

LIVING

Written by
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Based on the original screenplay "IKIRU" by
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FADE IN:

EXT. OUTSIDE RAILWAY STATION - ESTABLISHING - DAY

England, early 1950s. Summer. A station in a commuter town thirty miles from London.

Morning rush. Men with bowler hats, dark suits, briefcases, rolled umbrellas converge on the station entrance.

EXT. STATION - PLATFORM ONE - DAY

A Mother, 30s, and an uniformed Schoolboy, 12, stand together on the platform, awaiting their train.

She is reading a magazine. He is reading a comic.

Behind them, and in front of them, bowler-hatted Commuters stream past, all hurrying in the same direction to reach the other platform.

At any moment, the Mother and Schoolboy might get swept up into the tide of commuters. But the tide continues to part around them, leaving them unscathed.

The Mother and Schoolboy remain absorbed in their reading, completely ignoring the Commuter tide.

EXT. STATION - PLATFORM TWO - DAY

The tide's destination is this platform across the tracks. It is already packed with other Commuters standing shoulder to shoulder. Many read newspapers, folded back and held out before them.

PETER, 24, is dressed identically to his fellow commuters, though his suit is of a lighter shade and less broken in.

He's glancing about nervously, looking for something or someone.

He attempts to shift position within the crowd, bumps into a Gent standing behind him, reading his newspaper.

PETER

Oh! So sorry!

Gent mumbles without looking up, carries on reading.

Two Schoolboys push past, almost knocking Peter over. He recovers, resolves to stand with more dignity in his designated space.

Then he sees what he's been looking for:

Three bowler-hatted men standing together further along platform. MIDDLETON, late-40s; HART, mid-40s; RUSBRIDGER, late-20s.

PETER raises a hand half-heartedly. They don't see him.

He raises his hand more boldly, waves.

Hart notices, draws attention of Middleton and Rusbridger. All three gaze neutrally towards Peter.

Peter smiles, starts to go towards them, hesitates.

Middleton, taking charge, gestures for Peter to come over.

PETER (CONT'D)
(squeezing past)
Excuse me...

He reaches the others.

PETER (CONT'D)
(too loud)
Good morning!

MIDDLETON, HART, RUSBRIDGER
(subdued)
Good morning.

PETER
So. Here I am. All ready for
battle.

Beat.

MIDDLETON
I'd better introduce you. This is
Mr Peter Wakeling, our new
colleague. Mr Wakeling, Mr Hart. Mr
Rusbridger.

PETER, HART, RUSBRIDGER
(shaking hands)
How do you do.

HART
You're eagerly awaited, Mr
Wakeling. We've been short now for
nearly two months.

PETER
Well I hope to make a difference.
(laughs)
May take a week or two though!

Middleton, Hart and Rusbridger smile but don't laugh.

RUSBRIDGER

(to Peter; sotto)

Don't worry, old chap. We'll all get a lot livelier once we're in London.

(indicates)

This time of morning, it's a kind of rule. Not too much fun and laughter. Rather like church.

Peter looks down platform:

Rows of bowlers, dark suits, folded back newspapers. No-one is talking.

PETER

Hmm. I see what you mean.

EXT. STATION - PLATFORM TWO - MOMENTS LATER

Train comes in. Steam. Commuters jostle politely but firmly.

NB The train has old-style carriages divided into individual compartments, each with a door opening to the platform.

INT. RAIL COMPARTMENT - TRAVELLING / EXT. SCENERY - DAY

Train is moving. They have secured a compartment to themselves. Middleton and Hart on one side, Peter and Rusbridger opposite.

No-one is talking. Middleton and Hart have got out documents and are studying them. Rusbridger is reading the sports page of his newspaper.

Peter looks at his new colleagues. He almost speaks, stops himself, gazes at view out of window.

After a few beats, Rusbridger takes pity.

RUSBRIDGER

First day's always a bit nerve-racking.

PETER

Yes.

RUSBRIDGER

You'll get the hang of it. As for these chaps here, they'll improve somewhat once they wake up.

MIDDLETON

(not looking up)

It's not us you have to worry about, Mr Wakeling. We're your pals. But you'll need to get on the right side of the old man.

PETER

You mean Mr Williams?

Silence.

PETER (CONT'D)

He seemed a decent sort at the interview. Perhaps on the frosty side, but er... Truth is, I didn't get to see much of him --

HART

You're about to get another chance just now. Here's his station coming up.

EXT. VILLAGE STATION - DAY

Train slowing as it comes into small leafy 'countryside' station on commuter line. Steam.

INT. RAIL COMPARTMENT/EXT. VILLAGE STATION - DAY

Middleton, Hart and Rusbridger have put down their reading and are leaning forward to the window.

Peter looks out, apprehensive.

In the window: the Waiting Passengers on the platform outside glide by as train slows. A smaller crowd than at previous station, but large proportion are bowler-hatted.

As the train stops, the window neatly frames WILLIAMS out on the platform, waiting to board.

Williams is tall, angular, elegant, early 60s. Dressed immaculately in the commuters' uniform.

He gazes into their compartment, raises his rolled umbrella in subdued greeting.

Middleton, Hart and Rusbridger immediately touch or raise their bowler hats.

Peter hesitates, also raises hat, but by then Williams has gone OUT OF VIEW to board the train.

DOORS SLAM up and down the train.

PETER
Is he coming in here?

HART
Oh no. Never travels with us. But he always manages to be at exactly the right spot to greet us. The way he was just now.

MIDDLETON
Rather mysterious, the way he gets it right every morning.

RUSBRIDGER
He must watch us go by and run along the platform.

HART
Can you imagine Mr Williams running along the platform?
(to Peter)
Train stops and there he is. Every morning. Very calm.

RUSBRIDGER
But how else is it possible? He must spot us and run.

PETER
But why would he... bother?

RUSBRIDGER
Why? Just Mr Williams, I suppose. It's what he does every morning. Before we came along, I expect he did the exact same thing to our predecessors.

Peter looks around anxiously, as if Williams might burst into their compartment at any moment.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The train journeys on.

EXT. WATERLOO STATION - NEAR TICKET BARRIER - DAY

ON: A huge SEASIDE POSTER advertising a break in a resort town: 'JUST 90 MINUTES BY RAIL FROM VICTORIA!'

It shows: sea, beach, blue sky, pier, Ferris wheels, happy families.

MOVE DOWN to discover Peter, Middleton, Hart and Rusbridger amidst crowds. They've just come through the barrier.

Peter starts to push his way into the crowd, but Middleton stops him, indicates they must wait.

The four men become stationary while crowd moves around them. They look back to the barrier.

Williams emerges, comes towards them.

WILLIAMS

Good morning, gentlemen.

MIDDLETON, HART, RUSBRIDGER

Good morning, sir! / Good morning,
Mr Williams!

WILLIAMS

(looking Peter up and
down)

You appear taller than at your
interview.

Beat.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

I do hope you'll be... comfortable
with us.

PETER

Thank you, sir. I... hope to make a
contribution.

Williams strides off. Peter is about to follow, but again Middleton stops him.

Middleton, Hart and Rusbridger watch until Williams is sufficiently ahead. Only then do they start to move.

Peter follows.

EXT. WATERLOO STATION - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Morning rush on streets. Summer.

EXT. OUTSIDE COUNTY HALL - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Massive grand building on south bank of Thames.

EXT. OUTSIDE COUNTY HALL NORTH BLOCK - DAY

Entrance to this section of building. Office Workers, male and female, ascend steps and pass in through double doors held open by Porters.

INT. COUNTY HALL NORTH BLOCK - ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

Impressive Art Deco hall. Signs pointing to 'FIRE DEPT', 'EDUCATION DEPT' etc.

Broad central staircase leading up to upper levels, at present filled with ascending Office Workers.

FAVOUR Williams within this tide. He now seems just one among many, patiently taking his place in the slow procession up the stairs.

INT. COUNTY HALL NORTH BLOCK - SECOND FLOOR - CORRIDOR

A quiet corridor.

Williams comes into it, walks a few strides. Then stops, surprised.

Further down the corridor, SIR JAMES emerging from a door.

SIR JAMES, 60s, Chairman of London County Council, walking regally in Williams's direction. Although the corridor is wide enough for them both to pass, Williams steps aside, waits.

In marked contrast to his earlier demeanour, he now appears very deferential.

Sir James strolls past, hardly looking at Williams.

WILLIAMS

(sotto)

Good morning, Sir James.

SIR JAMES

Hmm.

Williams waits till Sir James turns out of the corridor, then resumes walking.

INT. COUNTY HALL NORTH BLOCK - SECOND FLOOR - OUTER OFFICE

A large room. Lined with desks, arranged in neat rows. Office Workers installing themselves behind each desk, getting ready for the day ahead.

SINGH, a clerk, carrying folders, comes down aisle between desks, walks past a door to an adjoining office.

It is marked 'PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT.'

INT. OFFICE - TABLE - DAY

NOISE of TYPING in background, CLOSE SHOT - A TOWER OF PAPERS AND FOLDERS stacked precariously on a wooden table.

A name sign before it reads: 'MR WAKELING'.

PETER peers around the tower, studies it nervously.

We now see he is seated at the table behind the tower. There are six people, sitting and working around the table, each with their own tower.

On one side, Rusbridger, Hart and MARGARET HARRIS, early 20s - though we don't yet favour her.

On the other side, Middleton and Peter.

Williams is at the head of the table, his back to two tall windows. He has that side of the table to himself, wearing once again his confident, poised air.

Aside from the name signs, the towers help to mark out each official's territory.

Williams has two such towers, to either side of him.

CLOSE ON: PETER trying to extract a sheet from his tower. He almost brings it down, hastily restores it to stability.

MARGARET (O.S.)
Consider yourself very fortunate,
Mr Wakeling.

Across the table, Margaret is looking at him from behind her own tower.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Bequeathed one of our tallest
skyscrapers. Courtesy of Mr
Woodward, your predecessor.

Peter looks around at others, at Williams.

The others, Williams included, keep working, eyes down.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
Imagine if you'd arrived here and
there'd been no skyscraper for you.
(MORE)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

It could take you a good few days
to build one as tall as that.

Peter studies his skyscraper closely.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

If your skyscraper isn't very tall.
Or God forbid, you work so fast you
don't have one at all...

(looks round table; stage
whisper)

Then people will suspect you of not
having anything very important to
do!

Hart and Rusbridger snicker quietly without looking up.

Middleton looks disapprovingly at Margaret.

Williams gives no reaction.

PETER

I see...

MARGARET

So here's your first rule, Mr
Wakeling. Keep your skyscraper
high!

He's at a loss how to respond. But he's smitten by Margaret.

He smiles at her. She grins back mischievously.

Then she bows to her tower of papers, as if it's a religious
object.

Hart and Rusbridger laugh quietly.

Middleton frowns.

Williams looks up, watching Margaret expressionlessly. Then:

WILLIAMS

Mr Rusbridger. Why has this D19
come back to us?

He holds up a document.

RUSBRIDGER

Mr Wright at Planning was of the
view that a remittance certificate
should be attached to it.

WILLIAMS

A remittance certificate can only be issued after the D19 is authorised.

RUSBRIDGER

Yes, I tried to tell Mr Wright that, Mr Williams. But he simply won't have it.

Williams looks at the folder in his hand, thinks.

MARGARET

Mr Rusbridger, why didn't you try bribing that horrid Mr Wright? All you'd need is a photo of Tessie O'Shea.

Hart, Rusbridger and this time Middleton all laugh.

Peter, not in on joke, smiles anyway.

Williams doesn't react, continues to consider the folder.

Then he inserts it decisively midway into the tower to his left.

WILLIAMS

Then we can keep it here for now. It'll do no harm.

Williams's gaze turns to the next document.

The others resume their work.

Singh comes INTO VIEW, passing through the small gate, into the 'privileged' area sectioned off from the rest of the room by a waist-high mahogany rail.

They all look up at him.

SINGH

(addressing Williams)
The ladies from Chester Street, sir.

An ironic groan goes around the table. Peter is intrigued.

Williams looks around the table, all avoid his gaze.

WILLIAMS

Please show the ladies in, Mr Singh.

Singh nods, goes OUT OF VIEW.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
Mr Middleton. Your turn, if you
don't mind.

Middleton suppresses sigh, rises.

MIDDLETON
Of course, Mr Williams.

Middleton goes OUT OF VIEW towards the barrier.

WILLIAMS
Mr Wakeling. Perhaps you'd like to
assist Mr Middleton with the
ladies.

PETER
Of course, sir.

Peter rises, nearly upsetting his tower as he does so.

Margaret grins. Peter smiles, goes OUT OF VIEW.

INT. OFFICE - BARRIER RAIL - DAY

Peter joins Middleton at the rail, as Singh leads in:

MRS SMITH, 40s, MRS McMASTERS, 30s, MRS PORTER, 40s - all
'respectable poor', neatly attired in hats, jackets, etc,
which they have carefully made or adapted for themselves.

Middleton has on his 'public smile'.

MIDDLETON
Ladies. How are we today?

Mrs Smith, the leader, is patient, controlled, a tactician.

MRS SMITH
We were elsewhere in this building
all yesterday and kept waiting hour
upon hour. First at Planning, then
at Parks, then at Cleansing and
Sewage. Then just before closing
yesterday, the gentleman said we
were to bring this to you.

She holds up a folder. Middleton hesitates, smiles, takes the
folder.

MIDDLETON
Let me speak with Mr Williams. Just
a moment.

Middleton goes OUT OF VIEW.

Peter, left at the rail with the women, smiles nervously.

MRS MCMASTERS
New here, ain't you?

PETER
(laughs nervously)
Yes. First day actually.

Mrs Smith is watching the rear of the office.

Peter follows her gaze: Middleton, at the table, leaning down to confer with Williams.

MRS MCMASTERS
Well. You enjoy yourself, son. No
end of entertainment you'll get
here.

PETER
No doubt...

MRS MCMASTERS
Like a good old Punch and Judy
show. We the citizens are Judy. And
all you lot are Mr Punch --

MRS SMITH
(with quiet authority)
Eliza.

MRS MCMASTERS
Just chatting to the young
gentleman. He's a nice lad this
one. I can tell.

Peter smiles.

MRS PORTER
Here he comes. Back he comes.

Middleton is coming back, folder in hand, wearing his public smile.

MIDDLETON
Your letter and your petition are
very well presented. We of course
know this from before. However you
must first take it to Parks and
Recreation on the third floor --

MRS SMITH
We were there yesterday, sir.

MRS MCMASTERS

They even thought to offer us a bench to sit on. That's how long we was there!

MRS SMITH

Eliza.

MIDDLETON

I do apologise. And we don't wish you any further inconvenience. So Mr Williams has suggested you be accompanied this time by a member of our staff. To ensure there's no further confusion.

(looks at Peter)

This is Mr Wakeling.

The women all look at Peter.

PETER

Oh! Splendid! Then I'll make sure... all this confusion...

MRS MCMASTERS

That's lovely, son. Then you'd better hop over to our side of the fence.

PETER

Yes.

(passes through gate)

Well, if you ladies would care to follow me...

He starts to lead them out. Singh holds open the door.

Then Peter realises he doesn't know the way.

MRS SMITH

Allow me to lead the way. We're perhaps more familiar with this building than you are.

INT. OFFICE - TABLE - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Williams looks up, gazes after Peter and the ladies: a concern - even a conscience - momentarily detectable in his expression.

Middleton takes his seat at the table.

WILLIAMS

(looks down at his work)
Miss Harris. Is it really true you
may be leaving us?

Beat.

MARGARET

It's not certain yet, Mr Williams.
But I did have my interview. And it
seemed to go well. They're going to
let me know.

(to others)

It's a Lyons Corner House.

WILLIAMS

A Lyons Corner House.

(beat)

Is that a respectable job for a
nice young lady?

It takes a moment to realise Williams is making a joke. They
all laugh.

RUSBRIDGER

So will you become one of those,
what d'you call them? Skippys?
Nippys?

HART

You'll look fetching in that apron,
Miss Harris.

MARGARET

(cross)

It's an assistant manager's post,
Mr Hart.

(beat)

At least once I've settled in.

HART

Wasn't trying to be cheeky, Miss
Harris.

RUSBRIDGER

They do an excellent treacle
sponge. At least the one in
Coventry Street does.

Margaret, cross, gets on with her work.

Williams gazes at her expressionlessly then he steals a
glance at his watch. A tension enters his manner as he notes
the time.

MIDDLETON

Good idea, sir.

Williams doesn't respond. He's still staring at his watch then realises he's been addressed, looks up.

WILLIAMS

Mmm?

MIDDLETON

Mr Wakeling, I mean. Good training.

HART

Rather the deep end, I'd say.

WILLIAMS

He'll manage. Seems bright enough...

INT. COUNTY HALL NORTH BLOCK - STAIRCASE - DAY

Mrs Smith leads way up grand staircase.

Peter follows, Mrs McMasters a step in front, Mrs Porter one behind.

PETER

What an excellent idea.

MRS MCMASTERS

A playground's what's sorely needed, love. There's nowhere for them to play. It's still so blimming dangerous everywhere.

MRS PORTER

A cesspool. No other word for it. There's no-one been near it since the Germans dropped that bomb. Rats as huge as that, and our houses backing right onto it --

SOUND of SHRILL BELL, a beat long, resounding through this part of the building.

Peter, startled, stops, looks around.

PETER

What on earth...

MRS PORTER

(bumping into him)
Oh, you'll have to get used to that, love...

PETER sees Mrs Smith and Mrs McMasters continuing up the stairs as if nothing has occurred. Two Officials come down the stairs, also oblivious to the bell.

Peter hurries to catch up, Mrs Porter close behind him.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Peter opens a door marked 'PARKS AND RECREATION', ushers ladies through with a flourish.

INT. CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Peter comes out of same door, holding folder, the wind taken out of his sails. The ladies, behind him, appear weary but stoic.

An Official, 50s, appears in the doorway, indicating further down the corridor.

A SERIES OF SHOTS

A) Dismissive Official, at desk piled with papers, shaking head as though to say, 'Oh, not this thing again', laughs wearily, gives folder back to Peter, waves hand dismissively.

B) Distracted Official, standing near doorway of his office. While Peter tries to talk to him, he continually looks away at something going on OS. Soon it's clear he's ceased to listen altogether. He gestures with irritation OS to reprimand a colleague, strides angrily OUT OF SHOT, even as Peter continues to offer him the folder.

C) Irritated Official, in corner of large office, bent over re-setting mouse trap. He gestures impatiently TOWARDS CAMERA, indicating we should consult another official OS.

INT. PLANNING DEPT OFFICE - DAY

Peter stands inside doorway of large office. The ladies stand just behind him.

TALBOT, 40s, is barricading further access to the room.

Behind Talbot, a room busy with Clerks and Typists. SOUND of TYPING.

TALBOT

That's all very well. But we've bliming through this before, haven't we. First we need all that water drained.

The SHRILL BELL goes off again, one beat long, making Peter start. No-one else reacts at all.

TALBOT (CONT'D)
I've explained this to you.
Cleansing needs to look at it
first.

SERIES OF SHOTS

A) Mrs Smith leading the party along corridor. She remains upright, determined.

B) Peter going down staircase, while Mrs McMasters and Mrs Porter lecture him. He is nodding.

C) Peter emerging from another office, looking dejected.

D) Peter now bringing up rear, as Mrs Smith leads party along another corridor.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE CLEANSING DEPARTMENT - DAY

Mrs Smith, Mrs McMasters, Mrs Porter are gathered in corridor in front of an official, HARVEY, who is holding up their folder and barring entry.

Peter stands at rear of group, trying to minimise himself.

HARVEY
So this isn't for us. But I'm sure
the Public Works Department will be
pleased to assist you.

MRS MCMASTERS
Public Works? That's where he's
from!

All gazes fall on Peter. The SHRILL BELL goes off once more.

Again, Peter starts. Again, no-one else reacts.

HARVEY
You're from Public Works?

PETER
Well, yes. First day, actually.

HARVEY
(affecting anger)
Then why on earth have you brought
these good ladies here?
(to ladies)
I do apologise.
(MORE)

HARVEY (CONT'D)

Yours is an excellent scheme and I wish you well with it.

(to Peter, thrusting folder at him)

Look here. Take this back to your office at once. These ladies deserve better!

INT. COUNTY HALL NORTH BLOCK - OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Peter, demoralised, now alone, clutching folder, walks past the rows of desks towards the door to the Public Works Department.

Singh comes INTO SHOT, opens door for him.

INT. OFFICE - TABLE - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Peter arrives at the table, folder in hand. He hovers, unsure.

Margaret points to the folder, points at Williams - still head down, working.

Peter goes over, stands beside Williams.

Eventually Williams lays down his pen, looks up.

WILLIAMS

(ignoring Peter)

Forgive me everyone. Unfortunately I shall be obliged to leave early this afternoon. At twenty past three.

An unprecedented occurrence. Surprise around the table.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

Perhaps Mr Middleton. You'd be so good as to deputise in my absence.

MIDDLETON

Of course, Mr Williams. I'll see everything stays ship shape.

Hart is annoyed by this.

It's unclear if Williams intends to say something else.

An awkward silence. Then Williams notices Peter standing beside him with the folder.

WILLIAMS

Mr Wakeling. What may I do for you?

PETER

The ladies' petition, sir. Um. Mr Harvey at Cleansing insists this is for us after all.

Williams takes the folder from Peter, thrusts it midway into one of his two towers.

WILLIAMS

Mr Harvey is quite wrong. But we can keep it here. No harm.

INT. CORRIDOR/LANDING/STAIRCASE/ENTRANCE HALL - DAY

Williams approaches, his gait upright, almost military. The corridor opens out to building's central staircase before him.

JONES and three SECTION HEADS emerge and engulf Williams, who reacts instantly, greets them, smiles.

They begin to descend together.

WE MOVE WITH Williams's face, the others drifting INTO VIEW and OUT OF VIEW as they interact with him.

All five men are making humorous remarks, indiscreet gossip.

They reach the bottom of the stairs. Jones claps Williams on the shoulder, moving off OUT OF VIEW. Williams, genial, gives a final smile.

He turns to face directly ahead of him, the doors to the outside.

WE REVEAL Williams standing entirely alone in the large entrance hall. He takes a few steps forwards. Something catches his eye. He stops still.

A tall wall mirror hanging near the doors. Williams stares at his reflection. His expression solemn.

He adjusts the knot of his tie, building up his resolve.

EXT. OUTSIDE COUNTY HALL NORTH BLOCK - DAY

Williams comes down the steps. Pauses to consult watch.

INT. DOCTOR'S WAITING ROOM - DAY

A poster on the wall: 'THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE BELONGS TO US ALL!'

MRS BUTTON
Bournemouth. Ten days starting next
Monday.

Two patients waiting: Williams, sitting isolated in a corner,
and MRS BUTTON, 30s, seated near the reception desk.

RECEPTIONIST
Oh lovely! You must be looking
forward to it.

MRS BUTTON
The same guesthouse we stayed in
year before last. The lady there
provides a very nice supper.

SOUND of BUZZER

RECEPTIONIST
Mr Williams? Doctor will see you
now.

WILLIAMS
Thank you.

He rises, crosses floor then pauses at the doctor's door,
hand on the knob, his nose almost touching the wood.

RECEPTIONIST
(to Mrs Button)
I much prefer the beach at
Bournemouth. A pebble beach is just
so uncomfortable.

Williams remains still for a few beats, hesitant.

MRS BUTTON
I couldn't agree more.

Williams opens the door, goes in.

INT. CONSULTING ROOM - DAY

The DOCTOR stands from behind desk, looks uneasy. Gestures to
seat in front of desk.

DOCTOR
Mr Williams. Please sit down.

Williams hardly reacts, but he doesn't sit down. The Doctor's
manner has made him stiffen.

They look at each other like men about to fight a duel. Then:

WILLIAMS

Thank you.

They both sit. The Doctor looks at the papers before him. He removes his spectacles from his face.

DOCTOR

The results have come back. I'm afraid this time they're pretty conclusive.

(looks up grimly)

Never easy this.

WILLIAMS

Quite.

Williams's face remains calm, betrays nothing.

EXT. WATERLOO STATION - NEAR TICKET BARRIER - DAY

ON: the huge seaside poster displayed near the ticket barrier. Williams is gazing at it.

Legend: 'JUST 90 MINUTES BY RAIL FROM VICTORIA!'

Williams adjusts his head to see the poster more clearly. It dwarfs him and his fellow commuters.

A flicker of emotion. Then he moves OUT OF VIEW towards the platform.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STREET IN SUBURBS - NIGHT

Around 9:00 PM. A quiet residential street lined with trees. Victorian semi-detached houses.

MICHAEL and FIONA, both late 20s, come walking arm in arm. They've had a little to drink, but they're not quite drunk.

Fiona is laughing boisterously - perhaps too much so for this respectable neighbourhood.

FIONA

... Really, darling, that's incredibly wicked of you!

They giggle together as they walk. Fiona suddenly straightens her gait, digs elbow into Michael.

Coming towards them - the only other person in the street - is MISS FRY, 60s, a very prim lady walking a dog.

Fiona and Michael go quiet. They pass Miss Fry.

FIONA (CONT'D)
Good evening, Miss Fry.

MISS FRY
(frostily)
Good evening.

They walk on a few steps before Fiona dissolves into giggles, clutching Michael's arm.

MICHAEL
(suppressing laugh)
Stop it. She's still watching us.

FIONA
How can she be? She doesn't have eyes in the back of her head.

MICHAEL
I assure you she does.

They both giggle, look over their shoulders furtively.

EXT. OUTSIDE WILLIAMS FAMILY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT

They turn through a gate, up the garden path of a solid suburban family house. No lights are on.

FIONA
(sotto)
If your father's in, this is a good time to talk about you know what.

MICHAEL
(shakes his head)
Not a good time.

FIONA
Look, dear, you'll have to start the ball rolling at some stage.

MICHAEL
Yes, but not tonight, darling. I'm really not up for it. Besides...
(looking up at house)
He's not in.

FIONA
(unlocking front door)
But this isn't his cinema night.

They go in through the door.

INT. WILLIAMS FAMILY HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT

The hall, the entire house, is in darkness.

MICHAEL
 (calling)
 Hello! Dad!
 (to Fiona)
 He missed his cinema on Tuesday, so
 he's gone tonight.

Fiona turns on the hall light.

FIONA
 As I was saying - you can't put it
 off forever, dear. I don't intend
 still to be in this stifling house
 come Christmas.

MICHAEL
 Christmas! How can anyone purchase
 a house and move in that sort of
 time?

From the living room we catch their shadows moving outside as
 they hang coats, etc.

MICHAEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 And it is his money, darling. We
 can't just --

FIONA (O.S.)
 Your mother intended that money for
 us all. And what's he sitting on it
 for? We're the ones who need it.
 You have to speak to him, Michael,
 I mean it.

A small movement. In the armchair beside the unlit fireplace -
 someone is sitting silently in the darkness.

Fiona comes into the room, turns on the light.

Williams is revealed, sitting in the armchair. He looks at
 them blankly.

FIONA (CONT'D)
 Father! What on earth --

Michael comes in after Fiona.

MICHAEL
 Oh! Dad. You gave us a start.
 Thought you'd gone to the pictures.

Williams looks at him blankly. Fiona and Michael both realise there's something strange about Williams's manner.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Dad, are you all right?

WILLIAMS
Quite all right.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
I was just sitting here. Thinking things over. Then you two came in.

Fiona turns, suddenly embarrassed.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
So. Are you going to sit down? A little cocoa?

MICHAEL
Well...

FIONA
No. We both have early starts. I have to get ready for bed.
(to Michael)
You should too, dear.

Fiona exits. Her FOOTSTEPS GO UP STAIRCASE.

Michael and Williams look at each other.

Two beats.

MICHAEL
Well. Better get going. Heard what the boss just said.

Michael laughs nervously.

WILLIAMS
Yes.

Michael nods, leaves. Williams hears Michael's FOOTSTEPS GO UP STAIRCASE. Williams looks over at the upright piano and the framed photo on it of his late wife. She is in her early 40s.

Williams gazes at it from across the room.

FLASHBACK - INT. CAR / EXT. COUNTRY ROADS - DAY (AUTUMN)

POV BACK SEAT OF MOVING CAR: Rain, windscreen wipers, uniformed driver. The car in front, seen through windscreen, is a hearse.

REVERSE: Williams, years younger, in back seat with YOUNG MICHAEL, 5, who leans forward with keen interest, as if on a fairground ride.

The hearse gains ground, turns a corner.

YOUNG MICHAEL
Come on! Mum's leaving us behind!

Williams gives a start, reaches forward and embraces Young Michael with urgency, as if the boy might hurtle forward in the vehicle.

Young Michael keeps watching excitedly out of the windscreen.

FLASHBACK - EXT. SCHOOL CRICKET GROUND - DAY (SUMMER)

Williams, 12 years younger, sitting on pavilion bench, wearing a sun hat. The FATHER of another schoolboy sits beside him. Around them are other Boys, Parents, Teachers.

On the cricket pitch: a school match in progress.

TEENAGE MICHAEL is at the crease.

The Bowler bowls. Teenage Michael bats the ball cleanly through the fielders, starts his run.

APPLAUSE

FATHER
Well done, your boy.

Williams, filled with delight and pride, almost forgets his customary English reserve. He only just conquers urge to rise and cheer wildly.

WILLIAMS
(back in control, smiling)
Yes. Quite.

FLASHBACK - INT. PUB - NIGHT

COLLEAGUE, 40s, sitting, smoking, deep in thought. He kills his cigarette then speaks almost directly at CAMERA.

COLLEAGUE
...I'm being serious. Chap like you needs a wife. And as for your boy, well, he'll come round to it. Youngsters get used to anything.

FLASHBACK - EXT. OUTSIDE WILLIAMS HOUSE - DAY (1944)

Williams, younger, dressed in 'gardening' clothes, tends to his modest war time apple tree - he's up a ladder collecting apples.

He greets a passing neighbour.

VOICE (O.S.)
(calling)
Dad!

Williams turns, squints.

Some distance away, a bus moving off, having deposited a single figure at the bus stop. YOUNGER MICHAEL waving happily. He is in an army uniform, suitcase on the pavement beside him.

YOUNGER MICHAEL
Hey! Dad!

WILLIAMS
Michael...

MICHAEL (ADULT) (O.S.)
Dad!

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (PRESENT - JULY)

Williams starts, rises from the armchair, moves across the room as though to go to Younger Michael.

WILLIAMS
(inappropriately urgent)
Michael!

Beat. Then Williams remembers where he is.

MICHAEL (O.S.)
(calling)
Dad? Could you lock up? We're not coming down again now.

Williams, in the middle of the room, a disappointment and sadness engulfing him. He doesn't reply.

MICHAEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Dad? You there?

Williams walks slowly to the doorway. Calls up:

WILLIAMS
Yes. I'll lock up.

MICHAEL (O.S.)
Good night then.

WILLIAMS
Good night.

SOUND of DOOR CLOSING UPSTAIRS. Williams remains beside the doorway, head bowed. Then - he steps out into the hallway, taking care not to make a sound.

INT. HALLWAY/STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT

Williams looks up. The staircase rises to a half landing, turns, continues up a second flight OUT OF VIEW.

A MURMUR OF VOICES from upstairs. Williams starts up, taking each stair with care.

Three steps before the turn, he stops, a hand on the rail.

FIONA (O.S.)
...I do hope he's not upset.

MICHAEL (O.S.)
Of course he'd be upset. If he heard us. But look, darling, this might be for the best.

FIONA (O.S.)
How can it possibly be --

MICHAEL (O.S.)
If we're ever to have our own home, have our own life. We need to grasp the nettle. Make him understand we can't just keep...

Williams reverses carefully down the stairs. He reaches the bottom, lets go the rail.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS ACTION - NIGHT

Williams enters, glances around, reaches for the wall switch.

The room falls into darkness again only lit by the street light.

Williams goes back to the armchair, sits. His posture remains as upright as before, his expression reveals little.

But there are traces of tears in his eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OFFICE - TABLE - DAY

HART
 (looking at watch)
 But he's never late. Something must
 have happened.

Middleton, Hart, Rusbridger, Margaret and Peter sit around
 the table, each behind their towers and name signs.

Williams's seat is empty.

MIDDLETON
 Daughter-in-law said he'd left as
 usual this morning.

HART
 Very odd.

PETER
 I say. Do you think we should, you
 know, alert the police?

MIDDLETON
 Mr Williams is hardly an infant.
 What will the police care that he's
 a couple of hours late for work.

RUSBRIDGER
 'A couple of hours late for work.'
 Who would ever have thought.

HART
 Leaves early yesterday. Late today.
 You don't suppose, you know, that
 he's just had enough. Decided to
 pack it all in.

Beat.

Peter notices Middleton, Hart and Rusbridger have momentarily
 stopped working.

Margaret too notices, exchanges glance with Peter.

MIDDLETON
 (awkward)
 I don't appreciate that suggestion,
 Mr Hart. In fact I find it in
 rather poor taste.

They resume working - signing, stamping, reading.

MARGARET

A pity he should choose today of all days.

RUSBRIDGER

Why's that, Miss Harris?

MARGARET

Because the Lyons Corner House have requested my reference. So I needed Mr Williams to --

MIDDLETON

If it's a reference you're after, Miss Harris, I'd be happy to step in. As Mr Williams's deputy --

HART

Now hold on. He's just a little late, that's all --

MARGARET

Quite. Thank you, Mr Middleton, but I'd prefer to wait for Mr Williams to return.

Middleton knows he's asserted himself too quickly.

MIDDLETON

As you wish, Miss Harris.

Everyone returns to work. Hart sees Middleton turn to Williams's empty seat.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MRS BLAKE'S CAFE - EVENING

English seaside cafe situated on a pier. Booths. Fading light through windows.

The cafe has at present two customers, sitting apart.

For now we focus only on SUTHERLAND, late 40s, at a table near the front. He's writing in an exercise book, having made himself very much at home - loose pages, pens, coffee cup before him.

He wears a good suit, but as though he doesn't care if he ruins it. No tie.

He is addressing the owner, MRS BLAKE, early 50s, aproned, standing near her counter.

SUTHERLAND

Cocoa?! A cup of cocoa? Cocoa, Mrs Blake, will barely scratch the topsoil of the vast mountain that is my sleeplessness. I need strong medicine, Mrs Bee. I need tranquillised against this eternal, hamster's wheel of wakefulness. And you talk to me of cocoa.

Mrs Blake shakes her head, lips tight. She's used to this.

SUTHERLAND (CONT'D)

How can it be that in this colourful and popular resort town of ours, insomniacs converging from every corner of the land, how is it a fellow's not able to buy such a thing as a sleeping tablet?

MRS BLAKE

Oh you don't half go on, Mr Sutherland. If you was really sleeping as little as you says, I don't see how your brain can keep coming out with all these ridiculous phrases. Never mind all of your, well, 'entertainments' shall we call them...

SUTHERLAND

There! That accusatory tone again! That prudery! It creeps back. It is your constant curse, Mrs Blake, as it is mine, to be English.

MRS BLAKE

I'm very proud to be English, I'll have you know.

SUTHERLAND

Consider, I beg you, my last great work. 'Shocking Stockings'. Performed upon this very pier last summer for all of three weeks and two days. Now I very much suspect you have judged it to be smutty and trivial --

MRS BLAKE

You know very well, Mr Sutherland, I never saw it. It's not for me, that kind of thing.

SUTHERLAND

My point exactly. The dramatic vision of your most loyal customer. Devotee of your stubborn fish suppers. Of your ironic apple turnovers. Performed on the very pier to which your own establishment clings. And you shun it. Turn away with a blush. Because you're too English, Mrs Bee. Would it have been that way in Paris? In Pigalle, where, triumphantly disowned by my entire family, I so deliciously misspent my youth? Over there they know what true living is! The night, the wine, the women, the cabaret, the Moulin Rouge. Do you see Picasso, Degas, blushing and frowning upon it the way you do? Who knows, Mrs Blake? Had you been born French, who knows? You might even now be kicking high those lovely legs of yours for the appreciation of a discerning audience --

MRS BLAKE

Mr Sutherland! Really --

SUTHERLAND

This little town of ours, Mrs Blake. English it may be, but I still have high ambitions for it. Bournemouth, Bognor Regis, they're long beyond reach. But here, hope still lingers. Our own version of the can-can francaise may yet sprout from out of the mud of our Knees Up Mother Brown. I look at you even now, Mrs Blake, and I can see you coquettish, with a fur stole --

MRS BLAKE

Mr Sutherland! I will not have any more such talk in my --

SUTHERLAND

I could achieve all this, all this and more for this town if only... If only I could sleep. Sleep. Consider my fate, Mrs Bee. One grandfather a moderately feted poet. Two uncles, both very dreadful novelists.

(MORE)

SUTHERLAND (CONT'D)

Now it falls to me to steer the family line into playwrighting. Shakespeare. Marlowe. I grew up with them. And if only I could sleep at night, I might even now be standing where they once stood. Oh why won't the pharmacists sell sleeping tablets? What are they afraid of?

VOICE (O.S.)

(quietly)

Excuse me.

Sutherland and Mrs Blake turn to the speaker.

The other customer, till now obscured by the booth, is Williams. He is dressed in a noticeably less formal style.

He is raising a finger in the air.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

I don't mean to intrude.

SUTHERLAND

You do not intrude, sir. In fact, you're most welcome to join our conference here.

WILLIAMS

That's most kind. But I wondered. If I might have a word in private with the gentleman.

Sutherland and Mrs Blake swap glances.

MRS BLAKE

(moves to the kitchen)

I don't know. I'll leave you to it. The things that go on.

Sutherland rises, comes down past the empty tables, to Williams's booth.

SUTHERLAND

Well, sir? May I take it you're inviting me aboard?

WILLIAMS

(indicates seat opposite)

If you'd care to.

Sutherland sits, noticing that Williams has left most of his fish and chips untouched.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
Excuse me. I just thought,
overhearing what you were saying...

He's fumbling in his briefcase near his feet. He produces a pharmacist's packet.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
If you like...
(handing over packet)
You're welcome to these.

SUTHERLAND
Very kind of you, old man. Just
what I need.

Williams now takes out three more identical packets and places them on the table between them.

WILLIAMS
These too. You're very welcome.

SUTHERLAND
Rather a lot, old man.

Sutherland and Williams look at each other across table.

Suddenly Sutherland reaches over, takes remaining packets.

SUTHERLAND (CONT'D)
I'm grateful to you. I'll... take
them off your hands.

Williams laughs.

WILLIAMS
I did think about it. But I don't
have it in me. That kind of thing.

SUTHERLAND
Think of the inconvenience to your
landlady.

WILLIAMS
Odd. I thought about exactly that.
(beat)
It's not quite what you think. You
see, this is rather a bore but...
The doctors have given me six
months, eight or nine at a stretch.

Sutherland, despite his customary flippant manner, is a decent person and his concern is genuine.

SUTHERLAND
I'm so sorry.

WILLIAMS

Funny. You're the first person I've told. The thing is, I just came down here and ... Look, you're very welcome to those. I've no more need of them.

SUTHERLAND

...Six months. Nine. It doesn't seem long. But it's something. Enough time to get things in order. And to live a little, if you chose to.

WILLIAMS

When I was listening to you just now. I was wondering how a chap like you, what you'd do. If you only had six months left.

SUTHERLAND

I'm not the man to ask. You're clearly a gentleman, if I may say so. I may pass for one but... I'm not like you at all. These days I'm one of the... misbegotten. I write my saucy seaside farces by day. Do what I can to entertain myself at night.

WILLIAMS

(gestures to the window)
You do that... here?

SUTHERLAND

Oh yes. This time of year, town can rise to some... colour.

Williams looks out of the window, then back at Sutherland.

WILLIAMS

I withdrew some money. Almost half of my life's savings. Look.

Williams struggles to lift up his briefcase.

Sutherland recoils, holds up his hands.

SUTHERLAND

Look, old chap. Enough of that. You have to be more careful.

WILLIAMS

(lowering briefcase)
You see my problem. I withdrew this cash and came down here...

(MORE)

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

to enjoy myself. To live a little,
as you put it.

(laughs self-consciously)

But I realise I don't know how.
Just now, when I was listening to
you talking, I thought, a fellow
like that, it'd be easy for him.
He'd know. Despite all your
complaints... I thought, he
wouldn't find it hard.

(lifts briefcase again)

So I wondered. Of course, you'd be
fully entitled to refuse. But I
wondered, if you weren't busy,
and...

(laughs)

... since you're not a big one for
sleeping, if you'd help me spend
this money. Tonight. Out there.

Sutherland leans back, thinks.

SUTHERLAND

This can be a quite wonderful town
this time of year. What's more, it
has an underbelly elusive to the
average holiday-maker. I'll be
delighted to be your guide. However
there's one condition.

Williams looks at him, waits.

SUTHERLAND (CONT'D)

You don't touch a penny of that
there. You'll find better use for
it. This tour will be on me.

WILLIAMS

But really --

SUTHERLAND

I insist. Those are my terms, sir.
Do say yes.

INT. SEAFRONT AMUSEMENT ARCADE - NIGHT

Glassy, brightly-lit palace of penny arcade games: one-armed
bandits, 'What The Butler Saw', 'Gypsy Fortune Teller', etc

Outside, night has fallen.

Williams, bowler hat on, is bent over a machine. Six Holiday-
makers elsewhere in the arcade.

Sutherland comes INTO VIEW, stands a little way behind Williams.

SUTHERLAND

What have you found, old man?

Williams is too absorbed to reply. We stay on Williams's face: rigid with excited, child-like concentration.

WILLIAMS

(to himself; sotto)

Yes, yes... Just a little more... A little more...

Sutherland smiles, pleased.

A range of emotions rapidly crosses Williams's face, reflecting his changing fortunes.

Then sudden anguish.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

(straightening)

Oh! That's wretched! They must have it fixed! It's... some sort of optical illusion!

Williams starts to put more coins in.

SUTHERLAND

(stops him)

Give that up, old man. Come and look at this. You might have more luck.

Williams is reluctantly led away by Sutherland. He throws resentful glances back at the machine.

They cross the arcade and come to:

A CRANE GAME

(A glass cabinet houses a pile of small prizes. A miniature crane dangles over prizes. The aim is to pick up the prize of one's choice and to drop it into the chute mouth for collection.)

Williams peers into the cabinet at the prizes: The crane's jaws hang over boxes of sweet cigarettes, small plastic toys, trinkets.

The star prize is a fluffy toy rabbit, larger and brighter than everything else.

Sutherland is pleased to see Williams freshly absorbed.

SUTHERLAND (CONT'D)
 Always that same rabbit! It's what
 one wants. But can't quite get.

Williams stares at the rabbit. The rabbit stares back.

SUTHERLAND (CONT'D)
 Go on, old man. Have a go. I'm sick
 of trying.

Williams looks at Sutherland, who has suddenly become
 melancholy.

Williams turns back to the machine, puts in two coins.

The cabinet lights up. TINNY MUSIC starts.

Williams takes the handles, starts to manipulate the crane,
 concentrating hard, closing in on the rabbit.

Sutherland notices Williams's serious attitude.

SUTHERLAND (CONT'D)
 (murmuring)
 You're doing well. Doing well.

Williams slowly lowers jaws of crane over the rabbit.
 Adjusts, lowers again. The jaws open wider.

SUTHERLAND (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 You'll have to hurry, old man.

Suddenly the MUSIC and lights cut out. The crane becomes
 still, hovering over the rabbit.

WILLIAMS
 I... I wasn't quick enough.

Williams is inordinately disappointed. Sutherland claps him
 on the back.

SUTHERLAND
 Enough of this, old man. Let's go.
 Time to see more.

WILLIAMS
 Next time I have to --

SUTHERLAND
 Come on!

INT. PUB (1) - NIGHT

Crowded Saloon bar. Williams and Sutherland drinking on high
 stools at bar, watching revellers.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Williams, still with bowler hat, and Sutherland push their way through a back alley crowded with Local Young Men, Servicemen, Young Women, passing lit doorways and windows from which come competing MUSIC.

Williams is now quite unlike the man from County Hall, amazed by what he is seeing and feeling.

He stops, looks around him. Sutherland takes his arm to keep him moving.

GIRL'S VOICE (O.S.)
Hey! Hey you there! Mr City Gent!

Williams breaks away from Sutherland to look back.

A gaudily dressed GIRL emerges from the crowd, snatches Williams's bowler hat from his head, retreats laughing into the crowd.

Williams, bewildered, starts to go after the Girl.

Sutherland pulls him back.

SUTHERLAND
Let it go, old man. Girl like that
steals your hat, always cheaper to
buy a new one!

WILLIAMS
But --

SUTHERLAND
We'll get you a new one. It can
mark the new phase of your life.
Out with the old!

WILLIAMS
(waving arms in air)
Yes! Out with the old! In with --

Williams staggers into an Oncomer.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
Oh... Excuse me, excuse me.

Sutherland supports Williams till he regains balance.

SUTHERLAND
That's what we need. A new hat. For
a new era.

WILLIAMS

Where on earth... can a chap...
find a new hat at this time of
night?

INT. PUB (2) - NIGHT

Through a busy bar crowd we find Williams and Sutherland leaning against a back wall, talking, now noticeably drunk.

Around them, boisterous holiday revellers wash by in search of drink and laughter.

A Drunken Man comes to take a seat next to them. Sutherland finds Williams's gaze drift toward the man's impressive fedora hat.

INT. PUB (2) - NIGHT

According to licensing laws, this pub should be closed. But it has closed only its curtains and become a 'private club'.

Around 20 CUSTOMERS, middle-aged, sit or stand around the piano singing popular songs. Two Couples dance half-heartedly, slowly, in the middle of the floor.

The SINGING is led by the PIANO MAN, who also ACCOMPANIES.

Williams and Sutherland sit at the bar. They are very drunk.

Williams has on the fedora we last saw on the Drunken Man.

SUTHERLAND

A bargain, I tell you.

WILLIAMS

He'd have gone down to half a crown. I'm sure of it.

SUTHERLAND

Half a crown. It's a quality hat. A bargain.

(to BARMAN behind bar)

Harry. This here is my friend, Mr Rodney Williams of Esher, Surrey. Would you know it? This man before you now is grievously ill.

BARMAN

What's the matter with him?

SUTHERLAND

Stomach. A death sentence.

BARMAN

Then why's he drinking?

SUTHERLAND

Why indeed? Another man, a lesser man, might crawl into a hole and weep. Await his hour with gloom and dread. Not Mr Williams. He has decided to grasp life, what little of it remains to him. We have to admire him for it. Don't you admire him, Harry?

Williams is sitting with eyes closed, swaying lightly to the singing behind him. His lips move along to the song.

BARMAN

If he's not well, this ain't good for him.

SUTHERLAND

Harry. You don't understand. This man, who until yesterday had been living a shell of an existence, has sprung to life. Look! He even has a new hat!

BARMAN

(regards hat)

One size too large, I'd say.

APPLAUSE, LAUGHS and CHEERS as the song at the piano closes.

PIANO MAN

All right! All right! Come on.
What's to be next? What else do we know? Let's have someone new.
What's next?

Williams opens his eyes, turns, raises a hand.

WILLIAMS

Yes. Yes. I have a song.

PIANO MAN

Ah! And what might you offer us, sir?

Williams gets off his stool unsteadily, leans against bar, faces the room.

WILLIAMS

I... I have a little Scotch on my mother's side --

VOICE (O.S.)
Looks like you've got a little
Scotch in you right now, mate!

LAUGHTER. Williams smiles, waves for quiet.

WILLIAMS
You're right! I'm somewhat... Even
so, I'd like to sing a song for you
if I may. That is, sir... sir...
(to Piano Man)
If you happen to know The Rowan
Tree.

PIANO MAN
(searching memory)
The Rowan Tree. Old Scottish song.

WILLIAMS
Yes. I have a little Scotch in me.
And my late wife. She too...

Piano Man plays a run, starts on an arrangement.

None of the Customers around the piano know this song, but
Piano Man does.

PIANO MAN
(singing)
'Oh Rowan Tree, oh Rowan Tree,
Thou'lt aye be dear to me,
Entwined thou art wi' mony ties
O' hame and infancy...'

Williams joins in, quietly at first, then with growing
confidence. Not a great singer, but he has a heart-felt
quality that captures the attention. His gaze remains distant
as he sings.

After a few lines, Piano Man leaves the singing to Williams,
carries on accompanying.

WILLIAMS
(singing)
'... Thy leaves were aye the first
o' spring,
Thy flow'rs the summer's pride,
There was nae such a bonny tree
In a' the countryside.'

The Customers, Sutherland, Barman sense Williams's
melancholy, watch and listen silently.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

(singing)

'How fair wert thou in summer time,
 wi' a' thy clusters white,
 How rich and gay thy autumn dress,
 wi' berries red and bright.
 On thy fair stem were many names,
 which now nae mair I see,
 But they're engraven on my heart,
 Forgot they ne'er can be.

We sat aneath thy spreading shade,
 The bairnies round thee ran,
 They pu'd thy bonny berries red,
 And necklaces they strang.
 My mother, oh I see her still ... '

Williams trails off, stops singing. Piano Man goes on playing.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. This is too... I didn't mean to...

Piano Man stops playing. Hesitant APPLAUSE around the room.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

I'm spoiling your evening.

Sutherland rises, puts arm around Williams's shoulders.

SUTHERLAND

Come along, old man. I'll show you... another place I know. Come on, chin up. You're doing well.

Piano Man starts up an UP-TEMPO SONG. The Customers immediately start to sing along.

Williams and Sutherland leave.

INT. PIANO BAR - REAR STAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Sutherland and Williams come through a set of doors. Before them, stairs leading down to a back exit. PIANO and SINGING remain faintly audible.

Williams pauses at top stair, hurls fist in the air - a triumphant but oddly empty gesture. As he does so, he almost falls down the steps, but Sutherland steadies him in time.

SUTHERLAND

Come along, old chap. Let me now show you something really special. Strictly VIPs only.

They descend steps together, leave through doorway.

EXT. TENT - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

A large tent, illuminated from within, on the edge of a field near an unseen fairground.

A powerful light, somewhere nearby, is going on and off rhythmically.

From within the tent: MUFFLED SOUND of a BOISTEROUS CROWD SINGING 'Roll Out The Barrel', backed by ACCORDION, DRUMS and TRUMPET.

INT. TENT - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC and SINGING now much louder.

The tent's interior feels stifling: sagging canvas 'ceilings', garish lighting, closely packed benches and wooden chairs arranged in rows across the trodden grass floor.

An audience of twenty Men, and twelve Hostesses distributed among them, swaying and singing. Everyone appears to be drunk.

All gazes remain fixed on the make-shift stage where:

A Dancer, in a bizarre military costume, is performing a striptease.

The SINGING builds in momentum, to egg on the Dancer.

An Accordionist, Drummer and Trumpeter RAMP UP THE MUSIC'S TEMPO.

APPLAUSE and CHEERS as the Dancer discards an item of clothing.

In the midst of the audience: Williams, seated arm in arm with Hostess 1. Beside them, Sutherland, arm in arm with Hostess 2.

Both are now very drunk, and in danger of falling asleep.

Hostess 1 gives Williams a shake. Williams makes an effort to focus on the Dancer.

Sutherland's eyes are closing, but he forces them open, looks at stage, smiles as: More APPLAUSE and CHEERS greet another gesture from the Dancer.

SINGING continues boisterously.

Hostess 1 mouths the words to the song, encourages Williams to join in. Williams starts to sing along.

Suddenly he stops, his expression freezing as a stab of internal pain assaults him.

For a beat, he remains frozen in an unnatural posture while Hostess 1, continues to sing, an arm inside Williams's arm.

Williams pulls away from her, rises. Stumbles past Men and Hostesses in his row, towards the flap in the tent's rear, with the urgency of one about to vomit.

Sutherland, noticing, disentangles himself from Hostess 2, goes down row, reaches flap. Nods to Doorman as he goes out.

EXT. FIELD OUTSIDE TENT - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Dark no-man's land between fringe tents and the main fairground. Sutherland emerges, looks around:

The powerful light from nearby, as before, going on and off rhythmically, illuminating erratically the patch of field immediately before him. Beyond that is darkness.

Beat.

Williams emerges from the dark into the erratic light. He has lost his urgency. He dabs his mouth with a handkerchief, looks up, sees Sutherland, stops.

They stare at each other, now both strangely sober. Williams appears as if caught in the act of doing something shameful. He touches his handkerchief to his mouth again.

Sutherland's expression filled with pity and horror, as if the full import of William's condition - indeed, of Death itself - has only now dawned on him.

They continue to stare at each other. SINGING and MUSIC continue from the tent.

Williams smiles sheepishly, gives a small nod towards the tent, indicating he's ready to return.

He dabs his mouth again, puts away handkerchief, approaches. Sutherland continues to stare at him in horror, allows Williams to pass.

INT. TENT - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC and SINGING louder than ever. Everyone is swaying, singing at full throttle.

We don't see the stage, but the fixed stares of the Men and the Hostesses tell us the act has progressed to some new level.

Williams and Sutherland come in past the Doorman, head towards their old seats, both within a bubble of solemnity.

They squeeze down their row, past irritated Men.

Hostess 1 and Hostess 2 still mouthing the words of the song, partly out of duty, partly from a wish to numb themselves as Williams and Sutherland regain their seats:

Hostess 1 and Hostess 2 take their arms automatically, not without affection. They don't notice Williams's and Sutherland's changed mood.

The SINGING now feels overwhelming. The crowd press in on Williams and Sutherland, jostling them.

But none of the gaiety penetrates Williams's or Sutherland's bubble - Williams sits with eyes gazing into space.

Sutherland still stares at Williams. He suddenly becomes freshly aware of their surroundings, looks around at it with a kind of terror.

Then looks again at Williams.

Williams is far away, oblivious to everything around him.

We MOVE OUT steadily to see Williams and Sutherland within the audience, isolated in their melancholy, like men on a small boat tossed by wild waves.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PICCADILLY AREA - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Bright summer sunshine. Late morning. Double-decker buses, well-heeled pedestrians.

EXT. STREET IN PICCADILLY - DAY

Williams, looking without interest into the window of a smart men's shoe shop. He's wearing his new hat.

He moves along, aimlessly. A VOICE calls out to him.

MARGARET (O.S.)
Mr Williams... Mr Williams?

Williams turns slowly. Margaret arrives at his side.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Mr Williams. It is you! For a moment then, I was quite thrown. I mean, by your...

(looks him up and down)

... by your new hat!

WILLIAMS

Ah yes. I lost my old one.

MARGARET

It's jolly nice. But I do wonder what they'll make of it at the office.

WILLIAMS

I wonder.

(suddenly smiles)

What would be your guess, Miss Harris? Will my new hat... go down a storm there?

MARGARET

Noah himself couldn't get something to go down a storm with that lot! Oh, I shouldn't be unkind. Anyway, I don't have to worry about them any more. Because I have a new job.

WILLIAMS

Oh yes?

MARGARET

That's why I'm so pleased to see you. Oh! I mean, that's not the only reason. I'm pleased you're well and going about your business. Because when you didn't come in yesterday and the day before...

WILLIAMS

Yes. I have rather gone to ground. But you see, I had other... Well, never mind. Tell me more about your new job, Miss Harris.

MARGARET

You know about it, Mr Williams. The position with Lyons Corner House. It's a branch just round the corner from here. An assistant manager's role, at least once I get into the swing of it. I'm so excited! There'll be so many more people, so much more air! Oh. I didn't mean --

WILLIAMS

Quite all right. County Hall isn't for everyone.

They start to walk.

MARGARET

Mr Williams, I am glad I ran into you! I'll be honest. I have the job, but, well, it's subject to the reference. And because you were away...

WILLIAMS

Ah, I see I might have inconvenienced you. Surely Mr Middleton could have --

MARGARET

We all think you have to write the reference. So I've been dying for you to come back. You won't write a mean one, will you?

WILLIAMS

(smiling)

I wouldn't dream of it, Miss Harris. But this is a little awkward. I hadn't intended to return to the office quite yet.

MARGARET

Oh that's no problem. I have the form here with me.

(raises handbag)

I've been walking about with it.

WILLIAMS

Then perhaps I could just sign it here and you can fill it in how you wish.

MARGARET

Mr Williams! This might be a joke to you. But I do need my reference. It's required.

They stop on the pavement. Williams considers.

WILLIAMS

Very well. This is what I propose, Miss Harris. I was just thinking of treating myself to a light lunch at Fortnum's. If you'd care to join me, I could write your reference over lunch.

MARGARET

Fortnum's? Really? Are you sure?

WILLIAMS

Why not? It might make up for the inconvenience I've caused you.

MARGARET

But that's so kind, Mr Williams. Fortnum's! Is it this way?

WILLIAMS

Fortnum's is this way.

INT. FORTNUM AND MASON - SECOND FLOOR CAFE - DAY

Sun-filled room within the famous store.

Williams and Margaret have a table overlooking Piccadilly. A Waiter is clearing away dishes from their lunch.

Williams is writing on an official form.

MARGARET

You know, Mr Williams. When I see you like this, bowed over your paperwork, I suddenly remember you're the same person after all. The one at the head of our desk, every morning, every afternoon, for the last sixteen months of my life. But I realise today, you're not like that really.

Williams looks up from his document.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

What I mean is. There's much more to you. Fortnum's! And your new hat!

Williams smiles, touches the hat on the seat beside him.

WILLIAMS

Now now. I won't write a more favourable reference just because you say things like that.

MARGARET

Oh, I'm not trying to butter you up, Mr Williams. I just had you wrong, that's all. I'd never seen you outside of that building. So I never suspected you could be so...

WILLIAMS
 (writing)
 Go on, Miss Harris.

MARGARET
 (apologetic)
 Well... so alive.

WILLIAMS
 (looks up)
 Alive?

Beat.

MARGARET
 Mr Williams. If you promise, I mean really truly promise you won't get angry. I'll tell you my secret nickname for you.

WILLIAMS
 Very well. I promise.

MARGARET
 Now remember. You're really not to get cross. And it's not just you. I have nicknames for everyone. No-one knows them except me and Rosemary. My cousin with whom I share rooms.

WILLIAMS
 I see.

MARGARET
 For instance. Mr Rusbridger's secret name is The Reverend. Because he's always opening his hands like this.
 (imitates)
 Like he's addressing his congregation.

Williams consider this, nods.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
 And Mr Hart. I call him Saint George. Because he looks like he's expecting to see a dragon any moment.

She pulls a face to impersonate. It does resemble Hart.

Williams bursts out laughing. He turns to the window, goes on laughing. Margaret, pleased, laughs and laughs.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

All right. This time, I'll give you the nickname. And you guess who it is. It's someone on the fourth floor. Julius Caesar. Who do you think that is?

WILLIAMS

Julius Caesar. I suppose that would be Mr Brown, in accounts?

MARGARET

Correct!

They both laugh.

They're interrupted by the arrival of the Waiter.

WAITER

Excuse me. May I get you something else? A dessert? Something from our sweets trolley?

WILLIAMS

Not for me. But perhaps the young lady might --

MARGARET

Oh yes please! I've always wanted one of those ice cream sundaes!

WAITER

A Knickerbocker Glory, miss?

MARGARET

Oh yes! With fruit and nuts. Yes, please!

Waiter nods, leaves.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Oh, are you sure this is all right?

WILLIAMS

Of course. But Miss Harris. You haven't come round to the main point. You were going to tell me your name for me.

The smile leaves Margaret's face.

MARGARET

Well. It's a silly name really. Perhaps I shan't tell you after all.

WILLIAMS

Oh no. You've come this far. You have to tell me.

Margaret has become very tense.

MARGARET

All right. But remember your promise. Not to get angry.

(beat)

Mr Zombie.

WILLIAMS

(puzzled)

Mr what?

MARGARET

Mr Zombie. There was a film about it with, oh, what's her name. A zombie's rather like an Egyptian mummy. Except it can walk around, go about doing things. They're sort of dead and not dead. They say they really have them in the West Indies, though I don't suppose that's true.

Beat.

WILLIAMS

Mr Zombie. My, my.

Margaret is close to tears.

MARGARET

I'm so sorry. It's wicked of me.

Williams reaches over, touches her arm.

WILLIAMS

Miss Harris, you mustn't get upset.

Mr Zombie.

(breaks into smile)

It's rather good. In fact it's quite appropriate. I like it. Mr Zombie. An Egyptian mummy except... I can walk about!

Williams bursts out laughing. Margaret, relieved, laughs too.

The Waiter returns.

WAITER

Your Knickerbocker Glory, miss.

Margaret is delighted.

MARGARET

Oh thank you!

Williams shakes his head, laughs again.

WILLIAMS

Mr Zombie.

Williams and Margaret both laugh.

Across the room, waiting to be seated:

Miss Fry, watching Williams and Margaret laughing together.

She is holding her small dog (same as before) in her arms, its face close to hers.

She stares - scandalised, excited. As Waiter approaches, she pivots primly, walks away.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STREET IN PICCADILLY - DAY

Sunshine. Double-decker buses. Taxis. Pedestrians.

Williams and Margaret walking.

MARGARET

Oh Mr Williams, I so wish you could see where I'm going to work. It's just around the corner. But... Oh no, look at the time!

(laughs)

I was just about to say 'Mr Williams will be furious.' I'd better hurry just the same.

Williams stops walking. Margaret does too.

WILLIAMS

It's a splendid day. And I'd like to see your Lyons Corner House. Miss Harris, why don't you take the afternoon off?

MARGARET

I can't do that, Mr Williams!

WILLIAMS

Why not? You've handed in your notice. You have your glowing reference. Why not enjoy the rest of your day?

MARGARET

Mr Williams. Earlier I didn't wish to be... Well, I'll ask it now. Is that what you've been doing? I mean, skiving off? People thought you must be ill or something. But obviously you're not.

WILLIAMS

Look, here's my proposal. Why don't you and I 'skive off' together? What difference would our absences for an afternoon make to anything?

MARGARET

It is very tempting. Very tempting... But it does seem very... daring. What would we do?

SERIES OF SHOTS

(A) Williams and Margaret walking across the main entrance hall of an art gallery, gazing at rows of paintings. Margaret stops, pointing at a picture, says something. Williams comes to stand beside her, considers picture.

(B) Williams and Margaret walking along path through St James Park. She is entertaining him with another office anecdote.

(C) Williams and Margaret pass a large poster advertising I WAS A MALE WAR BRIDE with Cary Grant's face looming down.

INT. OFFICE - TABLE - LATE AFTERNOON

Peter, Middleton, Hart, Rusbridger at their usual places around the table.

The name plates 'MR WILLIAMS' and 'MISS HARRIS' mark vacant places.

Peter looks glumly across at the 'MISS HARRIS' sign, lost in thought. Rusbridger notices.

HART

One could easily find out her new place of employment, Mr Wakeling.

Hart and Rusbridger laugh quietly, not looking up. Peter smiles. But he's not pleased.

PETER

It's rather bad form really. Even if she is leaving. I wouldn't have expected it of her.

HART

I dare say she'll pop back Monday.
 (to Rusbridger)
 Well we know it's a Lyons Corner
 House. Narrows it down. If Mr
 Wakeling really wants to --

PETER

I don't want to! You're all getting
 quite the wrong end of the stick!

RUSBRIDGER

Mr Middleton. As Acting Head,
 wouldn't you be able simply to look
 it up?

MIDDLETON

That would be highly irregular, Mr
 Rusbridger.

RUSBRIDGER

What, even if there may be far more
 than curiosity at stake here?

PETER

(now seriously annoyed)
 Look, really! I do wish Mr Williams
 would come back. Things might go
 back to being more orderly around
 here.

EXT. WATERLOO STATION - APPROACH - DAY

Williams and Margaret have stopped on the pavement. People
 hurry past them and into the station, the evening rush not
 yet in full flow.

WILLIAMS

(consulting watch)
 I'd better be on the 4.56. Or else
 I'll find myself sharing the same
 train as our dear colleagues.

MARGARET

That would be awkward.

They exchange a smile. But Margaret now looks guilty.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

I do wonder if we haven't been...
 very wicked.

WILLIAMS

You've no need to worry about that
 any more, Miss Harris.
 (MORE)

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

You just keep your mind on your
Lyons Corner House.

MARGARET

I will. But I was thinking about
you.

WILLIAMS

Oh, don't worry about me. I had a
wonderful afternoon.

MARGARET

(smiling)

So did I. Thank you for treating
me. I do hope it hasn't been
terribly expensive and you don't
awfully regret it when you get
home.

WILLIAMS

I'll make a promise now that I
won't. Miss Harris. I did wish to
saying something to you...

(beat)

Your time with us. It might not
always have been so exciting. But I
hope you won't judge them too
harshly. Judge us, I should say. We
do what we can.

MARGARET

Yes, of course. I never meant --

WILLIAMS

Look at the crowd here.

(indicates)

Came through the war, so much still
to rebuild, so many dreams.
Sometimes it can get too much. Too
much to place on the shoulders of
ordinary decent chaps like those up
in that office.

MARGARET

Yes... I shan't think wickedly
about them any more.

WILLIAMS

Well, Miss Harris. Goodbye.

MARGARET

Goodbye, Mr Williams.

Williams goes into the crowd. Margaret watches, concern on her face.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STREET IN WILLIAMS' SUBURB - EVENING

Fiona, carrying a bag of groceries, and Miss Fry, dog in tow, conversing on the pavement.

Miss Fry is leaning forward, speaking with urgent intimacy, fervent with moral outrage.

Fiona, uncomfortable, takes a step back but Miss Fry immediately takes a compensatory step forward.

A Commuter approaches along the pavement. Miss Fry falls into a meaningful silence, waits for him to pass then leans forward again, continues speaking intently. Fiona shakes her head as though bewildered.

INT. WILLIAMS' FAMILY HOUSE - DINING ROOM/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Michael standing in the middle of the dining room. He is upset, looking towards the kitchen doorway - through which we see:

Fiona, in an apron, moving about busily.

Behind Michael, the table set for the evening meal.

MICHAEL
 (forcing voice down
 despite emotion)
 The woman is a public nuisance. A
 prize mischief maker...

Fiona brushes past him, places dish on the table, throws Michael a curt look.

Michael shakes his head in exasperation.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 Nothing she likes better than --

Fiona spins round, finger to lips, gestures with her head toward the open door to the hall.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
 (lowering voice)
 Look. Are we really supposed to
 believe --

FIONA

(sotto)

You have to speak to him. If people are talking about this here...

INT. WILLIAMS'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Modest, tidy bedroom. Single bed.

Williams standing before his wardrobe mirror, dressed in his 'at home' attire: V-neck pullover, shirt and tie, studies his reflection, adjusts his tie.

His hands become still around his tie knot.

WILLIAMS

(sotto, as if rehearsing)

Look here.

(beat)

Look here. There's something I'd like to share with you both.

(beat)

Bit of a bore, but...

Williams goes on staring silently at his reflection.

INT. WILLIAMS' FAMILY HOUSE - DINING ROOM/KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Michael, as before in centre of room, looks more upset than ever.

He can now barely keep down his voice. He's addressing Fiona through doorway to the kitchen.

MICHAEL

It's outrageous! At his age!

(beat)

And as for this... this girl.

Barely a woman. Certainly not a lady --

Fiona, emerging from kitchen, pushes past with another pot, gestures warningly upstairs with her eyes.

FIONA

(sotto)

It does all fit. The calls from his office. The savings. You simply must speak to him. You should have done so long ago. About everything.

MICHAEL

(sotto)

I'll speak to him all right! With
pleasure I'll speak to him!

INT. WILLIAMS'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Williams adjusts tie one last time.

WILLIAMS

(barely audible, to the
mirror)

Look here. Bit of a bore but...

With sudden resolve, he moves to the door, goes out.

Through the open doorway, we see him start his descent down
the staircase.

INT. WILLIAMS' FAMILY HOUSE - DINING ROOM/KITCHEN -
CONTINUOUS

Michael now sitting at the table, apparently absorbed in a
newspaper.

FOOTSTEPS.

Michael braces himself, raises newspaper till it hides most
of his face.

Fiona comes to the kitchen doorway, waits.

Williams enters.

FIONA

(nonchalantly)

Oh here you are, Father.

She retreats into the kitchen OUT OF VIEW. Williams looks
around, looks at Michael hidden behind the newspaper. He
sits.

Beat.

Fiona comes in with a dish, places it at centre of the table.

WILLIAMS

Ah. Smells wonderful.

FIONA

I do hope you'll enjoy it.

She throws a sharp glance at Michael.

Williams notices this. Michael remains behind the newspaper.

Fiona returns to kitchen.

Beat.

MICHAEL

(nonchalant, from behind
paper)

Fancy. Alf Jordan's sprained his
ankle while on holiday. Unlikely to
be fit for the start of the season.

WILLIAMS

Oh dear. How unfortunate.

(beat)

Look here. Bit of a bore but...

He trails off.

WILLIAMS watches Michael, unresponsive behind his newspaper.

Fiona, now without apron, comes in holding a gravy boat,
places it on table, sits.

She throws another sharp glance at Michael.

FIONA

Darling. This is hardly the time to
be reading.

Michael lowers the paper, looks around feigning distraction.

MICHAEL

Oh sorry. Are we ready?

FIONA

Of course we're ready. Ready as
we'll ever be.

Williams looks from Fiona to Michael, shakes head in fatherly
fashion.

WILLIAMS

(believing he's
peacemaking)

Shepherd's Pie?

FIONA

Yes. And decent mince too.

WILLIAMS

How splendid.

Fiona takes Williams's plate, serves food, places it back in
front of him.

Williams gazes at it, his thoughts now far away, realising he will not bring up anything significant at this present moment - defeat.

FIONA
You might look a little more grateful, Father.

WILLIAMS
What? Oh, excuse me. Miles away.

Fiona serves Michael, staring daggers at him. But she too knows now the moment has passed and Michael won't say anything.

MICHAEL
Thank you, darling.

Fiona's frustration boils over.

FIONA
(shockingly loud)
There was a time - when what one did in London - stayed in London. But these days - half of this street works in London!

She glares in turn from Michael to Williams back to Michael.

Michael looks down at his food.

Williams, still believing his role is solely that of peacemaker, nods wisely.

WILLIAMS
That's right, my dear.
(to Michael)
She has a point, you know.
(beat)
Half the street.

Fiona calms herself, serves own plate.

Beat.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
(eating)
This is really quite splendid.

MICHAEL
Yes, darling. Delicious.

They continue eating quietly.

INT. OFFICE - TABLE - DAY

Peter, Middleton, Hart, Rusbridger at their usual places around the table, working with bored diligence.

MOVE TO: Williams's empty seat.

We then MOVE TO a Calendar on the wall behind Williams's seat. It features a bright illustration with 'JULY' above it.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OFFICE - TABLE / BARRIER RAIL - A MONTH LATER - DAY

The Calendar: new illustration - 'AUGUST'. The light on the wall has changed.

PULL BACK to reveal: 'MR WILLIAMS' sign still marking a vacant place.

The 'MISS HARRIS' sign has been replaced by 'MRS JOHNSTONE'. Behind the sign sits working Mrs Johnstone, a handsome, stern-faced lady in her 40s.

Middleton, Hart, Rusbridger still working in their usual places. Peter is not with them.

INT. COUNTY HALL NORTH BLOCK - STAIRCASE - DAY

Peter, holding a folder, purposefully striding up the stairs. His face lights up with recognition at:

Mrs Smith, Mrs McMasters and Mrs Porter descending the staircase towards him.

PETER

Ladies! How lovely to see you!

They all pause on the stairs.

MRS SMITH

How do you do, Mr Wakeling.

PETER

And are you all well? Had a trifle more luck today perhaps?

Mrs Smith stares at him blankly.

MRS MCMASTERS

Another blimming day going all over this building. Like we had no husbands or kiddies to see to.

(MORE)

MRS MCMASTERS (CONT'D)

Downright disgrace, if you ask me,
the way they treat us.

PETER

Oh dear. I'm so sorry. I really
thought that by now --

MRS SMITH

(quietly explosive)

We want someone, sir. We don't care
who. We want someone to take
charge.

PETER

(rocked back)

Oh! But really. You must
appreciate, Mrs Smith. The way
these things work, it's never quite
so simple as one would...

He trails off, conscious of the hollowness of his words.

Beat.

MRS SMITH

We wish you a pleasant afternoon,
Mr Wakeling. It was nice to see you
again.

She leads Mrs McMasters and Mrs Porter down the staircase.

Peter remains frozen where he's standing, gazing after them,
disappointed by his own response to the encounter.

Then he starts up the stairs again, thoughtful.

EXT. ST JAMES PARK - DAY

Sunshine. Quiet. Williams sits alone on a bench, gazing at
surroundings.

To a casual observer he may look carefree. But we can see
that his tranquillity is willed.

A sudden stab of physical pain. He grimaces, stiffens.

With effort, he reimposes his 'relaxed' posture. But now his
expression betrays troubled preoccupation.

Annoyed with his intruding thoughts, he rises, looks around
for something to distract him.

His gaze finds nothing.

He takes a deep breath, as if it will bring him fresh resolve. Walks away from the bench purposefully.

INT. LYONS CORNER HOUSE - DAY

A large, smart Art Deco room offering food, tea and sanctuary to white-collar workers and genteel middle-class customers at 'reasonable' prices. Potted palms. Chamber orchestra.

Late afternoon. The place is busy.

Margaret, in waitress uniform, hurries between tables. She appears to be in danger of being overwhelmed.

As she hurries past a table:

PRIM LADY

Miss! Miss! This sausage roll is cold.

MARGARET

I'm so sorry. Shall I bring you --

PERSISTENT MAN

Miss? Miss!

MARGARET

(turning to his table)
One moment, sir. I'm sorry.

PRIM LADY

New here, aren't you? Not quite found your feet yet.

MARGARET

Would you care for something else, madam? Some more tea?

PRIM LADY

I shall think about it. Then I shall let you know.

Something catches Margaret's eye across the room:

Williams queuing behind two other Customers at the 'PLEASE WAIT TO BE SEATED' notice at the front. He is searching the room with his gaze.

Concern crosses Margaret's face.

PERSISTENT MAN

Miss? Miss!

PRIM LADY

Don't worry, my dear. I've seen a lot of girls come and go. I can tell you'll do fine here. Trust me.

But Margaret is preoccupied:

Williams has now spotted her. He waves. Margaret smiles, but shakes head slowly at him disapprovingly.

PERSISTENT MAN

Miss?

MARGARET

Yes, sir.

INT. LYONS CORNER HOUSE - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

HEAD WAITER leading Williams across the room to his table.

As he sits down, Williams is saying something, pointing towards Margaret on the other side of the room.

Head Waiter's gaze falls on Margaret. He signals for her to come over to Williams's table.

Margaret begins to cross the room while the Head Waiter, having left Williams, comes towards her. As they cross:

HEAD WAITER

Make it snappy, please. It's getting very busy.

MARGARET

Yes, Mr Adams.

Margaret approaches Williams's table.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Mr Williams. You're skiving again. I'm disappointed.

WILLIAMS

And Miss Harris. I'm disappointed to find you, well into your third week here, still working as a waitress. It was an assistant manager's post you accepted?

MARGARET

I hope to be given greater responsibilities... in good time.

WILLIAMS

If you wish, I might have a word
with your --

MARGARET

That won't be necessary, thank you.
And I am disappointed to find you
haven't returned to the office. You
did say, last time, that you would.

WILLIAMS

As it happens, I was just now
thinking about that. After all,
it's not as though I've discovered
a wealth of other ways to --

MARGARET

(looking over shoulder)
Oh look, I'm sorry. It's so very
busy--

WILLIAMS

Of course. I'll let you go. But I
did wonder when your present shift
ended.

MARGARET

And why would you mind about that,
Mr Williams?

WILLIAMS

Why? Well, for one thing, because
they're showing 'I Was A Male War
Bride' at the pictures. It has Cary
Grant in it. I wondered if you'd
care to come along.

MARGARET

Mr Williams, I refuse to encourage
you any further with this skiving.
We did say last Tuesday that would
be the last time. You really must
return to the office. What must
they all be thinking there?

WILLIAMS

Ah but today is my pictures day.
And I was merely... wishing for a
companion. Oh well.
(smiles charmingly)
Cary Grant, Miss Harris. I
understood you're quite fond of
him.

Margaret goes on looking at him. Then smiles.

INT. CINEMA - DAY

Williams and Margaret watching the screen. A nearly full house. We hear SOUND from 'I WAS A MALE WAR BRIDE'.

A FUNNY LINE OF DIALOGUE makes Williams, Margaret, the Audience Members all laugh loudly together.

Margaret, enjoying herself, keeps watching, poised to laugh again.

But now a change comes over Williams's face. His gaze remains on the screen, but his thoughts have gone elsewhere.

Another FUNNY LINE.

Margaret, Audience Members, laugh loudly.

Williams doesn't laugh, his gaze now melancholy. Margaret doesn't notice.

A third FUNNY LINE.

Margaret laughs, but this time notices Williams isn't laughing, looks at him with concern.

Williams keeps staring at the screen, thoughts far away.

EXT. LONDON WEST END - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

Theatres, lights, lit doorways.

INT. WEST END AMUSEMENT ARCADE - NIGHT

Garish lights. One-armed bandits, other machines. Reminiscent of the seaside arcade, but the atmosphere here lacks the seafront's innocence. Several Customers in the background, each solitary, verge on the sleazy.

Williams is bending over a machine that we do not see yet. We hear its TINNY MUSIC.

Margaret comes INTO VIEW behind him. She glances at Williams, then looks uncomfortably around at their surroundings.

MARGARET

Mr Williams. It's time I was going home. My cousin will be getting concerned.

WILLIAMS

(concentrating)
Yes, of course. But look at this.

(MORE)

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

It may seem easy. But I assure you
it isn't.

Margaret, without enthusiasm, looks over his shoulder.

CLOSE SHOT - CRANE GAME CABINET: A heap of small prizes. The
star prize a fluffy white toy rabbit.

The crane hovers over the rabbit, comes lower, clutches it.

But when Williams raises the crane, the rabbit slips out,
drops back onto the heap of prizes.

The light in the cabinet cuts out. TINNY MUSIC STOPS.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

(straightening)

Oh! It's so difficult!

MARGARET

Mr Williams, I really must --

WILLIAMS

Of course. But before you go, Miss
Harris, wouldn't you like to have a
try yourself? I have this feeling,
you see, that you'd be rather good
at this. We're after that rabbit.
It's what everyone wants.

Margaret hesitates, looks uneasily again around the arcade.

MARGARET

Very well. Just the once. Then I
must be going.

WILLIAMS

Jolly good. Now. You have to take a
good proper grip on these --

MARGARET

I can see what to do, thank you.

Margaret takes the controls without enthusiasm. Williams puts
in coins.

TINNY MUSIC STARTS. The cabinet lights up again.

CLOSE SHOT: Margaret manipulates the crane till it is
hovering over the rabbit.

WILLIAMS (O.S.)

I did warn you, Miss Harris. It's
not nearly as...

He trails off because Margaret has successfully caught the rabbit in the crane's jaws.

WILLIAMS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I say.

The crane picks up the rabbit, raises it off the heap.

WILLIAMS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Now be very careful. And hurry,
Miss Harris. They don't give you
long...

The crane holds the rabbit, swings it over to the mouth of the chute, drops it. A HOOTING SOUND to signal a win.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

(too loud)

Well done! Well done, Miss Harris.
I might have known it. I might have
known you could do it!

Margaret looks around self-consciously. Other Customers glance towards them, return to their own games.

Margaret extracts rabbit from the hatch, looks at it. For the first time she looks gleeful.

MARGARET

Oh! It's rather sweet!

WILLIAMS

Bravo, Miss Harris!

MARGARET

Now I really must --

WILLIAMS

Of course. I'll walk you to your
bus stop.

He makes an ushering gesture towards the exit. Margaret starts to stride towards it, eager to leave. Williams follows, beaming contentedly.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

Bravo, Miss Harris! Bravo!

EXT. LONDON WEST END - STREET - NIGHT

Brightly lit theatre fronts. Illuminated windows of restaurants and cafes. Taxicabs, Pedestrians, buses.

Williams and Margaret walking.

She is setting a purposeful pace. They are not talking. Williams registers another surge of pain in his abdomen. He grimaces. Margaret has not noticed.

Suddenly Williams stops in the middle of the pavement.

WILLIAMS
Miss Harris.

Margaret stops, comes back the few paces to him.

MARGARET
What is it, Mr Williams?

WILLIAMS
I know I've already taken more of your evening than I should. But I did wonder if you'd... If you'd join me for just one drink. A few minutes, no more. Because you see...
(reserve suddenly crumbling)
... I don't feel quite able to go home just yet.

Margaret looks at him with surprise. She's uneasy, but she nods.

MARGARET
Very well.

INT. PUB - INNER ROOM - NIGHT

Williams and Margaret are alone in this section of the pub. Their table is large enough for six. Margaret sits on a banquette, Williams sits at right-angles to her on a wooden chair. A lime cordial and an untouched pint of beer on the table.

They sit in uncomfortable silence.

Visible through an arch: the pub's bar and Main Room. Here six wholesome YOUNG PEOPLE - three couples, all Margaret's age - are talking and laughing cheerfully.

Margaret glances towards them, winds the clockwork mechanism of the fluffy toy rabbit.

A BURST OF LAUGHTER from the Young People.

Margaret looks at them enviously, sets the rabbit hopping across the table surface.

Before the rabbit can hop off the table edge, Margaret reaches over, brings it back to her.

She sets it hopping on its journey once more. But this time the rabbit slows, comes to a halt half-way across.

Williams and Margaret stare at the rabbit. More LAUGHTER from the Young People.

Margaret glances again towards them.

WILLIAMS

I'm sure you'll find things more conducive once you're given your proper duties --

MARGARET

Mr Williams. This isn't very nice really, is it?

Williams looks at her.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

I know it's quite innocent, I'm not implying anything. But you are, well, much older than me and... Well, frankly, Mr Williams. Someone might suppose you were becoming... infatuated!

She turns away from him. Williams looks at her with outrage but it melts away quickly. He looks sheepish, defeated.

WILLIAMS

Infatuated. I suppose, in a way, I am.

(beat)

But not quite as some might suppose.

Another BURST OF LAUGHTER, Williams and Margaret look again towards the Main Room.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

Miss Harris, I wonder if I may confide in you. There's something I haven't really told anyone. Not even my son.

MARGARET

Well, if you really think --

WILLIAMS

It's quite a bore really. But the fact is...

Suddenly he's overcome with emotion, unable to speak. For two beats, he struggles to hold back tears.

Margaret stares, astonished. She reaches out a hand.

But Williams has already recovered his customary composure.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

The fact is, I'm not expected to live much longer. It appears I have a cancer. Here, somewhere --

MARGARET

Oh...!

She raises her hands to her mouth, stares at him.

WILLIAMS

(now calm, almost humorous)

I've another seven months. A little longer if I'm fortunate. I'm sorry, I really didn't wish to distress you. But you see, I wanted you to know because, well, because of this infatuation as you called it.

(beat)

You see, after receiving my news, I took to looking around myself a little. At that office, that life. And I realized how, since you arrived, how very different it's been. I confess I did at times worry if your attitude was, well, appropriate. But then I came to appreciate you. Not simply for your youth. There was some other quality. Your appetite for life. The way you always make everything jolly and gay. Even whilst working there, with us. And that day I saw you, in Piccadilly. I thought, look at her, look at Miss Harris. If only to be alive like that, even for one day. And I suppose I hoped you might show me. Teach me how to be like you --

MARGARET

I have no such special quality. I'm just an ordinary person. With my fair share of worries and resentments. I try to keep cheerful, it's true. But all too often --

WILLIAMS

If only for a day. And I started to think... to remember. That perhaps, once, long ago, I too may have been... almost like you are now...

MARGARET

Mr Williams, really... Your son. Why haven't you told your son? Surely he's the one you must turn to now --

WILLIAMS

Michael?

(smiles distantly)

Oh, I do think the world of Michael. However he's now... he has his own life to lead. His own concerns. That's as it should be. I suppose that's why I've had to pester you, Miss Harris. But you're correct. I'm behaving like an old fool. Please forgive me. I should find some other way to --

The Young People in the Main Room start SINGING 'Happy Birthday'.

Margaret looks at them, now resentful for this inappropriate gaiety.

But Williams turns to regard them with gentle pleasure, conducting the singing lightly with his fingers.

The Happy Birthday chorus ENDS in APPLAUSE.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

A birthday. How pleasant...

(beat)

Yes, I'm sure of it, Miss Harris. I wasn't always this... what was it? Your name for me...?

MARGARET

(close to tears)

Mr Zombie...

WILLIAMS

Ah yes, Mr Zombie. No, I wasn't always... When my wife was with me, for instance. Then later, all the time Michael was growing up. I wasn't Mr Zombie at all then. Perhaps I didn't much resemble you. But in my own way --

MARGARET

Is there really nothing they can do?

WILLIAMS

(ignoring)

When I was your age, Miss Harris, no, even younger, from when I was this high. What I wanted was to be a gentleman. Nothing grand. Just a rank and file sort of gentleman. I used to see them in the mornings, all lined up at the railway station whenever I went there with my mother. Their suits and hats. Waiting on the platform to go into London. A gentleman like that. That's what I longed to be one day.

Again, his reserve crumbles. He struggles not to be overwhelmed by frustration, anger, sadness. Then he recovers, shakes his head.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

How did it happen? I fancy it crept up on me. The days proceeding one after the next. Each with their little burdens and defeats. Small wonder I didn't notice what I was becoming. But then I looked at you and remembered. What it was like, to be alive like that --

Williams stares at Margaret for a moment.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

Miss Harris, I wonder if you ever stop on your way home and watch the children playing. In the street, in the yard. Balls, cowboys, whatever. Always so full of life. And when the time comes and their mothers call them in, they're often reluctant, get a little contrary. Well, that's as it should be. Far better that than be the child you occasionally see, sitting by himself in a corner. Not taking part, not happy, not unhappy. Merely waiting for his mother to call him in. Now I've become rather afraid I might end up like that little fellow and... and I so very much wish not to do so.

(MORE)

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

When the time comes, when my Maker calls me, I wish at least for him to find me... living. The thing is, I don't see how to change it now. I've tried my best these last few weeks. Even went to the seaside...

Suddenly he's stopped by an idea opening within him. Beat.

Williams starts to laugh. Secretively at first, then his laughter seems to shake his whole being - a laughter filled with relief, revelation, and the appreciation of having missed something staring one in the face.

Margaret looks at him, alarmed, puzzled.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

(another short laugh)

Perhaps it's not too late after all for Mr Zombie.

He picks up the rabbit, holds it to his heart.

MARGARET

Mr Williams --

WILLIAMS

Miss Harris, I hope you're able to forgive me. Forgive me for everything. But I've kept you for too long. Let's get you to your bus stop.

Williams rises with urgency, reaches for his fedora, the rabbit still clutched to his chest.

Margaret rises too, looks at the rabbit.

MARGARET

Mr Williams, are you sure you're all right? Oh I'm so sorry. What I mean is --

WILLIAMS

Never better, Miss Harris! But we must hurry. Your cousin will be getting anxious.

He ushers Margaret out before him, an impatience, as well as a new energy, in his manner.

Margaret pauses to look round at him, but he hurries her on.

As they pass the cheerful Young People in the Main Room, Williams gives them a smiling nod, waves the rabbit at them triumphantly.

INT. OFFICE - TABLE - DAY

SOUND OF RAIN ON WINDOWS

The 'Mr WILLIAMS' name sign still marks a vacant place.

Peter, Middleton, Hart, Rusbridger, Mrs Johnstone in their allotted places, their towers no less tall. Suddenly, Hart looks up in astonishment, Middleton too.

Peter follows their gaze:

Williams coming through the gate in the barrier rail. Fedora, briefcase.

His rolled umbrella leaves a trail of drops on the floor as he goes to the head of the table.

MIDDLETON
(unable quite to hide
disappointment)
Mr Williams, sir! Welcome back!

Peter, Hart, Rusbridger, Mrs Johnstone now come to life, rising from their chairs.

EVERYONE
Good morning, sir! / Good morning,
Mr Williams! / Welcome back, sir!

MIDDLETON
I'm very glad you're feeling, er,
better, sir.

Williams ignores them, removes hat, sits at his old place. There's a physical fragility about him but he's lit up by an inner energy.

He breaks down one of his towers. Papers cascade across the table.

WILLIAMS
Good morning, everyone. Mr Hart.
Our file on that bomb site at
Chester Street.

The others watch in astonishment.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
The one the local ladies have been
petitioning to turn into a
children's playground.

HART
Ah yes, sir.

PETER
 (delighted)
 Yes, sir! I believe Mr Rusbridger
 has it now.

He has spoken out of turn. Faces look at him. Peter is
 defiant.

PETER (CONT'D)
 Mr Rusbridger, you took it off Mr
 Williams's desk last Friday, the
 last time the ladies were here.

WILLIAMS
 Well, Mr Rusbridger?

RUSBRIDGER
 Yes. I suppose I did. So it must be
 here somewhere.

WILLIAMS
 Mr Wakeling. You say the ladies
 have been in again? As recently
 as...

PETER
 Last Friday, sir.

RUSBRIDGER
 Ah yes. Here it is.

WILLIAMS
 (consulting watch)
 We have just enough time before
 lunch. I propose we go straight
 away.

MIDDLETON
 Go, sir?

WILLIAMS
 (rises)
 Mr Rusbridger, we'll take the file
 with us, but please wrap it up
 well. It's pouring outside.

HART
 Well, that's just it, if I may say
 so, sir. It's very wet just now.

WILLIAMS
 I'm sure we'll manage, Mr Hart. And
 this rain will allow us to assess
 all the better what the ladies are
 complaining of. Mrs Johnstone, we
 have not been formally introduced.

MRS JOHNSTONES

(stands)

How do you do, Mr Williams. A pleasure to meet you.

WILLIAMS

Pleasure's all mine. Mrs Johnstone, would you mind terribly remaining here to hold the fort? Messrs Middleton, Hart, Rusbridger and Wakeling, if you'd come with me.

Bewilderment. But those named get up.

INT. COUNTY HALL NORTH BLOCK - ENTRANCE HALL / EXT. OUTSIDE COUNTY HALL NORTH BLOCK - DAY

Williams, Peter, Middleton, Hart, Rusbridger stand just inside open doorway to the steps leading out of the building. Coats, hats, umbrellas at the ready.

Through the open doorway: the rain is coming down hard.

WILLIAMS

Chester Street. District line to Stepney Green. Then a brisk walk.

Middleton and Hart exchange dubious looks.

INT. VILLAGE CHURCH - NAVE - DAY (FEBRUARY)

Solemn ORGAN MUSIC. Peter, seated in a pew, studies his lap. Sullen. He takes a breath as he looks up, craning his neck to get a better view of:

Margaret, several rows ahead across aisle, eyes to the front of the church. She turns, notices him. Her face brightens. Peter smiles at her.

Peter takes in the rest of the mourners:

A) At the front, Michael staring blankly. Fiona glances at him with concern.

B) Middleton, Hart, Rusbridger, midway up nave. Solemn.

C) Singh in another part of the nave. Solemn.

D) Near the rear, Mrs Smith consoles Mrs McMasters. Mrs Porter beside them.

Margaret catches Peter's eye again, indicates to the entrance at the rear:

Sir James and two Officials have just entered. Sir James is very sure of the stir his presence will cause. He is shaking hands with the Usher near the door.

Peter swivels:

Mrs Smith notices, alerts Mrs McMasters and Mrs Porter. All three turn, staring daggers at Sir James, who is still talking with the Usher.

Peter turns, sees:

WILLIAMS'S PHOTO mounted on table. Formal, head and shoulders, framed. Surrounded by flowers.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - AREA ONE - DAY (FEB)

Mourners mingling, holding tea and refreshments.

Michael talking to a Vicar out of earshot. His attention is caught by something O.S:

Margaret crossing the hall through Mourners, towards the buffet table.

Michael watching her intently. The Vicar, oblivious, continues to talk pleasantly to him. Michael turns back to him.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - AREA TWO - DAY (FEB)

Peter, Middleton and Hart, holding cups of tea, huddled together in conversation amidst Mourners.

They all three straighten and turn as:

Sir James and the two Officials, also holding cups and saucers, come up to them.

MIDDLETON

Good afternoon, sir. Jolly decent of you to show up.

SIR JAMES

Good afternoon, Mr Ryman.

MIDDLETON

Middleton, sir. And this is Mr Hart and Mr Wakeling. All from Public Works.

SIR JAMES

(shaking hands)
Of course.

(MORE)

SIR JAMES (CONT'D)

Actually I knew exactly who you were. Just that I'm becoming such a blighter with names...

MIDDLETON

Perfectly all right, sir.

SIR JAMES

Knew exactly who you were. And you worked beside him. Must be like losing family.

MIDDLETON

Yes, sir. Feels almost like that.

SIR JAMES

I want you chaps to know how very sorry we all are.

MIDDLETON & HART

Good of you, sir / Thank you, sir.

SIR JAMES

I've never been one for skirting around awkward topics.

He indicates with his gaze across the hall:

Margaret offering sandwich plate to Mrs Smith, Mrs McMasters, Mrs Porter - who look uncomfortable in this milieu.

MIDDLETON

Of course not, sir.

SIR JAMES

Well, now's not the time to be going into this. Look here, Mr...

MIDDLETON

Middleton, sir.

SIR JAMES

Middleton, quite. Perhaps you'd be good enough to come to my office Monday morning. We might talk this over. How best to handle it from here.

MIDDLETON

Of course, sir.

SIR JAMES

(leans in, sotto)

Naturally one wants to give credit where it's due.

(MORE)

SIR JAMES (CONT'D)

But the way those ladies have been kicking up. Even complained to their MP.

HART

Yes, a bit steep.

SIR JAMES

And the irony is, in the end, it does a disservice to the memory of our dear departed friend. Such a self-effacing fellow. If he were here, he'd be the first to protest.

MIDDLETON

Quite.

Peter's attention has wandered from Sir James. He is looking over to the ladies - and Margaret.

SIR JAMES

Actually I did wonder if I could count on you fellows.

(chuckles, leans forward)

In the event of my requiring protection.

Margaret starts walking off to another part of the hall.

PETER

Excuse me.

He hurries off. Sir James looks after him, somewhat put out.

As Margaret passes through Mourners, Peter catches up with her. She stops, looks at him, delighted to see him, but controls herself.

MARGARET

Oh hello.

PETER

Hello.

They smile at each other.

PETER (CONT'D)

Saw you talking to the ladies.

MARGARET

Yes. They're very distraught. They were so fond of him.

PETER

You know. I think those ladies may have a point.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

Mr Williams didn't even get a mention at the official opening.

MARGARET

I quite agree.

PETER

Look, Miss Harris. Well. I was just wondering...

MARGARET

What were you wondering, Mr Wakeling?

For a beat, they go on smiling at each other, their pleasure in being together now barely contained.

Margaret smiles, but before she can reply, something catches her eye. Her expression darkens:

Michael comes towards them, holding up a letter-size envelope. He glances quickly at Margaret, looks away.

MICHAEL

Mr Wakeling.

PETER

Mr Williams.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry to raise this here. But I thought it best I give this to you right away.

Michael holds out the envelope to Peter, still avoiding looking at Margaret.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

It was amongst my father's things. Quite prominent. He's marked it 'Private and Confidential'.

PETER

So he has.

Beat.

Suddenly Michael turns to face Margaret.

MICHAEL

Miss Harris. We haven't been introduced, I know. But I wonder if we might have a word. In private.

MARGARET

In private?

MICHAEL
Yes. If you wouldn't mind.

Michael is now looking down, avoiding Margaret's gaze.

Peter and Margaret exchange a quick glance.

MARGARET
Well, of course.

MICHAEL
Perhaps over here.
(to Peter)
Excuse me. I'm so sorry.

PETER
Not at all.

Michael leading Margaret across the hall through the Mourners.

INT. VILLAGE HALL - CONSERVATORY - CONTINUOUS

Glass ceilings and panels. Wicker furniture. Plants.

No-one present until:

Michael opens the door from the main hall, holds it open to let Margaret pass. He closes the door after them.

They turn and face each other.

MICHAEL
Excuse me for bringing you away.

MARGARET
Not at all.

MICHAEL
I appreciate you coming today.

MARGARET
Thank you. I'm awfully sorry. It must be... Such a loss.

MICHAEL
It is rather.
(beat)
We haven't really been introduced.
I know that you... worked with him.

MARGARET
Yes, though only briefly. Margaret Harris.

She holds out her hand. Michael hesitates, then shakes her hand.

MICHAEL
How do you do, Miss Harris.

MARGARET
How do you do. I should have come and introduced myself earlier. But you seemed so busy and I --

MICHAEL
Oh that's quite all right.

Beat.

MARGARET
I'm dreadfully sorry. It must be so hard for you.

MICHAEL
One bears up. And I've been through this sort of thing once before...

MARGARET
Oh yes--

MICHAEL
(laughs)
Funny thing though. I was so small when Mother left. So you'd think I'd have no memory of it. But then when he left... I said to myself, isn't it funny, I know this feeling... I know it really quite well... Sorry. I'm boring you.

MARGARET
Not at all.

Michael looks away, collects himself.

MICHAEL
Miss Harris. There was something I wished to ask you...

MARGARET
Of course.

MICHAEL
Something I can't quite...

Beat.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

(exhales)

Did my father know he was ill? That
he was dying, I mean?

Now Margaret looks away.

MARGARET

I... really don't know what to say.

MICHAEL

Because if he knew. And he told
you...You see what I mean?

(laughs)

Why wouldn't he tell me?

Margaret turns back to Michael. Her expression makes clear:
she did know.

Michael's eyes well up. He attempts to wipe tears, then turns
away, sobbing.

MARGARET

Oh dear. Perhaps--

His sobs reach a climax, then come under control.

MICHAEL

If he'd just told me. I'd never
have let him leave us like that. In
all that cold.

In danger of losing control again, he turns, hurries out.
Margaret gazes after him, helpless.

INT. RAIL COMPARTMENT - TRAVELLING - DAY (FEB)

Middleton and Hart sit on one side, Rusbridger and Peter on
the other.

Peter surreptitiously takes from his jacket the envelope,
unseals it, takes out letter. Several handwritten pages.

He keeps the letter held low so as not to draw attention.
Reads:

WILLIAMS (V.O.)

My dear Mr Wakeling. I hope you
will forgive what by this stage
might appear an intrusion on my
part. But I did wish to draw your
attention to the on-going issues
regarding the maintenance schedule
for the recently completed
playground at Chester Street.

Peter, disappointed, shakes his head. He glances up, checks the others haven't noticed, goes on reading.

WILLIAMS (V.O.)

An approved timetable has been filed with Parks and Recreation, together with a completed D48, and you will already be aware that day-to-day responsibilities have been delegated to Allsop and Dundee, a local firm of sound reputation --

RUSBRIDGER

What's that you've got there?

PETER

(putting pages away)
Oh nothing. I'll read it some other time.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY (FEB)

The train journeys on.

INT. RAIL COMPARTMENT / EXT. VILLAGE STATION - DAY (FEB)

As train slows, Williams's old station glides by out of the window. Comes to a halt.

Peter, Middleton, Hart and Rusbridger gaze out at the space on the platform where Williams would have stood. Steam.

HART

Suppose we shan't ever know now.

MIDDLETON

Mmm?

HART

How he managed it. Always the correct spot.

MIDDLETON

However he did it, it was good of him. Just so he could greet us each morning.

The train begins to move.

INT. RAIL COMPARTMENT - TRAVELLING / EXT. SCENERY - DAY
(FEBRUARY)

VIEW FROM WINDOW: Home Counties greenbelt 'countryside'.

CLOSE: pages being shuffled in Peter's hands. He settles on a passage from further in the letter, reads.

WILLIAMS (V.O.)

... oversight is especially required concerning the quality of paints used on all exposed metal surfaces of the children's play apparatus --

RUSBRIDGER

Any of you chaps get to talk to Mrs Smith? Or any of the other ladies?

Peter places the letter on the seat beside him, out of the others' view.

MIDDLETON

You know one appreciates them sticking up for the old man's memory. But they've quite convinced themselves Mr Williams built that playground entirely by himself.

RUSBRIDGER

Parks did get more credit than they deserved.

HART

That's because they're called Parks.

RUSBRIDGER

Sir James certainly got his share of the credit. Made certain of that.

Uncomfortable silence.

Peter takes the letter in hand again, goes to a random passage, reads:

WILLIAMS (V.O.)

... successive layers of bitumen can never be a substitute for necessary repair to the hut's roof...

Peter shakes his head.

MIDDLETON

Sir James was quite crucial as far as that playground's concerned.

RUSBRIDGER

I suppose he was.

Middleton, Hart and Rusbridger go back to staring quietly out of their windows.

Peter looks around at the others. They remain lost in thought, gazing out at the passing view.

PETER

You know, I can't help thinking. I didn't know Mr Williams the way you all did. But it does seem to me...

RUSBRIDGER

That he changed?

PETER

Yes.

RUSBRIDGER

It was this playground business.

*The rhythmic sound of the train bleeds over all following flashbacks:

INT/EXT COUNTY HALL NORTH BLOCK. ENTRANCE HALL - DAY
(FLASHBACK)

Same as before but seen from a DIFFERENT ANGLE.

ON: Rusbridger, he sees Williams, Peter, Middleton, Hart, before him, looking out onto County Hall North Block steps and the outside. Rain pouring.

WILLIAMS

Chester Street. District Line to Stepney Green. Then a brisk walk.

Hart and Middleton exchange glances.

EXT. UNDER BRIDGE / WASTEGROUND - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Rain pouring down.

Williams, in coat and fedora, stands right at the edge of the sheltered area, gazing out at the wasteground before him - a bomb site unattended since the war. One end flooded by stagnant water, now rippled by falling rain.

The wasteground is overlooked by council houses. Their back yards abut the wasteground.

Behind Williams: Huddled to one side, Peter, Middleton, Hart, Rusbridger. On other side, Mrs Smith, Mrs McMasters, 4 Local Women.

Everyone is watching Williams - Peter with interest, Mrs Smith, Mrs McMasters and the Local Women with tension.

William's gaze moving from one point to another.

Drops fall on Middleton's shoulder. He moves to one side.

Williams raises a hand absentmindedly in the air, steps out from under the bridge, strides onto the wasteground.

Immediately he's ankle-deep in dirty water. The rain pours down on him. He keeps walking.

The others watch from the underpass, astonished. Suddenly Mrs McMasters hurries out after Williams, opening an umbrella as she does so and comes to stand next to him, holds umbrella over him.

Williams turns to her, gestures to her to return. But Mrs McMasters keeps holding the umbrella over him - revealing a steely, determined side of her previously hidden by her comic demeanour.

Something else in the wasteground catches Williams's notice. He strides towards it, the water deepening around his ankles.

Mrs McMasters follows him, determinedly keeping the umbrella over him, neglecting herself.

INT. RAIL COMPARTMENT - TRAVELLING / EXT. SCENERY - DAY
(FEBRUARY)

As before.

HART

He did become, well, obsessed. He was prepared to make himself a right bugger about it...

INT. PLANNING DEPT OFFICE - DAY (FLASHBACK - SEPTEMBER)

Large office with rows of desks. Secretaries typing, Clerks filing. NOISE of TYPING.

HART (V.O.)

I accompanied him once to Planning. That ogre Talbot was presiding that day...

With no obvious area for outsiders to wait, Williams and Hart stand just inside the doorway.

A Furiously Typing Secretary is working at a desk nearby, pays them no attention.

TALBOT, 50s, closed-faced, routine-weary, emerges from rear of room, holding a folder up in the air.

TALBOT

This is it here. Leave it with us.
We'll send it down to you once it's ready.

WILLIAMS

Actually I was hoping you might see to it now. Then I could take it off your hands straight away.

TALBOT

I'm unable to authorise it just like that. Look, don't worry. I'll see it gets done. Then we'll send it down to you.

Williams points to an empty chair right beside the Furiously Typing Secretary's desk.

WILLIAMS

Why don't I wait here while you check those entries?

Williams sits. The Furiously Typing Secretary pauses for a second, then resumes typing.

TALBOT

(put out)
It's up to you. You might find yourself waiting for some time. We've a lot on up here.

WILLIAMS

Take all the time you need, Mr Talbot. I'm quite happy here. Mr Hart, you'd better get back. Tell the others I've been held up. Indefinitely.

Talbot stares at Williams in the chair. Glances at the folder in his hand, goes off fuming.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PARKS DEPARTMENT OFFICE - DAY (FLASHBACK - SEPT.)

A smaller office. Six desks. Three male Junior Clerks, heads down, writing. Two female Secretaries typing. The section chief, JONES, sits behind a larger, central desk.

Williams and Peter enter, each carrying five heavy box files, pile them on Jones's desk. Jones looks up wearily, but his manner is kindly.

WILLIAMS
 (short of breath)
 It's very good of you.
 (turns to include everyone
 in room)
 I know we're placing an extra
 burden on all of you here.

The Junior Clerks and Secretaries ignore him, keep working.

JONES
 So this is what? A kiddies'
 playground?

WILLIAMS
 Yes.

JONES
 Urgent?

WILLIAMS
 We'd appreciate your giving it
 priority.

JONES
 Hmm. Well, if you request it, Mr
 Williams.

Suddenly Williams offers Jones his hand. Jones is surprised, but by instinct, rises and shakes hands.

WILLIAMS
 Thank you, Mr Jones.

Williams now turns and goes to each Clerk and offers his hand:

Junior Clerk #1 is astonished. But he too rises, shakes Williams's hand.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)
 I want to thank you. In advance. I
 appreciate it.

Junior Clerk #2, equally astonished, stands up to receive him.

PETER (V.O.)
 He went around to each of them in
 turn...

INT. RAIL COMPARTMENT - TRAVELLING / EXT. SCENERY - DAY
(FEBRUARY)

As before.

PETER

... Looked them in the face.
Thanked them all. Secretaries,
everyone.

RUSBRIDGER

Parks did then rather pull out the
stops, didn't they?

HART

The Mr Williams of a year ago would
never have thought of doing
something like that.

For a beat or two, they all stare out of train window: Home
Counties greenbelt. Pockets of suburbia appearing.

MIDDLETON

Actually. I witnessed something
even more remarkable. I never told
you chaps at the time because...
well, it rather annoyed me...

INT. SIR JAMES'S OFFICE - DAY (FLASHBACK - OCTOBER)

Sir James seated behind impressive desk, smoking, relaxed.

His office is grand, spacious, with a 'lounge area' - leather
armchairs, a fireplace with logs burning, a mahogany
occasional table.

Two DISTINGUISHED GENTS are in the armchairs, reading
newspapers, smoking. They totally ignore the business going
on at Sir James's desk.

Williams and Middleton sit across from him, on the edge of
their seats. Sir James passes a folder over the desk to
Williams.

SIR JAMES

So you see. For all these reasons,
this isn't something we can
contemplate for the foreseeable
future. I'm sorry. I genuinely
regret it.

Sir James rises, obliging Williams and Middleton to rise
also.

SIR JAMES (CONT'D)

I'm not saying it isn't a jolly good idea. It is. I can see what this would bring to the neighbourhood. And the site is a disgrace. Unfortunately, just now, we have even more urgent priorities. Well. Thank you for coming to see me.

Sir James shakes hands quickly with them both, moves over to join the Distinguished Gents by the fire.

Williams and Middleton cross the floor towards the door. Middleton has his hand on the door when Williams turns.

DISTINGUISHED GENT #1

They're considering Anderson. For the new editor's post at Punch. Don't fancy that, do you?

SIR JAMES

Wouldn't be quite right. Man's obsessed with the ballet.

DISTINGUISHED GENT #1

That's not entirely fair. Anderson also cares passionately about detective fiction and horses.

DISTINGUISHED GENT #2

Punch isn't what it used to be. Not amusing enough.

They now become aware that Williams is not only still in the room, but has come right up to them. Middleton, astonished, remains at the door, hand on knob.

Sir James looks at Williams, puzzled.

WILLIAMS

Sir James. Please excuse me. But I beg you to reconsider.

Sir James, taken aback, is lost for words.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

I beg you. Or at least. If you would leave the application open for one more week. What harm can that do?

Sir James stares at him.

INT. RAIL COMPARTMENT - TRAVELLING / EXT. SCENERY - DAY
(FEBRUARY)

As before.

MIDDLETON

I'd no idea what to do. Made myself
as small as possible.

PETER

But it came off.

MIDDLETON

What's that?

PETER

It came off. It must have done.
Chairman did reconsider.

MIDDLETON

Yes. I suppose he did.

RUSBRIDGER

Those ladies may have a point.

MIDDLETON

Yes. But we all put our shoulders
to it.

RUSBRIDGER

Yes but... There's no denying the
old man did push it.

PETER

Could it be he knew? That he didn't
have long? Knowing something like
that, I suppose it might...
galvanise a person.

MIDDLETON

But he didn't know. His son was
very clear on that.

HART

I'm pretty sure that's right.

They become lost in their thoughts. VIEW FROM WINDOW: outer
reaches of London.

Suddenly:

HART (CONT'D)

I think he did know.

The others look at him.

INT. COUNTY HALL - CORRIDOR - DAY (FLASHBACK - OCTOBER)

Mrs Smith, Mrs McMasters, Mrs Porter emerge out of an office with long faces. Williams and Hart behind them, both holding folders. They all walk despondently along corridor, not talking.

Williams stops.

WILLIAMS

Ladies. A moment.

The others all stop.

WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

We mustn't be discouraged. There'll be a way around this. I assure you.

MRS SMITH

I don't know how you kept your temper just now, sir.

WILLIAMS

I don't have time to get angry, Mrs Smith.

(smiles)

Now, ladies.

Williams makes an ushering motion for them to carry on down the corridor.

INT. RAIL COMPARTMENT - TRAVELLING / EXT. SCENERY - DAY
(FEBRUARY)

As before.

HART

Something about the way he said it...

PETER

He must have known.

MIDDLETON

Perhaps we'd all do the same. All of us here. We'd work with extra urgency in a situation like that.

PETER

Would we?

MIDDLETON

Surely... it's a natural reaction.

PETER

I don't think everyone, we here even, would necessarily have responded in quite the way Mr Williams did.

HART

I agree.

MIDDLETON

Hmm.

RUSBRIDGER

If he knew. And if he was in pain. He did an awfully good job keeping it to himself.

*The rhythmic train motion masks all other sound:

EXT. WASTEGROUND - DAY (FLASHBACK - NOVEMBER)

Men working. Cement mixers. Diggers.

PETER (V.O)

There was that one incident on site.

Williams strides among the Men and the diggers consulting a large sheet. Peter struggles to keep up with him, looking over his shoulder at the sheet.

Suddenly Williams drops the sheet, wobbles, sways. Peter stops him falling.

Peter helps Williams over to the edge of the work area, onto the abutting back yard of one of the houses.

Two Local Women hurry to help Williams into a garden chair, fuss over him, as Peter looks on with concern.

Then Williams looks up, smiles uncertainly, tries to stand up.

Woman #1 pushes him back into the chair, keeps her hands protectively on his shoulders while Woman #2 kneels before him, checks him out.

Now Woman #3 comes hurrying out of a nearby house with a mug of water, passes it to Woman #2 who offers it to Williams. He smiles reassuringly.

Peter sees WILLIAMS gazing with quiet satisfaction at the work going on before him, the mug of water close to his lips.

PETER (V.O.)
The expression on his face...

INT. RAIL COMPARTMENT - TRAVELLING / EXT. SCENERY - DAY
(FEBRUARY)

VIEW FROM WINDOW: Coming into London.

PETER
It was like...

Beat.

MIDDLETON
You're right. He certainly set an
example for us.

Middleton, Hart and Rusbridger all gaze out of their windows,
thoughtful.

Peter takes this opportunity to bring out again Williams's
letter. He shuffles pages, glances down.

His face ignites with new interest as he reads:

WILLIAMS (V.O.)
I wonder, Mr Wakeling, if I may now
turn to matters you may consider
more personal --

MIDDLETON
(cutting in)
Look here, everyone. If I may speak
as his successor - and I don't
think I'm getting ahead of myself,
it's all but official now - let me
propose we all make a pledge, here,
today.

Peters is dying to read more of Williams's letter, but
there's nothing for it. He tucks it away into his jacket.

MIDDLETON (CONT'D)
Let's pledge to learn from his
example. This lesson he set before
us. Let's vow never again to shy
away from our responsibilities.
Never again to push things under
the carpet --

HART
Or upstairs!

MIDDLETON

Or upstairs... I'm not saying we don't already do a jolly good job. But Mr Williams has shown us... Well, that if we put our minds to it, our backs into it, we can do even better.

HART

That's right.

Peter, watching, a caution growing in his expression.

MIDDLETON

And let me say this today. While I remain in charge of Public Works, we're going to be true to Mr Williams's memory. We're going to get things done.

RUSBRIDGER

That's right!

HART

Hear hear!

EXT. RAILWAY LINES - WATERLOO APPROACH - DAY (FEBRUARY)

Train slowing as it enters Waterloo Station.

EXT. WATERLOO STATION - NEAR TICKET BARRIER - DAY (FEB)

The giant seaside poster we saw is now in the process of being replaced. Two-thirds torn away, giving it a cruelly scarred aspect.

DISSOLVE TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS - (APRIL)

A) Spring coming to Central London streets.

B) Peter and Margaret, after work, strolling together along Thames embankment. Delighted to be with each other, but as yet they avoid any physical contact.

C) Margaret and Peter in the cinema watching The Thing. An expression of utter horror across Margaret's face. She digs her head into Peter's shoulder.

D) Arcade, same one as before. Margaret scoops another rabbit, triumphant. We then see Peter try. He's no good.

E) Dusk. Margaret and Peter enjoy a fish and chip dinner, sitting on a park bench. Margaret has two rabbits sitting next to her.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OFFICE - TABLE - DAY (JULY)

The name sign reads: 'MR MIDDLETON'. He has two towers of papers before him, to his right and left, just as Williams did.

Around the table, each with their name sign, and a tower of documents: Hart, Peter, Rusbridger along one side. On the other, Mrs Johnstone, then two new officials, Mr Grey and Mrs Henderson.

They are working, heads down. Singh comes INTO VIEW, goes to Middleton.

SINGH

Education insist this is for us,
sir.

Singh holds up a folder. Peter looks up, watches.

MIDDLETON

(not looking up)
Which one is this, Mr Singh?

SINGH

The disagreement concerning the
proposed prefabs at Saint Mary's
School in Shoreditch, sir.

MIDDLETON

Oh that.
(looks up)
Mr Hart, didn't you look into Saint
Mary's School?

HART

It's for Education, Mr Middleton.
It's a school matter.

SINGH

Even so, sir, Education insist...

MIDDLETON

Well we can keep it here for now.
No harm.

Middleton takes the folder, thrusts it into the midst of the tower to his left, returns to his work.

Singh starts to walk off. Peter slams down his pen.

PETER

But look here!

Middleton looking at him coldly.

Everyone else around the table, and Singh, all staring at him, astonished.

Peter stares at them. Then, with air of defeat, looks down again at his papers.

Middleton goes back to his work. So does everyone else.

Singh goes OUT OF VIEW.

Beat.

Peter checks no-one is still watching, opens the drawer below his allotted place, sees Williams's letter amidst pencils, etc, still in its original torn envelope.

WILLIAMS (V.O.)

I wonder, Mr Wakeling, if I may now
turn to matters you may consider
more personal...

Peter removes it, tucks it into his inside pocket, closes drawer.

EXT. STREET WITH BUS STOP - EVENING

Peter stands waiting, other commuters around him.

WILLIAMS (V.O.)

In the time we have known one
another, I have perceived in you a
certain spark perhaps not obvious
among your colleagues.

The bus pulls up, blocking our view.

INT. PHONE BOX

Peter grapples with receiver, sets out coins on counter, dials.

WILLIAMS (V.O.)

I write here then in an attempt to
pre-empt any undue disappointment
on your part concerning our
playground project.

Peter gets connected, pushes coins into the slot.

WILLIAMS (V.O.)

It is my feeling that you, perhaps
alone among colleagues, will be
vulnerable in days to come to a
certain disillusionment, precisely
because you have invested in it
more than others.

INT. MARGARET'S LODGINGS - FIRST FLOOR LANDING - CONTINUOUS

As Margaret comes out, Landlady indicates the communal
telephone fixed to the wall, receiver resting off hook on a
ledge.

LANDLADY

Reasonably brief if you don't mind.
I'm expecting my nephew to call.

MARGARET

Of course.

Margaret goes to phone, lifts receiver.

MARGARET (CONT'D)

Hello, Peter, how are you?

INT. PHONE BOX - CONTINUOUS

PETER

Oh... I'm all right.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

MARGARET

Oh dear. What did they get up to
today?

PETER

Oh, nothing much. I'm fine. But
look, would you mind terribly if I
came just a little later than we
said? Half an hour, no more --

MARGARET

(knowingly)
Very well.

PETER

Would you mind? Promise I won't be
long, and I can get the Circle Line
afterwards --

MARGARET

Why would I mind? I too worked in that office, remember? You go ahead.

PETER

It's just that... I sometimes feel you disapprove. Disapprove of me always going there.

MARGARET

No, dear, that's not it. It still upsets me a little, that's all. Remembering what happened there. To think of him like that, all by himself. In that freezing cold.

PETER

I know, darling. But honestly that's not how I see it --

MARGARET

I know. You go and have good look around, dear. But don't be too long. I've been missing you all day. Heaven knows why.

PETER

Promise I won't be long. Well, goodbye.

Peter replaces receiver, collects unused coins, turns.

EXT. STREET WITH PHONE BOX - CONTINUOUS

Coming out of phone box, Peter stops, unsure which way to go.

WILLIAMS (V.O.)

I have no wish to belittle our playground. But I put it to you that it was but a small thing. And that it will, before long, go the way of most such small things.

Peter decides on a route, starts to walk.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. EAST LONDON STREET - EVENING

A different, poorer district. Peter walks past rows of terraced houses. Illuminated windows. SOUNDS OF LAUGHTER, ARGUING, BADLY-PLAYED PIANO.

As he walks on:

WILLIAMS (V.O.)

For the time being, our playground may be safe, a thing of joy for the local children. In time, however, it may fall into disrepair, or be superseded by some grander scheme. In a word, sir, we cannot assume to have erected a lasting monument.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BRIDGE - EVENING

Peter walks over a deserted bridge lit by a street lamp.

WILLIAMS (V.O.)

Even the fine spirit mustered among us as we saw the project through may not, in the end, survive long, set against the daily frustrations that are part and parcel of lives such as ours. All this, Mr Wakeling, you must accept.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. EAST LONDON SQUARE - EVENING

Peter walks across a cobbled square. A group of Small Children playing under a lamp. They call out to him. He ignores them, walks on.

WILLIAMS (V.O.)

But let me counsel you, if I may. Should there come days when it is no longer clear to what end you are directing your daily efforts, when the sheer grind of it all threatens to reduce you to the kind of state in which I so long existed...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STREET OVERLOOKING PLAYGROUND - EVENING

A quiet street, another poor neighbourhood. Peter walks past terraced houses and their illuminated, curtained windows. No-one outdoors.

WILLIAMS (V.O.)

... I urge you then to recall our little playground, and the modest satisfaction that became our due upon its completion.

Peter walks on. The houses and street come to an end at a short rail fence.

Peter goes to it, looks over:

What was once the wasteland, now a well-appointed children's playground. Swings, climbing frame, roundabout, etc.

Three carefully-positioned street lamps illuminate it clearly. It is locked for the night and deserted.

WILLIAMS (V.O.)

I have, sir, only the best wishes for your future. Sincerely. Rodney Williams.

Peter gazes down at the playground. FOOTSTEPS approach from behind him.

A POLICE CONSTABLE, mid-30s, is coming along the darkening street towards Peter.

Police Constable stops beside Peter, regards him suspiciously, looks over the railings at the playground below.

POLICE CONSTABLE

Evening, sir.

PETER

Good evening, officer.

POLICE CONSTABLE

Everything all right?

PETER

Yes. I just wanted to see this playground again.

(beat)

I played a small part, only a small part mind you, in bringing it into being. I work at the L.C.C.

They both look down at the playground.

POLICE CONSTABLE

Is that so, sir. Well then the people here have a lot to thank you for.

PETER

Oh I didn't do much.

(smiles)

The man who did though passed away
this winter.

(beat)

He was my boss. Mr Williams.

POLICE CONSTABLE

Mr Williams. Yes.

(beat)

He'll be remembered around here
with respect and affection, if I
may say so.

The Police Constable continues to gaze down at the
playground. Something in his manner has changed. Emotion
crosses the face beneath the helmet.

Peter regards him with new interest.

PETER

If this is your regular beat, then
perhaps you knew him. He was here a
great deal last year.

The Police Constable remains silent, goes on staring down at
playground. Then:

POLICE CONSTABLE

If you was his friend, sir. Then
perhaps you won't mind my telling
you this. Station sergeant says I'm
being foolish. But it stays on my
mind. If you was his friend, worked
with him... If you wouldn't mind,
sir.

PETER

(surprised)

No. No, not at all, officer.
Please.

POLICE CONSTABLE

I never actually had the honour of
meeting your Mr Williams
personally, he was always that
busy. Closest I came, sir, was the
night he passed away.

PETER

You saw him that night?

POLICE CONSTABLE

It was fully reported, sir.

PETER
 (knowingly)
 Ah....

POLICE CONSTABLE
 Yes, sir. I was possibly the last
 person to see Mr Williams alive. I
 wasn't up here. I was down there.
 (indicates)
 Chester Street. It was nine thirty-
 five. The snow had started by then.
 Coming on quite heavy. I went over
 because I heard the singing. That's
 what drew me, sir.

FLASHBACK - EXT. CHESTER STREET / PLAYGROUND - NIGHT
 (FEBRUARY)

Snow falling. A VOICE SINGING (O.S.) softly, slowly.

The Police Constable comes up to the railings of the
 playground.

We are now on the same level as the playground:

Its three street-lamps illuminate the falling snow - a
 dusting of snow on the ground and on the play equipment.

The centrepiece of the playground is a frame holding three
 swings side by side.

Williams, in winter coat, scarf and fedora, is swinging
 gently on the middle swing. He is singing softly to himself,
 no-one else in the playground.

The Police Constable watches from the railings. Thinks about
 entering playground, hesitates.

We MOVE SLOWLY towards Williams on the swing, his face hidden
 under his hat, snow falling steadily around him.

His SINGING is heard more clearly as we approach.

WILLIAMS
 (singing; sotto)
 '... Rowan tree, oh Rowan Tree
 Thou'lt aye be dear to me,
 Entwin'd thou art wi' mony ties
 O' hame and infancy.
 Thy leaves were aye the first
 o'spring,
 Thy flow'rs the summer's pride,
 There was nae such a bonny tree
 In a' the countryside...'

POLICE CONSTABLE (V.O.)
 I recognised Mr Williams, sir. So I
 knew he had a right to be there.
 That he wasn't meaning any harm...

WILLIAMS
 (singing; sotto)
 '...How fair wert thou in summer
 time,
 Wi' a' thy clusters white,
 How rich and gay thy autumn dress,
 Wi' berries red and bright.
 On thy fair stem were many names,
 Which now nae mair I see,
 But they're engraven on my heart,
 Forgot they ne'ever can be...'

POLICE CONSTABLE (V.O.)
 And I thought, maybe he'd had a
 drop to drink and he was just...
 For his own good, sir, I should
 have persuaded him. Told him to get
 out the cold. That's what's been on
 my mind, sir... If only I...

We now see Williams's face. His expression is illuminated by
 an inner triumph. A glowing contentment that seems to warm
 the snow falling over him.

WILLIAMS
 (singing; sotto)
 '... We sat aneath thy spreading
 shade,
 The bairnies round thee ran,
 They pu'd thy bonny berries red,
 And necklaces they strang.
 My mother, Oh, I see her still,
 She smiled our sports to see,
 Wi' little Jeanie on her lap,
 And Jamie at her knee... '

POLICE CONSTABLE (V.O.)
 But you see, sir. He looked so...
 so happy. Happy as I ever saw a
 man. And it felt a shame, sir, to
 disturb him. I imagined, in time,
 he'd just come off that swing and
 go home.

EXT. STREET OVERLOOKING PLAYGROUND - EVENING

As before. Peter and Police Constable looking down on the
 playground.

POLICE CONSTABLE

It was negligent of me, sir. If I'd persuaded him to get out the snow...

PETER

No, officer. I think it was for the best. Mr Williams had a terminal illness and it was... right that you allowed him that moment.

The Police Constable accepts these words like communion.

PETER (CONT'D)

And I believe you were quite right. He was happy when you saw him. Perhaps as happy as he'd ever been in his life. So I wouldn't worry yourself any more, officer.

POLICE CONSTABLE

That does lift a cloud. What you say there. Thank you, sir.

Beat.

Peter touches the Police Constable gently on the arm.

PETER

Good night, officer.

POLICE CONSTABLE

Good night, sir.

Peter walks away down the street.

The Police Constable watches him, then glances back down at the empty playground below, lit by the lamps, silent.

Then Three Children, aged 8 or 9, come running into the playground, excited.

Two run towards the swings, begin swinging.

The other Child clambers eagerly up the climbing frame.

NOISE of PLAYING CHILDREN becomes audible, rises in volume.

The street lamps dim and go out, to be replaced by sunlight.

The playground, busy with children, on a summer's afternoon.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - CONTINUOUS - DAY

At ground level.

A YOUNG MOTHER emerges from one of the council houses whose back yards abut the playground. She looks cross.

YOUNG MOTHER

(calling)

Jennifer! Steven! I'm not going to
tell you again!

Jennifer and Steven, 6 and 9, come off the swings, hurry towards the Young Mother.

The other CHILDREN PLAY on NOISILY. A child is CRYING O.S.

The playground is clearly a resounding success.

A Boy jumps off the middle of the three swings in the frame.

Now all three swings are empty.

The middle swing, for the moment, continues to swing by itself.

FADE TO BLACK

The End