

MEG'S MEN

By Rick Pulford

(Based on the novel Meg's Men
by Martin Horrocks)

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EXT. MANSION - DAY

Establishing. Lowmere, the stone-built mansion in Yorkshire that is Meg Denby's family home.

INT. MANSION - SITTING ROOM - DAY

MEG, mid-twenties, above-average height, is drop dead gorgeous. She is with her parents, LORD AND LADY SHALCOTT.

LORD SHALCOTT

I don't know why you don't marry Roger and settle down. He's keen enough on you, that's obvious.

MEG

Daddy, Roger's life is up here farming his estate. My life is in London, trying to make my way in films ...

LORD SHALCOTT

You'll tire of all that...

MEG

Oh and one small matter: I don't love him. I simply like him as a friend.

FLASHBACK:

EXT. THE TERRACE AT LOWMERE - DAY

ROGER

Megs, you know I'm nuts about you. I want to marry you - now. We're so right together. I'm 'the boy from the estate next door'. Remember how you used to call me that?

MEG

That's the problem. We come from the same mould. It's not true that like calls to like. I need adventure, mystery, difference.

ROGER

Come on, Meg! Let's go and see the vicar.

MEG

(softly)

Dear Roger, I am flattered, really I am. I love you madly but not in that way. It can never be. It would be like fucking my brother.

ROGER

That didn't stop you before.

MEG

Perhaps I've grown up.

END OF FLASHBACK

LADY SHALCOTT

I wasn't in love with your father when we were married.

MEG

Mummy, times have changed. Women have more expectations now.

LADY SHALCOTT

Of course, we grew to love each other. Love comes.

LORD SHALCOTT

It's about that Everard fellow, isn't it? The popinjay can't walk past a mirror without admiring himself in it.

MEG

Yes, I'm in love with 'that Everard fellow', as you put it.

LADY SHALCOTT

Perhaps you should think again, darling.

LORD SHALCOTT

Roger won't wait around for ever. And you don't help your cause with all that campaigning against the Vietnam war.

MEG

Daddy, I don't have a cause as far as Roger is concerned!

LADY SHALCOTT

You're lucky he wants you, Meg. I'm sure plenty of girls are after Roger, the most eligible bachelor for miles.

MEG

After Sir Roger, three thousand acres and a place in county society ...That's what you mean, isn't it, but you wouldn't dream of saying it.

(heatedly)

Darling Mummy and Daddy, much as I love you, I won't marry Roger and that's flat.

LORD SHALCOTT

Steady, the Buffs! This is the twentieth century. We no longer lock up disobedient daughters.

MEG

Darling Daddy... And I'm still coming to that literary luncheon to help you sell your memoirs.

LORD SHALCOTT

Thank you. Sprinkle a little film-star glamour over dry old politics, eh? But you know, Meg, being with Everard won't do you any good. He's a nancy boy, I'll be bound.

INT. MEG'S FLAT - NIGHT

Meg and EVERARD are in bed. He is around thirty, blond, well over six feet tall - and narcissistic with it.

MEG

Ooh, do that again!

EVERARD

I'll do it again and again!

MEG

You could too.

EVERARD

Mmm, and you do that again! Where did you learn that?

MEG

At my Swiss finishing school with the gardener's boy - maybe!

EVERARD

Then I'll be the gardener's boy.

They renew their love-making vigorously.

MEG

(post-coitally)

Did you miss me when I was in Yorkshire?

EVERARD

Darling, it was an eternity.

MEG

It was twenty-four hours.

EVERARD

Every day lasts for ever away from you.

Meg nuzzles him.

MEG

Mmm! You're making up for lost time. Ooh, Do that again!

EVERARD

Certainly, milady. I know all your erogenous zones, but I'd forgotten about that one.

MEG

(tenderly)

Ev, you are so conceited.

EVERARD

It comes with the territory. Do you miss me when I'm in LA?

Meg nuzzles his neck.

MEG
Definitely not.

EVERARD
Not even for this?

She squeals.

MEG
You're an utter bastard, Ev - and I
love you.

EVERARD
Where's the weed?

Meg produces cannabis, they roll joints and start smoking.

EDWARD
Darling, I don't like you seeing
Roger.

MEG
I'm not 'seeing' him in the way you
mean. I grew up with him, remember.
There's only one man for me.

EVERARD
Who's that?

MEG
Have a guess. He's handsome, he's a
hunk and he's a big Hollywood star.

EVERARD
It must be ME!

INT. FILM STUDIO - OFFICE - DAY

The Chairman WALTER GREENING and Head of Production SPENCER
HARDY rise from their chairs as Meg enters.

GREENING
Ah Meg! How are you? We've asked you
here to discuss a new film. We're
thinking about making a Swinging
London picture. We feel we haven't

quarried that vein to the full.

MEG

Along the lines of *As Far As the Eye Can See*, Mr Greening?

GREENING

Exactly. Your present film looks like it will be a winner. It's a pity your character had to marry the hero ...

HARDY

That's what heroines do, WG.

GREENING

Quite so, Spencer. Otherwise we could have used the character again. But you can't be the spirit of *Swinging London* and married. Obviously.

MEG

Obviously.

HARDY

Like you can't be Miss World and married.

GREENING

Obviously. Now, Meg, you're marvelous in *As Far As the Eye Can See*. The *Swinging London* character would be even younger. Do you think you can do that?

MEG

I'm sure I can, Mr Greening.

HARDY

There's Alison Allsop, WG.

GREENING

Exactly. She is young - but does she have the experience to carry the role?

HARDY

Makeup would fix it for Meg.

MEG

(ironically)

Thank you, Mr Hardy.

GREENING

Then again, there's that girl Cheryl
Something ...

HARDY

Luccombe, WG. There's a rude rhyme
that goes with it.

GREENING

Careful, Spencer. Ladies present!

MEG

Don't mind me. Mr Greening, I'm sure
I could do you justice in the role. I'd
love to play it. Have you seen this
magazine? It's just been published.

Meg hands Greening a magazine.

HARDY

It's in your in-tray, WG.

GREENING

Somewhere.

He leafs through Meg's copy.

GREENING (CONT'D)

Ah, a feature about you. Excellent.
'The spirit of Swinging London.'

He reads aloud from the magazine:

GREENING (CONT'D)

'... cruising along the Thames in a
launch, riding on the platform of a
double-decker bus, peering from a red
phone box and joyfully leaping over
railings in Green Park. All with
mini-skirts to the fore and your hair
blowin' in the wind.'

MEG

(laughing)

You're embarrassing me, Mr Greening.

GREENING

Well yes, this is very much the look we want. Did you really leap over those railings, or use a double?

MEG

That was me doing it.

HARDY

Not using a double will help the budget, WG.

GREENING

Precisely, Spencer. Meg, you're a very strong candidate for this role. Mr Hardy here and I will have a think, and let you know.

INT. BOOKSHOP - DAY

Meg enters with leaflets and placards to share with LUCY, who like Meg is in her mid-twenties and plain. She does not make the best use of what looks she has. The radio plays Nancy Sinatra's *These Boots Are Made for Walking*.

LUCY

Megs, you're heavily burdened!

MEG

We shan't run out, that's for sure.

LUCY

(reading the placards)

STOP THE WAR ... AGENT ORANGE = MASS MURDER. Straight to the point! Are you sure, Megs? Greening will blow a gasket when he hears about it.

MEG

Pah! Luce, I don't care what the studio thinks. Vietnam is too important.

LUCY

Darling, are you sure sure? There'll be hell to pay if the photographers spot you ...

MEG

They won't. King's Cross is well off

their beaten track. No rich pickings
in Dumpsville.

LUCY
Is Everard joining us?

MEG
Dear Luce, you ask that every time, and
the answer is always the same. No! He's
not interested in politics. Or books
or art or anything intellectual, for
that matter. Besides, he'd be ter-
rified the moguls in Hollywood get to
hear about it.

LUCY
Perhaps you should be.

MEG
I so admire your optimism, Luce. Que
sera sera!

LUCY
Very well. The group are all ready.
Saturday at ten o'clock.

EXT. KING'S CROSS - STREET - DAY

It is raining and dreary. The small group of Vietnam protesters
hand out leaflets and march up and down with placards. They are
largely ignored in the crowded street. Few of the passers-by
refuse to take a leaflet. Most stuff it in their pockets, some
glance at it and one or two crumple it up and throw it on the
pavement. Meg is working with Lucy. They are approached by a
down-and-out.

DOWN-AND-OUT
Fucking tossers!

MEG
(emolliently)
I'm sorry you feel that way.

DOWN-AND-OUT
Fuck off!

LUCY
Would you moderate your language

please.

MEG

It's all right, Luce.

DOWN-AND-OUT

(mimics sarcastically)

'Would you moderate your language please.' Fuck off. I wasn't talking to you. I'm talking to her.

He looks at Meg more closely.

DOWN-AND-OUT (CONT'D)

I know you. You're Meg fucking Denby.

By now the other protesters have crowded round Meg and Lucy watching the action.

MEG

Yes I am. What have I done wrong? Don't you want to stop all the bombing and the deaths in Vietnam?

DOWN-AND-OUT

What I want is houses for everyone on the streets and fucking food to eat.

LUCY

Come on, Megs. It's no use.

MEG

I want those things too, and I'm pushing for them.

DOWN-AND-OUT

You're not doing fucking much about it, are you? You live in a castle and eat caviar every day, so why worry? Middle-class tosser!

MEG

Look, I'm sorry you feel this way. Please at least have a cup of tea and a bun.

Meg proffers a pound note.

DOWN-AND-OUT

I don't want your fucking money.

He takes the banknote anyway and ambles off.

LUCY

I'm sorry you had to go though that,
Megs.

MEG

It's not a problem. All in a day's
work. Lets get all the leaflets out -
and then I'm for a cup of tea and a bun.

LUCY

We might run into that horrible man in
the cafe.

MEG

I'm afraid we shan't. That pound will
go on drink.

EXT. MANSION - GARDENS - DAY

MEG

Come on, Ev, I'll race you to the lake!

EXT. MANSION - LAKE - DAY

Everard reaches the lake first.

EVERARD

I won! I won!

MEG

Only just - and you have much longer
legs. Seven inches longer if we're
both in proportion.

EVERARD

Darling, we're both in perfect pro-
portion. That's why we're stars.

MEG

See that statue ... it's Venus de Milo.
It's an eighteenth century replica,
and itself very valuable.

EVERARD

I don't see why anyone would put up a statue with no arms.

MEG

That's not really the point, darling Ev.

She picks up a stone and hits the statue with three bounces.

EVERARD

Clever girl!

MEG

Your turn.

EVERARD

I don't know how to skim a stone.

MEG

Don't know how! Everyone can skim.

EVERARD

Everyone with a lake. Our garden wasn't big enough for a goldfish pond, never mind a lake. When we tried to do it in the park. a fierce park keeper always stopped us.

MEG

Poor Ev! I'll show you. It's easy

He continues to resist.

MEG (CONT'D)

Spoilsport! Then I'll race you back to the house.

EXT. MANSION — GARDENS — DAY

They arrive breathless back where they started. A girl VISITOR of about sixteen approaches.

VISITOR

You're Meg Denby.

MEG

Yes, I am.

The girl is frozen into silence. Meg helps her out.

MEG (CONT'D)

How are you liking your tour of the house and gardens?

VISITOR

(recovering)

I saw you in *All in a Day's Work*. You're gorgeous.

MEG

Thank you.

VISITOR

How do you manage to stay so young?

MEG

That's because I am young. Seriously though, cold cream at night like my mother and lots of fresh air.

EVERARD

Have you seen my latest hit, *Too Much Too Late*?

VISITOR

No I haven't. I think I saw you in that coffee advert.

Dissolve to moments later. The girl has left.

EVERARD

What a silly girl!

MEG

Don't be upset because she didn't recognise you, darling.

EVERARD

Of course I'm not upset.

MEG

I think you are the teensiest bit.

EVERARD

Publicity have fallen down on the job. Wait till I tell them what I think!

INT. HOTEL - DAY

A literary luncheon is in progress. Meg sits at the top table, a few places away from her father. HOWARD and OLIVER, who are reporters covering the event, sit at the bottom of one of the arms. Howard, in his upper twenties, is of average height and average appearance.

OLIVER

I say, Howard, you've been staring at our local film star for ten minutes.

HOWARD

I was just wondering why she's at this crashingly boring event.

OLIVER

You don't fool me, old cock. I can read your thoughts - or rather your one dirty thought! But to answer your invented question, she obviously here to help daddy flog his crashingly boring memoirs.

HOWARD

So, she's a stunner. I must get to know her. I bet she's as nice in real life as she is in that film *Never a Dull Moment*.

OLIVER

You have got it bad! Tune in, turn on - and drop out with the gorgeous Miss Denby, eh? I hate to see a man wasting his time. She's way out of your league. She's the sexiest young actress around - and the daughter of the local lord of the manor.

HOWARD

Wasting my time? Watch me!

INT. FILM STUDIO - DRESSING ROOM - EVENING

ALISON ALLSOP, a rookie actress, sits at her makeup table crying. Meg hears her while passing. Alison, in her early twenties, is the classic 'sweet young thing' in looks and

manner.

MEG

Why, what's the matter, Alison?

ALISON

Nigel's not happy with my bedroom scene. He says I must stay behind to reshoot it. Everyone knows I made a hash of it - the crew, I mean. I feel I'm being kept in after school.

MEG

Directors can be like that! Reshooting a scene isn't the end of the world.

ALISON

You're lucky to have Bert directing you. Nigel says he doesn't want to hold everyone up so he'll feed me the cues himself. Then I'll be ready tomorrow to do the scene again. But I'll just freeze, I know it. I'll make even more of a hash of it.

MEG

I'll give you your cues. Then when Nigel comes you can show him you're word-perfect.

ALISON

Would you really? Surely you have things to do.

MEG

Nothing that can't wait.

ALISON

It's not even your picture. And you're a star. You shouldn't be reading cues.

MEG

Rubbish, Alison! I don't mind at all. We're all in the same team in this studio.

ALISON

Gosh, thanks. What can I do in return?

MEG

You don't have to do anything in return.

ALISON

But I want to.

MEG

Very well. What's do you think about Vietnam?

ALISON

I think it's wicked the way we - I mean the West - are bombing and killing innocent villagers.

MEG

In that case perhaps you'll sign my petition.

Alison nods.

MEG

A group of us hand out leaflets at the weekends.

ALISON

Please can I come.

EXT. A MARQUEE IN A SPACIOUS GARDEN - DUSK

VANESSA SNELGROVE, the daughter of the house, is having her eighteenth birthday party. A West Indian steel band plays in the background. Vanessa is with a group of friends as Howard approaches.

VANESSA

Hello, who are you? Pull up an orange box.

HOWARD

I don't see any orange boxes but I'll have this chair.

FIRST MALE PARTYGOER

Van always says things like that.
(with a Goon-like silly

voice))
Why do you always say things like that?

VANESSA
I only do it in the mating season.

Undeserved laughter.

HOWARD
Miss Snelgrove, Howard Jenkins of the
Messenger. Congratulations on turning
eighteen. We'll do a little write-up
of the party in the paper. Perhaps
you'd tell me about your plans.

VANESSA
To be legless by midnight, I hope.

SECOND MALE PARTYGOER
That's not very ladylike, Vanessa!

Laughter.

HOWARD
Will you be working or travelling, or
what?

VANESSA
I'll be in London to catch up with my
friends from Switzerland ...

FIRST MALE PARTYGOER
Where she was at school being finished
off.

Coarse laughter.

VANESSA
Then in the autumn I'll go to Madrid
for a year to learn Spanish. Then I may
go to Paris to brush up my French. Then
I'll get a job. Everyone should work,
don't you think? Something with the UN
perhaps. For a year. Then I'll find
someone nice to marry.

HOWARD
You have it all mapped out, Miss
Snelgrove.

VANESSA

One should do something with one's life, don't you think? Of course I'd like to be an actress like Meg Denby. Do you know Meg? She's super. She's coming tonight.

The steel band strikes up *Water Melon Man*. Vanessa sings.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

Water melon maaan!
(addressing the nearest boy:)
Come on, Ted, Let's dance.

She whirls away with Ted. Meg enters the tent with Roger and two others. Meg is momentarily alone at the buffet table. Howard seizes his chance.

HOWARD

Miss Denby, I'm Howard Jenkins.

MEG

That's nice for you, Howard. What brings you here? Are you a friend of the Snelgroves?

HOWARD

No, I'm reporting the party for the Messenger.

MEG

Really? I didn't think it was that important.

HOWARD

It isn't. It's just what we do for the society page.

MEG

Not the scoop that every reporter dreams about, I suppose, but I'm sure it's important. My parents are keen readers of the Messenger's society page.

HOWARD

I thought you were terrific in *Never*

a Dull Moment.

MEG

Why thank you. It was a lot of fun to make.

HOWARD

(seeing Roger returning)

Miss Denby, I have to rush back to the office, but before I go I'd love a dance with you. May I?

MEG

You may, on one condition: that you drop the 'Miss Denby'. Come on then, let's go!

They dance to the insistent beat of Suku Suku.

MEG (CONT'D)

Howard, is this a waltz or a samba that we're doing?

HOWARD

I'm most terribly sorry. I'm not very good at all. Let's sit down.

MEG

Of course not, silly, although you do need a little practice. Perhaps you'd better follow me.

They complete the dance. Howard bows and makes to sit down.

MEG (CONT'D)

You're very sweet, aren't you? I love that bow. Don't you want another?

HOWARD

Can we? Will your er-escort mind?

MEG

'Escort', what a marvellous Jane Austen-type word! You mean Roger. It's not up to him. No excuses!

She waves to Roger. He doesn't wave back. Meg and Howard dance again as the band sings and plays *I Had to Leave a Little Girl in Kingston Town*.

MEG (CONT'D)

Howard, you're holding me at arm's length as if I was infectious. You have to hold people close when you're dancing even if you find it unpleasant.

HOWARD

It's not that ...

MEG

I know that, silly. You must relax more. You've done your work for the day. Tell me though, what do you do to relax?

HOWARD

Gosh, what do I do to relax? All I can think about at the moment is your exquisite perfume. I can feel your heartbeat.

MEG

I should hope so, otherwise I'd have a problem. But come on, tell me about you.

HOWARD

Well ... I read a lot. I play tennis ... go for walks in the Dales. God, that sounds so boring. Actually, I'm trying to write a novel. Every journalist is, you know.

MEG

I don't find reading and writing boring. My first serious boyfriend was a writer.

HOWARD

And I'm very keen on the cinema. I suppose this is fearful cheek but I was wondering if I could watch a film being made. I mean, your film. Ends limply: That would be very interesting.

MEG

(hesitates)

It could be difficult. They're usually not keen about observers on set. But you can ring the studio if you find yourself in London. I'll give you the number when we sit down. Which is basically now. I must do my thing with my party.

INT. MEG'S FLAT - DAY

EVERARD

Meg darling, these last few days have been glorious but now I have to go.

MEG

Go where?

EVERARD

LA, of course.

MEG

Fuck it, Everard, you've only just arrived. Daddy says you treat airliners like buses. You're never around when you're here. You disappear for hours. I have no idea where you are. And I want us to have a little holiday at Lowmere.

EVERARD

You spend too much time at Lowmere. I can't see the attraction.

MEG

That's because you're never there long enough to find out. You spend too much time in Los Angeles. Don't give me all that retakes stuff!

Everard moves closer but she pushes him away.

EVERARD

Sweetheart, I don't want to argue with you.

MEG

I want to argue with you! I love you,

Ev, but it's time you thought about me
and what I want.

EVERARD

I'll do better when I get back from LA,
darling. It won't be long. Promise.

MEG

Oh, please your fucking self ... phone
me from LA.

Meg storms off. Everard looks unconcerned.

INT. A HOTEL IN DEVON - EVENING

TWO WEEKS LATER

Meg and her co-star BOB CURZON attend the wrap party for a
location shoot in Torrington, Devon. Bob, who is a dependable
six feet tall, has typical leading man looks, with a strong yet
sensitive face. He is about thirty. A burble of animated
conversation is heard from the cast and crew.

BOB

(to Meg)

So there's your next film in the bag,
m'lady. You'll be a howling success.

MEG

If I am it'll be because you carried
me, dear Bob.

BOB

(making a mock bow)

My pleasure, madam. Now a little bird
tells me you're up for the Swinging
London picture. You'll be brilliant in
that too, darling.

MEG

(making a mock curtsy)

Thank you, kind sir. More importantly,
I'm still hungry. These buffet snacks
don't make a decent meal.

BOB

We should find some fish and chips.

MEG

Mmm, I agree. I'll tell the others.

BOB

Let's steal away - just us two
principals.

They leave.

INT. A FISH AND CHIP SHOP - NIGHT

BOB

Double chips for us both please - the
greasier the better.

Attendant looks unsympathetic.

MEG

That won't do my weight or my com-
plexion any good.

BOB

You've finished work for awhile. Eat,
drink and be merry for tomorrow we -
do nothing!

MEG

(laughing)

Don't be silly, Bob!

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Bob and Meg walk along the street laughing and eating the fish
and chips from the wrappers.

MEG

You didn't make a friend back there,
Bob. He didn't like your reflection on
his chips.

BOB

Sorry but I like chips swimming in fat.
If you're going to sin, sin big! Isn't
it nice that no one's bothering us or
being nasty?

MEG

Everard used to say people were being nasty by not asking for our autographs!

BOB

How is Everard. I hear he's back in LA.

MEG

I'll say! He likes to hang out with his celebrity pals whether he has work there or not. It leaves me in limbo. We row about it.

BOB

I'm so sorry to hear that. You make a beautiful couple. Meg, it's great to be working with you. There's so much I want to talk to you about.

MEG

Like what? You've been talking to me all fortnight.

BOB

Not seriously though. Like your work against the war in Vietnam.

MEG

Bob, I feel privileged to be part of a huge movement letting the American government know what we think of Agent Orange and their evil war in Vietnam.

BOB

(softly)

I feel the same.

MEG

And since it's serious-serious time, right now I'm reading Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*. You can't get much more serious than that.

BOB

I wondered what you were doing in your little room. You'll have to enlighten me.

MEG

It's about the almost infinite growth of human numbers on a planet of finite resources. How is everybody to be fed? The ideal family is a childless couple with two adopted children. Somebody said that ... I'm not sure it was Ehrlich.

BOB

I'm not doing so well. I have two - both natural.

MEG

(laughing)

Very natural, I'm sure.

BOB

Cheeky!

EXT. THE EDGE OF AN ESCARPMENT - NIGHT

MEG

Wow! I've seen this by day but never at night. Those houses are so far below us.

BOB

It's a natural military strongpoint. Torrington is called the Cavalier Town. It was held for the king until Cromwell's forces won in a bitter fight. Miss Denby, I suppose you know you're lethal.

Meg looks at Bob inquiringly.

BOB (CONT'D)

Yes, a lethal combination of naturalness and sexiness. You're a supercharged girl next door.

INT. HOTEL - BEDROOM CORRIDOR - NIGHT

BOB

It's been a wonderful, Meg. Just what I needed after that boring wrap party.

MEG
(softly)
It doesn't have to end.

BOB
(apologetically)
I'm afraid it does. I'm a happily
married man. I just can't. Don't think
too badly of me, Meg.

INT. THE MESSENGER - NEWSROOM - DAY

Oliver approaches Howard, who is working at a manual typewriter.

HOWARD
Oh hello, Ollie. Listen to this:
'A possible new source of hake, which
may result in cheaper prices in the
shops, has been found, according to
the Ministry of Agriculture, Fish-
eries and Food.' What exciting lives
we lead at the Messenger!

OLIVER
I'm bursting to know how you got on
with the beautiful Meg Denby.

HOWARD
Brilliantly. I wanted to tell you but
knowing her as a person it seemed
disloyal somehow. Boastful, you know.
I danced with her at a party old
Snelgrove and his wife held for their
tedious daughter, Vanessa.

OLIVER
You lucky devil.

HOWARD
Ollie, Meg's a marvellous person. Warm
and natural and sparkly - exactly like
she is in her films.

OLIVER
Oh dear, you have got it bad. So what
now?

HOWARD

Well ... I can't reach her. I keep phoning Lowmere. It's embarrassing. They won't give me her London number. The film studio won't put me through. I just don't understand why she doesn't respond.

OLIVER

She's sending you a message, old son. As Napoleon said, no message is a message. Howard, you can't expect a girl like that to be waiting simply to fall at your feet.

HOWARD

I know but it hurts. I can't just give up.

OLIVER

Then you must storm the gates ... confront her. Go to the film studio and hang around till she sees you.

HOWARD

It's Everard Hughes. Meg's in love with him.

OLIVER

The Hollywood star? You can't compete with that. Looks like my bet - metaphorical since I didn't make one - is safe after all.

INT. A RIVERSIDE FLAT IN LONDON - EVENING

A bottle party is in full swing, hosted by VIVIEN, an actress. The patio doors are open to give a fine view of the Thames. Meg enters alone. She is intercepted by an actor, ADRIAN.

ADRIAN

Will you dance with the second most handsome man in London?

MEG

Who's the first?

ADRIAN

Your Everard, of course. Where is he,
by the way?

MEG

In Hollywood, terribly busy with this
and that.

ADRIAN

So who have you come with?

MEG

I've come with myself.

ADRIAN

(as they start to dance to a
song by Joan Baez)
That's cool.

MEG

We know each other, don't we?

ADRIAN

We worked together on *All in a Day's
Work*. I had the proverbial interesting
little cameo. Two lines, actually.

As they dance, track to where an actor of colour, JONAS, is
declaiming to a small group.

JONAS

Yes, I've got something coming up at
the National. With Sir Laurence. Fine
actor ... hopeless director.

FEMALE ADMIRER

Jonas darling, you're simply impos-
sible!

JONAS

I know, sweet. It's part of my fas-
cination.

Track back to Meg and Adrian dancing. A hand taps Meg on the
shoulder. It is the hostess, Vivien.

VIVIEN

Can the hostess pull rank and cut in?

Adrian gives way.

VIVIEN (CONT'D)

Darling Meg, it's so good to see you.
How's Lucy?

MEG

Singing with her choir. Couldn't avoid
it.

VIVIEN

Darling Lucy. I so wanted to see her.

MEG

And where's Amy?

VIVIEN

In bed in the next room with flu, the
poor darling. Actually, I'm sure it's
a cold but we're calling it flu. Gets
more sympathy.

They dance on until Bob comes up to them.

VIVIEN (CONT'D)

No cutting in unless you're the
hostess!

Dissolve to later.

Bob intercepts Meg when she finishes dancing with Vivien.

BOB

Are we still friends?

MEG

Of course. I like a man who takes
things seriously.

BOB

That sounds sarcastic.

MEG

No, I mean it.

BOB

If you want serious you need my wife
Meryl. Here she is now.

Meryl joins them.

BOB (CONT'D)

Meg, this is my wife Meryl. This is Meg, who I worked with on *As Far as the Eye Can See*. She's the star with me in support.

MEG

No, no ...

MERYL

Perhaps it doesn't matter too much.

MEG

I agree, it doesn't. Are you in the business?

MERYL

I'm an academic. At Imperial. Bob and I met at Cambridge.

BOB

(to Meryl)

You teach English but you should be teaching women's studies. *The Feminine Mystique* is more relevant than Jane Austen.

MERYL

Rubbish! Jane knows the girls call the shots. A man chases a girl until she catches him, as the song has it.

BOB

As you say, Merrilees darling. Do you mind if I dance with Meg?

MERYL

Not at all. Jokingly: I must go and work on my dissertation.

Meg and Bob dance closely to the music of *Waterloo Sunset*.

MEG

Dear Bob, I'm glad we didn't at Torrington. I'd have felt very awkward just now.

BOB

I don't know if I'm glad or sorry. They say you regret what you didn't do more than anything you did do. But look, there's your protegee, Alison Allsop. Who's the beanstalk boy she's with?

MEG

No idea but I'll soon find out.

Meg goes over to them. They break off dancing.

ALISON

Meg, this is Tony. We were at school together.

Tony gawps at Meg.

MEG

Stage school?

ALISON

Golly, no. I haven't been to one of those. It was our grammar school in Sevenoaks. Tony is training to be an accountant.

MEG

(easing Alison's embarrassment)

I didn't go to stage school either, or at least I didn't finish it.

ALISON

Wow, you didn't? You are fantastic, Meg. I wish I could do half of what you can do. I so admire you.

INT. A CORRIDOR AT THE FILM STUDIO - DAY

Meg runs into Alison.

MEG

Hi, Alison. How goes it? I hope you're looking forward to Saturday.

ALISON

(uneasily)

Ah yes, I was going to mention that.

MEG

Spit it out then.

ALISON

Mr Greening called me in. He'd heard about the leafleting somehow. He said it was a bad idea.

MEG

Bad for who?

ALISON

He meant me. He said it wouldn't do my career any good to be associated with a left-wing cause like stop the war. 'Too controversial' he called it. He even said the security services would be watching us. That really frightened me.

MEG

He wanted to scare you. We have the right to protest peacefully. I'm sure most young people - lots of oldies too - agree with us. Alison, it's totally up to you. I don't mean to put pressure on you but don't you think some issues are as important as one's career, if not more so?

ALISON

I know, and I'm very upset. But I'm not as established as you are. I've worked hard to get here ...

MEG

So you won't be coming with us on Sunday?

Alison nods.

INT. THE OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN, WALTER GREENING, AT MEG'S FILM STUDIO - DAY

Greening gets up as Meg enters.

MEG

You wanted to see me, Mr Greening.

GREENING

Yes, Meg. I need to talk to you. You're doing a great job on *As Far As the Eye Can See*, which makes me all the sadder to find you're still campaigning against the Vietnam military action. We've spoken about this before.

MEG

About the war, you mean. I don't understand the problem, Mr Greening.

GREENING

I'm old enough to be your father so I hope you won't mind me repeating how unwise it all is - for you and for me.

MEG

You sound like my father. He says the same. I can't bring myself to give up my peace work. Don't you think that young people, who are the ones fighting this war, have a duty to speak their minds about Vietnam?

GREENING

Maybe they do, maybe they don't. The question for us is how staging protests affects our pictures. The answer is - badly. People can't relate to Miss Demure when she stomps around in dungarees waving anti-war placards. I'm disappointed that you recruited Alison Allsop - who's just a young girl - to go campaigning with you ...

MEG

I didn't recruit her, Mr Greening. She offered to go, although she didn't show up.

GREENING

Fortunately for her, I got to know about it in time. I explained how damaging the publicity would be to her

career. Sensibly she's decided to stop political activities. As for you, Meg, I'm sure you'll readily understand that we can't cast you in the Swinging London picture. We'll use Miss Allsop.

INT. THE MAIN ENTRANCE OF MEG'S FILM STUDIO - DAY

Howard approaches the DOORMAN.

HOWARD

I need to see Miss Meg Denby very urgently.

DOORMAN

I'm sorry, sir, the answer's the same as yesterday and the day before. And the day before that. Miss Denby's working. She can't be interrupted.

HOWARD

It's really most important. I'm a personal friend from Yorkshire.

DOORMAN

So you said, sir.

HOWARD

Please get a message to her while I wait.

DOORMAN

Miss Denby is aware that you've made contact, sir.

Howard tries to light a cigarette but fumbles it, dropping three matches one after the other.

HOWARD

(colouring)

Always a mistake trying to light up in a headwind.

DOORMAN

Yes, sir, there is a bit of a breeze.

He lights a match and, without sheltering it, puts it to Howard's cigarette.

HOWARD

(bleakly)

Thank you. What time does Miss Denby finish work?

DOORMAN

I wouldn't think about that, sir. And in case you're wondering, there are several exits from this site. Are you sure you aren't a pressman? You seem very determined.

HOWARD

No. I mean, yes. I am a pressman as a matter of fact, but this is a personal visit.

DOORMAN

So Miss Denby's expecting you?

HOWARD

Yes. I mean, no. She's expecting me to get in touch sometime. And I have to go back to Yorkshire tomorrow morning.

DOORMAN

You're a personal friend, as you say, sir. I'm sure Miss Denby will be in touch when she's ready.

EXT. THE REGENT'S CANAL, NORTH LONDON - DAY

Meg walks with Bob along the towpath.

MEG

Why did you want to see me, Bob?

BOB

Does there have to be a reason?

MEG

No, but I expect there is.

BOB

Since you ask, I love talking to you. That's important as well, don't you think?

MEG
(laughing)
'As well'!

BOB
You're interested in books and current affairs. You know things.

MEG
I got that from Arnold Haverstock, the author, my first lover - except for a tumble in the bushes beyond the walls of my Swiss finishing school. Well, one thing I know is how to make a circular tour of the River Thames without getting off the boat.

BOB
Via this Regent's Canal.

MEG
Clever you, although I suppose it was pretty obvious since we're walking along it. The canal connects with the Thames at both ends.

BOB
I'm impressed with your local knowledge. But I love how you're interested in the big issues - like Gloria Steinem.

MEG
The American women's libber. Why do you mention her?

BOB
Because I think of you when I read about her. Megs, you should be the British Gloria Steinem. Gloria says women's liberation is the next big issue after Vietnam. She's also stunningly beautiful, which helps.

MEG
Vietnam's quite enough for me.

BOB

Vietnam will end one day but the subjection of women will still be with us. That's what she says.

MEG

Surely not. Don't you think the barriers are coming down so fast that by the year 2000, when you and I are middle-aged, men and women will be equal at work and in the home?

BOB

Oh, I hope so. Take abortion. Despite being legal now, society still makes women feel guilty about not pursuing a pregnancy. I doubt a man feels guilty if a woman aborts his unwanted child. Gloria had an abortion. She says she doesn't feel guilty. She wasn't going to let things happen to her, she was going to take responsibility for her own life.

MEG

I'm pro-choice but maybe in reality I'd feel different.

BOB

Sorry, Megs, I'm being too heavy. I started the subject. Time to find a pub.

MEG

The most sensible thing you've said all morning, Mr Curzon! By the way, what is your hand doing?

BOB

Trying to take hold of yours.

MEG

Just so I know.

She keeps her hand in his.

BOB

Meryl and I are leading separate lives now. Forget all that guff I gave you

about being happily married. We've been drifting apart for years. Meryl wants to be a full professor. She hates being married to a mere actor. I'm better off this way.

MEG

If that's what you want, Bob, I'm happy for you.

BOB

They say you regret what you didn't do more than anything you did do. Oh Meg, I've learnt that bitter lesson with you!

MEG

That's in the past now. Are you still sharing the house with Meryl?

BOB

Well yes but we plan to change that. We're both looking for flats.

MEG

So you haven't left each other really, have you?

INT. THE SITTING ROOM OF MEG'S FLAT - DAY

Lucy looks around her while sounds are heard from the kitchen.

MEG

(emerging with two cups)

Thanks for stealing away from work, Luce. This is only instant, I'm afraid.

LUCY

That's all I drink these days - except at posh restaurants. You seem down, Megs.

MEG

I'm not down. I'm fucking angry. I've lost the Swinging London picture. Greening's given it to Alison Allsop.

He doesn't like my Vietnam campaigning. Reactionary fossil!

LUCY

Oh Megs ...

MEG

I'll find another studio. They'll buy out the contract, and then, Mr Greening, you watch me!

LUCY

That's the spirit!

MEG

Now then, tonight ... Are you ready for it?

LUCY

I certainly am. Looking forward. It's a pity Everard won't be with us.

MEG

Luce, I really don't know what Ev's up to over there. He doesn't write, of course. We speak on dodgy phone calls. He says he's missing me dreadfully, but I always seem to hear party sounds. And he name-drops like crazy. Kate and Anne and Warren - stuff like that ...

LUCY

Megs, do you ask yourself, Is he really yours? He sounds like he's in no mood to rush back, and when he's in London you don't know where he is half the time.

MEG

He says he needs his space.

LUCY

Sorry, Megs, I don't see Everard as the reflective sort. (Pause.) So, who's accompanying you tonight?

MEG

Lucy, I don't have to be accompanied

to my own supper party. Even if Ev was here, he wouldn't come. It's not his sort of thing. He can't make it all about him with a group of distinguished people, especially best-selling authors and war heroes.

LUCY

(laughing)

Especially when they're the same person - and on top of that Arnold is one of your exes! I can't think why you let him go.

MEG

(laughing)

Too old basically. The war was a long time ago. What's the word for fucking your father? But we've stayed good friends.

LUCY

You're lucky. Not every man would accept those terms. Their egos bruise easily.

MEG

Arnold thinks he was the one to do the dropping. That's the art of it!

LUCY

Impressive! So who else is coming tonight?

MEG

As well as Arnold and yourself we'll have his publisher Peter, Tommy Radicek ...

LUCY

The eternal bachelor.

MEG

... plus Gene Tombleson, who's here from the States to play at the Festival Hall.

LUCY

How about Bob Curzon?

MEG

You don't miss much!

LUCY

I try not to. It comes from having no life of one's own, and sitting around all day selling books.

MEG

I don't believe that for a moment. But yes, Bob's nice and cerebral and sexy. He's also very married. And I'm no marriage wrecker.

LUCY

So the one that got away.

MEG

Yes. Oh, and the other one coming tonight is a sweet young man from Yorkshire - Howard Jenkins, I think.

LUCY

Do tell. One of your conquests?

MEG

Hardly. He's a journalist on the Messenger newspaper up there. He'll probably end up marrying a girl from the tennis club.

LUCY

So why ...

MEG

He's harmless. He keeps leaving messages at the house. He was reporting at a party I attended. He saw me smoking a Hamlet. Now every week a box of Hamlets arrives at Lowmere. It's a family joke. Daddy wouldn't give him this number, of course. Then this week he turned up at the studio gate. Said he was in London for a few days to see friends. I wonder ... he came back day after day. They kept

telling him I was busy and couldn't be reached.

LUCY
Except eventually you could be.

MEG
Yes. I thought that if he gets his moment of glory it will cool him down. And there's an end of it.

LUCY
I can't see that working. Do you have a secret plan, Megs? Are you lining him up as your walker with Everard away so much?

MEG
Certainly not, Luce! I have Tommy for that. And in Yorkshire Roger will come whenever I beckon.

EXT./INT. MEG'S FLAT - EVENING

Howard rings the bell. Meg opens the door.

HOWARD
(surprised)
Oh ...

MEG
What's the matter? Have you come to the wrong house?!

HOWARD
No, it's just that ...

MEG
You didn't expect me to answer my own door? I'd have to be Marilyn Monroe not to do that. Or perhaps Bette Davis. Come on through and meet the others.

They enter.

MEG
(continues)
Everybody, this is Howard. He works

for the Messenger, which is the leading daily newspaper back home. Howard, meet Peter and Lucy and Gene. And this is Arnold - Arnold Haverstock.

Arnold comes forward and shakes hands.

MEG

Have you read any of Arnold's books?

HOWARD

(covers his unease with pomposity)

I know him by repute - not, unfortunately, by experience.

ARNOLD

It's all right. One can't read everything. I know the Messenger well. They've been good enough to reprint some of my political articles. Broad-minded of them, actually, since they're a conservative newspaper and I'm ...

MEG

To the left of Che Guevara.

ARNOLD

A classic centrist.

GENE

(to Arnold)

How's the new novel coming?

ARNOLD

Sometimes I feel it's not coming but going. Having got Peacefull over the precipice I have to do my Conan Doyle and get Sherlock Holmes out alive - or there again perhaps not.

PETER

What Arnold means is that the hero ...

ARNOLD

Tut, tut!

PETER

... the whatever is lulled by a superabundance of material possessions and reaches a state of anomie. That is, he believes in nothing and nobody. The book explores how this modifies Peacefull's responses to familiar situations on his country estate.

LUCY

Sounds positively Chekhovian.

ARNOLD

Exactly. He hangs himself in the end, you know, with a noose made out of three Carnaby Street ties, which he has bought in a bid to get with it.

GENE

Gee thanks, Arnold. Now I don't have to buy the book to find out how it ends.

MEG

I want to know about the swallow. What's the significance of the title, *One Swallow at Midsummer*?

ARNOLD

To discover that, Miss Margaret Mary Louisa, you'll have to buy a copy of the book. Or I might even give you one.

GENE

It's like medicine perhaps. One swallow every midsummer before retiring.

ARNOLD

(to Howard)

I heard about your write-up of Meg at a literary luncheon. Apparently she appeared in a striking example of decolletage.

MEG

Poof, nothing of the sort! I was well covered. But the write-up was more than I deserved.

LUCY
I'm sure that's not true. Didn't you say you wore your beautiful bottle green?

PETER
(to Howard)
Would you say it was untrue?

HOWARD
(flustered)
Oh certainly most untrue. After all, I wrote it.

Laughter. Howard looks uncomprehending.

GENE
(to Meg)
I expected to see Everard tonight. Charming fellow.

MEG
He says sorry and sends his love. He's in California.

GENE
Still? He sure loves the place.

TOMMY RADICEK arrives.

TOMMY
Today everything go wrong. The trials of film-making are nothing to those of the Underground. Why does nobody tell a poor emigre that your Piccadilly Line does not go to Goodge Street? You need to know this to get yourself about. Notwithstanding, I am sorry to be late nevertheless.

ARNOLD
Never mind, Tommy. Have a sherry and relax. Then tell us all about it over dinner.

INT. THE AUX PLUMES DE MES TANTES BISTRO - NIGHT

The party is ushered to a circular table.

MEG
(to Howard)
Sit next to me, Howard.

ARNOLD
(to Tommy)
Now tell us about your problems,
Tommy.

TOMMY
I hope I do not bore you.

MEG
You haven't started yet.

TOMMY
Ah, my dear Meg, such spirit you have!
You seize on my poor command of English
and ... What would we all do without
you, eh?

MEG
Go on, Tommy. We're all ears.

TOMMY
Well, Miranda, as you know, is always
difficult. Today she is doubly dif-
ficult. I think she have boyfriend
trouble.

LUCY
Or even husband trouble.

TOMMY
Maybe even that. And then the script
... We have serious problems - too many
to say.

GENE
I think screen writers are hugely
underrated. To me it would be ten times
harder than learning a Beethoven
concerto.

PETER
I don't see the connection. To the
screenwriter it's probably no harder
than a Beethoven concerto is to you.

Now, transcribing a book for the screen is different. That needs such an interpretative approach.

MEG

(to Howard)

What do you think, Howard?

HOWARD

I don't really know. I suppose ...

TOMMY

(cutting across)

I don't need an interpretative approach to make my film. I just need someone who can write a script.

MEG

Tommy wanted to make a sort of *Last Year at Marienbad*.

TOMMY

You British dislike eggheads so instead I have to film about an old car. With all the delays, it will be called *Three Years Ago at Brighton*.

Laughter.

ARNOLD

Here's Monsieur Joseph. Now we can order.

MEG

(to Howard)

Do you speak French? That's how they operate here. English only under protest.

HOWARD

I've always meant to learn French properly. I never got around to it. This menu means nothing to me anyway. I'll have the same as you.

MEG

Very well. Bonjour, Monsieur Joseph. Mon ami et moi, nous commanderons les

memes choses. Nous voudrions ...

DISSOLVE TO LATER:

LUCY

What do we all think about hippies?

ARNOLD

God, I hate these general questions
thrown out to all and sundry.

LUCY

We have to talk about something.

MEG

I suppose Lucy is talking about
Haight-Ashbury. I'm all for the Summer
of Love. We need more opposition to the
Vietnam War and more peace and love.

PETER

And more anti-consumerism.

ARNOLD

Except for this restaurant.

MEG

Bollocks, Arnold!

She kicks him under the table.

MEG (CONT'D)

I suppose you want to go to the Wimpy
for a burger next time.

ARNOLD

By the way, Peter, you know the
Winton-Graingers, don't you?

HOWARD

That must be the family that I ...

ARNOLD

(cutting across)

I'm a distant cousin. A twig to the
main tree, as it were. Did you know
that son Paul has been sent down from
Oxford? He was discovered at dawn with
a young lady in his room. And that was

the end of him at Oxford for a while.

TOMMY

It's the morality of the bourgeoisie
at work.

MEG

(to Howard)

Where did you go?

HOWARD

I didn't go anywhere. Educated at the
University of Life.

MEG

A most valuable education.

She lays a hand on his arm.

HOWARD

It was a joke.

DISSOLVE TO LATER:

PETER

Isn't that Lady Aristotle?

ARNOLD

It is. A leading member of the jet set
... damned unhappy she looks about it
too.

HOWARD

(to Meg)

They're staring at you.

MEG

They're staring at Arnold too. They're
very rude.

LUCY

They think that because someone's in
the public eye they can stare to their
heart's content.

ARNOLD

I've been appearing on television too
much. I should carry a bagful of my
magna opera. 'Excuse me, madam, since

you're so interested would you care to stop me and buy one?'

HOWARD

(to Meg)

Is your film going well?

ARNOLD

(cutting across)

I suppose we should call for l'addition and go.

EXT. THE STREET OUTSIDE THE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The party of seven stand around waiting for someone to make the first move.

MEG

Let's go on somewhere. It's still early.

ARNOLD

I'm going home. I've found a way to get Peacefull off his precipice.

PETER

Me too. It's eleven o'clock. Bed-e-byes. Sorry.

LUCY

Megs, I'm so desperately tired. I don't have any staff at the bookshop at the moment.

GENE

I'm a party pooper too. I have my big concert tomorrow.

MEG

Shame on you all! We could go to the Potting Shed. Come on, Tommy, I know you'll enjoy it.

TOMMY

No, please. I have a script to read. Besides, I have reached the time of life when I deny myself certain of the pleasures of life for the sake of my

life.

HOWARD

I'd like to go.

MEG

I'm very tired, too.

(long pause as she deliberates.))

Oh, all right.

INT. THE POTTING SHED NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

Meg and Howard are shown to a table.

MEG

We can see why it's called the Potting Shed. This seed box makes a good table, and the stuffed sacks are very comfortable, don't you think? You didn't have much to say during dinner, Howard.

HOWARD

There wasn't much I could think of to say.

MEG

Surely you journalists have something on the tip of your tongue at all times?

HOWARD

Usually. Tonight I didn't dare bluff it. You see, I haven't read any of Arnold Haverstock's books. I haven't seen any of Thomas Radicek's films. I hadn't even heard of Gene Tombleson. I didn't sing for my supper, I'm afraid. I'm sorry.

MEG

Don't apologise, Howard. We all know each other so well I'm sure we forget to include strangers in our cliquish talk. How's your novel coming along?

HOWARD

Ah, you remember. Badly, I'm afraid. They say write about what you know but what do I know? I come from an ultimate suburban non-background. My life's not full of colour and excitement like yours.

MEG

You might be surprised. Everyone's life looks different from the inside, Howard. You know Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*? If a book can be made from the tedium of a Soviet gulag, it can be made of anything! Your book will be a best-seller, I know it. You'll be as famous as Arnold one day.

A four-piece band strikes up *Paper Moon*.

MEG (CONT'D)

We should be dancing, not talking.

Meg sings as they dance.

MEG (CONT'D)

This is one of my very favourites!
'It's a Barnum and Bailey world - dum - di - dum - di - dum - dum - di - di - but it wouldn't be make-believe if you believed in me...It's only a paper moon sailing over a cardboard sea, but it wouldn't be make-believe if you believed in me.'

Howard hums along, self-consciously at first, then with mounting confidence.

MEG (CONT'D)

You have a nice voice, Howard.

HOWARD

It's a pity I don't know the words.

MEG

And you're dancing better tonight. Quite the Fred Astaire, in fact.

The band strikes up the kwela.

MEG (CONT'D)

Ah, this is good. The kwela. I love it!
Just wriggle around and follow me. I
pat you on the sides from the arms to
the knees. Now you do it to me. Come
on then ... PAT ME DOWN!

They pat each other in turn from shoulder to hip while continuing
to dance.

MEG (CONT'D)

Phew! I must have a breather. I'll tell
Arnold what fun he missed. Too bad he
didn't come.

HOWARD

(unenthused)

Yes. Will he mind, us going like this?

MEG

No he won't mind. Why should he?

HOWARD

I thought you and he ...

MEG

Of course not.

FLASHBACK:

INT. A HALL AT RADA, EVENING

A younger Meg is with fellow students and a few faculty at a
party. A besuited, older man approaches her group.

ARNOLD

Abigail invited me but she's not here.

MEG

Abigail? We don't know any Abigail, do
we?

The rest of the group nod agreement.

MEG (CONT'D)

Sorry about that. Will we do?

ARNOLD

But of course.

He fixes his attention on Meg.

ARNOLD

How are you all liking RADA?

The rest of the group get the point and melt away.

MEG

It's very different from the amateur
dramatics I did before. The greatest
thing is to perform in front of real
professionals.

DISSOLVE.

ARNOLD

As You Like It? I know, you played
Rosalind.

MEG

As a matter of fact, I did.

ARNOLD

(undressing her with his
eyes)
You'll be pushed to pass for a boy.

MEG

(smiling)
I can do it when I try. I was quite a
tomboy in my teens. My father was
unhappy about it. I suppose I grew out
of it.

ARNOLD

I suppose you did. In Shakespeare's
time the joke was that Rosalind was
played by a boy playing a girl playing
a boy.

MEG

I suppose audiences found that ter-
ribly funny.

ARNOLD

Perhaps, although it was what they

expected at that time. I can tell you lots more about how things were done in Shakespeare's day. It's noisy in here. Why don't we have a coffee after the party?

MEG

If you like. This do finishes at nine. There's a late-night coffee place just down the street. You can't miss it.

ARNOLD

See you at nine.

He leaves her. She moves across to talk to a friend, Emerald.

MEG

Who was that interesting man? Arnold something ...

EMERALD

That was Arnold Haverstock, the famous author. Prizes galore, Cambridge blue for rowing, Battle of Britain pilot - you name it, he's done it!

MEG

Wow! And what's more, he's a bit of all right for an oldie, isn't he?

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. THE POTTING SHED NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

MEG

That was the start of it. Of course, I soon moved in with him without Mummy and Daddy knowing. It's all over now except that we've stayed friends.

HOWARD

Silly of me. I forgot you're with Everard.

MEG

Yes, there's only Everard.

INT. MEG'S FLAT - DAY

Meg answers the door to find Howard there. She is in a distressed state.

MEG

Howard, what are you doing here?

HOWARD

I've tried every way to contact you.
You've been crying!

MEG

No, no. I'm preparing for a part.

HOWARD

I don't believe you.

He pushes past her into the sitting room.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

(continues)

You didn't answer my phone calls. I
made so many ... I left messages. I
even wrote. Why didn't you answer?

She says nothing, continues sobbing.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

What on earth has happened? How can I
help?

He puts his hand on her shoulders and leads her to the sofa.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I'll make some tea. Where is every-
thing? No, tea's not a good idea.
Brandy. Do you have any brandy?

She points to a cupboard. He fetches the brandy, finds glasses
and pours a measure each.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I shan't say cheers ... not the right
time. Whatever it is, Meg, I want to
help.

She says nothing. He tries to lift her mood by pointing to
paintings on the walls.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Those must be yours. They're awfully good. What does MMLD stand for?

MEG

(recovering herself)

Margaret Mary Louisa Denby. Arnold says they're just daubs.

HOWARD

By the standards of Constable perhaps but who claims to be another Constable?

MEG

(resumes sobbing)

It's Everard. He's just phoned from Los Angeles. He's thrown me over. He's found someone else - a MAN. Jason is his name.

HOWARD

Surely that can't last. He'll be back.

MEG

(more composedly)

No, he's gone for good, I'm sure. It's all become clear. I know why he spent so much time in America ... why he disappeared all the time in London. I was his beard - just his fucking beard!

HOWARD

He must be crazy not to want a woman like you ... you're gorgeous, you're charming, you're talented ...

She shrieks in distress and sobs violently. Eventually she settles and clings to Howard.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Do you want to talk about it?

MEG

He's everything I don't want in a man - but I love him. How stupid is that?

HOWARD

Love is never stupid.

MEG

He's so vain. Daddy says he can't walk past a mirror without admiring himself. He never reads books or follows the news. Couldn't give a fuck over Vietnam. Oh, how could I be such an idiot!

Howard says nothing.

MEG (CONT'D)

In bed he was efficient but not really involved. I could tell. He was like a mechanic servicing a car - at least I was a Healey 3000!

HOWARD

Is that your car?

Meg nods.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You haven't lost your sense of humour.

MEG

(resumes sobbing)

How will I get over this?

HOWARD

You will. You need Lucy with you.

MEG

I do. I will. I'm glad you came, Howard. Thank you for listening to me.

HOWARD

I'm privileged that you're confiding in me. Meg, I'm so ashamed that when I saw you at that literary luncheon I wanted to meet you because you're beautiful and a film star and a lord's daughter. Your life is everything mine isn't.

Meg shakes her head.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

But that night at the Potting Shed changed everything. I know you're funny and kind and - a real person that I have real feelings for.

MEG

You've nothing to be ashamed of, Howard. I've become used to being pinned up on bedroom walls. You're crossing the great divide - getting to know me in real life. I'll admit something too. I knew from the start you had a crush on me. I invited you to that dinner because I thought you'd get it out of your system after you'd met me. But I'm seeing the real person too, Howard. You're simpatico, you listen. Not many men do that.

HOWARD

Oh, Meg! Thank you. How do you feel now?

MEG

Empty. As if I've been hollowed out inside. I hardly know where I am or what day it is. I'm numb.

Meg gets up from the sofa and pulls Howard up with her. She heads for an inner door.

MEG (CONT'D)

Come with me, Howard.

INT. MEG'S BEDROOM - DAY

Meg and Howard make love.

CUT TO:

ARCHIVE FOOTAGE of the march from Trafalgar Square in London towards the US Embassy, with eight thousand or more primarily protesting against the Vietnam War but with anarchist agitators in the mix. Among the banners: U.S. GET OUT OF VIETNAM, END THE BOMBING NOW and WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE. The march is peaceful at this point.

EXT. BEFORE THE U.S. EMBASSY - DAY

The camera angle is from the rear of the crowd gathering before the building. Vanessa Redgrave, actress and leading protester, and wild man singer Mick Jagger are at the demonstration. The fence in front of the embassy has been broken down, with protesters spilling onto the lawn.

Massed police, including some mounted, form a defensive wall. No sign of American security guards. They are rumoured to be inside the embassy, ready to use their arms in the event of a break-in. Meg and Lucy are well to the back.

MEG

So we're here. What do we do now?

LUCY

Hope that the Americans take note of the numbers, I suppose. We should have started earlier. I can hardly see a thing.

MEG

I couldn't get up. Morning after the night before. I feel guilty now.

LUCY

You're here, aren't you? Look, there's Vanessa handing in her letter.

Vanessa Redgrave is seen in the distance and from the rear handing over a document to an embassy official.

MEG

... of protest, yes. Do you know what that white headband signifies?

LUCY

Purity. Our cause is pure?

MEG

White is the Vietnamese symbol of mourning. I hope it's not lost on the embassy officials, but don't count on it. I must get to Vanessa. She'll want to know what our group has been doing.

As Vanessa steps back from the embassy door, scuffles break out

here and there between demonstrators and the police.

LUCY

Not now, Megs, for God's sake. You'll never reach her. This looks like trouble.

MEG

Watch me! You stay back if you want, Luce.

LUCY

I'm coming with you.

As they push their way through the crowd, the scuffles turn into a pitched battle. The police push the protesters away from the embassy. The protesters hurl mud and stones - and firecrackers aimed at the horses.

One man is seen with a handful of marbles although he doesn't throw them. The attacks on the horses infuriate the police, who respond with added vigour.

CUT TO:

The camera angle is now looking away from the embassy. Meg and Lucy are gradually making their way forward as the fighting continues. A mounted policeman heads in their direction. Meg rushes towards the horse.

MEG

(shouting and gesticulating)

Stop the war ... stop the murder!

The policeman responds by whacking Meg on the shoulder. She falls, and is helped up by several around her.

DEMONSTRATOR

Fucking pigs!

LUCY

Oh Megs, what a stupid thing to do! Are you all right?

MEG

I'm okay. I'll have a bruise in the morning, that's all.

LUCY

We're going home - now. You've done your bit here.

INT. FILM STUDIO OFFICE - DAY

Greening is at his desk. He is angry. Meg knocks and enters.

GREENING

(pointing to a magazine)

Ah Meg, perhaps you've seen this. It's an international news magazine. It has pictures of the riot at the American embassy in Grosvenor Square. And there you are - right in the middle of it.

MEG

Not in the riot, Mr Greening.

GREENING

Near enough to get your picture in the press. As I've told you before, people won't want to watch 'that dreadful girl', as they'll call you. How do you expect me to ignore this? We had a request from Monumental Pictures in LA to lend them someone to star as the young Elizabeth of York in a Tudor drama called *A Multicolored Rose*. Originally, I thought of you. I had to tell Monumental about your Vietnam activities. They said they didn't want you. Too big a risk to the picture.

MEG

Hollywood's important and so is campaigning ...

GREENING

There's nothing for you to think about, Meg. You've crossed that particular Rubicon.

INT. FILM STUDIO - CORRIDOR - DAY

Meg encounters Alison.

ALISON

Hello, Meg. Come from Mr Greening? I'm on my way there.

MEG

Good luck then. Do you know what you'll be doing next?

ALISON

(embarrassed)

Actually, I've had a call from Monumental Pictures. I'm going out to Hollywood next week for a screen test.

INT. MEG'S FLAT - DAY

Lucy is with Meg, who has been crying.

MEG

Oh Luce, I've lost Everard, I lost the Swinging London picture and now I've lost Hollywood. I've lost everything!

LUCY

You'll get it back.

MEG

Like how? Everard's come out of the closet as gay. He never was interested in me. I see it now. And Greening won't give me another film.

LUCY

Darling, I told you to stop campaigning after he heard about us leafleting. Just for awhile.

MEG

(anger replacing her tears)

That's not helpful to me. Greening's not the only producer in town. I said I'd find someone to buy out the contract, and I almost have. Mr sodding Greening can't take me out of my present picture. It's almost finished!

LUCY

There you are then. It will be a smash hit. All will be forgiven and forgotten. Hollywood will come for you. Alison Allsop will be forgotten ... Meg Denby will be the star over there!

Meg and Lucy embrace.

INT. A PUB IN YORKSHIRE - DAY

Howard and Oliver are drinking pints of beer.

HOWARD

I still don't know what's going on with Meg.

OLIVER

(teasing)

Oh, 'Meg' is it now?

HOWARD

It's not funny, Ollie. I'm bloody angry with her. I think she's playing with me.

OLIVER

How so, old son?

HOWARD

After that dinner and the wonderful visit to the night club, I kept phoning and writing. I got nowhere. She wasn't at the flat or at Lowmere - at least they said she wasn't.

OLIVER

Don't get paranoid, mon brave!

HOWARD

Then I found her at her flat one day. I ended up staying the night ...

OLIVER

You lucky devil!

HOWARD

Yes, well ... That should make a

difference, don't you think? But since then, nothing. I'm fed up with her, I tell you, Ollie.

OLIVER

Howard, listen to yourself. You said you wanted to get to know Meg - one of the sexiest girls in England and way above your league, quite frankly. You wanted to get to know her, and you have in every sense of the word. The colour of my face is green. Yet you complain that you don't have exclusive rights to her.

HOWARD

I know, but I just can't stand the uncertainty.

OLIVER

I don't think Meg is 'playing with you'. She obviously quite likes you. I think she's just enjoying her freedom in Swinging London - and Swinging Yorkshire. And why shouldn't she?

INT. MEG'S FLAT - DAY

Meg is with Lucy.

LUCY

What do you mean, you're pregnant?!

MEG

I mean I'm having a baby!

LUCY

You can't be. You're on the Pill.

MEG

I ran out. I was busy and forgot to get another packet ...

LUCY

Have you told Everard?

MEG

It's probably Everard's.

LUCY
It's probably Everard's!

MEG
There was also Howard.

LUCY
Howard!

MEG
Luce, I wish you wouldn't keep repeating what I say. When Everard went to the States I stopped taking the Pill. Then Howard turned up here right after Everard phoned and told me he was throwing me over. I needed someone to comfort me ...

LUCY
You could have rung me.

MEG
Howard was already here. One thing led to another and ...

LUCY
Oh Megs, what are you doing to do? Will Everard change his mind?

They hug each other.

MEG
He told me it doesn't make any difference. He said to get rid of it, as he put it.

She sobs.

LUCY
Fuck! The beast! And you don't even like Howard.

MEG
I don't not like him. I like him, actually, but I'm certainly not going to marry him.

LUCY

You can lose it legally now, you know.

MEG

I know. I believe in choice but I could never do that.

INT. MANSION — SITTING ROOM — DAY

Lord and Lady Shalcott are with Meg.

LORD SHALCOTT

(angrily)

What a blastedly silly thing to do, Margaret. This is what comes of running around with theatricals. And you don't know who the father is!

LADY SHALCOTT

(dabbing her eyes)

Oh Meg, how could you? We expected better from you.

LORD SHALCOTT

You've ruined your life.

MEG

Having a baby is hardly the end of the world, Daddy.

LORD SHALCOTT

Don't be clever with me! I always thought Everard Hughes had the smack of a nancy boy about him. Now you tell me he actually is one, even though he managed to get you pregnant. And the other one — he's a journalist.

LADY SHALCOTT

Nothing wrong with being a journalist, Stephen.

LORD SHALCOTT

Nothing wrong with being a bus driver or a road-sweeper but I don't expect Margaret to marry one.

MEG

I don't plan to marry anyone.

LORD SHALCOTT
Yes you will. We don't have unmarried mothers in this family...

MEG
Plenty of unmarried fathers.

LORD SHALCOTT
(ignores her)
It would destroy your mother. No, you'll have to marry Roger. He's been keen enough for years.

LADY SHALCOTT
Stephen, haven't you heard? Roger is engaged to Vanessa Winton-Grainger.

LORD SHALCOTT
Nice work, Margaret! You should have taken him when you had the chance. Well, there's Arnold and your foreign friend, Thomas ...

MEG
Tommy. I've sounded them out, as a matter of fact. Arnold is living with an actress - a younger version of me - and Tommy says he's too attached to his bachelor lifestyle to give it up, even for me.

LORD SHALCOTT
Another left-footer! My God, what a mess! Then it will have to be Howard Jenkins. The honour of the family, Meg. Five hundred years of history are on your shoulders.

EXT. MANSION - TERRACE - DAY

Meg rises from a recliner when Howard enters.

HOWARD
Wow! I've not seen this side of the house before. It's so beautiful.

MEG

The park was laid out in the eighteenth century. Many of the trees have had to be replaced over the years. Trees are being planted all the time, actually. Do you see where the lawn ends and the park proper begins? They're separated by a ha-ha. That's a ditch so cattle can't get into the garden. You can't see the ha-ha from here. That's the idea ...

HOWARD

Meg, you seem a little nervous. I've not seen you nervous before.

MEG

Sit down, Howard. Would you like to marry me, Howard?

He is dumbstruck.

MEG (CONT'D)

Say something. It's a simple question. Do you want me to say it again?

HOWARD

No, no. I just wasn't expecting it.

MEG

I'm having a baby.

HOWARD

Meg! That's marvellous news. But I don't want you to marry me because you're having my baby. People don't need to do that anymore.

MEG

Howard, the baby may be yours - but it may be Everard's. No way of knowing.

HOWARD

(angrily)

Meg, how could you?

MEG

(spiritedly)

Now just a minute ... I was with Everard, remember, until he left me - for a man. That was how you and I came together. If that makes a difference, sorry. Forget what I said.

HOWARD

I was surprised, that's all. I'm sure I'll love the baby, whatever. Darling Meg, I thought I loved you. Now I'm sure.

MEG

I'm fonder of you than I ever expected, Howard. Not love exactly but, as Mummy says, love comes.

HOWARD

Surely no-one 'has to get married' these days? I need to be sure of you, Meg.

MEG

You can be. It's still important for a child to be born legitimate. Mummy will be upset if you don't 'make an honest woman' of me. I'd be an embarrassment at county dinner tables. And Daddy chunters on about 'honour of the family'. I'm not pressing you, Howard!!! The fans wouldn't like it either ... an unmarried mother spoils the Goody Two Shoes image.

HOWARD

Darling, I loved the old Meg. I love the new Meg even more. Yes, let's get married.

INT. MEG'S FLAT - DAY

Meg answers the street door to find Bob.

MEG

Bob! What a surprise ... a nice one, of course. Come on through.

BOB

I had to see you, Megs. I'm bursting with news. Meryl has left me. I'm a free man.

MEG

That nice for you, Bob. Congratulations.

BOB

Is that all you can say? Megs darling, don't you see what it means - we can be together. If you still want me, of course. Meryl won't stand in the way of a divorce. She wants one so she can marry some professor or other.

MEG

Stop, Bob! It's too late. I'm having a baby. I'm getting married.

BOB

To Everard? I heard you two had split.

MEG

No, not to Everard. To someone you won't have heard of, I think. His name is Howard Jenkins.

BOB

Call the wedding off. I'll love the baby as my own. Darling, the divorce won't take long. I want to be with you right now and forever.

MEG

Sorry, Bob, it won't do. I'm marrying because I want the child to be legitimate. I was more than fond of you once, and you didn't want me.

BOB

I did, I did!

MEG

You're here now because Meryl's left you, as you said. Not the other way round. It seems you don't want me

enough, Bob.

INT. THE MESSENGER — REPORTERS' ROOM — NIGHT

Howard and his fellow reporter Oliver are alone in the room.

OLIVER

Congrats, Howard, on bagging the sexiest bird in England ... by getting her up the duff.

HOWARD

It wasn't supposed to be like this.

OLIVER

You sat at that literary luncheon last year and told me you'd get that gorgeous girl at the top table - and you have.

HOWARD

I know.

OLIVER

And fucking unhappy you look for a man about to marry and leave this tawdry life behind him.

HOWARD

For a tawdry job in London, probably on a trade magazine, and handouts from my film-star wife.

OLIVER

Steady on! As the one left behind in this tawdry life I say half your luck! And as your best man tomorrow I instruct you to cheer up.

HOWARD

Olly, I just don't think I can stand the pace. I'm drowning in debt. I simply can't afford the life Meg and I have been living. I don't even fit in with her film and art crowd. What creative work can I show? A novel that in a year hasn't got beyond chapter

two. At Lowmere it's even worse. I don't know whether an honourable outranks a baronet, do I tip the maid who brings in my bag from the car, and so on and so on.

OLIVER
(ironically)

Oh dear, what huge problems you have. I diagnose pre-match nerves. Your stag night beckons. A few beers will sort you out.

INT. HOTEL BEDROOM - DAY

Oliver is at the hotel phoning Lord Shalcott at Lowmere.

OLIVER
Lord Shalcott, I can't find Howard anywhere. He's missing.

INT. MANSION - DAY

LORD SHALCOTT
The devil he is! What do you mean 'missing', man? He must be somewhere. All the guests are seated already. Get Howard to the church right now. Meg's in the car already.

INTERCUT:

OLIVER
I would if I could. I've searched everywhere but he's simply gone ...

LORD SHALCOTT
Then search again - the grounds, the boiler room, everywhere. If he's hiding in a cupboard in a funk, this is not the time or place for it.

OLIVER
I'm just so sorry for Meg.

LORD SHALCOTT
Never mind that now. Ask all the staff.

Someone will have seen him.

OLIVER

I've done that. No one's seen Howard for half an hour or more.

LORD SHALCOTT

Ask everybody again! Meg doesn't know yet. I can't keep it from her much longer. If you haven't found him in five minutes I'll come over myself.

INT. BRIDAL LIMOUSINE - DAY

Meg is waiting with Lucy.

MEG

It's time. Why hasn't Daddy joined us and we can get going?

LUCY

Probably some small delay at the church. I expect it's quite normal. Your father will be here in a moment, you'll see.

MEG

I'm sure something's horribly wrong. Look, Luce, there's the vicar almost running to the house. Why is he not at the church? If he rushes like that at his age, there won't be a ceremony.

LUCY

It's good that you still see the funny side. I expect there's no phone at the church so the vicar has come to give your father a message.

MEG

(stifling a sob)

What can it possibly be? I know, Howard's not coming. He's not going to show up.

LUCY

Megs, that has to be serious bollocks.

MEG

I pushed him into it. I'm the one who proposed because I'm having a baby that may be is.

LUCY

Howard is head over heels for you.

MEG

As a picture for his bedroom wall, yes - but as a real woman?

Lord Shalcott speaks to Meg through the car's open window.

LORD SHALCOTT

Meg darling, you must prepare yourself for bad news. No one has seen Howard for more than half an hour. He's disappeared from the hotel.

LUCY

Perhaps he went for a walk before breakfast and has fallen injured somewhere.

LORD SHALCOTT

It's possible. We just don't know. But darling, we must face the fact that the wedding may not happen. You must come back into the house.

MEG

(sobbing)

What about all the guests at the church?

LORD SHALCOTT

We'll see to that. You are the priority for you mother and me.

Lucy cradles Meg in her arms.

EXT. A COACH STATION - DAY

Howard, still in his wedding clothes and carrying only an airline cabin bag, boards a long-distance coach. Its desti-

nation: Bristol.

INT. HEATHROW AIRPORT TERMINAL - DAY

Meg and Lucy enter followed by a porter with many items of luggage. Meg is disguised with a blonde wig, glasses etc.

MEG

Phew! We've managed to dodge them.

LUCY

So far so good. I'd get through check-in and get airside as soon as you can. I don't know why you didn't use VIP departures.

MEG

And guarantee the photographers and reporters find me! They'd soon see through this disguise. I had quite enough of them after the wedding fuck-up. 'Film star bride left at the altar' - it was manna from heaven for the press. Miss Havisham reborn.

LUCY

You weren't exactly at the altar, Megs. You were at the house waiting.

MEG

Don't split hairs, Luce! I can't face more publicity if this comes to light.

Meg pats her stomach.

MEG (CONT'D)

Far away from England, maybe it won't.

LUCY

Will you be all right, Megs?

MEG

Of course. Aunt Tilly will be a laugh a minute. And Florence is a very interesting city. I'm looking forward to it.

LUCY

That's not what I meant and you know it.

MEG
I'm a survivor, Luce.

LUCY
Don't forget to come back, Megs. With your girl-next-door looks you could be the next-big-thing in Italian cinema.

MEG
Acqua e sapone, eh!

LUCY
What's that when it's at home?

MEG
'Water and soap', or 'soap and water' to us. It's their way of saying 'girl next door'. Aunt Tilly already suggested it. But maybe not right now.

She taps her stomach.

MEG (CONT'D)
Don't worry, Luce. The baby will have a lovely Italian mummia, and I'll be back with my girl-next-door image intact.

LUCY
Attagirl!

EXT. ROAD - DAY

SIX MONTHS LATER

Lucy and Meg are in Meg's Austin-Healey 3000 with Lucy driving.

MEG
How's the flat?

LUCY
All fine. Exactly as you left it - including the washing-up in the sink.

MEG

Oh no!

LUCY

Just joking. I did it the day you left. All the gang send greetings. Tommy's filming in India but we heard from him. Ditto Gene from New York. Roger married Vanessa. They both send their love. Even Arnold took time away from his latest identikit starlet to send a message.

MEG

And Howard?

LUCY

I'm surprised you even ask! But we don't know anything. Your parents say his name has disappeared from the Messenger. But enough of all this, Megs. Was it terrible in Italy?

MEG

Not at all. Florence is so beautiful and interesting, and Aunt Tilly was so welcoming.

LUCY

You know what I mean.

MEG

Dearest Luce, I feel such a failure. Everything was going well. Then without warning - gone. It was a boy.

LUCY

I'm so sorry. There's no shame in a miscarriage.

MEG

That's what my head says but it's not the complete answer, is it?

LUCY

I suppose not - not that I'm ever likely to know - but hey! we'll hit all the old places, you and me - that'll cheer you up. And your new film is

ready to go, I hear.

MEG

Oh, I'm not in the mood for any of it,
Luce.

INT. FILM STUDIO - VIEWING ROOM - EVENING

A test screening of *As Far As the Eye Can See*. Meg is present with Bob Curzon and the director, Bert Brump, as well as a child actress, Juliette Smiles.

BERT

Great credits, *As Far As the Eye Can See* - great title! They're going to eat this up!

DISSOLVE TO:

BERT (CONT'D)

That should be a laugh, not a titter.

DISSOLVE TO:

BERT (CONT'D)

Bob, great conviction in this scene
... real veri-veri ...

JULIETTE

Verisimilitude.

BOB

(to Meg)

Smarty-pants! No wonder I'm convincing
... I can't stand Juliette for real.

DISSOLVE TO:

BERT

Omigod, with what that stunt cost it
should have produced bigger gasps!

DISSOLVE TO:

BERT (CONT'D)

Juliette darling, we'd better rethink
that bit. Cartwheels in church aren't
right when you're about to read the

lesson.

JULIETTE

The cartwheels are an expression of the character's inner her. Anyway, they laughed.

BERT

It's not supposed to be a funny bit.

DISSOLVE TO:

BERT (CONT'D)

Meg darling, we're going to reshoot your big scene. More agony please. You're choosing between your faithful boyfriend and the man you've fallen for - not between broccoli and green beans in a supermarket.

DISSOLVE TO:

BERT (CONT'D)

Not bad at all, everyone. There's nothing we can't fix.

INT. FILM STUDIO - CORRIDOR OUTSIDE VIEWING ROOM - NIGHT

BOB

It's great to see you, Megs. I say, there's a great place for coffee round the corner. To cheer you up, darling.

MEG

So I need cheering up?

BOB

Just the teeniest bit, darling. Don't mind about what Bert said. Directors can be sarcy, that's all.

MEG

I don't need cheering up.

BOB

Then cheer me up, Megs. Meryl's gone. In fact, the divorce is well underway. Finally, you and I are both free.

MEG
Coffee and that's it, Bob.

INT. MEG'S FLAT - DAY

Lucy enters. Meg is staring vacantly.

LUCY
(brightly)
Good morning, Megs. How did the screening go?

MEG
Fucking awful. The picture looks like a car crash, and my career with it. Bert says he can fix it. I don't believe him.

LUCY
I'm sure he can.

MEG
You know nothing about it! Oh sorry, Luce, I'm not quite myself this morning.

LUCE
I know, sweetheart. But it's not really about the film, is it?

MEG
It is - partly. I can't help thinking about my child.

LUCY
Thinking about it doesn't help, Megs. You have nothing to blame yourself for.

MEG
You know nothing about that too! You've not had a child - or even a regular man, as far as I know ... Oh, forgive me, Luce.

Lucy moves across and embraces Meg.

MEG (CONT'D)

Did you pick up my copy of The Stage?

LUCY
Maybe look at it later.

MEG
There's something in it, isn't there?
I want to see it now.

LUCY
It's nothing really.

MEG
I must see it now! Show me ... show me
the page.

Lucy reluctantly hands over the magazine, and turns to the page.
Meg reads aloud.

MEG (CONT'D)
'British ingenue shines in first
Hollywood role. Fresh-faced British
star Alison Allsop is the talk of the
town before a foot of her first
Hollywood movie is in the can. Word is
that her performance will be sensa-
tional. Some seers are talking already
of a tilt at an Oscar ... '

LUCY
Ignore it. It's rubbish.

Meg bursts into tears.

INT. THE POTTING SHED NIGHT CLUB - EARLY EVENING

The club is deserted. Meg enters alone, looking careworn.

MANAGER
Good evening, Miss Denby. How was your
day?

MEG
The usual - waiting for the phone to
ring. My agent has gone decidedly
silent!

MANAGER

I'm sorry to hear that. What will you have to drink?

MEG
My usual please.

MANAGER
Darren here will fetch it for you.

DARREN
Will you wait for your friends at a table or stay at the bar?

MEG
I'm not expecting anyone. I'll stay here.

DARREN, who is about eighteen, brings the drink - double gin and It - that the manager has prepared.

MEG (CONT'D)
I don't believe I've seen you here before.

DARREN
I started yesterday. I like it but it's hard to keep up with all the different drinks and the large rounds people order.

MEG
I bet you do a pretty good job. What did you do before this?

DARREN
I worked on a building site. This is better. More easy money. What do you do? Let me guess. Something important obviously. In an office ... A bank maybe?

MEG
Not even warm! I'm Maggie and I'm a librarian.

DARREN
Nice to meet you, Maggie. I'm Darren. I don't read books. I look at my dad's

Sun newspaper sometimes.

DISSOLVE TO:

HOURS LATER

Meg is still at the bar, visibly the worse for wear.

MEG

(to Darren)

Come round this side and have a drink.

DARREN

I'm afraid it's against the club rules, Maggie. I'd like to, of course.

MEG

Then when you finish your shift let's find a drink somewhere else.

INT. MEG'S FLAT - LATE EVENING

Meg and Darren enter.

DARREN

This is a beautiful place you have here, Maggie.

MEG

I wish it were mine. I'm looking after it for a friend.

DARREN

I'm starving.

MEG

Poor you. I don't suppose you ate all night.

She produces bread and cheese. Darren wolfs it down, spraying crumbs.

DARREN

Have you got any weed, Maggie?

She rolls two big joints, which they smoke clinging together on the sofa. Soon the joints are put aside and they start to make energetic love.

INT. MEG'S FLAT - MORNING

Darren and Meg are on top of the bed, both naked. Meg awakens. She mounts him and brings him to climax, still asleep. He wakes up.

DARREN
(casually)
Oh hello.

He turns her over and pushes into her. She climaxes quickly and lies there sated. Darren leaves the bed.

DARREN
I've got to go now.

Darren dresses quickly and leaves. Meg says nothing.

INT. THE POTTING SHED - EARLY EVENING

Meg enters. The manager is alone at the bar.

MANAGER
Good evening, Miss Denby. How are you tonight?

MEG
A few worries at work, as a matter of fact, Paul.

MANAGER
I'm sorry to hear that. I'm sure your usual will help matters.

MEG
Thanks. I'm not stopping. Will the young man who was serving last night be in again tonight? I never got his name.

MANAGER
You mean Darren? I'm sorry, Miss Denby, he's left us already. Said he couldn't take the evening work. They're all the same these boys. They want the money but they don't want to do the work.

MEG

Give me his forwarding address, will you, and I'll write to him.

MANAGER

Sorry, we don't have an address. Boys like him don't have forwarding addresses. We paid him in cash and he left with everything up to date.

The manager shakes his head out of Meg's sight.

INT. MEG'S FLAT - DAY

Meg answers the door to find Howard. She looks rough but rallies with a visitor.

MEG

Hello, Howard. What kept you? I wondered when you'd be back.

HOWARD

Oh Meg, I didn't know if I should contact you after ...

MEG

(interrupting)

All that. We're different people now. Let's start from somewhere else. Come in. You remember this old place?

HOWARD

How can I ever forget it? Meg, I know all about you from the papers. I often wondered if I should get in touch. I didn't dare.

MEG

Silly boy! I'm glad you have. And I know nothing about you, Howard, except that you told Lucy you have a job in London.

HOWARD

Yes, I checked with Lucy before coming here. I'm with the Sentinel now. You won't see my name. I'm a back-room boy

- a sub-editor.

MEG

... And you don't have a girlfriend.

HOWARD

I did. I was nearly married, actually
... Omigod, I didn't think ...

Meg rests a hand on his arm.

MEG

It's all right. Who was she?

HOWARD

A girl from my old tennis club in
Bristol. We agreed it wouldn't work.
I suppose it was a rebound thing.

MEG

(mischievously)

Can you be on the rebound from
something you haven't done?

HOWARD

I thought you must hate me. Instead,
you're so forgiving.

Meg rests a hand on his arm.

MEG

I've never hated you, Howard. Upset at
the time, certainly. I'm sure what you
did was right for you.

HOWARD

I'm not so sure. I find it hard to
forgive myself even though you can.

MEG

You must. If I say you're to forgive
yourself you definitely must. You
should go now. We can have lunch at the
weekend if you'd like that. I know a
nice little bistro in Charlotte
Street.

INT. MEG'S FLAT - EVENING

WEEKS LATER

Meg and Howard enter laughing.

MEG

What was that film about?

HOWARD

I've no idea. Who cares!

They kiss standing up, then fall on to the sofa together.

MEG

You're good for me, Howie. I've been terribly down lately. I'm broken up over losing the baby. My film will be a flop. The studio has dumped me because of my anti-war work. But you stand by me.

HOWARD

Do you mind terribly that Hollywood didn't work out? That Alison Allsop took the part that should have been yours?

MEG

I do mind but not too much. My months in Italy helped to get it into perspective. We get used to everything in the end, don't we?

HOWARD

They didn't deserve you, Meg - look at it that way. Alison is not a patch on you as an actress. She can register only one emotion. That's neutral!

MEG

Well, I can register two! Enough about me, though. What about you? Has your novel been published?

HOWARD

It hasn't - but it's finally finished. I really and truly believe I've cracked it.

MEG

That deserves a kiss.

They kiss fervently, then Howard pulls away.

HOWARD

Once again, the last train to Wimbledon ...

MEG

(murmuring)

We're taking this very slowly, Howie.

HOWARD

I thought that's what you wanted, darling ... - after last time.

MEG

No need to prove yourself. You don't have to take that train to Wimbledon - not tonight, and not ever.

INT. MEG'S FLAT - NIGHT

Meg and Howard are in bed.

HOWARD

Meg, there's something I must know. Why were you ever interested in me?

MEG

Because you're - my Howie!

HOWARD

No, I mean it all started with that dinner at Aux plumes de mes tantes. I'd nearly given up. You weren't answering my messages. Why did you invite me?

MEG

What does it matter now?

HOWARD

I want to know. Please, Megs.

MEG

I felt sorry for you. You were clearly desperate to see me. 'A dinner won't

do any harm,' I told Lucy. 'Safety in numbers.' You were fitted in. Lucy said it wouldn't work. She was right. Look where it's led!

HOWARD

Darling, I can't get over why you chose me.

MEG

Be careful ... I might change my mind! Shall I tell you? Arnold and Roger - both of whom you thought I was in love with, by the way - were never right. Arnold was too old and Roger was too 'country booby squire'. You know the expression? Yes, I was devastated when Everard left me but he was gay, for Christ's sake. It would have been a disaster.

HOWARD

I heard rumours about Bob Curzon.

MEG

Bob? Yes, dear Bob. You may have a rival there. Bob was a solidly married man until his wife called time. They're divorcing now, but ... So, Howie, you have me all to yourself. Make the most of it.

He makes love to her again.

EXT. VIETNAM RALLY IN HYDE PARK, LONDON - DAY

A rally against the Vietnam War. Meg, who is to speak, is present with Arnold. Over the crowd noise comes the chant of 'Hey hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?'

ARNOLD

Now remember, little star, what we agreed. You'll ask who is our enemy in Vietnam - and answer your own question quickly before the audience start shouting answers. Lock down hard on the US military-industrial complex.

That's what we said, isn't it?

MEG

It is, Master. But I'm nervous.

ARNOLD

You? Never! I'll be at the front of the crowd waving.

SPEAKERS' ROSTRUM

Meg and the chairman mount the platform.

CHAIRMAN

Friends, comrades, we are here to make known how the people of this country feel about this wicked war ...

Cheers.

CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)

It has backers in high places, which is why we must make our numbers count

Cheers.

CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)

- few higher than the Right Honourable the Viscount Shalcott, former Tory Minister, panjandrum of the House of Lords, Lord Lieutenant of the North Riding of Yorkshire, owner of four thousand acres.

Meg looks disturbed at this unexpected reference to her father.

CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)

Never heard of him?

Shouts of 'No'!

CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)

You can bet your week's wages that the Government know him very well as he presses them here and pushes them there as an arch supporter of America's colonial adventure

Boos.

CHAIRMAN (CONT'D)

Well, I'm glad to say his daughter is cut from a different cloth. She's with us - and she's with us now. Friends, comrades - the actress and campaigner Meg Denby

Loud cheers as Meg gets to her feet.

MEG

Friends, fellow campaigners, it's true my father and I have arguments over dinner ...

Unintended laughter with 'Dinner by Jove!' heard. Meg is nonplussed. She sees Arnold giving her a thumbs-up and begins again.

MEG (CONT'D)

I am young and the people fighting this war are young. The people running this war are old. It's a war of the young set up by the old

Boos.

MEG (CONT'D)

... to fight an enemy that doesn't exist

Cheers.

MEG (CONT'D)

For who is our enemy? Very quickly: It's not the Viet Cong

Shouts of 'No'!

MEG (CONT'D)

It's not the North Vietnamese Army

Shouts of 'No'!

MEG (CONT'D)

It's not the Chinese

More muted agreement.

MEG (CONT'D)

We're frightened of them but they're
even more frightened of us - or I
should say the Americans

Loud jeers.

MEG (CONT'D)

Even the Americans aren't our enemy
...

Meg makes a theatrical pause, which prompts a range of responses
with 'Yes they are!' and the like predominating.

MEG (CONT'D)

No, the American people aren't our
enemy. Kids like us are protesting
over there the same as here.

Cheers.

MEG (CONT'D)

Even the airmen who carpet-bomb de-
fenceless Vietnamese villagers from
their B52s, who pour Agent Orange on
to their crops - they aren't the enemy
either. They have their orders.

Shouts of derision. Meg makes another pause. Into the silence
a lone voice shouts 'Get to it, girl ... tell us who!'

MEG (CONT'D)

Yes, I'll tell you. Our enemy is the
small group of evil people behind this
war - the US military-industrial
complex,

Shouts of 'Yes!'

MEG (CONT'D)

aided and abetted by the British
Government.

Huge, derisive cheers.

MEG (CONT'D)

They want this war and they profit from
this war. They sell their weapons and
make their fortunes; they win their
medals and bask in glory. BUT we can

beat these evil people and we can end this war ... If we stand together and stay solid, friends and fellow campaigners, we can overcome!

Meg sits down. Crowd applauds wildly. Arnold appears at the edge of the platform.

ARNOLD

Wow, little star! If that doesn't stop the war single-handed, I don't know what will!

MEG

And do you know what? I don't give a flying fuck what Greening and the studio think any more.

EXT. MANSION — LAKE — DAY

Meg and Howard are cuddling on the grass while the Venus de Milo statue in the lake looks on.

MEG

This is my very favourite place in all Lowmere. So peaceful. Nobody can see us from the house or anywhere.

HOWARD

Except the odd poacher in the bushes.

MEG

(affectionately)

Don't be silly, Howie! You've got me worried now.

HOWARD

Why, Megs, are you planning to go in in the altogether?

MEG

No way! Although we did as children - my brothers Jeremy and Thomas and I. Strictly against the rules, of course.

HOWARD

You little rebel!

MEG

And we used to hit that statue by
skimming stones at it. That was
forbidden too. It's frightfully
valuable.

Howard picks up a stone, skims it at the statue and hits the
target with four bounces.

MEG (CONT'D)

Hey, four! That's pretty good - but I
can do better.

Meg picks up a stone and hits the statue with three bounces.

MEG (CONT'D)

There you are!

HOWARD

You haven't lost your old skill, Megs.
Did you knock her arms off with your
stones? He sings: 'Venus de Milo was
noted for her charms, but strictly
between us, you're cuter than Venus -
and what's more you've got arms.'

MEG

(laughing)

Love Is Just Around the Corner. It's
one of Mummy's favourite songs.

HOWARD

'Cos arms are so useful. Like this ...

He folds her in his arms, and they fall to the grass giggling.

MEG

Darling, blissful as this is we must
go to London tomorrow. We're joining
our friends at a fantastic film called
The Graduate. We have a private view
at the Tate. And - get this! - we have
a backstage pass to a Beatles concert.

HOWARD

Yes please. Yes please. Yes please ...

MEG

You've changed, Howie. You were always sweet but now you're more confident. I love the new Howard!

HOWARD

Darling! I suppose it was finishing the novel. And getting the job in London on a national paper. I was so in awe of you and Arnold and all the gang. Now I feel I can look you in the eye.

MEG

You always could but you wouldn't.

HOWARD

I used to be terrified of this place - and your parents. Now I know they're straightforward, decent people.

MEG

What did you expect? People dressed in coronets and robes, spending all day bossing the serfs around?

HOWARD

No, but all this must make a difference.

MEG

Must it?

HOWARD

Perhaps more than you know.

INT. MOVIE THEATRE LOBBY - EVENING

The post-premiere reception for *As Far As The Eye Can See*. The film is a success after all. A buzz of animated talk. A strange-looking man approaches Meg and Lucy.

STRANGE MAN

Miss Denby, may I say I so admired your nuanced performance.

MEG

Well, thank you.

STRANGE MAN

I'm from Rationalist Times magazine. Don't you agree that major life decisions, like in this case choosing between your boyfriend and the rival man are reducible to a straightforward cost-benefit analysis?

MEG

Well, I ...

LUCY

Like, say, choosing between green beans and broccoli?

STRANGE MAN

Ah yes, I couldn't have put it better myself!

MEG

Nor could I.

The man drifts away mumbling thanks.

LUCY

So who was that strange-looking man, Megs?

MEG

No idea. He's a rationalist, whatever that means. He told me I'd given a 'nuanced performance'. That sounds like another way of saying under-powered.

LUCY

Don't you believe it! You gave a knockout performance. You have a smash hit on your hands despite all your fears.

The strange man is replaced by another enthusiast.

STREETER

Pardon me interrupting but I heard 'smash hit'. One hundred per cent Al at Lloyd's! All thanks to you, Miss Denby - Meg. What a performance ...

knocked everyone else in the show out of the park. Dan Streeter, Monumental Pictures, LA.

He hands Meg and Lucy his card.

STREETER (CONT'D)

And this lady
(looking at Lucy)
is maybe your executive assistant?

LUCY

(sotto voce to Meg)
Sounds like another 'nuanced performance'.

MEG

This is Lucy Plessey, my best friend.

STREETER

We want you for LA, Meg - like tomorrow. Mr Michaels has been looking for an English rose to play Florence Nightingale, England's first woman doctor.

LUCY

Pioneer nurse, actually.

STREETER

Whatever. It will be an imaginative interpretation of the story.

MEG

I'm deeply flattered, Mr Streeter ...

STREETER

Dan.

MEG

... Dan, but I'm under contract.

STREETER

To Walt Greening, I know. He'll release you for three or four months.

MEG

Then my friend and flatmate Howard could be a problem for me. He's a

famous writer. He's very committed right now and I have to support him.

LUCY
I'll fetch him.

Lucy leaves them.

STREETER
No problem! We'll bring him over too. Mr Michaels always has stories waiting to be written. He likes famous writers to do them. Adds class, you know. Like Scott Fitzgerald going to Hollywood.

MEG
We'd be most grateful, Dan. Ah, here comes Howard now.

Howard joins them.

MEG (CONT'D)
Dan, this is Howard Jenkins. Howie, this is Dan Streeter of Monumental Pictures of Los Angeles. I've told him you're a famous writer ...

STREETER
Yes, and we're bringing you out to the Coast along with your beautiful companion here.

MEG
... And I was going on to say that your new book is about the beautiful people of Swinging London. The gilded youth, the jeunesse doree.

STREETER
(to Howard)
Swinging London ... fabulous! Harold, how are you on murder in an English village? Can you do death stalks among the hollyhocks?

HOWARD
Well, I ...

MEG

Of course he can. It's a strong second line for you, isn't it, Howie?

STREETER

That's settled then. Let's all meet in Walt's office tomorrow morning to tie up the details. Eight a.m. No point in wasting the day. Now excuse me, folks, I want to get a word with young Bob over there.

Streeter leaves them.

HOWARD

What did you do that for? I've never written a screenplay in my life.

MEG

You'll soon learn.

DISSOLVE TO:

Meg and Howard are surrounded by well-wishers. Bob comes across.

UNKNOWN SUPPORTER

Make way for the star!

BOB

No, this is Meg's picture. She played a blinder!

Murmured agreement.

MEG

(to Bob)

If I did, it's only thanks to you.

She adds tactfully for public consumption.

MEG (CONT'D)

And Juliette.

BOB

After this outburst of mutual modesty
...

Laughter.

BOB (CONT'D)

... perhaps we can agree that the picture will be huge. But come, let me get Meg a glass of wine. Excuse us, everybody.

He leads Meg unresistingly by the hand towards where drinks are served.

MEG

I've seen a man from Monumental Pictures. He's flying me - and Howard - to Hollywood straightaway. Seems they want me after all despite the Vietnam protests.

BOB

Success always alters people's view of things! I'm delighted for you, darling. Actually, I've been asked to go to LA, too. See you over there! You know, we can be the next golden couple of show business - the new Olivier and Leigh. Darling Megs, I turned you down once. You've been punishing me ever since.

MEG

Bob, this isn't the place!

BOB

I think of you all the time. I think of nothing else ...

MEG

We're friends. Isn't that enough?

BOB

It's not enough! Don't grind me into the ground, Megs.

MEG

What else should I say? I love you, Bob, but I just don't know. You stayed with Meryl until she left you. She left you, remember. You're asking me to take sloppy seconds.

BOB

No, no, no!

Howard comes up to them.

HOWARD

What are you two so solemn about? And near the bar.

MEG

You're right. Let's hit it!

INT. MEG'S FLAT - MORNING

Meg and Lucy are working through a pile of newspapers.

MEG

I shouldn't blow my own trumpet, but I must read you this one: 'Meg Denby plays her part to perfection. Artfully, she overlays her girl-next-door persona with a depth of character that makes her a worthy partner of any successful man.' It's what I always hoped.

LUCY

Nothing but the truth. And look what I've found ...

Lucy reads out various items.

LUCY (CONT'D)

Everything from the straight-out 'stonking good yarn ... a good old-fashioned weepie' to the thoughtful 'the spirit of young London isn't confined to the rich and well connected. The miniskirt is available to all' to the intellectual 'richly layered picture well worth the effort of unpicking - life seen through the prism of class and the role of fate'. Megs, they all love it. Bert said he'd turn the picture around - and he has.

MEG

Oh Luce, I'm thrilled. But I have to be careful.

LUCY
What do you mean?

Meg says nothing, then drops her eyes to look at her stomach.

LUCY (CONT'D)
You don't mean?

Pause.

LUCY (CONT'D)
You do mean!

MEG
Yes, I do.

They embrace.

LUCY
What does Howard think about it?

MEG
I haven't told him yet. I'm saving it for the plane. That way he can't run away.

LUCY
You shouldn't joke about something like that. It's bad karma. Do tell - was it er-intended?

MEG
It was at the time. Not exactly as a replacement for the dear child I lost, but because there seemed no reason why not after that disastrous test screening. Then I thought I'd blown my acting career with Vietnam. Now going to Hollywood I have quite a problem.

LUCY
Look on the bright side ... It will be months before you'll start to show. I'm sure they can work around things.

MEG

Then it'll be goodbye jeans and hello kaftans.

INT. THE OFFICE OF HOWARD'S LITERARY AGENT - DAY

The agent leafs through Howard's manuscript.

HOWARD

I'm sorry I took so long. I gave up, then I got inspired again - and finally finished it. I hope you like it.

AGENT

Yes, Howard, I've read the novel with a lot of interest. I also asked a colleague to read it. Our views are the same. You're a professional journalist so you will be able to accept well intended professional criticism.

She sighs.

AGENT (CONT'D)

So many of my authors can't.

HOWARD

(relaxing in his chair)

Of course, I'm keen to hear it. I'm always open to changes and additions.

AGENT

It's more than that, I'm afraid. I wouldn't feel comfortable to send this manuscript to any publisher. It has its moments, of course, but I can't see anyone in London - or elsewhere for that matter - successfully publishing this novel. I'm sorry to be frank, Howard. It's better to know where we stand, don't you agree?

Howard is dumbstruck.

AGENT (CONT'D)

I'm glad you feel that way. Very professional.

HOWARD

Is there something wrong with the plot? The characters? The dialogue?

AGENT

All three, actually. The characters are stereotypes, the dialogue is laboured and the plot is predictable. I hope I'm not being too candid.

HOWARD

(bleakly)

What can I do?

AGENT

Do? Start the journey from somewhere else would be the best bet, to use an old Irish joke.

Howard does not smile.

AGENT (CONT'D)

Sorry, not appropriate. I know the work you've put into this. Seriously, I'd treat this as a practice run for the great novel that you'll write next. You might try your hand with some short stories for magazines -

She sighs.

AGENT (CONT'D)

not that the market's what it was for those.

INT. MEG'S FLAT - EVENING

MEG

That agent is wrong! Someone will take it. It'll be all right, I promise.

HOWARD

I hate it when people say that. You can't possibly know.

MEG

Oh, we are in the dumps! I know you, Howie. I know you'll be a first-rate writer.

HOWARD

I'll never make a writer. An average journalist, that's me. And writing a film script ... what was I thinking of!

MEG

Don't say things like that.

HOWARD

An average journalist orbiting a bright star, that's me.

INT. MEG'S FLAT - DAY

Meg is on the phone. She looks drained.

MEG

Luce, he's gone. I don't know where - just gone. I found a note: Sorry. Can't make it. Good luck ... Yes, of course I'll still go to LA. I'll be at Lowmere until it's time for the flight. I'll get too depressed if I stay here. Howard will know where to find me if he returns ... No, Luce, I mean if. I've got bad vibes about this ... I don't think he will. I suppose he felt he wasn't good enough for me. Or good enough for Hollywood. I kept telling him he was ... Hold on a mo. Someone at the door.

She leaves the room. Sounds of the front door being opened. She returns to the phone.

MEG (CONT'D)

You still there, Luce? Bob has turned up. No, not Howard - Bob. I'll get back to you later.

Bob enters.

BOB

(with high emotion)

Megs darling, I couldn't let you go to America without seeing you. Meryl has left me, okay. That's not the point.

I knew from the first moment I saw you that I'm yours for ever - if you want me. I know you're with Howard but ...

MEG

It seems I'm not with Howard.

BOB

Then you and I ... ?

MEG

(shaking her head)

Bob! It doesn't work that way. You and I aren't meant to be.

BOB

(emotionally)

We are, we are. I know you feel for me, Megs, so why, why?

MEG

Don't spoil what we have, dear Bob. I must be in control of my life. I can't be certain you want me quite enough. I need the whole of love, or nothing.

BOB

You have all my love too, Megs darling. Absolutely totally all. How can I convince you?

He moves to embrace her. She pushes him away.

MEG

You can't. You should go now, Bob. Go quickly.

BOB

We'll see each other in LA. And I'll wait for you, for years if necessary - as long as it takes.

MEG

(emotionally)

Then you'll waste your life. I beg you, dear Bob, don't do that.

EXT. MANSION - LAKE - EVENING

Meg wanders alone in the falling light of a chilly evening. She is melancholy. She looks at the Venus de Milo statue. She skims a stone, hitting it in three bounces.

MEG

(singing softly)

'Strictly between us, you're cuter than Venus ... '

A VOICE BEHIND HER

'... and what's more you've got arms!'

MEG

Howie, you came back! I thought you'd gone forever.

They fall into each other's arms.

HOWARD

Can you forgive me, darling Megs? I've been everywhere - nowhere - trying to work it all out. I felt crushed by the weight of your love for me. How can I live up to it?

MEG

I'm so sorry, sweetest. There's nothing more to work out. You're here and that's all that matters to me.

They fall to the ground as they embrace.

HOWARD

I want to come to California if you'll let me.

MEG

I will. Of course I will.

HOWARD

I feel I can do it. I even have this idea for a story I want to propose to them ...

MEG

'Pitch to them'.

She nuzzles him.

MEG (CONT'D)

Tell me about it.

HOWARD

... Pitch to them. It's about a very average boy from a very ordinary background who falls in love with a girl who's far beyond him. She's an actress. She's famous, beautiful, kind, intelligent, caring ...

MEG

She sounds too good to be true.

HOWARD

Oh no, she has flaws.

MEG

Such as?

HOWARD

I'm still working on those. Naturally, he has to beat many rivals for her love.

MEG

It would be better for her to reject many rivals for her love, I think.

HOWARD

Darling, you're right. And then somehow the impossible happens. He finds she loves him. He never quite knows why.

MEG

Perhaps because he needs her, and all the others didn't. It'll be hard to find the right person to play the girl.

HOWARD

We'll scour the country - the world. Somehow I think we'll find the answer right here in Yorkshire.

They renew their embrace.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Sweetest Megs, do you really, really want me, after everything?

MEG

Of course I want you, darling Howie. And I have a surprise for you. I'll save it for the plane. It's a nice surprise, you'll see. We've been through the fire, you and I, but that's over now. It's been you for a long, long time only I couldn't see it.

HOWARD

Darling Megs, we're off to Hollywood! You've rescued me after the disaster of the novel and my lack of self-belief.

MEG

And you rescued me, dearest Howie, when I was at rock bottom.

It has begun to rain.

MEG (CONT'D)

We're getting soaked in case you haven't noticed.

HOWARD

The wetter the better when I can lie here with you.

THE END