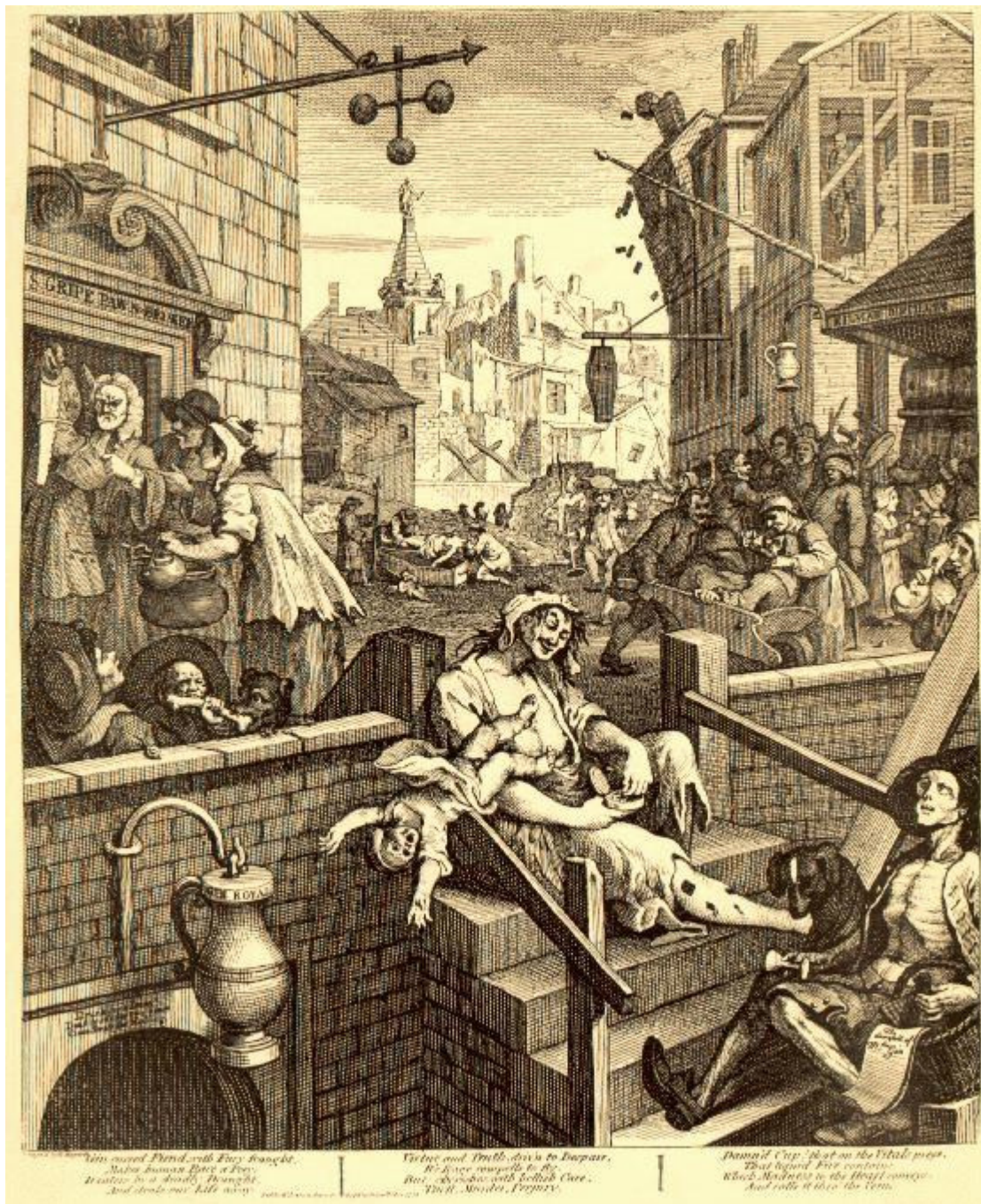


BBC Radio Afternoon Theatre

GIN AND RUM

a London ghost story

by Philip Palmer



Transmission: R4 30th June 2000

PRODUCER: Toby Swift

JUDY...Caroline Catz

BOB... Philip Whitchurch

Acoustic: A London roof top.

JUDY: It's not that warm actually.

BOB: It's fine.

JUDY: Hardly picnic weather, though.

BOB: Walk around a bit. You'll soon warm up.

PAUSE.

JUDY: What's that?

BOB: Post Office Tower.

JUDY: No, no. The building there. With the fence on the roof.

BOB: A Catholic school. (PAUSE) St Joseph's. They have a playground on the roof.

JUDY: That building there?

BOB: Alliance and Leicester Building Society.

JUDY: Where's Saint Paul's Cathedral?

BOB: That direction. (HE POINTS)

JUDY: Do you want half my sandwich? I'll have half of yours.

BOB: What's yours?

JUDY: Avocado and mozzarella. Yours?

BOB: Cheese. (PAUSE) Spread. (PAUSE) Laughing Cow.

PAUSE. SHE DOESN'T WANT HIS SANDWICH...

BOB: (HUFFY) It was your idea to share.

PAUSE.

JUDY: I'm really cold.

BOB: Go back in if you like. (SHE LOOKS AT HIM) I get an hour, I take an hour. It's only management who choose to take short lunch breaks.

JUDY: Are you trying to get rid of me?

BOB: Admit it: you're aching to get back to your desk.

JUDY: Don't be so rude.

BOB: It's written all over you. You feel silly for coming up on the roof.

JUDY: I just wanted to see the view.

BOB: Well there it is.

JUDY: And I could do without the sarcasm, thank you very much.

BOB: It comes with the view.

PAUSE.

JUDY: Where's the river?

BOB: There.

A TRUCE HAS BEEN ACHIEVED...

JUDY: And what's the bridge I can see?

SXF: The sound of the city, amplified, heard from ground level. The sound ebbs as we return to the rooftop, for another lunchtime:

JUDY: ...Smithfields and Barts. St Paul's that way.

BOB: What have you got?

JUDY: Coronation chicken. Try some?

BOB: Thanks.

JUDY: (CONTINUING) Post Office tower.

BOB: Easy! Anyone could get that. Nice chicken.

JUDY: The big building, that's the Alliance and Leicester. That's the Cooper & Lybrand Building. St Joseph's. The Peabody flats. Regent Street that way. How am I doing?

BOB: Good.

JUDY: That building over there. What's the street running next to it?

BOB: Albany Street. Leading into Farrier's Way.

JUDY: You should do the Knowledge.

PAUSE.

BOB: Bored?

JUDY: A bit. Sorry.

BOB: I always feel I should be more entertaining.

JUDY: No, no, not at all. Buildings are fascinating.

(PAUSE) Up to a point. (PAUSE) Funny though. We never talk about work.

BOB: Work's boring.

JUDY: Your work is boring. Mine isn't. I'm head of an entire retail department!

BOB: So tell me about your work.

JUDY: Well, what is there to say? (SHE LAUGHS, UNEASILY) It's all of my life, apart from these lunchtimes.

BOB: That's why you come up here, on the roof. It's time out.

JUDY: But still....we don't talk about work. You never go to the cinema. You have no telly. Theatre...

BOB: We talk about theatre.

JUDY: You talk about the plays you've read. Sheridan. Congreve. David Hare. You talk all the time, we have no conversation, all I do is listen.

BOB: You're talking now.

JUDY: I'm grumbling. That's different.

BOB: Okay, we'll do it differently.

PAUSE

JUDY: What exactly are we doing?

BOB: Pausing.

JUDY: Oh yeah?

BOB: Yeah. You pause. Then I pause. Then...

JUDY: I pause again.

SHE PAUSES.

HE PAUSES.

SHE PAUSES AGAIN, THEN GIGGLES.

JUDY: (CONT) Is there a point to this?

SFX: The sound of the city; followed by the peace of the rooftop. It's another lunchtime.

BOB: ...which is why I say, democracy is a myth.

JUDY: An ideal.

BOB: The Ancient Greeks...

JUDY: ...were a bunch of paedophile Nazis.

BOB: ...invented democracy! But in fact, their system was more a form of oligarchy.

JUDY: Dictatorship.

BOB: A ruling elite.

JUDY: Dictators.

BOB: Chosen by merit, not by force of arms.

JUDY: Do you really believe that?

BOB: Not entirely. But as an idea...

JUDY: It stinks.

BOB: If you read Plato...

JUDY: I have.

BOB: In the Greek?

JUDY: Foul stroke! Come off it, Bob. Shit means *merde*, whatever the language.

BOB: It's impossible to have a rational argument with you.

JUDY: That's because I interrupt when you're talking crap.

BOB: I need to build up a head of steam! Or I...

JUDY: You like to lecture people. No one lectures me.

BOB: I can see why you're good at your job.

JUDY: Now you're trying to flatter me.

BOB: You're remorseless.

JUDY: Ah, a plea for sympathy.

BOB: But the truth is, you miss so much by not *listening*.

JUDY: And *now* you're trying to patronise me. Give it up, Bob. I've been patronised by *really* patronising people.

BOB: Can't we just *talk*? Why do we always have to bicker?

JUDY: We don't.

BOB: We do.

JUDY: Don't!

BOB: Do!

HE REALISES WHAT HE'S DONE AND LAUGHS.

BOB: You do see my point though, don't you?

JUDY: I see you're an elitist.

BOB: (GAME SET AND MATCH) Exactly!

JUDY: Oh Bob.

SFX: Another lunchtime

BOB: ...and over there, the Tower of London.

JUDY: You can't see the Tower of London.

BOB: Yes I can.

JUDY: Not from here.

BOB: Yes I can. Over there.

JUDY: I can't see a thing.

BOB: You're not looking hard enough.

PAUSE.

JUDY: I still can't see a thing.

PAUSE.

This is a mindgame, isn't it?

BOB: Look hard enough and you can see it.

JUDY: I've never been to the Tower of London.

BOB: Now you're taking the mickey.

JUDY: No I'm not.

BOB: Then you're a disgrace. You should be ashamed of yourself.

JUDY: Oh I am, I am.

BOB: I've been there many times. The first time when I was 17.

JUDY: We never went into the centre much, when we were kids. My dad used to take us to the markets on Sundays. That was a day out, that was.

BOB: I was doing A Levels. I stayed all day, then hid when the guards came and stayed all night as well.

JUDY: I've always lived in London. *London*. Not the tourist place.

BOB: You're mad.

JUDY: Never seen the Changing of the Guard either.

BOB: The Whispering Gallery?

JUDY: That's St Pauls? Yeah, I've been there.

BOB: The Lord Mayor's Show?

JUDY: Never seen it.

BOB: The National Gallery.

JUDY: Oh yes.

BOB: The Courtauld Gallery, the Wallace Collection, Apsley House?

JUDY: No, no, no. Where's Apsley House?

BOB: Park Lane. The Duke of Wellington owned it. He still has the use of it, in fact. Natural History Museum? V & A? Science Museum? Museum of London?

JUDY: We used to go the Horniman a lot. Forest Hill. That's nice. Nice museum. But usually, on weekends, we went to the coast.

BOB: I despair of you.

JUDY: I've been to Ronnie Scotts though.

PAUSE.

Quaglinos. Mezzo. The River Café, once. Number 1, the Aldwych. The Hackney Empire. The Comedy Store, a lot.

BOB: Now you're cheating.

JUDY: What was it like?

BOB: What?

JUDY: The Tower of London. When you stayed there overnight. That was a mad thing to do, by the way.

BOB: Oh it was great. Really...great.

JUDY: You must have been hungry.

BOB: I packed sandwiches. Pathetic, isn't it?

JUDY: Where did you hide?

BOB: There was a stairway, in the Beauchamp Tower. Shut off to the public. I pushed the door open and went up. There were no guards. All the security is in the Waterloo Block, where the Crown Jewels are kept. No one guards the old towers. Not inside. I couldn't go out of course. I got claustrophobia pretty badly. I threw up on the paving flags. It was the turning

point of my life.

JUDY: Maybe we should have a visit. You and me. One Saturday?

BOB: (IGNORING HER) The only room I could visit was the upper floor of the Beauchamp Tower. Where the aristocrats were imprisoned. Sometimes for years, sometimes for decades. The walls are covered in graffiti. Scrawls, and carvings. Beautiful, beautiful carved stonework, the kind you'd expect to see in a chapel or a cathedral choir, with the prisoners' names chiselled in their prison wall, each of them saying, 'I Was Here.' Thomas Rooper carved a skeleton of himself. That was in 1570. Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, scrawled his name above the fireplace. Every life was there. I could feel their breath, hear their voices. Robert Dudley, Johan Decker, Robart Tidir, Thox Jenkins, Marmaduke Neville, William Tyrrell. One prisoner carved the name of his gaoler on the wall - Hugh Longworth - then killed him in an escape attempt. I heard Hugh Longworth that day. I heard him. I felt him.

JUDY: We should go, maybe? Have a day trip?

THE MOOD IS BROKEN.

BOB: Maybe.

SFX: Another lunchtime

JUDY: It's warm.

BOB: I'd noticed.

JUDY: I thought I might go away for the weekend. The seaside maybe.

BOB: I don't feel like talking today.

JUDY: Nor me.

BOB: I'm sorry. I don't mean to be rude.

JUDY: You aren't being.

A PAUSE. IT LASTS.

THEY ARE BOTH COMFORTABLE WITH THE SILENCE.

SFX: The city; the rooftop; another lunchtime.

JUDY: Oh Bob! For heaven's sake! Don't make a mountain out of a molehill!

BOB: You had no right to interfere!

JUDY: I just made a couple of calls!

BOB: I'm happy where I am!

JUDY: You're wasted! Overqualified!

BOB: It's my life! Don't meddle with it.

PAUSE

JUDY: (CONTRITE) I was trying to be helpful, that's all.

BOB: I know that. But I don't want a better job okay? End of story.

JUDY: Whatever you say. Let's forget the fact you have a menial job, and everyone in the office treats you like crap!

BOB: You don't.

JUDY: Everyone but me. That's why I started being nice to you.

BOB: You thought: someone ought to.

JUDY: I just can't believe you don't want to do more

with your life!

BOB: It's a choice! My choice. I can live on very little. My rent is thirty quid a week. Twenty quid a week on food. Ten quid a week into a clothes account, for when I need a new suit.

JUDY: You live in poverty. It's absurd.

BOB: Poverty is relative.

JUDY: But you have a degree! You have a PhD!

BOB: So it's written in stone, is it? I have a degree: so I have to have a graduate income.

SHE SHRUGS.

I hate that sort of conventional thinking.

JUDY: Don't make out you're a rebel! You're the most conventional person I've ever met.

BOB: You're talking about fashion. That doesn't concern me.

JUDY: That's because you have no sense of style!

BOB: Brown suit: brown shoes. Black suit: black shoes. That's all I need to know. Tell me: How much is a copy of Time Out?

JUDY: Dunno. Why do you ask?

BOB: One pound ninety. How much is a Pret a Manger sandwich?

JUDY: Dunno. Depends.

BOB: Mozzarella and avocado. You have one every week.

JUDY: Dunno.

BOB: Three pounds ninety five. One pound twenty for the takeaway cappuccino. That's where your money goes. How much do you need a month to live on?

PAUSE

JUDY: Stop interrogating me! I earn good money. I'll spend it how I like.

BOB: For you, money is something that dribbles away. For me - it's controlled. I'm in charge. That's how I live my life.

JUDY: Broke.

BOB: Monastic. A monastic discipline.

JUDY: You don't think you're romanticising this a little? You're an office clerk!

BOB: I'm a man who has his life in perfect balance.

JUDY: Monastic!

BOB: Don't scoff!

JUDY: Celibate too, I suppose?

A PAUSE

Oh shit.

BOB: Nearly fifteen years now.

PAUSE.

Something wrong?

JUDY: I'm taken aback that's all. Is this a religious thing?

BOB: No no.

JUDY: So why then?

BOB: I just prefer it.

JUDY: Maybe you're not that highly sexed. Some people aren't.

BOB: That's not the reason.

JUDY: If you were highly sexed, you couldn't give it up.

PAUSE.

BOB: The opposite is true. For me, sex is all important. Women - and men. Slim, fat or skinny. Young, middle aged or old. Everything gets me hot. PAUSE) I'm hot now.

PAUSE

JUDY: What do you mean?

BOB: I mean, I'm hot now. Sexually aroused.

JUDY: You mean....?

BOB: Oh yes.

JUDY: Oh my Lord. Are you saying: you want to make love to me?

BOB: I want to, yes.

PAUSE

JUDY: You bastard. I could report you for that.

BOB: (DEVASTATED) Damn.

JUDY: Sexual harassment.

BOB: I was not. I was not...

JUDY: I walked into that one.

PAUSE.

Okay. I'll let it go. This time.

BOB: I've screwed it up.

JUDY: But if you ever try that again...

BOB: This was meant to be...I just wanted you as a...friend.

JUDY: I said: I'll let it go.

BOB: And now it's screwed up. End of friendship.
I could kill myself.

JUDY: Hey, hey. Steady on.

BOB: I've always thought of these lunchtimes as...as sanctuary periods. When we can say anything to each other. Without fear of comeback!

JUDY: Look, I'm just saying, back off a little! It's not a...a...a...blowing your brains out issue!

BOB: I'm so stupid! I was just...I would never, ever, try to get you into bed!

JUDY: Bob! Just shut up, okay? Let's change the subject.

PAUSE

Why...why not?

BOB: What?

JUDY: Why wouldn't you try to get me into bed?

BOB: I'm sorry?

JUDY: Am I so awful?

HE LAUGHS. HE'S BEWILDERED.

I'm sorry. What a crass thing to say. I don't care if you don't fancy me.

LONG PAUSE

BOB: I do.

SHE LOOKS AT HIM.

I do. Fancy you. Desire you. I could love you, if I let myself.

SHE THINKS ABOUT THIS.

JUDY: Strangely enough, I don't mind you saying that.

BOB: I do want to make love to you. I really do.

PAUSE

JUDY: That's cool.

BOB: But I never will. I don't want the release. I'd rather bottle it up. (PAUSE) Feel the hurt.

JUDY: (FINALLY GETTING IT) That turns you on.

BOB: Not doing it. It makes me high.

JUDY: That's a new one on me.

BOB: You want to try it?

PAUSE. SHE WRESTLES WITH IT.

JUDY: How?

BOB: It's quite safe. A game. A thought experiment.
No touching. That's the rule.

PAUSE

JUDY: I'm going to regret this. (SHE LOOKS AT HER
WATCH) I have a three o'clock meeting.

BOB: It's only 1.45.

JUDY: What do I do?

BOB: Say: 'I want you.'

JUDY: I want you.

BOB: You can't have me. Say: 'I want to kiss you.
Touch you. Stroke you.'

JUDY: I want to kiss you. Touch you. Stroke you.

BOB: You can't. Say...

JUDY: (INTERRUPTING) I want to hold you in my arms. I
want to crush my lips against yours. But I can't...

BOB: Now you're getting the hang of it.

JUDY: I want to close my eyes, and have you run your
tongue and lips over my cheeks. My throat. I want you
to kiss my eyelids. I want you to be so close, I can
feel the warmth of your breath.

PAUSE. (NOTE: SHE HAS HER EYES CLOSED FOR THE ABOVE
SPEECH).

BOB: Go on.

JUDY: I want to see you naked.

BOB: Then open your eyes.

PAUSE (AS SHE OPENS HER EYES).

JUDY: Very funny.

PAUSE. NOTE: HE IS ACTUALLY TAKING HIS CLOTHES OFF.

I was only joking! Put your clothes back on! Bob!
Bloody hell! Someone might see!

PAUSE. WE ASSUME BOB IS NOW NAKED.

BOB LAUGHS, BREAKING THE SPELL.

JUDY: (STUNNED) Christ.

BOB: That was good?

JUDY: Yes. (PAUSE) Yes. Yes, that was good.

SFX: The traffic rises, and ebbs; another lunchtime.

JUDY: ...Oh well, let me think...The most important thing
about me is...I'm sorry. There isn't a most important
thing about me. How do I play this game?

BOB: I'll go first then.

JUDY: You'll just brag. You had a congratulatory
first, didn't you? From Oxford. You were a don at 22,
while you were still doing your PhD. I read your CV.

BOB: I didn't put that on my CV.

JUDY: Four jobs ago. You actually had a managerial
position. I spied on you. (PAUSE) Go on then, you
brainy beggar.

BOB: The most important thing about me is...I'm mad.
Completely mad. Deliberately mad.

JUDY: This is good. You are such a show off.

BOB: But not organically mad. Not psychotic. Just...slightly to the left of reality.

JUDY: Oh come on Bob. This is just bullshit.

BOB: (IRRITATED) Bear with me. I have a point here.

JUDY: Go on then.

BOB: My subject: History. More specifically: History of London. More specifically: Everything that happened in every street, every house, every alleyway. Who lived where and when. The names of their children. When they died and how. I could write a book, that was my plan initially, when I started this. Two and a half decades ago. I could write a book, but the trouble is, it would be a million pages long. I could walk from St Paul's to Covent Garden and tell you something about every building we passed.

JUDY: Wow. Do you take bookings?

HE LAUGHS; SHE CAN'T PUT HIM OFF.

BOB: Pick a century. I can describe it. Pepys's London, easy. Walk down the streets, traders calling 'Pancakes!' and 'Dumplings! Dumplings! Diddle, diddle, dumplings ho!' 'Knives to Grind!' 'Cucumbers to pickle!' 'Hot Baked Warren Pears and Pippins!' I can see it, as clear as day, as clearly as I see you. I'm there now: on the street market, on the banks of the River by Fleet Bridge. I can see vicious-looking men standing by barrows piled high with gingerbread and nuts, I can see old hags offering the passing Londoners their night caps and plum pudding and furmety. I can see it all.

JUDY: Don't take this to heart: but you're on the cusp of being very boring.

BOB: That's one view. I'm a trainspotter, an anorak. But my special joy is: I know my world so well, I can live there, just by closing my eyes.

JUDY: I have to go. Crazy Hour is over.

BOB: I close my eyes and I'm there. I can hear the voices. Real people. People who lived, people who died. Men, women and children who burned in the Great Fire of London, Jack the Ripper's victims, the butcher who drowned in the River Fleet before they paved it over and made it a sewer.

JUDY: Enough, Bob!

BOB: The Gordon Riots. 1780. The London mob erupted. They broke into Langdale's distillery and set it alight. Hundreds of people risked their lives by running through the flames and fetching out pails and jugs and even pig troughs full of gin. The stills exploded and raw spirits poured into the streets, into the gutters, mixing with gallons of rum from the smashed barrels. People lay down in the gutters and drank the liquid, it burned their throats like acid, it burns my throat too. You see my point?

JUDY: You have an over-vivid imagination.

BOB: I know too much, and now I'm my own life's work. (PAUSE) I want you to share it with me.

JUDY: This game isn't working for me.

BOB: Close your eyes and hear the mob. (PAUSE, AS HE CLOSES HIS EYES) Listen to the mob! Listen to their screams of pain as the rum and gin mixture from the gutters burns their throats! (PAUSE, AS SHE CLOSES HER EYES) You hear it?

JUDY: I hear it.

BOB: You mean that?

JUDY: I hear it. I feel it. I CAN FEEL MY THROAT BURN! I CAN TASTE THE RUM AND THE GIN!

PAUSE.

That's really spooky.

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

JUDY: Crisps?

BOB: Mmm. Thanks.

PAUSE.

JUDY: I had a date last night.

BOB: That's nice.

JUDY: Do you want to know his name?

BOB: I'm happy to know.

JUDY: Geoff.

BOB: Nice name.

JUDY: He works in accounts.

BOB: You're not serious?

JUDY: He's a senior manager.

BOB: Hmmm. Nice night?

JUDY: Very nice.

BOB: You're seeing him again?

JUDY: Yes.

BOB: You like him?

JUDY: Yes. He has a child. A nine year old. Geoff is devoted to him.

BOB: Is this smalltalk?

JUDY: Yes. Verging on gossip, in fact.

BOB: How'm I doing?

JUDY: It's blood from a stone time, to be honest. But at least you're trying.

SFX: The sounds of the city; another lunchtime

JUDY: Crisps?

BOB: Mmmm..What flavour?

JUDY: Salt and vinegar.

BOB: Yeah okay.

PAUSE.

JUDY: Want to swap? Sandwiches?

BOB: No.

JUDY: Oh, go on!

BOB: I hate swapping. You should choose what you want in the first place.

JUDY: My moods change.

BOB: In five minutes, your mood has changed?

JUDY: Five minutes ago, I was in a cheese and pickle mood. Now I'm in a pastrami mood.

BOB: Well so am I.

JUDY: I'm feeling much more pastrami than you are.

BOB: Oh for pity's sake!

JUDY: You always used to eat cheese. Home made cheese sandwiches. Laughing Cow, as I recall?

BOB: Today, I'm buying pastrami. I steeled myself to do it. I can't just *swap*.

BEAT

Half of each, each?

SFX: The sounds of the city; another lunchtime

BOB: ...[who gives a damn] about what those idiots say or do? You shouldn't let them get to you!

JUDY: That's easy for you to say.

BOB: You're good at your job! That's what counts.

JUDY: Not in this man's world it isn't.

BOB: I'm sure you're exaggerating.

JUDY: I'm not. I'm being passed over. I can feel it. Bastards!

BOB: Then say something.

JUDY: That would make it worse.

BOB: Then say nothing.

JUDY: Worse still.

BOB: I don't know what to say.

JUDY: Don't patronise me.

PAUSE.

Hell. I'm sorry. I don't mean to take it out on you.

BOB: No problem. That's what I'm here for.

JUDY: Sounding board.

BOB: Whipping boy.

JUDY: You're the only person in the world who can't bully me.

BOB: Gee, thanks.

JUDY: The only person stranger than I am.

BOB: You're not strange.

JUDY: Not compared to you.

BOB: I'm mellowing.

JUDY: I don't want you to. I like you the way you are.

BOB: No, no. You were right. What you said to me once. I should get out more. So I do. I went to the cinema last week.

JUDY: And?

BOB: Tarkovsky. Loved it. The time went so fast, I couldn't believe it when the film ended.

JUDY: I have news for you Bob: you're still strange.

HE LAUGHS.

BOB: How's Geoff?

JUDY: Who?

BOB: The boyfriend.

JUDY: That was months ago. I've been seeing Frank recently. The American.

BOB: Which American?

JUDY: Forget it. (BEAT) You're not interested in me, Bob. (BEAT) Don't bother denying it. (BEAT) Tell me about the ghosts.

BOB: No.

JUDY: Please, Bob. Please.

BOB: I don't hear the ghosts anymore. Not recently. Not since...

JUDY: Tell me about the ghosts!

PAUSE

BOB: The trouble with knowing things is...it grows and grows. I look at a building, I see its history, the men who built it, the people who lived there. I see colours and clothes and periwigs. I hear voices. Then the voices speak to me. They tell me things.

JUDY: Tell me about the voices.

BOB: There's a house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, near the John Soane Museum. A girl lived there, her name was Joan Whyberry. Her father raped her and she committed suicide. I know it's all true: I checked the historical records. But I knew it all before I read a word. She spoke to me, Judy. I saw her. I walked through Lincoln's Inn Fields and saw her ghost.

JUDY: And what did she say?

BOB: She told me her name. Her mother's name. Her father's name. Her sisters' names. She told me her age. The names of her friends. She told me her father had raped her, and where. She told me the name of the poison she bought. She told me the day she stole it. She told me the room she was in on the day she drank it. The colour of the walls. It was raining outside. It was a Wednesday. She told me all the facts of her life, every smell she smelled, the sounds of her house at night, everything.

JUDY: Joan Whyberry.

BOB: Daughter of Alice Whyberry. Alice married a lawyer, Joan's father. He wore a yellowing wig in court. He smelled of absinthe. His fingernails were cracked. He must have tugged at them, or tapped them, in court maybe, so they kept cracking, never had a chance to grow back clear. Joan was a hard working girl, as you had to be in those days. She helped her mother with the washing, she swept the floors, she did sewing, and darning. She didn't cry, the night her father first raped her, because her mother was downstairs, she was afraid to disturb her.

JUDY: The poison.

BOB: Morphine, washed down with gin.

JUDY: The gin again.

BOB: She threw most of it up. All she had left was gin. So she drank and drank. Then slashed her arms.

JUDY: Both arms.

BOB: The right arm first. Then the left. Then her stomach. Then her throat. The throat wound was fatal, she was blind drunk by then, her father was in a tavern, her mother was with relatives.

JUDY: Her sisters.

BOB: With a nurse. The nurse didn't stir.

JUDY: The nurse's name?

BOB: Edith.

JUDY: The sisters?

BOB: Alice, 12, Betty, 9. Joan was the middle one.

JUDY: I can taste the gin. I can smell his breath. I can see his fingernails.

SHE STARTS TO CRY.

BOB: Steady. Steady.

JUDY: HIS BREATH, HIS HAIR, HIS TONGUE, HIS CRACKED, YELLOW NAILS!

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime; winter

PAUSE, AS THEY LOOK AROUND.

BOB: I love this view.

JUDY: It's like Dickens.

BOB: A carpet of white.

JUDY: It's bloody cold.

BOB: I hardly notice it.

JUDY: I'm going in.

BOB: Sandwich?

JUDY: I can see my own breath!

BOB: Well, that's a good sign.

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

BOB: ...yeah, I know what you mean. (PAUSE) But I love old people. Very old people. People who are so old the skin stretches and the eyes get creamy white and still, and scary. They live with the ghosts, all the time, and they don't even know it.

JUDY: This is a ghost story. That's good. (PAUSE) It's been one of those days. I almost cried in a meeting today. (PAUSE) I covered well, though, I gave the deputy head of retail a public reprimand, he had to leave the room to get his head together.

PAUSE

BOB: You're pretty scary too, now I come to think of it.

JUDY: My point is: I'm stressed. I could use a ghost story.

PAUSE

BOB: All right. (PAUSE) You know when you go back somewhere? Somewhere where you once spent a lot of time. A place, or a street, or a park, a favourite pub even. Then a few years later, you go back again. And then, more time passes, and you go again. And then again. And it all becomes one great mass of memories. Moments folded on to moments.

JUDY: A story, Bob, please, not a philosophy class.

BOB: Old people get like that. They have memories of their memories. That's why old people start to forget things, the recent things. They *need* to start erasing things, just to clear a bit of space in the head. But the older memories are all there. They're there, they're everywhere, they're on you.

JUDY: Scare me! That's all I'm asking. It's twenty minutes to two o'clock, scare me! Is that so much to

ask?

HE SIGHS.

BOB: I don't think I can.

JUDY: Try.

BOB: I've told you my stories. The apprentice boy, beaten to death. The babies, poisoned by their nanny. Murders, rapes, tortures, burning at the stake.

PAUSE

I can't scare you any more. There are no surprises left.

JUDY: Try.

BOB: There's nothing I can do to make your heart *jolt*.

JUDY: Well, try, you lazy devil, try!

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

BOB: ...though that's not something that bothers me. But when I think of everything I've done with my life. I think: Was it enough?

JUDY: It's not a competition. You don't get marked.

PAUSE

BOB: Damn. I never knew that.

JUDY: Idiot.

BOB: Damn.

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

PAUSE: BOB IS THINKING OF A STORY.

BOB: Her name was Evelyn.

PAUSE.

JUDY: Go on.

BOB: She was Welsh. South Welsh. Born in the year 1904, in Llanelli.

JUDY: More.

BOB: Her father was a coal miner, her mother took in knitting. When she was 11 her father, Geraint, coughed himself to death. Pneumoconiosis.

JUDY: More.

BOB: When she was 12 Evelyn came to London, she was in service. The family was called (HE HAS TO THINK) Absalom. He was a goldsmith.

JUDY: She was raped?

BOB: No.

JUDY: Murdered?

BOB: No.

JUDY: A tragic suicide?

PAUSE.

I'm sorry. I'm being awful.

BOB: (TEASING) Yes you are. I'm shocked at your insensitive prurient curiosity.

JUDY: All right, all right, don't rub it in. I'm sorry.

BOB: This is not the telly. *I knew this woman.*

JUDY: Understood. I'll be more tactful in future. (ANXIOUS FOR DIRT) Now tell me about her!

BOB SIGHS.

BOB: All right. (PAUSE) She was plain, puritanical, she had a sharp tongue, and by her own admission, not much of a sense of humour. Her first boyfriend jilted her. She went twelve years until her next boyfriend. She was 31. Her first child died in childbirth. Her second child died in childbirth. The third child survived, and died when it was seven. She was a pretty, blonde girl, her name was Marjorie, her mother adored her. When Marjorie died, Evelyn was griefstricken. Her brother George died the same year. Her father Geraint had died when she was young, as I said, mother died just before Marjorie was born. Evelyn came from a big family, 8 sisters 4 brothers. By the time she was 41, only two sisters were left. The rest were dead. There were hordes of nephews and nieces though. Evelyn grew older. The nephews started dying. The nieces died. She made a very good friend called...Rachel, at the hospital where she worked as a clerk. Moorfields Eye Hospital, next to the site of the old Holy Land rookery. From scullery maid to hospital clerk was a big social climb in those days, though it must be said, the job was mindnumbingly boring. Anyway, I digress: Rachel was...

JUDY: How did she die?

BOB: Let me...

JUDY: How did Evelyn die? I want to know. I need to know.

BOB: I have no idea! I assume she *must* be dead by now, I knew her twenty years ago, and she was an old old woman even then. But we lost touch. I simply don't know...how she died. (PAUSE, EXPLAINING:;) We went to the same supermarket. I used to help her carry her shopping. She could total a bill in her head in ten seconds flat. She had no friends. All her family were dead. She still had that sharp, spiteful tongue. I loved her. I loved that old woman.

JUDY: The ghosts...Where are the ghosts in this story?

BOB: You know the answer. She carried them. On her. She had old old skin, with stiff grey wrinkles, you couldn't help but stare at her flesh, and wonder if she'd ever been young. And her eyes were...weary. I looked into her eyes and saw her father coughing himself to death. I brushed her arm and I felt a child dying as it fell out of the womb. That old woman, with her razor sharp mind. She carried the ghosts around her. *People carry ghosts too.* It's not just buildings, it's not just places.

JUDY: I don't find that sad. She was an old spiteful woman...she didn't love anyone...no one loved her...

BOB: You'd liked it more if she'd been hacked to death. Scary story. Turn on.

JUDY: Maybe. I love your stories. They shock me.

BOB: Not stories. Real. Real ghosts. Think what that old woman lived with. Death in every pore, every cell. Ghosts smothering her. Imagine what that must be like. *Imagine what that must be like.* You wake up, you see the dead, you remember the dead, the stories the dead used to tell are with you, the pain, the boredom, every stupid incident of all their stupid lives!

JUDY: Less of the self pity Bob, I'm getting sick of it.

BOB: Oh, shove it.

JUDY: (TAUNTING) You know *such* pain.

BOB: Don't mock me.

JUDY: Well I'm sorry! But I...I...(DEFLATING) I didn't like that story. It's getting late. I should be in work.

BOB: Maybe I shouldn't tell any more ghost stories. Maybe we're both getting tired of them.

PAUSE

BOB: (CONT) Mmm? Judy? What do you think? No more ghost stories? (SOFTLY) No more ghost stories...Please.

JUDY: (BLOCKING HIM OUT) I might get sushi tomorrow.

BOB: Please!

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

BOB: ...and the challenge is to travel as far as I can, without cheating, before the dawn.

JUDY: So how far? How far did you get?

BOB: Regent's Park.

JUDY: From here.

BOB: From here. I've done it before, many times. Sneak up after work, wait until the sun goes down. Then I begin.

JUDY: Up that fire escape?

BOB: Down the next one. All the roofs are interconnected. To cross a street, you get down to ground level, cross the road, go up the next fire escape. It's cheating but it counts.

JUDY: Wow.

BOB: A good night.

JUDY: Some walk.

BOB: It's a way of seeing the world.

JUDY: Will you take me?

BOB: Of course. But not now. We only have twenty minutes.

JUDY: Oh come on. Let's make a start.

SFX: Judy walks to the ladder; a clang of metal as she starts to climb.

JUDY: Oh, hell.

BOB: Are you okay?

JUDY: Vertigo, I think.

HE LAUGHS.

BOB: You're safe enough. The hoops will catch you if you fall.

JUDY: Oh that's really put me at my ease.

SFX: He climbs quickly up the ladder, past her.

JUDY: (CONT) Bob! Watch out...you'll knock me off...you'll...don't mind me will you!

BOB: (SING SONG) Come and get me!

JUDY: I can't! I'm stuck. I'll...see you tomorrow.

BOB: Come on!

SFX: She sighs. Starts to climb the ladder slowly. Then stops.

BOB: That's great. Don't stop, you're doing fine.

JUDY: There's a problem.

BOB: Come on. The views are better up here. You can

see the ball on the top of the Coliseum.

JUDY: No I'm serious.

BOB: I think that's St Mary Le Strand. Well of course it is. The Gibbs spire. Come and see.

JUDY: BOB I'M STUCK!

BOB: Don't be stupid.

JUDY: I can't move.

BOB: Just move a hand. Then a foot. Then continue.

JUDY: I'm frightened Bob. I'm going to fall.

BOB: You can't fall. You're holding on.

JUDY: I'M NOT! I'M NOT! I'M LETTING GO! I can see myself doing it. Letting go!

BOB: Judy, don't let go.

JUDY: I'm going to fall. I'm going to die.

BOB: You aren't going to fall. You won't die.

JUDY: I'M FALLING I'M FALLING I CAN SEE IT HAPPENING I'M SLIPPING THROUGH THE WIRE HOOPS I'M FALLING OFF THE ROOF!

BOB: Okay. So let's look at this rationally. (PAUSE) You're afraid of heights, am I right?

JUDY: I'm afraid of hitting the ground at speed and my guts spurting out like jam, that's what I'm afraid of!

DESPITE HIMSELF, BOB STARTS TO LAUGH.

JUDY: Bob, stop it please, I really can't help myself.

BOB: Look, I'm coming to fetch you. Okay? I'm coming down the ladder. Here I am. Take my hand.

JUDY: GO AWAY, GO AWAY YOU'LL MAKE ME FALL!

BOB: Okay, okay, I'm climbing back up the ladder, I'm on the roof now, I'm not crowding you. You're safe. (PAUSE) I'll go for help.

JUDY: (WHIMPERING) You can't. You can't.

BOB: I won't be long.

JUDY: The only way down is past me.

BOB: I'll go the other way. Down to the ground. Back up through our building.

JUDY: But you can't leave me. You can't leave me alone. Or I'll fall.

PAUSE.

BOB: I think we have a situation here.

JUDY: Oh Bob, I've never been so humiliated in my life.

BOB: You can't move your hand, even a little bit?

JUDY: I'M SCARED! I've never been so scared. I know it's stupid, BUT I'M STILL SCARED.

BOB: You have to come up here. Right away, Judy. Now! Move your hand!

PAUSE.

Or I'll jump to my death.

PAUSE.

JUDY: Are you crazy?

BOB: Yes I am! Deranged! So do as I say, or I'll kill myself! That's the deal - climb or I jump! Climb! Climb! Move your foot! Your hand! Your foot! Your hand! Your foot!

SFX: The clatter of feet on metal rungs as Judy hurries to the rooftop.

BOB: That got your attention, didn't it?

JUDY: Oh no, oh no, oh no!

SHE IS LAUGHING AND CRYING.

JUDY: It wasn't far. All I had to do was climb.

BOB: It's okay. It's okay. You're safe now.

JUDY: Oh Bob.

SFX: He is holding her, hugging her, muffling her voice. They kiss passionately.

JUDY: Oh Bob. You clown. I could almost love you, sometimes.

BOB: Don't talk. Say nothing. Just...kiss me.

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

JUDY: ...and after that, I never saw her again.

PAUSE.

Ask me something else?

BOB: Okay. Eleven. Tell me about eleven.

JUDY: I never lived eleven. My sister was sixteen. She had cheesecloth shirts and jeans she shrank by sitting in the bath. She listened to pop music, the music you get in lifts now, but then it was like a revolution in your living room. She had boyfriends. So many boyfriends. She had lipstick, she had high heels and she had sex, lots of it. I didn't live eleven when I was eleven: I lived sixteen.

BOB: Eight.

JUDY: The seaside. The taste of salt. Ice cream, chips.

BOB: Six.

JUDY: We had a holiday on a farm. I could smell cowshit all the time. The farmer's wife made us an omelette.

BOB: Tell me about when your father died.

JUDY: That was twelve. We were supposed to be going on holiday. Mum and Dad spent the morning quarrelling. He took the car to the garage to fill it up. He never came back. Mum was furious, 'you can't trust your father to do the simplest thing,' she kept saying. Then one of the neighbours said there'd been a car crash. When we went to look it was our car. That was a real shock. It was empty and smashed up. That was our car! (PAUSE) How did you know my father died?

BOB: A blue Metro. It hit a lamppost.

JUDY: Not very hard. He had a heart attack at the wheel. I must have told you about my father?

BOB: He was muttering under his breath as he died. If I'd only filled the car up last night. If I'd only filled the bloody car up!

JUDY: I never told you about my father.

BOB: He was balding. That angular face. You look more like your mother.

JUDY: How did you know about my father?

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

JUDY: ...but we never talked about it. My mother, my sister, and me. It was our secret. We must have thought, if we never mentioned it, no one would know it had happened. We'd look like a normal family. So when people at school talked about my mum and dad, I never said, 'Oh, sorry, my dad's dead.' I should have said that. I wish I had.

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

PAUSE. THEN:

JUDY: My sister's married now.

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

JUDY: ...but that's always the way, isn't it? My first boyfriend was Jewish. And all my girlfriends used to say to me: 'What's it like?' And I didn't know what they meant. I thought they meant sex, so I said, oh yeah, it's great, and then laugh. And they said: but what is it like? It. I wish I could start my life again from the age of ten. Then at least I'd understand all the dirty jokes.

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

PAUSE. THEN:

JUDY: And did you love her?

BOB: For a time yes.

JUDY: And Claire. What was she like?

BOB: You know.

JUDY: Tell me.

BOB: Blonde, small. A fiery kiss.

JUDY: Thin, fat?

BOB: A slim waist, big breasts. She'd have put on weight by now. We were in our twenties.

JUDY: And did you love her?

BOB: Oh for pity's sake, Judy!

JUDY: I'm not jealous! I just want to know.

BOB: You're not jealous.

JUDY: I have no reason to be jealous.

BOB: I didn't love her.

JUDY: Who else?

BOB: The girl I loved was called Emily. She was second in our class in French, after me. I kissed her one night at a party. I wasn't invited. To the party.

JUDY: A good kiss?

BOB: Melancholy.

JUDY: *What?*

BOB: I mean, the experience made me melancholy. Verging on depressed. I said to her - I had no chat-up lines, as you can imagine, so I said to her: Emily, I love you. I want to kiss you. So either, a) you want to kiss me too, which is great, or b) you don't want to. So if it's a) then let's kiss! and if it's b) then, let's kiss anyway! Otherwise I'll keep pestering you. You'll be sick of the sight of me,

I'll stand here and talk about Kant and Hegel and Nietzsche until you're ready to scream. So she kissed me and she bit my tongue. I can taste the blood now.

JUDY: That's rape!

BOB: (SHOCKED) I stole a kiss!

JUDY: Verbal rape.

BOB: I was thirteen.

JUDY: You must have frightened her.

BOB: She was laughing at me. I was a joke. I traded on that. She wanted to tell the story to her friends, what a joke I was, so she kissed me.

JUDY: That's a truly pathetic story.

BOB: I never asked you to like me.

JUDY: There's a dark streak in you.

BOB: There's a light streak. Aside from that, I'm...

JUDY: ...*all* dark. I can see your cliches coming these days.

BOB: Rape is too strong. I stole a kiss, that's all.

BEAT.

Judy?

Judy!

JUDY: What do you want me to say?

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

JUDY: Listen! I can hear church bells. Can you hear church bells?

BOB: St Bride's, I think.

JUDY: From here? Maybe. And look - the leaves are falling!

BOB: I can see. It's beautiful.

JUDY: I love this time of year.

PAUSE.

JUDY: They've offered me promotion.

PAUSE.

BOB: Yes?

JUDY: Yes.

PAUSE.

BOB: Will you take it?

JUDY: I'd be mad not to.

PAUSE. THEY REFLECT.

BOB: Well take it then.

JUDY: I shall.

PAUSE.

BOB: (APROPOS OF NOTHING) I've always envied mediocre people. (PAUSE) That sounds arrogant, doesn't it?

JUDY: No. It is arrogant.

BOB: I've always envied...Oh Lord. How can I say it?

JUDY: You're too brainy for your T shirt, pal.

BOB: I have talent without purpose. That's my tragedy.

JUDY: You're romanticising again.

BOB: And why not? My life is no ordinary thing.
(GRANDLY) I've made myself a walking library of knowledge!

JUDY: Oh, give it a rest, Bob!

BOB: I've achieved something!

JUDY: You've read a lot of books.

BOB: London lives through me!

JUDY: Sad so-and-so.

BOB: Mr Casaubon.

JUDY: Key to All Mythologies. We did the same degree, remember. (PAUSE) You're just a forty five year old big kid, aren't you?

BOB: I'm strange, I admit it, I revel in it.

JUDY: *Weirdo*. (LOOKING) This city's full of trees. Every street has trees, almost. Not like New York, or even Paris. I love that.

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

JUDY: We went to dinner. I came home early. I had a headache. Sorry. Washout, really. You?

BOB: I walked the roofs again. (PAUSE) From here to City Wall. I didn't touch the ground once. Not once.

JUDY: One day, you'll take me.

BOB: St Paul's was that close. (HE GESTURES) One day I'd like to climb the dome. Reach the lantern. One day.

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

JUDY: And what was her name?

BOB: Jane Elliott. Jane Miranda Elliott. Her father's name was Claude. Her brother's name was...

JUDY INTERJECTS A COUGH; MEANING, CUT TO THE CHASE!

Sorry. (PAUSE) We lived together, bought furniture, everything. But she kept telling me I was too intense. I frightened her. And she thought I was boring. But when we went to bed... (BEAT) ...the Earth moved.

JUDY: Good sex.

BOB: The best.

JUDY: You're good at it.

BOB: I'm great!

JUDY: So why did she leave you?

BOB: *Because* of the sex. She couldn't cope.. She was having orgasm flashes a week later.

JUDY: You're bragging again.

BOB: Just stating a fact.

JUDY: So you'll have to show me sometime. How good

you are.

BOB: Against the rules.

JUDY: Bob.

BOB: Don't pressure me.

JUDY: I want you. I want you so much.

BOB: Bottle it up then. Feel the hurt.

JUDY: I don't want to! I want you to make love to me Bob. I want you to love me. Will you Bob?

PAUSE.

BOB: I'm making love to you now.

JUDY: No more games. Just do it.

BOB: (INSISTENT) Close your eyes. I'll close mine. (PAUSE) Feel it! I'm making love to you. I'm inside you. Your body is shaking. You've never felt like this. It's like dying. It's like flying. You're coming.

JUDY: I'm coming.

SHE GROANS.

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

JUDY: Your father.

BOB: My father was a bus driver. He's still alive. My mother's dead. No brothers, no sisters. I have an uncle in Australia.

JUDY: When did your mother die?

BOB: Ten years ago.

JUDY: How did you feel?

BOB: Grief-stricken. Of course.

JUDY: But what else. What else?

BOB: Nothing.

JUDY: No guilt.

BOB: No.

JUDY: You didn't feel you'd let her down.

BOB: I wasn't interested in her approval.

JUDY: No guilt. (FUMING) How could you have had no guilt?

PAUSE. HE SHRUGS.

You jammy beggar!

PAUSE.

I ought to get back.

BOB: Work beckons.

JUDY: I wouldn't cope. If it wasn't for our times together. Our lunchtimes.

BOB: I'll see you tomorrow.

JUDY: Tonight?

BOB: Tomorrow. Never tonight. You know that.

PAUSE

JUDY: Bob. Before I go. Tell me again. Tell me about the rooftops.

BOB: My secret world.

JUDY: Tell me what it's like. When you sleep on the roof. And the dawn comes up over London.

BOB: It's bliss. It's like, watching life begin again.

JUDY: And the nets, the pigeon nets?

BOB: You never see them, till you know to look. Staked out across sheer drops. You can climb them, if you're quick, if you don't yank. You can hang there, high in the air, clinging on by your fingertips. It's a wonderful feeling. The danger is such a buzz.

JUDY: And tell me, tell me, about the time you flew!

PAUSE

Tell me Bob.

PAUSE

Tell me! *Why* did you do it?

BOB: You were trapped there, on the ladder, screaming you were stuck, and I shouted at you: 'Hand, foot, hand, foot, hand, foot!' And you reached the top. And I held you. And we kissed for the first time. The only time.

JUDY: Why the hell did you jump?

BOB: I thought it. And the thought was so vivid, I did it.

REPRISE OF PREVIOUS SCENE: JUDY IS STUCK ON THE LADDER. SHE STARTS TO CRY.

BOB: You have to come up here. Right away, Judy. Now! Move your hand!

PAUSE

Or I'll jump to my death!

JUDY: Are you crazy?

BOB: Yes I am! Deranged! So do as I say, or I'll kill myself! That's the deal - climb or I jump! Climb! Climb! Move your foot! Your hand! Your foot! Your hand! Your foot!

SFX: Judy rapidly climbing the fire escape.

BOB: That got your attention, didn't it?

JUDY: Oh no, oh no, oh no!

SHE IS LAUGHING AND CRYING.

It wasn't far. All I had to do was climb.

BOB: It's okay. It's okay. You're safe now.

JUDY: Oh Bob.

SFX: He is holding her, hugging her, muffling her voice. They kiss passionately.

JUDY: Oh Bob. You clown! I could...almost love you, sometimes.

BOB: Don't talk. Say nothing. Just...kiss me.

THEY KISS AGAIN.

SFX: His footsteps on the roof, as he runs to the edge.

JUDY: Now you're teasing me.

BOB: I'm not afraid of falling.

JUDY: Not too close to the edge.

BOB: I'm not afraid...I almost wonder...

JUDY: Not too close Bob. I'm sorry, I sound like your mother - not too close!

BOB: ...what it would feel like.

JUDY: Bob. You're scaring me. Bob!

BOB: Don't be afraid. I'm not.

(NOTE: THIS IS THE MOMENT WHEN HE JUMPS).

JUDY: Bob! (SCREAMS) Bob! For pity's sake! Bob!

SFX: A pause; then the sound of traffic below swells. We hear horns sounding below as the cars see the dead body on the ground and veer around it...

JUDY: Bob. Oh Bob! This can't have happened! Come back! Oh no. BOB!!!!!!

SFX: The city, the rooftop; another lunchtime

JUDY: It's not warm. That's for sure.

BOB: I love this view.

JUDY: In fact, it's bloody freezing. I think I'll go in.

BOB: I love this view. I do.

JUDY: I turned down the promotion.

BOB: It's like Dickens.

JUDY: There's more to life than work, hmmm?

BOB: A carpet of white. But cold. So cold.

JUDY: You can feel it?

BOB: Not really. I can see your breath.

JUDY: Not yours.

BOB: Not mine.

PAUSE

JUDY: Bob?

NO ANSWER.

Will you tell me about the ghosts?

NO ANSWER.

Please?

NO ANSWER.

Bob?

PAUSE. SHE HEARS HIS ANSWER.

So I'm not consistent. Sue me! Today, I'm in the mood, all right? So: tell me about the ghosts.

PAUSE. IN THESE PAUSES, SHE IS LISTENING TO BOB'S RESPONSES.

Oh yes, I do. I want to hear. Tell me about him. Tell me about Matthew.

PAUSE. SHE LISTENS.

But why? (PAUSE) And when? (PAUSE) And how did Matthew die? (PAUSE) And who found the body? Tell me. Tell me!

END