



GARDENING LEAVE

BY

NICOLAS RIDLEY

Extract

A SMITH SCRIPT

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Cast:

BOB (Robert)
TOM (Thomas)
FIONA

Setting:

A West End club
A sofa, two armchairs, a coffee table etc.

Props:

Bob's smartphone
Tom's shoulder bag
Tom's mobile
Fiona's mobile
Bob's theatre tickets

Lights up on BOB who is sitting in one of the armchairs. While he waits, he checks messages on his smartphone.

BOB thinks he hears someone coming and stands up. But there's no one there.

He sits down again, adjusts his tie and his shirt cuffs and then re-checks his messages.

TOM enters and looks round. He is carrying a shoulder bag

BOB: *(standing)* Thomas?

TOM: *(surprised)* Tom.

BOB: Tom? Right. Of course. I'm Robert. Bob. Bob Chalfont. I was wondering if I'd recognise you.

TOM: If you'd –

BOB: Luckily the Club's pretty empty today. Better switch off the mobile. Don't want any of the older members complaining, do we? Club rules. And so on, and so forth.

TOM: Club rules?

BOB: No mobiles.

TOM: *(taking out mobile)* Oh, in that case I'd better –

BOB: Didn't you know?

TOM: I'm not a member.

BOB: Aren't you? Oh, I assumed you must be. Actually, neither am I. It's my wife who's the member. She works round the corner in St James's. I'm what's termed 'a spouse'. Means I'm allowed to use some of the facilities. And it's a handy place to meet if one doesn't have an office in the West End. Which I don't. Not right now. Of course some of the rules are a bit tiresome. Not being able to use a mobile, for one. Not that they're strictly enforced. But best to keep one's nose clean if you know what I mean. Actually, strictly speaking, bags aren't allowed in here, either.

They have to be checked in at the cloakroom. Don't worry. Not a problem. Give it to me. Let's stick it here. (*takes shoulder bag from TOM and places it behind the sofa*) Sit down, sit down. Let me get you something from the bar. A coffee? A glass of wine? Something stronger?

TOM: No, nothing. Thank you.

BOB: You're sure? Now tell me. How do you know Harriet?

TOM: Harriet?

BOB: Harriet Boston. It was Harriet who – No, no. That's wrong. Strictly speaking, it was Timothy who suggested it might be a good idea if we –

TOM: Timothy?

BOB: Harriet's brother, Timothy. Tim. Tim Boston?

TOM: Oh.

BOB: Nice chap, isn't he?

TOM: I'm not sure I know Timothy –

BOB: I can't say I know him, either. Not well. But he's always extremely agreeable. And, of course, Harriet's an old friend. Although actually, strictly speaking, Harriet's Stella's friend more than mine.

TOM: (*confused*) Stella?

BOB: (*explanatory*) My sister. Stella.

TOM: Listen. I –

BOB: Stella Chalfont?

TOM: I'm sorry. The only Stella Chalfont I know is Stella Chalfont, the actress.

BOB: That's right. Stella. Now the point is –

TOM: Stella Chalfont's your sister?

BOB: Yes. Now the point is –

TOM: Good heavens. Stella Chalfont. How extraordinary. I am such an admirer.

BOB: Really. Now the point is –

TOM: She is such a star. The last time I saw her was at Stratford. Or was it Chichester? It could have been Brighton –

BOB: I'm not a theatre-goer myself.

TOM: And her new show in the West End –

BOB: Suspension of disbelief. That sort of thing.

TOM: Wow. What a hit. Rave reviews. Completely sold out.

BOB: Does nothing for me, I'm afraid.

TOM: Not a ticket to be had. Not for love nor money,

BOB: Nothing at all.

TOM: (*dreamily*) Stella Chalfont.

Beat.

BOB: Anyway. As I was saying, Harriet – or, strictly speaking, Tim – suggested it would be a good idea if we –

TOM: I don't suppose you – ?

BOB: I – ?

TOM: Your sister's show. I don't suppose you – ?

BOB: What?

TOM: Tickets. I don't suppose you – ?

BOB: Tickets? Oh, yes. Not a problem. Now the point is –

Bob's mobile rings.

Sorry, Tom. New phone. I thought I'd switched it off.

Bob terminates the call without checking the caller.

What was I saying? Listen. Why don't I tell you the whole story?
You don't mind, do you?

Tom looks at his watch.

I know you must be a very busy man but so often starting from the beginning saves time in the end if you know what I mean. Is that all right?

TOM: Well –

BOB: The first thing I want to say is this. I need to get back in the saddle.

TOM: The saddle?

BOB: Yes. I need to get back in it. Good to have a little gardening leave once in a while. Wonderful, in fact. Chance to re-focus. Regroup. Recuperate. But now I need to pick up the reins. Take the helm. Grab hold of the joystick. Work. I need to work, Tom. It's not the money, although – You see work for me is a compulsion. An imperative. A compulsive imperative if you like. It's something I have to do. Work is my life, Tom, and I strongly believe – What am I saying? I *know* for an absolute, cast iron certainty that I have something to offer. *(beat)* A great deal, in fact.

TOM: I'm sure you have. Listen. I think you may have –

BOB: I'm not pretending money isn't important. Of course it is. Money makes the world go round. And so on, and so forth. But the job has to be the right one. There's no urgency. No great urgency. Not yet. These things take time. I know that.

TOM: I'm sure they must.

BOB: At this stage, I'm really just seeing what's out there. Putting the word about. Setting out my pieces. Extending the feelers. Tickling up my network. If you see what I mean.

TOM: Umm, yes.

BOB: Which is why –

TOM: Why?

BOB: Hindsight's a wonderful thing, don't you think, Tom?

TOM: Yes, I suppose it is.

BOB: With hindsight – But one can't think like that, can one? What's past is past. But with hindsight I should have got out of S & M earlier.

TOM: S and M?

BOB: Soskin & Mooney.