think they



both follow the Sikh faith. Well I had to tell her she lived in an age of political correctness, and she had to keep her opinions to herself.

JOAN I'll bet Emma didn't go along with that.

MARGARET She did not, and it got quite heated. We're supposed to be educating these kids, she shouted. They have to learn how to agree and how to disagree, and when. How can I teach them if you gag me? And she went out slamming the door. Then the 'phone rang. I had a really distraught mum complaining about the LEA. She's wanted her son admitted to this School for ages. The LEA will admit him to almost any other one. You wouldn't believe what her son's been doing - smearing his crap all over the walls of the house. Sheer frustration if you ask me. I am sure we could do something for that boy. And that poor lady is having to deal with this all on her own.

JOAN Well that's the sort of thing that happens when the LEA decides to starve a school of pupils.

MARGARET It is. The real problem is the LEA. And they actually want me to work with them to close the school ...to try and prove to the parents that the School just isn't viable,

JOAN Oh, not again. Don't they understand basic economics. The more kids in this school the less each one costs?

MARGARET They do not. I wouldn't trust them with my household budget. I'd be in the knackers' yard in a week.. It's just that in their simple little minds they think that all our kids would be better off in mainstream schools.

JOAN Oh dear. That's terrible. Some yes, maybe, not all, not all.

MARGARET I don't like letting the school down, but you can't fight them, can you? They are bound to win in the end whatever our parents say.

JOAN What do they want you to do?

MARGARET Just argue their case for them, the case for Inclusion. They think it will be more persuasive if I say it than if they do.

JOAN They're certainly not wrong about that.

MARGARET And they're going to make it easier for me. Easier! We are going to run short of money with falling rolls and budget cuts. There'll have to be redundancies. Everything I've worked for. My God. And I've got to applaud it. You know they even suggested I took down our Merit Board, where we show what our kids have achieved over the years. They said you can't live in the past.

JOAN That was our achievement as well as the kids.

MARGARET Well they don't want people reminded of it. Anyway, what's going to happen to our kids? Some will be alright, but I'll bet others won't be. It's not surprising that I have migraine during the day and insomnia at night. And pills as and when. If I am a good girl, the LEA has promised me another headship after this school closes. They didn't use the word promise, mind you. But they can work these things. They can work them both ways, of course. They write the references. And they help the other school read them. You can probably get a job there too if you want it.

JOAN Did they say that?

MARGARET Yes. Knew it probably would sweeten the pill. Don't say they are not thoughtful about our needs

JOAN When they want to be.

MARGARET And we have to be thoughtful about their needs also when they want us to be.

JOAN And their needs are very clear

MARGARET Yes, to get more children into mainstream schools, saying they have a right to it. Rights, some rights they are.

JOAN Too true.

MARGARET They gave me no choice. They really didn't. The Government wants schools like ours closed. They think it'll save money which it won't. They pass the buck to the local authorities to do their dirty work for them and the local authority

passes the buck to me. God, what a lousy world.

JOAN I can see what's going on. They don't want another losing confrontation with parents at all costs.

MARGARET You know what I feel like? I feel like a lump of plasticine, a little lump of plasticine that they have twisted in to a shape of their own choosing....

*(Pause)*.... Give me a hug, Joan, I must tell you there is one other thing that's happened this week that I found personally very upsetting.

JOAN What's that?

MARGARET I heard a member of staff talk about Queen Margaret, and I suddenly realised that she was talking about me. I could do without that too.

JOAN We could both do without that

*(They snuggle up together on the couch)*

MARGARET I think I know the answer.

JOAN What?

MARGARET I'll resign.

JOAN That's a silly thing to do.

MARGARET No, it's not. It's the only thing to do.

JOAN Just put that idea right out of your head.

MARGARET Don't you understand. I'm pig sick of this job. And I'm pig sick of the world we're living in. Every damn thing is a cynical charade, and I'm now given a lead role.

JOAN If everyone who didn't like their job resigned, there'd be a hell of a lot of vacancies.

MARGARET *(Begins to cry)* Don't you understand, I just can't do it any longer. I can't look kids in the face. I can't look my staff in the face, or the governors. And, what's more, I can't look myself in the face either.

JOAN You must.

MARGARET I can't.

JOAN What about us?

MARGARET What about us? It won't make any difference if I'm not here.

JOAN Of course it will make a difference. But anyway it's a waste. You're a wonderful teacher and a wonderful head. You can't give all that up.

What about your pension? What are you going to live on? What will you do with yourself?

MARGARET I'll find something. I won't be the first teacher to throw in the towel. Now will I?

JOAN Look, whoever takes your place will do what you've said you'd do, and probably without any conscience at all. What on earth are you going to gain?

MARGARET My conscience. My sanity!

JOAN Oh, come on. That's self indulgence.

MARGARET Self Indulgence. Self Indulgence. Oh my god. How can you say that to me? You of all people. What a horrid thing to say. I don't think you understand me at all. I want out. I want out altogether. Out, out, out.

JOAN You're just trying to make a martyr of yourself.

MARGARET If that's the best thing you can say you'd better go.

JOAN Oh, be sensible.

MARGARET Go ... Please go.

JOAN I just hope and pray you'll come to your senses. In a year's time all this will be a bad dream.

MARGARET Just leave me alone. Leave me alone.

*(Joan exits with her head down)*

TRACY The next evening Mummy Margaret tried to kill herself. Come back in ten minutes. I'll tell you the rest of the story.

# Act Two

## Scene 1

TRACY I'll never forget that day ... not ever. The School was in mourning. I've never seen everyone look so sad. It was awful. Awful. Joan Errington told us. It must have been terrible for her. We still didn't know for sure whether our head teacher was OK or not. There was a rumour that it had something to do with closing our school. Emma gave us all a hug. She said she was praying every minute of the day for our head teacher. Terry went home. He was sick all over the place. Wendy had to clear up the mess. And me? I was all weepy, and I didn't feel like learning anything at all that day That day someone trod on my dreams.

### **In the Director's office**

*David Harding picks up the telephone.*

DAVID .... Morning, Don. How are you? .... Any spare time on your hands? We need your help? .... Good .....I am pleased to say she is. They've brought her round.... It's a bit complicated. I'll try to explain. You know we've been trying to close Brighthouse for some time.....Yes, more than a little, and the governors too... You know us too well. But it is in a good cause, you know that... Take over the school for six months, maybe a year.....And we want you to sell the closure to the governors and the parents. It'll come better from you than from us.....I guess it did upset Margaret. Certainly didn't help. But she had a problem anyway. It's common knowledge.... You may find the Governors a bit difficult... Yes, they must know their place... weren't you a very good slip catcher in your day..... a canny spin bowler too if I remember it. Didn't you once take seven wickets for thirty? ... No-one said it wasn't cricket (*Gentle laughter*) ... many thanks. Gerry Thompson will be in touch with you to take it forward. Bye. And, just watch that bicycle of yours. We certainly

can't afford another of our head teachers risking life and limb. Okay, mate.

*.(David puts down the 'phone and immediately picks it up again.)*

DAVID James. Glad I've caught you. I thought you should know. The head of Brighthouse has tried to kill herself. .... No, mercifully not ... silly old what?.. I am not sure who is the silly old thing ... No, I haven't lost control .... Yes, I am upset ... and so should you be. It could have been a disaster. ... I agree it isn't. .. It's actually opportunistic. We are putting one of our own people into the school to head it up, Don Smithson. .... Yes, I am sure the governors will go along with it. .... No I won't lose any sleep. ... Just thought you should know. Bye. *(Puts 'phone down)* And so he damn well should.

## Scene 2

TRACY I've still got the letter that Philippa wrote to the Prime Minister. She shared it with us before she sent it. I offered to make it a special wheelchair delivery to 10 Downing Street, but she just posted it. Johnny said he'd make a news story out of it in the Gazette. It got a little write up there. As I said, I've still got a copy.

"Dear Mr. Prime Minister

I am writing to invite you to visit my school. I am writing to you personally because you should know what pupils like me think about where we should be taught. I know that some love the big challenge of a mainstream school. We think we will be much better off here, learning more and enjoying our school days as well. You should see for yourself just how much we will lose if this school is closed. My parents told me this could still happen, even though all our parents said that they wanted it kept open. My childhood was a happy one, but difficult at the same time. When you are in a wheel chair and all your friends have been walking, straight away it clicks you're different. I first went to a primary school but I was called "old wheelie bin" there and that was not very pleasant. Some friends of mine were called "spackers."

Then I came here to Brighthouse. They gave me real enthusiasm for living. Brighthouse does not take or give the easy option. It pushes everyone to the full and then pushes some more. They pushed me academically and physically even though I am in a wheel chair. I've competed three times in Great North Runs, and I went to the Athens Para Olympics with two of my friends. I won a Silver medal, and my friend a Gold. And I am planning to get my GCSE's and word processing qualifications. And I also play in the Tin Pan Ally Steel Drum Band. We have gigs every week and give a lot of pleasure to a lot of people and especially to ourselves. Children like me don't want to be social experiments. We have got one chance and the staff here know just how to make it a real one. If you could just spare the time to come down to our school, and look into the eyes of the children and ask them where they want to be, I personally guarantee you won't want us to go anywhere else. I may not be a voter today. But I soon will be.

Yours sincerely,

Philippa Jones,

TRACY She got a long letter back, not from the Prime Minister. We wouldn't lose out. Our parents would be fully consulted you know, de da, de da, de da.. That's one thing they're very good at in 10 Downing Street ...writing letters.

### **Scene 3**

TRACY Eileen Winterton, our chair of governors, badly wanted to understand why Mummy Margaret had tried to take her own life. She thought Joan Errington would be the best person to tell her. She would be, wouldn't she? She invited Joan to a local coffee house for a chat.

*(Eileen enters with a cup of coffee on a tray, shortly followed by Joan with a pot of tea and a chocolate brownie)*

JOAN Sweet tooth. I can't resist their brownies.

EILEEN Chocolate's better than tobacco?

JOAN Just. I need something for sure..

EILEEN I am so pleased you've come. How are you?

JOAN Still a bit fragile.

EILEEN I can believe it, especially as it was you who found Margaret. Do tell me though, do try and explain to me why she did such a terrible thing.

JOAN Please don't press me too much. It's still very painful.

EILEEN I do need to know.

JOAN Well, just say she's a casualty of the world we are living in. That's certainly where you have to start.

EILEEN I do worry about that. Especially this bit of it.

JOAN So do I. You've read 1984?

EILEEN Yes, but it's not as bad as that, surely?

JOAN It is, and it isn't... what is a free society these days?

EILEEN We're not living in a dictatorship. We're a long way from that.

JOAN I'm saying something different. What I am saying is that in one sense you are free, in one sense you are not. If you want some of the goodies today you have got to accept Big Brother.

EILEEN Who is Big Brother? The PM?

JOAN Whoever is the PM. It's the System. We live in a dependent society. We depend upon each other. There's nothing wrong in that. But we also depend upon the State, and far too many people are totally dependent on it.

EILEEN That's very true.

JOAN People at the top of the pile can be every bit as dependent on the State as people at the bottom – probably more so. More to lose, or to win. And the price you pay for the State being kind to you, you obey it or you comply with it. You toe the party line, or you keep your head down, right down below the parapet. You cooperate. You do what's expected of you.

EILEEN I suppose that is a bit Orwellian.



JOAN It is the way it's going. Then there's "Spin". What is "Spin" if it's not another word for "New Speak"? Can you believe anything you are told these days? Take the words "parental choice" or "parental preference". When parents can't, mustn't, to talk to a school where their children might go, or when the schools they are supposed to choose from don't exist, - they have been shut, democratically of course, but shut all the same - you might as well say "parental rhubarb".

EILEEN I'm afraid you're right.

JOAN And there's far, far too much politics in education full stop.

EILEEN It has to be. The State provides the money.

JOAN Yes, but it keeps meddling. It should demand standards, but it shouldn't keep meddling and trying to control us all the time, and it's all this social engineering I can't stand, and I don't think Margaret could stand it either.

EILEEN I am curious, Joan, would you like to be a Head Teacher one day?

JOAN I would not. Too much pressure from too many sides. I wouldn't have wanted Margaret's job for all the money in the world.

EILEEN We do get it wrong, if that's the case. Teachers like you have so much to give.

JOAN It makes me so sick at times, especially now. When terrible things like this happen – you know I'm very, very close to Margaret - you really start to think. I'll give you a strange thought. The word 'Equality' is a lot of the problem. It's mucked up, fucked up education for years. We are not all equal.

EILEEN No, that's heresy. Surely there's got to be equality of opportunity?

JOAN What does that actually mean? What does it mean? Don't you see? All kids are different, very different, our kids especially, and they need different kinds of opportunity. Fair play is what they all want, not equality. The needs of gifted and talented youngsters are every bit as important as the needs of kids in our school, from the country's point of view maybe even more important. Those that trumpet equality don't begin to understand that. If kids are not given the opportunity that's

right for them – and they’re all different – they’ll never meet the challenge of the times.

EILEEN Then, of course, they’ll never be included in it.

JOAN Yes, and this country needs them to be.

EILEEN I’ve always thought that another word for Equality is mediocrity.

JOAN And what’s even worse, for many people the quest for Equality is simply built on envy.

EILEEN Or guilt. Well, the opposite of envy is ambition. Envy somehow diminishes you. Ambition enlarges you.

JOAN Interesting you should put it that way. Emma - she’s for ever quoting the Bible - - she keeps saying there’s no sin in ownin’, but there is a sin in covetin’.

EILEEN It’s not surprising that, a lot of kids have lost their way.

JOAN They’ve never been shown it, Eileen. – you know, the way to live that’s right for them - that’s what education should be about. What these kids want is not equality of opportunity. It’s just, well, opportunity.

EILEEN It certainly is a rat race these days and a different kind of rat race from any before.

JOAN But a rat race you can’t run away from. It has got its good side, if you know where to find it. I’m sure none of this sadness would have happened to Margaret if people realised like we do that all kids have very different needs.

EILEEN Poor Margaret. I’m afraid our old friend Karl Marx is still around in education. People are looking for that elusive level playing field, and with the proviso that no-one actually competes on it.

JOAN Yes, , they are forever looking for solutions to the world’s problems in the libraries of their minds, not in the classrooms of the real world.

EILEEN They don’t see how complicated it all is these days.

JOAN Yes, they think it’s so simple, so very simple. And they think that what they would want for themselves, everyone else should want as well.

EILEEN That's why they keep putting square pegs into round holes

JOAN Yes, with epoxy glue.

EILEEN And when it all goes wrong - you know how the old saying goes - they point a finger at other people when they should see where their other three fingers are pointing.

JOAN I like that. I hadn't heard it before.

EILEEN It's not just Karl Marx you know. Liberals are the very worst people for thinking things are simple. The Achilles' heel of the Liberal is naiveté. And, when you don't know you're naïve, well it's highly dangerous.

JOAN Insanity.

EILEEN No, I'd put it another way. You can care too much. You can you know, if you see people how you'd like them to be, and not how, I'm afraid, most of them are.

JOAN Yes, I think we're getting there. If you want to know why poor Margaret tried to kill herself, don't look just at her. And, don't think it was all to do with the LEA either. That was literally the last straw, the straw that broke the camel's back. You have to look at the world she lived in, as I know she saw it. She why she was so depressed, why she kept taking those goodnight pills all the time. Then you'll begin to understand. You've got to dig deep. When people go as far as she went, you've got to dig deep to understand.

EILEEN I do see it now. Yes, it's ironic isn't it? Right at the very bottom, there are two dreams in Western Society, the Marxist dream and the Liberal dream, separately and together, both of them, the opium of the brainy classes. And why? Because they inhabit the world of "wouldn't it be nice if." Wouldn't it be nice if only such as such were the case?

JOAN And, of course, it very rarely is.

EILEEN Give a function to the State to make the world a better place, put a value on individual worth, yes, but allow for human frailty as well. They don't do that. That's where they both go badly wrong.

JOAN That's why they make such a mess of things

EILEEN And some folk hate globalisation too. But you can't turn the clock back. You just can't. We don't need an old clock. We need a brand new compass.

JOAN. Well, once upon a time the big problem used to be private wealth and public squalor. Today, it is private stress and public unhappiness. Just look at poor Margaret and our parents...and me.

EILEEN Oh dear, I shouldn't have started all this. I really am sorry I encouraged you to sound off.

JOAN Don't apologise. I badly, badly needed it. I don't much like the world I see. I can't pretend I do. But I'll find a way of living through it. You've just got to.

EILEEN Our little discussion has been cathartic for both of us. It has certainly helped me to understand why Margaret did what she did. It was the LEA, but it went far beyond that.

JOAN I am sure that it did. There is a word that covers it, and it probably applies to most people who try to take their own lives, including all those children who have been persistently bullied with no-one stopping it.

EILEEN And the word?

JOAN Despair, just total utter despair. What is very sad for me is that at the end, I became one more part of it. You know the day before she tried to take her life we had a little tiff, she thought about resigning, not taking her own life, - no, she never said that - she asked me to leave her.

EILEEN I didn't know that.

JOAN Those twenty four hours, what she must have gone through! It never even crossed my mind she'd take an overdose. It must have been a very long night after I left. Poor soul, it must have felt like an eternity.

EILEEN For heaven's sake, don't blame yourself here. Don't do that. As you said, right at the beginning, one way or another, we're all of us walking wounded, not just Margaret.

JOAN I guess so. I must go. (*Stands up to leave*) .....You know, I've just really seen it. It wasn't the pills that kept her going. It wasn't me either. It was the kids, and she did so worry about the world they'd have to grow up in. She knew, you see, she knew. In those twenty four long hours she suddenly realised that whatever she did, do the bidding of the LEA or resign, whatever she did, she'd lost everything that made her life worthwhile.

(*Eileen also stands up to leave*)

EILEEN Of course, you're right. That was her despair. Thank you for your time. I do appreciate it.

JOAN Oh, I don't like my world at the moment one little bit.

EILEEN Look, there's a lot wrong with this world of ours. There always has been. There always will be. But there's an awful lot right as well, isn't there? You've just got to ride that roller coaster between the two. And try not to fall off.

JOAN I suppose so. See you again soon. Bye,

## Scene 4

TRACY The terrible cloud over the school began to lift a little. Mummy Margaret had come round. It didn't lift altogether though, not for anyone. For a start Mummy Margaret had to learn to live with herself.

### One month later

*In Margaret Williamson's living room, Margaret is listening to Lizst's "Consolations" in her chair. Joan Errington is in the kitchen.*

(*The door bell rings, and Joan answers it*)

FRANK Hello. Ok to come in?

MARGARET Sure, take a chair.

(*Margaret switches off music*)

FRANK How are you?

MARGARET A bit better than I have been, and a little worse than I could be.

JOAN Come on. You're a good deal better.

MARGARET I needed to be, didn't I? The world's not any better.

FRANK You gave us all a terrible shock.

MARGARET I am so sorry about that. That's why I wanted you to come this afternoon. I owed you an explanation.

FRANK We really didn't want that, you know.

MARGARET I'll explain, when Eileen arrives. I have invited her to come as well.

FRANK You really don't have to explain.

MARGARET Actually I do. Would you like a cup of coffee, or a cup of tea.

FRANK Coffee please.

JOAN Instant, alright?

FRANK Of course, milk and no sugar.

*(Joan goes to make coffee)*

MARGARET And how are you? I hear you resigned from the Governors.

FRANK Yes I did. I was pretty upset at everything - that the LEA still wants to close the school. The leopard doesn't change its spots, does it?

MARGARET You'll be a big loss. Couldn't you have seen your way to stay?

FRANK You know they say business is the survival of the fittest. It's certainly tough, and it's rough. And there's precious little sentiment, especially these days. But by and large there's trust. There has to be if you are playing the long game, and you want to be successful. You probably think I'm a bit old fashioned to say this.

MARGARET If you are, don't for heaven's sake, apologise for it.

FRANK I am. Remember I'm a member of Westborough's Rotary Club.. You know what we all sign up to - high ethical standards in business and the professions as an opportunity to serve society.

MARGARET Are there still people today who do that, Frank?

FRANK We try - there'll always be a few who don't succeed - I'm not alone, you know. There's over a million of us world wide. Now the trouble is I just cannot trust the LEA, and I can't trust politicians either, not these days. Others felt they had to try. I couldn't. I've got plenty to do in my own company anyway.

MARGARET So you're not thinking of retiring there.

FRANK No way. Cannot even slack off. I have two boys and neither want anything to do with it. They're afraid that more and more printing will go abroad.

*(Joan brings back coffee)*

JOAN What do your boys do?

FRANK Thanks. One is in IT, working in Bangalore. That's where he says all the action is. And the other is on a gap year in Africa. He doesn't know what he is going to do after that.

*(The door bell rings. Joan answers and welcomes Eileen)*

EILEEN I hope I am not late.

JOAN No, just learning a bit about Frank's family. Coffee or tea?

EILEEN Coffee, black please.

*(Joan exits to make coffee).*

EILEEN How are you, Margaret. Best wishes from everyone of course.

MARGARET The days are long and the nights even longer. But I've had a good deal of help, especially in hospital.

EILEEN You know we didn't want to trouble you. We certainly didn't want to ask you a lot of questions.

MARGARET You may not have been asking me questions, but I've had to

ask myself some. You know the most awful moment? It wasn't taking the overdose. You sort of reconcile yourself to that. The most awful moment is when you wake up and a nurse is offering you a cup of tea. The nightmare returned, you see. You have to face up to everything all over again, and added to that, what you have tried to do and failed. That's when you really do hit the bottom... and weep.

*(Joan returns)*

JOAN Mercifully some help was at hand.

EILEEN Thanks.

MARGARET *Yes. There was a most wonderful* young Indian doctor. A psychiatrist. I was so grateful to him. He listened, which was the most important thing to me at the time. He just listened while I talked, and I needed to. It helped.

EILEEN I am so glad.

MARGARET Then he started talking. He introduced me to Ayurveda. He said its origins went back 5000 years. He talked about the three doshas that everyone has. The essence was finding balance. The way to cope with life, and the things it throws at you, was to find your true self, accept it, be comfortable with it, even with all of its imperfections. I could only find peace within myself if I could do this. And part of this had to be sharing the truth with you, making my peace with you and with the school.

EILEEN Are you sure you want to do this.

MARGARET Yes, I am.

EILEEN You're not alone, you know, with this cleansing business. In today's world any number of people do things they shouldn't, or not do things they should, and they then have to seek forgiveness for their trespasses on a regular basis.

JOAN Yes, my aunt Betty - she never missed Church on a Sunday - she used to say if you Hoover your home on a Monday that's no good reason why you don't have to Hoover it all over again the following Monday.

FRANK Some people have got a hell of lot of Hoovering to do. How do the godless manage their guilt without a sin bin?



MARGARET Bury it in their subconscious, take Prozac or find a good therapist, like my wonderful Indian doctor. Everyone's got a sin bin, Frank. We've all got to find our own way to manage guilt. We have to learn to live with it, and we have to find a way to forgive it within ourselves. Anyway, what I have to say to you is that I let the school down. They leant on me to tell parents the school had to close. After the last time they thought it would come better from me than from them. They wanted me to drop the bomb on my own school, on everything I've tried to build. And you know the result.

EILEEN You really don't need to say any more. We guessed as much.

FRANK I certainly did.

EILEEN We've all been leant upon here. Yes, leant upon one way or another. Joan dear you did explain that to me.

JOAN I did try to give you the bigger picture.

EILEEN But, there's still this one. I'll tell you something, I have always seen a big difference between hot anger and cold anger. Hot anger flares up, and then dies away, leaving just a trail of ash. Cold anger lingers. You take it to bed with you at night, and you get up with it the following morning. It doesn't just die away.

JOAN And that's how you feel?

EILEEN Yes I certainly do. It's a great school we have to wave goodbye to.

FRANK You're dead right. I feel exactly the same. Margaret, I'm so sorry.

JOAN I knew, of course. Margaret told me, before it all happened. She said she felt like a little lump of plasticine in the hands of the LEA.

FRANK But you didn't want to say.

JOAN I couldn't say, could I? And anyway, I am still not sure what we can now achieve by starting up the fight all over again. I really can't see it helping the school and the kids. I think that NHS bod, John...

EILEEN Lavers?

JOAN Yes, John Lavers was probably right. We should draw a line. All I really want to do is to teach. Can't we get back to that simple idea? I will let you into a secret, when I was at school my first love was politics and sociology. The trouble is that these subjects make me angry, and you can't teach in a permanent state of anger, hot or cold. It's not good for you and it is certainly not good for the kids.

FRANK You made the right decision. But why English?

JOAN Three reasons. First of all I love it. Secondly, I think that every generation has a responsibility to pass on its heritage to the next. That's what teaching is about. Finally, I think we all take our own heritage for granted. We shouldn't. We've given over half the world English.

MARGARET I bet the Romans didn't appreciate what a wonderful gift Latin of all languages was going to be to the world either.

JOAN I bet they didn't. Anyway I, connect with politics and sociology at the same time, and without the aggro. Just think of the great tragedies, Hamlet.

MARGARET Yes, indeed (*sadly*) "To be or not to be"

JOAN Your winter of discontent, Margaret? Think of Othello.

MARGARET Poor, poor Desdemona (*feeling sorry for herself again*)

EILEEN I could name one or two lags today.

FRANK I'm beginning to see what you mean.

JOAN I'll give you one or two more. "The best of times and the worst of times".

EILEEN Tale of two cities?

JOAN Yes, Charles Dickens. Fiction and fact aren't all that far apart.

MARGARET There's poetry too, Joan isn't there? "I wandered lonely as a cloud".

William Wordsworth.

JOAN Oh dear. (*A look of real sadness*)

MARGARET Sorry Joan, but it's been like that recently. How about then (*ironically*),  
Cat on a hot tin roof?

JOAN Yes, we mustn't forget great American writers who had their own way with English.

FRANK I thought the Americans didn't do English any favours?

JOAN No, not at all, Frank. Just get the poems of Emily Dickenson out of the library, and start there. And after that come back home and read the poems by Rupert Brooke. You know he was one of the lost generation, died during the First World War.

"... thoughts by England given;

Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;

And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,

In hearts at peace, under an English heaven." Ah me, once upon a time. You see politics, sociology and the human story are never far away from teaching English. I can very easily keep my early interest going with our wonderful English language, and without any torment. That's what I want to give to our kids. And it's for life, not just for exams.

EILEEN More strength to you. Look, I don't want any teacher to martyr themselves. It's not worth it. You are all much too valuable. I think we are going to have to accept the inevitable if they carry parents with them. Joan, you just keep teaching. And Margaret, don't feel the need to share your thoughts with anyone else. You've got a career to start up again. Don't sight of that, for heaven's sake.

MARGARET I'm grateful for that. Joan, one thing I must ask you. Have you forgiven me?

JOAN Well, almost.

MARGARET Only almost? Oh dear.

JOAN I wish you hadn't asked me. It's the way it is, for you and for me I think.

FRANK What was that lovely piece of music you were playing as I arrived?

MARGARET It's called "Consolations." Emma sent it to me with her best wishes, and from the kids in her class too. I really appreciated that.

EILEEN Play it again.

*(Margaret puts on the CD It runs into the next scene)*

## Scene 5

### *Left Stage*

TRACY I've tried to understand it. Why do some people like to destroy things that are beautiful? They do. They really do. Some are just out and out vandals. What they can't have, they don't want anyone else to have. But others? Maybe it's because they think that what's right for them is right for everyone else, when it just isn't, and then they go on to think that everything else is wrong. If that is the reason, they make a big mistake. When you think about it, isn't it a bit arrogant? A bit blinkered? Aren't they - how do say – sometimes just too clever by half? Certainly too clever for our good. It isn't as though they've always got it right for the kids that want to go to mainstream schools and there are some. Somebody should tell them. The trouble is that they think they understand us. They just don't, and they don't understand what they are stealing from some of us either. The rest of this play is history. It started with a meeting with the parents and the execution squad.

### **Meeting with parents**

*In the School Hall, the stage is the platform.*

*(David Harding, the Director of Education, Gerry Thompson and Ron Smithson are sitting on a platform, David Harding in the chair. Parents and staff have their backs to the audience, acting as its front row. The theatre audience are the parents)*

DAVID Thank you all for coming tonight. I think you probably know why I've asked you to come. I know you're all worried about the future for your kids. I do want to give you my personal assurance you that we do want to do what is best for them. That's what my job is about, nothing else. I've asked your acting head to put you in the picture. Before he does so, there are a couple of things I want to say.....We were all

so sorry to hear about Margaret Williamson, your Head teacher. The news I have is that she is very much better. I'm sure you would want to send a message to her tonight wishing her a speedy recovery. Yes? Secondly, you all know that your wonderful music teacher is leaving you. I'm sure you will all want to congratulate her on her new appointment as regional adviser for music. Do congratulate her and show your appreciation for all she's done for the kids. Your great band will certainly miss her. I've asked your Para Olympian Philippa to make a small presentation.

*(Philippa makes the presentation to Emma Kirk. The audience is encouraged to applaud)*

The other thing I must do on behalf of the authority is to thank the Governors for the work they do. I know it's not been easy. They are the greatest resource for voluntary work in the country. There is more than 1 million of them. I don't know where we would be without them.

*(Audience encouraged to applaud)*

Now I've brought along with me tonight Gerry Thompson, who is in charge of Inclusion. And we'll do our best to answer all your questions. But first I've asked your acting Head, Don Smithson, to say a few words. Before I call on him I would like to thank him for stepping into the breach after Margaret's er... became ill. He's always been a great admirer of this school. Don.

DON Thank you David. I know you haven't been feeling too well this past week. We appreciate it that you have come this evening, despite that.

DAVID I didn't want to miss tonight, Don. I really didn't.

DON As David said, I've long been a great admirer of this school. I've a lot of time for the teachers and the carers here. They give so much of themselves to your children. They're a great bunch, and a great team. That's a part of their strength. It's a privilege for me to work with them now. So please don't think I don't understand your feelings when you hear on the grapevine that the LEA still wants to close this school.

I'll tell you something else. Three years ago you campaigned to keep this school open. I was with you. I was. I for one wasn't surprised when the Minister turned down the proposal to close you down. At that time he was dead right to do so. But the world has moved on since then. The LEA has responded to your criticism that mainstream schools were not ready to take your children. The staff are now better trained, and more and more parents are pushing to get their kids with special needs into mainstream schools. Next year there are going to be twenty three fewer children in this school than last year, and the year after fewer still.

PARENT Who caused that, I'd like to ask?

PARENT Sh.

DAVID There'll be a time for questions later.

DON Look, more and more parents want their children in mainstream schools. This has a direct effect on the money the governors can spend. In round figures they're losing nearly two hundred thousand pounds. That has just got to mean job losses. Someone like Emma leaves with a promotion, and the governors can't afford to replace her. Or there are voluntary redundancies or, worse still, compulsory ones. Now, I said that one of the great strengths of this school was the team. I am sure those who remain will do their level best, but it can't be the same. As your Head I do worry about being able to deliver the national curriculum. That's why I think you have to listen to what the Director says this evening. That's really all I want to say, David, at this stage. Thank you.

DAVID Thanks, Don. I don't want to talk about the past. I want to say something about the future. What I want to tell you about is good news and sad news. I say sad news, not bad news.

The good news first. As you know education is the very first priority for the Council and the Government, and lots of businesses are investing large sums of new money in it. We are all determined to drive up standards in an Inclusive environment where more and more children with special needs can go to mainstream schools. We have

a brand new Academy coming here in the next couple of years, and we are investing in all our other schools as well. Don has told you that this school now has difficulty paying its way. You've contributed to keep it alive. And we have done our best as well. The sad news - and it really isn't bad news - is that good housekeeping requires us to recommend to the School Organisation Committee that the school closes next year.

*(Groans from the audience ..Shame)*

Yes, it is a shame. But times change and we must move on. I do want some of your kids admitted to this new Academy. It will be great for them, a really great opportunity. It will be good for the Academy too. . It's what Inclusion is all about, and I would like some of your teachers to have an opportunity to teach in that school. That too will be a good thing both ways. You were right to fight to keep this school open, but there's a time and a place, and if you were to try to do it again and delay things, some people will certainly lose out. This is not a threat. It's just the way things will happen. I am sure you can see that. The one thing I want to assure you is that we have a great team, and we are totally committed to make the new world better than the old. This is a time of opportunity for everyone, and if you come with us in this exciting project your children will be in good hands, the best school possible for each of them.

*Head teacher leads polite applause from the audience*

We'll now take your questions. Who'd like to be first?

JUDY My son Harry came here from mainstream school. He's got brittle bones. He kept being bullied in his last school and I was for ever taking him to the fracture clinic. At this school there have been no more fractures and no more bullying. Why should I think you are going to look after him better next time?

DAVID Gerry would you answer that?

GERRY We don't want to get involved with individual problems tonight. Just come and see me afterwards and we'll find a solution. I'm sure there'll be one.

QUESTIONER A (*from the audience*) What's going to happen to our staff?

DAVID I'm glad you asked that question. They'll get jobs in mainstream schools.

Their expertise in special needs will be absolutely invaluable there.

JILLY You said that we had fewer kids here because parents didn't want to send their children here. I know two parents in the clinic who were told that you were closing the school.

DAVID I'm sure that's not right. We told them that the future was uncertain. We had to tell them that to be fair.

QUESTIONER D Are you trying to get rid of Statements?

DAVID They are more trouble than they are worth.

QUESTIONER D For you maybe, but not for us.

DAVID We do have to meet the needs of your children whatever a piece of paper says or doesn't say.

QUESTIONER D But we lose our right to a special school for our kids. What about parental choice, hey? What about our choice? Where's that gone?

QUESTIONER B (*In the first row of the real audience*) I had a great problem getting my Stephen into this school. Had to take it through a tribunal. Much good are your new ideas going to do for Stephen. I think you've tried to starve this school of pupils.

DAVID Gerry, would you answer that?

GERRY We're back to individual cases again. They're all different, and some are difficult to decide. Yours was probably one of them.

QUESTIONER C (*In the first row of the audience*) Some kids will do well in mainstream. What about the rest? Mine has speech problems. She really suffered in mainstream schools before she came here.

DAVID You really have got to trust us to work that out at the time. There are still going to be some special schools, you know. We'll do our level best to respect parental preference, believe me.

QUESTION C I don't.



DAVID Oh.

QUESTIONER A Are the staff going to have the same amount of time as they give here. Will there be a school nurse all the time? Will there be physio all the time? Will supply teachers know these kids? Or are you going to give all the work to classroom assistants? Amiable mums, that's the name they've been given, isn't it?

DAVID I make that five questions. Gerry, (*turning to Gerry quietly*) help me out here.

GERRY That's my responsibility to sort.

QUESTIONER B Is that an answer to any of them? Look can we have a vote?

DON Can I say something here? This is not that sort of meeting.

QUESTIONER B Why not?

QUESTIONER A Yes, why not?

DON There are clearly lots of different views this evening. There has been what is called a candid exchange of views. The LEA has to look at the broader picture.

They've now got a much clearer view of this bit of it.

*(David leans over to Don and whispers in his ear)*

DON I said that the Director came from his sick bed to be here. He's trying to shake off a bout of flu. He would like to get back to his bed. Can we round off this meeting. Can we thank David and Gerry for coming here tonight? Yes.

*(Don leads polite applause)*

I promise you that I'll do my best to see things work out well. And I'm sure that Margaret Williamson, if she was here tonight, would echo that. Thank you all for coming.

DAVID (*walking out with Don*) Thanks for everything, Don. I think they've bought it.

*(David then collapses.)*

DON (*To the audience*) Is there a doctor here? (*Someone comes forward from the auditorium*) Oh dear, the Director is not very well I'm glad we stopped when we did.

## Scene 6

TRACY Well, it had to happen, didn't it? It was about a year later. Have you ever seen a bulldozer at work? You must have. And have you heard it clanking and grinding? I still can. One moment a building is there. Almost the next it is a pile of rubble, just rubble. And we watched it all happen. I won't forget it. I lost part of myself that day. That bulldozer, well for me, it was sort of symbolic. You see we were all casualties one way or another. Remember the name my friends call me, Katy, after Kate Winslet. I was on the Titanic, too.

### A year later

*The scene is outside the School. A bulldozer is slowly demolishing the building. Staff, parents and children watch. Joan Errington and Margaret Williamson have come in together. They are followed by Emma Kirk and Eileen Winterton. All are wearing raincoats.*

JOAN Oh God, politicians. Save us from politicians. Scurvy politicians, that's how William Shakespeare described them.

EMMA Jesus Christ said "Forgive them, for they know not what they do".

JOAN Sorry Emma, I really can't bring myself to do that.

EILEEN I am a bit surprised to see you here.

EMMA I owed it to my memories. It's so sad.

JOAN Yes, so very sad

MARGARET I just felt I had to come. I still wonder whether I could have done anything to prevent this.

EMMA Oh for heaven's sake, now don't you say that. This was always going to happen. We all did our best for the kids one way or another. Anyway, how are you keeping?

MARGARET It's not easy. Good days and bad, but more good than bad, and the

medics said I could get back to work. I feel much more like it now. And it's good for me.

EILEEN We all hope so too. You are a wonderful Head. The kids love you.

And you really stretched them, and you made them whole, whole human beings.

MARGARET They made me whole. And they stretched me too. I'm applying for a job in the new Academy. I hope that the medics say I am fit enough for that. The LEA thinks I have a good chance to get it, especially with my experience of special needs, and they are short of Head teachers these days.

EILEEN You carry all our good wishes. You know that.

MARGARET I do and I am grateful for them.

EILEEN Hopefully some of our kids will get into the Academy.

MARGARET They better had.

EILEEN You hope to go there too Joan?

JOAN If they'll have me. It's either that or Grovewood Comp.

MARGARET That's my alternative too. It does need to be one of them.

*(Johnny, Philippa, Terry and Tracy arrive together, the bulldozer noise intensifies.)*

TRACY It's a crime

PHILIPPA It's a waste.

JOHNNY I think it's obscene.

TERRY They're all shit.

MARGARET Terry, you shouldn't use that word in polite company.

TERRY Very sorry miss. It's those new pills I am taking. They don't always work.

*(Enter Anwar and Judith Fawzi and Harry, bulldozer noise temporarily stops.)*

ANWAR I hate them. Kids have just one chance, and they spoil it for them with their big ideas. And I hate them for something else. They try to make us feel guilty doin' the best for our kids, givin' good schools like this a bad name as a reason for pulling them down. I really do hate them.

EMMA They don't understand. That's the trouble. They do not begin to understand. ,Schools like this have the gift of healing. They engage the spirit. They are for life. That's what's so good about them.

MARGARET Emma, some people don't want to understand.

JUDITH I wish someone would expose the charade of those who say they care. They just don't.

MARGARET No, that's not quite right. Some do care. They do, you know. It's just that they care more about defending their precious little cardboard castles, and then helping others defend theirs..

JUDITH It's every bit as bad in the NHS.

MARGARET The system's become one big job protection society. It's not about enriching kids lives. And we pay for it.

JUDITH You've hit the nail on the head there.

ANWAR Rights of kids paramount. Words. Empty words.. You just try to assert those rights today, you know, in a tribunal. It's not easy.

ANWAR And not cheap either..

JUDITH No, not if you have to get a medical report.

MARGARET Tribunals are supposed to help you. I'm afraid that they are really just a part of their defence works.

ANWAR And Statements are our part of ours.. And now they're trying to get rid of them altogether. Then our kids will have no real rights at all.

EILEEN Our kids are just little pawns in a gigantic game of chess.

MARGARET Sacrificial pawns, Eileen. And for everyone else it's "Snakes and Ladders", with more snakes than ladders.

EILEEN Margaret, the problem's not just here. It's everywhere. Remember Enron when that big American energy company went bust and people lost billions. In Enron they had another name for it. They called it "rank or yank". You were "ranked" if you played ball with them, "yanked", sacked, if you didn't.

MARGARET It probably explains why no-one blew the whistle on our credit crunch. Someone must have known about all that mountain of unpaid mortgages. They must have.

EILEEN There's always a cover-up, every single time. That's why they play "pass the parcel" with our complaints - you know pass the buck. Nobody's held accountable when they boob.. They make sure of that. That's the real trouble .

ANWAR You're right there. And they play games with us, those people. They play "charades" when it comes to consultation - they don't really consult - they just want to make it look as though they do.

*(Bulldozer noises continue in the background until the end of the scene,)*

JUDITH They're positively awful.

HARRY What about all those prayers to God, Miss? They don't seem to work.

EMMA We are not given to understand everything, Harry. At times her ways are very inscrutable.

HARRY What does "inscrutable" mean?

EMMA Well, in my book She's a woman. Sometimes you just don't know whether She's coming or going. Women are like that. They're wired differently. Same power source as men, but different. You'll find out when you're a little older.

HARRY So are you still going to sing her praises on Sunday?

EMMA Sure I am. She knows how I feel. It's just She's got some catching up to do.

JOAN Emma dear, please, you really don't have to bring God into it.

EMMA I do bring God into it. I just fear for her temper these days. One way or another - I think we're really provokin' her. She's capable of quite a tantrum when she's provoked. We'd better be a bit more careful with ourselves, and stop provokin' her.

JOAN Well I won't disagree with you there..., God or no God.

TRACY In a year's time there'll be some lovely houses here.

HARRY I bag the house with our duck pond.

MARGARET Rubble, just rubble. Such a pity.

JOAN Memories, just memories.

EMMA Come on you guys, join me, like good old times. (*Everyone singing*) “You are my sunshine, my only sunshine; you **made** me happy, when skies **were** grey.

ALL You’ll never know dear, how much I loved you...please don’t take my sunshine away.”

*Bulldozer continues its demolition, and sounds continue for a full minute. Time for quiet contemplation.*

TRACY Remember the little white dandy lion heads blowing away in the wind. Well, a couple of weeks ago, in the next street to mine, a boy of twelve – I think he was a bit overweight – well, he tried to take his own life. Thank you for coming to listen to my story. Can I leave you with a really naughty thought to take home with you. There are some little creatures that build and defend their own nests but they cannot move on and they cannot do anything else. That’s what they do. They build and defend their own nests. That’s all they do That’s all they’ve ever done. That’s all they’ll ever do. There is a name for them. “*Termites*”, yes ”*Termites*.” If there are any of them here tonight, let them go to their beds and sleep peacefully ... if they can. Good night.