

THE DECIDING FACTOR



The Deciding Factor

By Derek Webb

Drama about a talent show host. John Tower is an outspoken judge on the hit talent TV show 'Star Potential'. A contestant has committed suicide after appearing on the show and a suicide note found beside the body suggests that his comments might have been the deciding factor.

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SYNOPSIS

John Tower is an outspoken judge on the hit talent TV show 'Star Potential'. As the play opens, he is in his home at breakfast time. There is a report on the news about one of the contestants, Zoe Walker, who has committed suicide after appearing on the show and having been accused by John of 'being totally without a shred of talent'. A suicide note found beside the body suggests that his comments might have been the deciding factor. His initial reaction however is to have a callous disregard for what happened, and he dismisses any thought of his comments having contributed to the event.

A few days later John's friend, Dan, comes round to discuss the new show they're planning to pitch to the TV company. During the conversation we learn that John has been receiving hate mail and his initial arrogant confidence is starting to be shaken. The balance is finally tipped when he gets a visit from a reporter who completely unnerves him (sample from this scene follows) and in his mind, he not only starts to accept responsibility for Zoe's death, but it begins to become an obsession. He collects photographs and, during a visit to her parents, steals some of her personal items which he keeps in a cupboard.

The TV company decide to rest him from the show until public antipathy towards him wanes - and this spurs him on to prove himself while, in his mind, making amends for Zoe's death at the same time. He plans to 'bring her back to life' by finding a lookalike he can nurture and train to become a major star. Amy is the same age and very similar in looks to Zoe. She goes along with his plan and starts to work with him to develop an act. He boasts that he can turn her from a nobody to a somebody in three months and has all the means he needs at his disposal. He also boasts that he has what it takes to influence some of the biggest names in show business. He has hundreds of contacts. He also knows who's sleeping with whom, who is taking what drug-wise, who is into straight porn, gay porn, child-porn. Whatever there is to know, he has got it, so whenever he wants to call in a favour he can.

When his wife and other friends desert him, the obsession becomes complete. His determination to show the world the superstar he intends to create is all that matters. But, when Amy discovers, his 'shrine' to Zoe, there is a blazing argument and Amy too deserts him - but not before stealing his back up hard drive containing all the data he had boasted about. Knowing what it will mean in the hands of the media, what she has done to him is tantamount to taking his life.

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Characters in order of appearance:

JOHN TOWER:

Successful presenter and judge on TV Talent show 'Star Potential'. Big ego. Renowned for his acerbic comments on the contestants' performances. 35-40.

ANNA TOWER:

His wife, loyal but whose patience is severely tested when faced by a sudden and unpredictable change in her husband's behaviour. Mid 30s

DAN:

Colleague and long time friend of John's who is working on a new talent based TV show. Generally supportive, but like Anna gets exasperated by John. 35-40.

LUCY GLADSTONE:

Newspaper reporter. Bright, sassy and very definitely planning her career path with little regard for who is in the way. 25-30.

AMY PULLMAN:

Likeable young woman who gets caught up in the drama, not quite sure how she got there. Wants to succeed in the business, but rather naïve. 20-25.

In addition there are two short pre-recorded sequences with a weatherman and TV presenter

Set:

One set is used throughout: the sitting room in John Tower's home.

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ACT 1: Scene 1

The sitting room of an Edwardian house in Holland Park, furnished in a modern, minimalist style. There's a large sofa and armchair, with a coffee table between them, and an impressive-looking sound system. Against one wall is a shelving unit full of books and various music industry awards. There is a large flat screen TV built into the unit and another part of the unit is a cupboard section with two doors – there is a key in one of the doors. There is also a desk with a lap top on it. A door leads to the hall and kitchen. A man enters in jeans and half done up shirt, wearing no shoes. This is JOHN TOWER. He goes over to the desk and picks up a large desk diary. He flicks through it until he finds the date he wants, takes a pen off the desk and writes something in the diary. We hear a voice call though the open door, it's his wife ANNA.

ANNA (OFF): Coffee's nearly ready. Shall I put some toast in for you?

He looks up from the diary and turns his head in the direction of the open door.

JOHN: What? No – no I'm fine. Just a coffee.

ANNA (OFF): Coming up.

He closes the diary and goes over to the television to switch it on. It's the end of the weather forecast.

WEATHERMAN: ...tomorrow the rain will push its way across much of the country from the West, so there is some unsettled weather to come I'm afraid.

ANNA (OFF): Coffee's ready.

He turns away from the television and goes to the door.

JOHN: Coming.

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He goes through the door as the television programme continues:

PRESENTER: And now the headlines again. Seventeen year old Zoe Walker was found hanged at her parents house in Tredegar. A suicide note was found near her body.

John comes back with his coffee in time to catch the last few words before the presenter continues:

PRESENTER: Zoe was a contestant on the popular talent show 'Star Potential' last week, where her performance was severely criticised.

Anna appears at that moment with her coffee. She is in her dressing gown.

ANNA: You do remember we're going to Tanya and Nigel's for the weekend?

She is interrupted by John walking to the television in disbelief.

JOHN: Shhh!

ANNA: What?

The television presenter continues with the rest of the news.

PRESENTER: A commons committee has concluded that –

John turns the television off abruptly.

JOHN: Sorry! I wanted to hear that.

ANNA: What?

JOHN: Have the papers come yet?

ANNA: I expect so, I haven't looked.

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Without answering, he puts his coffee on the desk and rushes past her and through the door. Anna yawns, then goes over to the sofa and sits on it, cradling her coffee.

A few seconds later, John reappears clutching a newspaper and a magazine. He sits beside Anna and starts flicking through the newspaper in an agitated manner.

ANNA: What is it?

JOHN: Something I caught the end of on the news.

ANNA: About what?

JOHN: The show. *(He flicks through some more pages, then spots what he's looking for.)* Ah... *(He reads a little.)* Oh, shit!

ANNA: Will you tell me what this is about?

JOHN *(Reading)*: “So-called talentless contestant commits suicide. A teenage contestant on the popular talent show 'Star Potential' was last night found dead, having apparently committed suicide.”

ANNA: Oh, awful...

JOHN *(Reading)*: “Zoe Walker, 17, appeared on the show last week, where her performance was severely criticised by one of the judges John Tower, who has a reputation for his outspoken and sometimes abusive comments. He said of her performance that it beggared belief that Zoe had even been allowed to come on to the show. 'That was karaoke with a capital 'K' he said of her singing. Frankly, next door's cat has more of an ear for music.” Jesus! The way they've written that amounts to libel! They're implying it was my fault!

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ANNA: Are you saying that's not what you said?

JOHN: Of course I said it. That's not the point. They can't extrapolate like that.

ANNA: That's the press for you.

JOHN: What am I supposed to say? So I put it a little harshly. But no more than I usually do.

ANNA: I didn't see the show, but, going by that, you do seem to have gone – a little over the top, even by your standards.

JOHN: What are you saying?

ANNA: I'm not saying anything.

JOHN: You seem to be.

ANNA: No, it's all right.

JOHN: She was talentless. I mean totally without talent.

ANNA: No one is totally without talent.

JOHN: I'll get a tape of the show. I'll show you.

ANNA: It's all right. I'll believe you. But, whatever you said, she obviously took it very seriously.

JOHN: I hope you're not agreeing with this rag?

ANNA: No, of course not. Don't be ridiculous. I'm just saying that – well – sometimes, you say things and you don't really know what you're saying. Or what the effect will be.

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JOHN: I know exactly what I'm saying, thank you very much.

ANNA: Well, perhaps you should just pause a second before you do, maybe think for a second about who you're saying it to.

JOHN: I can't be held responsible for what goes through the mind of every precocious bloody 17 year old!

ANNA: Alright, don't get touchy.

JOHN: They put themselves up for it. They come in thinking they're God's gift to the music business and if they're not prepared to take a knock, well that's their problem.

ANNA: They're just kids, most of them.

(Beat.)

JOHN: Yeah, well I have to say I really do have an issue with the audition process. Kids like that should never be allowed on the show. They need to be a lot more rigorous about who they let through. They're obviously setting the standard too low, if they let someone like her on, when she was so totally bereft of anything worthwhile. *(Beat.)* She wasn't even particularly pretty.

ANNA: Oh for Chrissakes! How could you say that? Come on, she's dead poor kid. She couldn't help her looks *(looking at newspaper)* I think she has quite a cute face.

JOHN: She's got her 15 minutes of fame now that's for sure. That's all she wanted.

Anna looks at him, horrified.

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ANNA: I can't believe you said that! Jesus Christ! Don't you feel *any* responsibility?

Silence.

Anna gets up with her cup

ANNA: Do you want some more coffee?

JOHN: What? No. I haven't finished that one yet.

ANNA: Where is it?

JOHN: On the desk.

Anna goes over and picks up the cup which she hands to John.

JOHN: You're not really saying I should hold myself responsible because some stupid bitch tops herself after appearing on the show? Well are you?

ANNA: Not personally no. But doesn't the show have a collective responsibility to its contestants? I mean shouldn't the company weed out anyone who's obviously a bit lacking in the common sense department?

JOHN: Isn't that exactly what I've been saying! They should be weeding out the total no-hopers. But they don't.

ANNA: It's all so bloody sad, isn't it? It's like a drug or something. People so desperate to be on telly.

JOHN: Tell me about it. Maybe that's something we can cover if we get the new show off the ground. We needn't just look at the lucky bastards who've made it. We can look at all those who fell by the

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wayside too. It'll make more interesting television. And we won't just look at it from the professional's point of view, we'll get the punter's perspective on it.

ANNA: Good. Yes, that sounds good.

JOHN: I'll run it by Dan. We've got to get together later this week anyway to work out the details for the pitch. It'll give it more substance. *(He takes a sip of coffee.)* Ugh, it's cold.

ANNA: I'm not surprised. I asked you if you wanted another.

JOHN: Oh, yes please.

He hands her the cup and goes back to looking in the paper. Anna starts towards the door, then turns back to speak to John.

ANNA: You know I'll be late back tonight, don't you?

He looks up.

JOHN: Do I?

ANNA: I did tell you. I've got to go to the clinic.

JOHN: Oh, yes, right. It's just routine though, isn't it?

ANNA: It's to check if there is actually anything there.

JOHN: But the doctor doesn't think so, does he?

ANNA: That is why he's sending me to the clinic. To make sure.

JOHN: Best to be sure.

ANNA: That's what I thought.

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- JOHN: I've got a meeting with the production team anyway, so I won't be back that early either. Go out for a meal shall we?
- ANNA: If you like. Yes, that'd be nice.
- JOHN: What do you fancy? French? Italian? There's a new Lebanese...
- ANNA: I don't mind.
- JOHN: How about Hawaiian?
- ANNA: Hawaiian? I don't think I've ever eaten Hawaiian. What's it like?
- JOHN: Lots of seafood I should imagine. And chicken. A bit Chinese, bit Portuguese... interesting I expect. Probably lots of bananas and coconuts.
- ANNA: You don't know, do you?
- JOHN: No, but I'm willing to give it a try. They're bound to serve piña coladas.
- ANNA: Now we're getting to it! And I have to wear a grass skirt, do I?
- JOHN: Not compulsory.
- ANNA: Good. It sounds a bit – you know, loud though.
- JOHN: Somewhere quieter then?
- ANNA: Yes, somewhere we can just be ourselves ... Please?

Blackout

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ACT 1: Scene 2

It's four days later. John is sitting at his desk, with a lap top in front of him, tapping at the keyboard. DAN is on the sofa, folders in front of him, flicking through a sheaf of papers.

JOHN: OK, who have we got on board now?

Dan flicks through papers as he talks, John occasionally types something on his keyboard

DAN: Mike Watkins is still um-ing and ah-ing about it, but I think we can get him to produce.

JOHN: Good.

DAN: Manager-wise, there's Paul, Jason and Al. We've got Steve talking about A&R, Steph's up for doing the voice coach bit and Tracy on the role of a stylist.

JOHN: So it's shaping up then?

DAN: Yeah, it's looking good. And they've all got good acts we can talk to. From boy bands to stand up comedy.

JOHN: Same thing isn't it?

Dan laughs.

DAN: Yeah! Ah, but Roland came up with a good idea.

JOHN: Yes?

DAN: He thought it would be good to look at it from the kids' point of view too.

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- JOHN: He must be psychic.
- DAN: Why?
- JOHN: That's what I was going to suggest.
- DAN: Really?
- JOHN: Well, the way I see it, the new show's looking at the stages someone goes through before getting the big break – and we could either see that from the professional's point of view. Or from the performer's point of view.
- DAN: There's nothing stopping us from looking at it from both points of view is there?
- JOHN: No, I suppose not. I just think it would be cleaner, to do it one way or another. I think I'm in favour of following a kid – or a couple of kids – through the process, you know meeting up with some managers, arrangers, voice coaches that sort of thing. But getting *their* take on it. Rather than just letting some arsehole publicist try and steal the show.
- DAN: Yeah, well I can see that working I think. But we'll have to have some solid examples, I mean we'll have to show what a publicist actually does for his money. Could be a challenge!
- JOHN: Of course. But that's the point isn't it? The thing is to show it is a *profession*. That, despite what the public thinks, these people are professionals doing their job. And the good ones do it very well indeed. So the kids watching it get to understand exactly what it's about. We could dispel any idea that they can just walk straight into the Number One spot.

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Dan goes over and inspects the awards on the display shelves. He picks one up.

DAN: Some of them do.

JOHN: Yeah, well that's part of the problem too.

DAN: Yeah.

JOHN: I was talking to Anna, just after that kid topped herself you know.

DAN: Oh, yeah...

JOHN: Well Anna made the point that shows like 'Star Potential' have a duty to these kids, to protect them from themselves, so to speak.

DAN: Meaning what?

He puts the award back in its place.

JOHN: Sometimes they're just too bloody lax. You know, the bar's just not set high enough to begin with. So we're getting kids on the shows that are real no-hopers.

DAN: But you're stating the obvious. Everyone knows that. Isn't that part of the appeal – seeing just how awful some of them are, is what makes the show, isn't it? And, come on, John, where would you be if you couldn't take the piss out of them? That's the sole reason some of them tune in, you know that.

JOHN: It's not really the point of the show though is it? What we should be doing is discovering talent, not running a freak show.

DAN (*Laughing*): Hey, come on, loosen up! You're starting to get serious about this. It's a show, that's all. Entertainment, pure and simple.

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JOHN: We have a responsibility.

DAN: We have a responsibility to entertain. No more, no less. And I think we're doing a pretty damn good job. So some fall by the wayside. But that's life.

JOHN: Or death.

Dan sighs and sits back on the sofa.

DAN: Yeah OK, or death. But that's not down to you. Really it isn't.

JOHN: A lot of people seem to think it is.

DAN: What're you talking about?

JOHN: I'm getting letters. Stacks of them.

DAN: Are you talking hate mail?

JOHN: Last couple of days. They range from 'I'll never watch your show again' to 'How does it feel to have a teenager's death on your hands?'

DAN: Oh, shit, I'm sorry you're having to put up with that. Don't these people have anything better to do?

JOHN: Seemingly not. Christ knows where they even find out my address, but they do.

DAN: So what do you do with the letters?

JOHN: Bin them of course.

DAN: You told the police?

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- JOHN: No, what for? What're they going to do? I might have to if it gets much worse though.
- DAN: Is it?
- JOHN: There was a dog turd on the mat yesterday.
- DAN: I'm guessing the postman didn't deliver that.
- JOHN: No, I nearly caught the bastard though. There was a pile of letters on the mat already when I got in the hall. As I went to pick them up, the letterbox flaps open and this shovel pokes through it and deposits a fresh turd on top of them.
- DAN: But you didn't catch him?
- JOHN: No, I flew at the door and dragged it open , but the letters got wedged underneath and by the time I got it open, he'd flown. The street was clear.
- DAN: And what does Anna say about it?
- JOHN: She doesn't know. The postman never turns up before ten and most days she's at work by then.
- DAN: I see. Still, It'll die down. Bound to. There'll be another story tomorrow and they'll all forget about you and Zoe what's-her-face.
- JOHN: Maybe we shouldn't forget. (*Beat.*) 'Star Makers' is about what goes into making a star. That's our pitch, agreed?
- DAN: Agreed.

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JOHN: We do all that. Just as we said. But we also look at it from the kids' point of view.

DAN: Yes, that's what we were saying.

JOHN: So we try and get inside their heads as well, so it's not just treating them like commodities, products to be groomed, we find out what makes them tick.

DAN: If you like. But we don't want to get too psychoanalytical about it do we? What makes them tick is a lust for stardom. That's it. It's very simple. I mean, 'Star Makers' is a TV programme, not a university course.

JOHN: I'm just saying perhaps it can do a bit more.

DAN: Yeah, well that's fine. No problem with that.

JOHN: And maybe it shouldn't just be about looking at kids who've made it – and the people who helped put them there, Maybe we should look at the others who didn't make it too.

DAN: The losers, you mean?

JOHN: If you like, yes. The losers.

DAN: So what are you suggesting?

JOHN: We don't just show the business through the eyes of kids who get a break, we also see it through the tears of the ones who don't.

Dan shakes his head in disbelief.

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DAN: Oh Jesus! Come on, is this really John Tower talking? I mean I really don't see where you're coming from. It seems to me that one poor kid, who was obviously on the edge anyway, is causing you to have lost your sense of perspective. So you're getting letters from dickheads who hold you responsible for what happened. They're talking shit! You know they are! You're no more responsible for that kid's death than my Aunt Mabel is. And all of that doesn't mean you have to go on some sort of crusade to save other kids like her. Get real, will you?

JOHN: Real is exactly what it is. I am getting real. No, I don't feel personally responsible. Of course I don't. My skin's a bit tougher than that I can tell you. Only that doesn't mean we should ignore it. The fact is there'll be other kids like Zoe. And, either we have to make sure they don't end up in such a vulnerable position. Or we equip them to handle the situation better.

DAN: It seems to me that's a very big want.

JOHN: Maybe. But with 'The Star Makers', we can at least explore these kids, find out what they're going through.

DAN: You're talking a different show, you know that?

JOHN: Yes. But I'm not saying it should be that much different from what we were proposing. All I'm saying is we give it a bit more depth.

DAN: I really can't see it working.

JOHN: It'll do all the things we talked about. It'll be fun, bright, and interesting. But it'll do a bit more. There'll be more insight into the business. At the very least, when other kids see the show, they'll have a better idea what they're letting themselves in for.

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DAN: Well, yes I can see that. But I'm not sure the network will. My worry is if we go into the pitch with that idea, it could water down the whole thrust of the show. You know, we could blow it, just for the sake of trying to do what you see as the right thing.

JOHN: For fuck's sake, I'm not trying to be some sort of good Samaritan, I'm trying to inject a bit of humanity into the show that's all. For the sake of better television.

DAN: Very laudable.

JOHN: Is that all you can say?

DAN: What do you want me to say.? All, right, let's work it up. Let's do it as you say, but don't come bleating if the pitch gets thrown out, because it's lost its focus.

John stands up and walks downstage, staring ahead, not looking at Dan

JOHN: Do you know what her suicide note said?

DAN: Sorry?

JOHN: Zoe Walker's suicide note.

DAN: No, what did it say?

JOHN: 'If I'm so totally without talent, let them judge how well I kill myself.'

DAN: Oh, shit. Really? How did you find that out?

JOHN: One of the letters I got. I think it must have been from a neighbour or something.

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DAN: It was anonymous though, I take it?

John goes over to the chair and perches on the arm.

JOHN: Oh yeah, of course. But it rang true. There was stuff in it about what a nice girl Zoe was. How *talented* she was, and what a waste, and how she had such a decent family, and been brought up well. South Wales postmark. No, it all fitted.

DAN: Why would they do that? Why would anyone do that? I mean do they think that making you feel a shit will help somehow? It's as if these people just flail around, directing their venom at everyone to make themselves feel better.

JOHN: The thing was, it wasn't particularly vindictive, the letter. It was all surprisingly normal, rational. They simply laid down the facts as they saw them.

DAN: But they didn't have the balls to put their name to it?

John gets up and returns to his desk.

JOHN: No, that's true. But it was – dispassionate, you know. As if they just wanted me to know about Zoe. It wasn't like the other letters, it was like a chronicle. They just seemed to want to tell me about Zoe as a girl. No more, no less.

DAN: But they managed to drop in a little nugget about the suicide note?

JOHN: Well, yes, but that was in a sort of matter of fact way too.

DAN: So how do you feel about it now? I mean –

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JOHN: Oh, I don't know, I suppose I –

The door opens and Anna comes in.

ANNA: Hi Dan, how are you?

DAN: Fine thanks, Anna. And you?

ANNA: Oh, bearing up.

JOHN: Everything OK?

ANNA: Yeah, yeah, fine.

JOHN: Good ... OK Dan, look I'll work on this, this evening, and email you, alright?

DAN: Sure, yeah. we've got a week or so still before we finally have to firm up on things. When shall we get together next?

John pulls his diary towards him.

JOHN: I've got a run through on Monday for Wednesday's show. But Tuesday's looking OK.

DAN: Fine that suits me. If you email me the notes, I'll have a look at them over the weekend.

ANNA (*to John*): You know we won't be around.

JOHN: What? Oh right, yes, Tanya and Nigel's.

ANNA: 'Fraid so.

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JOHN: Still you can get me on the mobile if you need to Dan. That's assuming they have a signal in the depths of beyond where my dear sister lives.

DAN: They're enjoying it down there are they?

ANNA: Seem to be. Well it is rather more relaxed than Holland Park.

JOHN: Tanya's in her element. I think she was born to be lady of the manor.

ANNA: I hardly think that old cottage of theirs qualifies as a manor house.

JOHN: Knowing Tanya, she has plans.

DAN: I'd better be going. I'll catch up with you next week, John, if not before.

JOHN: Sure thing.

ANNA: I'll see you out.

DAN: No, don't worry. *(He goes to the door.)* See you.

JOHN: Yeah, bye Dan.

ANNA: Bye...

Anna goes over to John as Dan goes out.

There's a patch they're not sure about.

JOHN: Who's not sure about what?

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- ANNA: On my breast. I've just got back from the doctor's. he's has the mammogram results.
- JOHN: And... you have a patch? What does that mean? Cancer?
- ANNA: Not necessarily. But there's an area of abnormality and he wants me to have it checked. It might be nothing. But they may do a biopsy to make sure.
- JOHN: Oh... right... I forgot you were going. I thought you'd been to the clinic. I – well I assumed – everything was OK.
- ANNA: Had to wait for the results to go to the doctor's.
- JOHN: Right.
- ANNA: Best to catch it, if there is anything. Don't want it spreading.
- JOHN: No.

Blackout

ACT 1: Scene 3

John is sitting at his desk, tapping idly at the keyboard of his laptop with his left hand, while holding a telephone in his right. There's a package on the desk.

- JOHN: Yeah, sure thing... No, no problem... sure we can build that in too. Do what did David have to say? ...So do you think he likes the idea? ...Well, in principle? Good... Well, that's good... So we could have a go-er? No, no, I'm not –

He's interrupted by the door bell

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Hold on a sec will you Dan, there's someone at the door.

John puts the phone down on the desk, goes to the door and opens it. We hear him as he opens the front door, in the hall.

LUCY (OFF): Mr Tower?

JOHN (OFF): Yes. It's in here.

LUCY (OFF): Sorry?

JOHN (OFF): I'm on the phone. Can you come in?

John and Lucy enter

JOHN: Hold on.

He goes over to the desk and picks up the phone.

I'll give you a bell back, Dan. Won't be long.

He picks up the package and turns to Lucy.

JOHN: Here we are. This is it.

LUCY: This is what?

JOHN: What you've come for.

LUCY: I don't want this.

JOHN: You're not from the couriers?

LUCY: No, I'm from the Argus.

JOHN: You're a reporter? ... I'm sorry I don't want to talk to the press. I mean you came in under false pretences.

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LUCY: As I recall, you invited me in.

John laughs

JOHN: Well, true! But only because I thought you'd come to collect a package.

LUCY: But since I am in here now, you wouldn't throw me out would you?

JOHN: I really don't have anything to say.

LUCY: It'll only take a few minutes.

JOHN (*Sighing*): Oh, alright then. But I really have got things to be getting on with you know.

LUCY; I appreciate your time.

She sits on the sofa and takes a recorder out of her bag.

Do you mind if I record this. It makes writing it up a lot easier.

John sits down in the armchair opposite the sofa.

JOHN: A few minutes that's what you said...

LUCY: Yes, that's all I want. But I don't want to go misquoting you, do I?

JOHN: Most definitely not.

LUCY: Cool. (*She sets up a recorder and microphone on the coffee table between them.*) OK, Interview with John Tower by Lucy Gladstone. OK, where shall we start?

JOHN: You're doing the interview.

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LUCY: Right.

JOHN: Fire away then.

LUCY: OK, let's start with the show.

JOHN: Which show?

LUCY: 'Star Potential'. Is there another?

JOHN: I have plans for several other shows.

LUCY: I see. Well, perhaps we could come to them later.

JOHN: As you wish.

LUCY: OK, let's talk about 'Star Potential' first. I thought you would welcome the opportunity to set the record straight.

JOHN: Set it straight about what? I have been straight. I've always been straight. No one can accuse me of not being direct. No bullshit, straight talking is what I'm known for. And, love it or hate it, you can't deny that.

LUCY: You haven't exactly been your normal dismissive self lately though have you?

JOHN: What do you mean?

LUCY: Last week's show for instance. Jason Williams.

JOHN: Yeah, so?

LUCY: Well, by comparison with the rest of the panel, you were a puppy.

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JOHN: Puppy! I've been called a few things in my life. But never a puppy!

LUCY: Sorry! It just struck me that you were missing a little – how shall I say – bite in your comments about him. Your acerbic criticism is what many viewers tune in for. Some of my colleagues say you've gone totally off the boil – and the show's a bit of a wank now.

JOHN: Oh do they? A bit of a *wank*?

LUCY: Yes. They say it's because you don't want another... death on your hands.

He stands up abruptly.

JOHN: Fuck off! Go on, fuck off! This interview is over!

LUCY: You're sure you wouldn't welcome the opportunity to set the record straight?

JOHN: I'd like you to go.

LUCY: Look... John, I can write up this story anyway I like. And – um – perhaps you would rather I wrote it up in a – shall we say – more favourable light?

(Pause.)

JOHN: What do you want?

LUCY: Just the truth of course. What else?

JOHN: You surprise me.

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LUCY: Shall we continue?

JOHN: Go on.

LUCY: You're not going to sit down?

JOHN: I'll stand if it's all the same to you.

LUCY: OK ... Mr Tower, could you tell me if you remember what you said to poor Zoe Walker?

JOHN: Why 'poor' Zoe?

LUCY: She's dead.

JOHN: I know she's dead. What I mean is that it's a loaded question, isn't it?

LUCY: I don't think so. But let me ask you again: do you remember what you said to Zoe Walker?

JOHN: Not exactly.

Lucy dives into her bag and brings out a DVD and notebook.

LUCY: Would you like me to remind you? I have the programme here on DVD.

JOHN: No, that's hardly necessary. I said words to the effect of she lacked talent.

LUCY: You said a great deal, about her – as you saw it – total lack of talent.

JOHN: I was just being honest.

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LUCY: Honest, yes, well that's one way of putting it. *(She consults a note book)* 'If I told you that you'd got the slightest shred of talent, I'd be lying. And frankly, if you carry on in this competition, we'll all have failed.'

John rubs his hands over his face in disbelief.

JOHN: This interview is pointless. You ask me what I said and you already know what I said. You've got it in your notebook and a DVD.

LUCY I just want to make sure. I like to be accurate.

JOHN: I'm sure you do.

LUCY: Whereas, last week, you said of Jason Williams *(she consults her notebook again)* 'I got the impression he was even more nervous than you might expect in this – what is obviously a stressful situation. But beneath the nerves I could detect a raw talent straining to get out.'

JOHN: Yes, so?

LUCY: Not exactly what you said about Zoe is it: 'If she has any talent, it's a talent for keeping any ability to sing completely hidden.'

JOHN: Different people. Different circumstances. Different everything.

LUCY: Yeah, well Jason's still alive as far as I know.

JOHN: You little shit-stirrer! What I said about Zoe is no more and no less than what I'd say about anyone who is attempting to break into this bloody awful business. Can't you see? Can't you get it

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into your brain that in saying what I do, I'm doing these kids a favour?

LUCY: Zoe is dead, Mr Tower. I'm not quite sure you understand that!

JOHN: Oh, believe me I do! I understand all right. I also understand that the lure of fame, stardom and all the trappings is what gets these kids hooked like it does.

LUCY: Something for which you are directly responsible. You and people like you are stirring up thoughts in the Zoe's and Jason's of this world. Promising them that maybe they might make it. Promising them the earth. And then standing by while their hopes are trampled on by the very business that you are a part of.

JOHN: Yes. It's a tough bloody business. And it's a tough person who can make it. It's also because of people like you – the media – that it's so fatally attractive to these kids. I would argue that far from fanning the fires, I am helping to quench them. I am taking a realistic – hard maybe – but realistic stance. And by speaking the truth – the unvarnished truth – I am doing these kids a favour. All I'm doing is telling people who don't have a chance in hell that they don't have a chance in hell. They can do one of two things: they can give up – and go and do something less demanding. Or they can toughen up and perhaps make it in the big bad world.

LUCY: And by your definition, Zoe gave up did she?

JOHN: Zoe is the only person I know, or who have ever heard of, who took such extreme action as a result of criticism on a programme like 'Star Potential'.

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LUCY: Right! Great! So you admit do you? The great John Tower admits that his words led directly – yes directly – to the death of Zoe Walker!

JOHN: You print anything like that and I'll sue you and your paper for everything you've got!

LUCY: Oh big words! ... I think it is very evident from what you've said that you accept there may be some – I say some – possibility that your words tipped the balance – and 'poor' Zoe's death was the tragic result of your – ah – 'balanced, truthful criticism of her performance'.

JOHN: I accept no such thing.

LUCY: You still haven't adequately answered then why you have adopted such a change of heart in the way you judge contestants on the show.

JOHN: I think I have.

LUCY: Well perhaps we can best leave that for our readers to decide, shall we?

John goes over to the built in cupboard and opens it. Inside are bottles of spirits, wine etc and glasses. He pours himself a drink without offering one to Lucy.

LUCY: You said you were involved with other shows Mr Tower. Would you care to talk about them?

JOHN: Not at the moment thank you. They're at a planning stage. You'll be the first to hear when I'm ready, believe me.

He puts his glass down on the coffee table.

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LUCY: I'm glad you hold me and my paper in such esteem.

JOHN: Did I say that? I don't believe I did.

LUCY: It strikes me you have difficulty remembering what you did say a lot of the time.

JOHN: And it strikes me that you've got what you came for. So perhaps you'd do me the courtesy of leaving?

LUCY: If that's what you want. If I need to check any facts with you, I'll give you a call shall I?

JOHN: I'll be away. And, in any case, why would you want to bother checking facts?

He walks towards the door and she reluctantly gets up from the sofa and follows.

Blackout

THE DECIDING FACTOR

ACT 1: Scene 4

Anna is sitting on the sofa. There are a number of artwork illustrations for a children's book on the floor. She regards them for a minute then picks one up and looks at it then replaces it in a different position on the floor. She picks up another and puts it on the chair, then rearranges the others. The door opens and John enters, an overnight bag in one hand and a large shoulder bag in the other.

JOHN: Hello.

ANNA: Oh, hi! Good trip?

JOHN: Yeah, yeah...

He puts the bags down, then goes over and kisses her.

What are you doing here? I thought you'd still be at work.

ANNA: I needed to do some admin. I can do that just as well at home, so I took the afternoon off. In any case, I needed to get these sorted for tomorrow.

JOHN: They're good.

ANNA: Thank you.

JOHN: When's it due to be published?

ANNA: God knows. The wheels of publishing can turn exceedingly slow. In any case, I've got to redo a couple. Not right for the target market apparently.

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JOHN: Really? It's kids, isn't it?

ANNA: That's what I like about you. You're so concise.

JOHN: Are you taking the piss! You mean it isn't kids?

ANNA: As a target market definition, I'd say that's a bit too broad for the publishers. My illustrations have to reflect the ethnicity, socio-economic grouping and cultural background of the seven to ten year olds who'll read the damn thing. Or not as the case may be.

JOHN: I see.

ANNA: Yes, well then maybe you should try your hand in the world of publishing.

JOHN: No thanks. I've got enough problems of my own.

ANNA: Yes, I know.

(Beat.)

JOHN: What do you know?

ANNA: Like all those letters.

JOHN: Letters? ... Ah –

ANNA: How long has it been going on for?

John sighs.

JOHN: Since a couple of days after she died.

ANNA: Why didn't you tell me?

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JOHN: Didn't want to worry you. You've got enough on your plate with your publishers and your cancer scare.

ANNA: They've taken a biopsy now anyway. It's been sent off to the lab.

JOHN: Well at least they're doing something about it.

ANNA: Yes. Nothing to do but wait ... So how long would it have been before you told me you were getting all these awful letters?

John takes the illustration off the chair, and sits down still holding it.

JOHN: Not sure I would, to be truthful. I was always here when the post came. You were at your studio. I thought they'd died down. There weren't any before I went away. I thought that was it. Have there been many?

ANNA: A dozen.

JOHN: You saw fit to open them.

ANNA: I wouldn't have done, only one was so obviously illiterate, I was intrigued. I knew it couldn't have been business.

JOHN: No, right.

ANNA: It beats me how people can write such things.

JOHN: Me too.

ANNA: So how was the trip?

JOHN: Oh, fine.

ANNA: Dan didn't seem to know anything about it.

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JOHN: Why should he?

ANNA: You told me it was research for the show. Only Dan came round here last night looking for you. He seemed surprised when I said you were away.

JOHN: Yeah, well I don't tell him everything.

ANNA: It was successful though was it?

JOHN: Yeah, guess so.

ANNA: Well, aren't you going to tell me?

JOHN: Nothing much to tell.

ANNA: I don't even know where you went.

JOHN: South Wales.

ANNA: South Wales! What's in South Wales?

JOHN: Zoe's parents.

ANNA: You haven't...?

JOHN: I needed to see them.

ANNA: You did not need to see them.

JOHN: Don't tell me what I needed to do. I had to talk to them. You've seen those letters, you know what people are saying.

ANNA: They're talking crap! Oh, for God's sake John. Get it out of your head, will you? So a girl commits suicide. That has nothing to do with you.

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JOHN: I can't see it that way. I thought I did. Stuff happens I know that. Expressing my opinion is what I'm paid to do.

ANNA: Exactly.

JOHN: I blotted it out. So what if some kid over-reacts? That's not down to me ... But it's been eating at me.

ANNA: Well don't let it. They'll forget. The vindictive sods who're sending this stuff will tire of it.

JOHN: Dan said the same.

ANNA: And he's right.

JOHN: But that's not the point. I say some off the cuff remarks, and the consequences are tragic. It may not be directly down to me –

ANNA: It's not down to you at all.

JOHN: – but I still have to bear some responsibility.

Anna gets up and goes over to him. She grabs his hands to emphasise what she is about to say.

ANNA: No you don't! Will you listen to me! You did not cause her death! You are not responsible.

JOHN: That's not what you said when you first heard.

ANNA: What?

JOHN: When it was first announced, and I made that crass remark about her finally having got her 15 minutes of fame, you had a go at me. Didn't I feel *any* responsibility you asked.

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ANNA: Well, is it surprising? You were acting boorish. Like it was of no consequence at all. Now you're acting completely the opposite. And frankly, if anything, it's more worrying.

JOHN: Why?

ANNA: Because this is not like you.

Silence.

Anna goes over to the desk, opens a drawer and takes out some post-it notes and a pen. She comes back to the sofa and writes notes on some which she sticks on the corner of the illustrations in front of her.

JOHN: They're very nice. Decent family. Really decent.

ANNA: Well they let you out alive.

JOHN: Why wouldn't they?

ANNA: You need to ask.

JOHN: They don't blame me. Not a hint of recrimination.

ANNA: You're still a fool to have gone. What if the press get hold of it – they'll crucify you!

JOHN: How will they know? Zoe's parents won't tell them.

ANNA: Oh you know that for a fact do you? Well that'll be a first. Someone who doesn't fancy getting their name in print.

JOHN: Not everyone craves fame you know.

ANNA: That's pretty rich coming from you.

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JOHN: In their case, I happen to know it's true.

ANNA: I don't know why I bother talking to you sometimes John. It seems to me that you perpetually live on another planet.

JOHN: I don't think so. If anything, being down to earth has been my undoing.

ANNA: Yes, well the less said about that the better.

JOHN: They've just accepted it. They didn't want her to go on the show to start with. But she was so desperately keen. And they supported her. Then, when she did what she did, they were devastated of course – but they say she's at peace now.

ANNA: What?

JOHN: They're deeply religious. She's left this life and gone on to a better one – that's what they say.

(Beat.)

ANNA: I need a drink.

JOHN: Get me one too will you?

Anna goes to the drinks cupboard and pours two glasses of wine.

ANNA: You certainly know how to pick them don't you?

JOHN: They're a very nice family.

ANNA: I'm sure they are.

JOHN: They were very distressed about the suicide note.

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ANNA: I expect they were.

JOHN: No, I mean they were distressed that someone had written to me and told me what it said.

ANNA: I don't follow.

JOHN: I had a letter, a week or so ago, amongst all the others, that talked about Zoe and what a nice person she was, and what a tragedy and that. It also said what she put in her suicide note.

ANNA: I don't think I want to know ... And how do you know it wasn't them who wrote? Who else is going to know what was in the note.

JOHN: I think that was what upset them. It was obviously someone close to the family. And they couldn't imagine anyone being so callous.

ANNA: No.

Anna takes a swig of wine and comes over, handing John a glass and putting hers on the coffee table.

ANNA: Here.

JOHN: Thanks.

Anna resumes her seat on the sofa. Then she bends over, picks up the illustrations and carefully stacks them in a pile on the other seat of the sofa.

JOHN: I want to help them.

ANNA: Oh – what? Help who? The kid's parents?

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JOHN: Yes...

ANNA: The only way you could help them would be to bring their daughter back. And you can't do that, can you?

He takes a drink and sips more during the following speeches.

JOHN: No, I suppose not.

ANNA: Good. I'm glad we've got that sorted. Jesus, John what the hell possessed you? Going all the way down to some godforsaken part of the country.

JOHN: It was surprisingly pleasant actually.

ANNA: Yeah, well I don't believe that.

JOHN: We could take a few days off down there if you want.

ANNA: No thank you.

JOHN: There are some great walks.

ANNA: Look, I don't know what's got into you. But since when have you been a paid up member of the Ramblers' Association?

JOHN: No, alright, I was just saying.

ANNA: You were moaning last weekend when Nigel suggesting walking down to his local.

JOHN: Not the point.

ANNA: I can't go anywhere, anyway. I want to be here when the results of my biopsy come through.

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JOHN: Oh, yes, sorry. I forgot. Will that be soon?

ANNA: They said about a week. So the end of this, or the beginning of the next I guess.

JOHN: You worried?

ANNA: Of course.

JOHN: Yes, sorry, of course.

ANNA: That's OK.

John realises he's nearly finished the glass and goes over to the drinks cabinet to refill it. As he does so, the door bell rings.

JOHN: Oh, Christ, who's that now?

He puts the glass down and goes to the door. Anna picks up her drink and sips. We hear the front door opening.

JOHN (OFF): Oh, hi there. Wasn't expecting you.

DAN (OFF): No. I thought I'd better come round in person.

John and Dan enter the room

ANNA: Hi Dan. This is becoming a habit.

DAN: Yes.

JOHN: Can I get you a drink? We've just opened a bottle.

DAN: Oh, yes, please, That'd be good.

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John goes over to the drinks cabinet, finishes topping up his glass and pours another for Dan which he brings back over to him. Both drink throughout the following speeches.

JOHN: Well, what is it? What is so very important?

DAN: The show.

JOHN: Show?

DAN: I had a call from Jonathan, their Commissioning Editor this morning. *(He sighs.)* He says he doesn't want to discuss the 'Star Makers' pitch at the moment.

JOHN: Oh, what!

DAN: 'Not an appropriate time' he says.

JOHN: What shit!

ANNA: I thought it was all arranged.

JOHN: It was.

ANNA: What are they thinking of?

DAN: That's not all, I'm afraid.

JOHN: What?

DAN: It's not official. I mean they haven't released it yet.

JOHN: Oh, for Christ's sake Dan, spit it out!

DAN: They're dropping you from 'Star Potential'.

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JOHN: They can't do that!

DAN: It seems like they are.

JOHN: What because of the Zoe business? That won't last.

ANNA: That's old news now, surely?

DAN: No, it's moved back up the running order.

JOHN: Moved back up – how?

DAN: There was a complete spread on it. And they think it's going to be picked up again. The thing is it just won't lie down and –

JOHN: Die?

DAN: Yes.

JOHN: Saying what?

DAN: Everything. Interviews with Zoe's friends, neighbours, schoolmates, the lot. Pictures of her as a kid – talent contests, all emotionally charged stuff. How she was so looking forward to being on the show. And a full transcript of what you said.

JOHN: Oh Christ!

DAN: It wasn't good.

ANNA: No interviews with her parents though?

DAN: Well, no I don't think so. Why do you ask?

ANNA: No reason.

(Pause.)

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JOHN: And how come they tell *you* this, mate? Why didn't they have the balls to tell me themselves.

DAN: They planned to. But they couldn't get hold of you. You were away. And they needed to get a replacement in time for next week's show.

JOHN: And who is the replacement?

DAN: Well –

Dan looks down at his feet.

JOHN: I see... Congratulations.

John finishes his glass and goes back to refill it.

DAN: It's only for the short term. Until the thing blows over. That's what they say.

JOHN: And you'll be happy to relinquish your new found status will you... when it's 'blown over'?

DAN: Oh come on, don't be silly.

JOHN: Silly! I thought we worked well together –

DAN: We do.

JOHN: Oh really, well that's not how I see it, standing here.

DAN: I think you're over reacting...

JOHN: Over reacting! For fuck's sake, what do you think I should be doing?

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ANNA: John, calm down. It's hardly Dan's fault is it?

JOHN: So you're on his side now too, are you?

ANNA: It's not a case of being on anyone's side.

(Beat.)

JOHN: And who wrote this piece?

DAN: I've no idea. I didn't notice.

JOHN: Well, let me guess. Lucy Gladstone.

ANNA: Who's Lucy Gladstone?

JOHN: A reporter with the local rag.

DAN: Oh this wasn't in the local rag. It was in the red tops.

JOHN: She's obviously going up in the world.

DAN: I'm sorry. Really.

JOHN: Yeah, yeah...

ANNA: What are you going to do?

JOHN: What can I do? Carry on. Do what I do best, I suppose.

DAN: Take a bit of time off. Do you good.

JOHN: No thanks.

ANNA: Once I get my results, we could go away maybe.

DAN: Results?

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ANNA: No, no, it's nothing. Nothing at all.

DAN: Oh... right.

Dan finishes his glass, puts the empty glass on the coffee table.

Right. Ah, thanks for that.

JOHN: Thank you.

DAN: Right *(He starts for the door.)* Be seeing you.

JOHN: See you.

The door closes behind Dan.

JOHN: Prick!

ANNA: It's not him John ... Is it really surprising? I mean what are they supposed to do? They've got their ratings to think about, after all.

JOHN: Fuck their ratings!

ANNA: I think that's what they're worried about.

JOHN: I need time to think.

ANNA: We'll go away, like Dan said. As soon as I get the results. If I've got to have an op or something, it won't be immediately. What do you say?

JOHN: I need time on my own.

ANNA: You don't want to go away with me?

JOHN: I don't want to go away.

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ANNA: It strikes me you don't know what the fuck you want!

JOHN: No.

Anna glares at him for a second, then storms out. John calmly walks over to his bags. He unclasps the shoulder bag and takes out a colour photograph. It's of a young girl: Zoe. He looks at it as the lights fade.

Blackout

THE DECIDING FACTOR

ACT 2: Scene 1

John is sitting at his desk with the chair swivelled around facing the sofa, on which sits AMY. She is 17 and looks just like the photograph John was looking at earlier. He glances at a CV he holds in his hand.

JOHN: So what have they told you – your agents?

AMY: Not a lot. They said it could be a good step up, with you being who you are like.

JOHN: I see. So you don't exactly know what the job is?

AMY: Acting. They said it'd be acting and singing.

JOHN: By the sounds of it, I'm not sure they listened to my brief at all. Or maybe you didn't understand what they were saying to you.

AMY: I'll do it though. Whatever. To get a chance to work with you, that'd be pretty cool.

JOHN: Pretty cool.... yes. So what have you done with your life so far...
(he refers to the CV in front of him) Amy.

AMY: This and that.

JOHN: Would you care to be a bit more specific?

AMY: I've sung at a couple of clubs.

JOHN: Oh really? Which ones?

AMY: Club Six, Lady Luck's, City Bar.

JOHN: I didn't think they employed singers. Only dancers.

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AMY: Yeah well they've got that an' all.

JOHN: Lap dancing?

AMY: Yeah, so why not? Nothing wrong with that. Only I was singing see. Like I said.

JOHN: I see. Anything else. Did you sing at school for instance?

AMY: Yeah, well I was in a musical. We did Jesus Christ you know.

JOHN: And what part did you play?

AMY: Mary Magdalene.

JOHN: Right ... Well, let's hear you, shall we?

AMY: What, now?

JOHN: Can you think of a better time?

AMY: Well, no, it's just – like, well I wasn't expecting to sing.

JOHN: What were you expecting?

AMY: Dunno. So, have you got backing tracks and that?

JOHN: No. I'd like you to sing – unaccompanied.

AMY: Not really done that before.

JOHN: Oh come on, course you have. You must have.

AMY: Not in public.

JOHN: You're not in public.

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AMY: No, but, well... all right. what do you want?

JOHN: Whatever you want. Something you're comfortable with singing. I just want to hear your voice, that's all.

AMY: Well, I could do *(She names a song – one which the actress playing Amy is also comfortable with singing)*.

JOHN: That'll do fine. Absolutely fine.

AMY: Well OK.

She starts to sing.

JOHN: I think you'd find it easier to sing, if you were standing up.

AMY: Oh, right.

Amy stands up. She sings a verse or two of the song.

AMY: Well?

John looks critically at her.

AMY: Well?

JOHN: How do you think that went then?

AMY: I – well I could've sung it better I suppose...

JOHN: You could hardly have sung it worse.

AMY: Oh, come on, it wasn't that bad.

JOHN: Believe me, it was.

(Pause.)

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AMY (*Angrily*): I'll go then shall I – piss out of your life?

JOHN: Did I say that?

AMY: You didn't have to.

JOHN: Your voice we can work on. Your looks we can work on. What I'm looking for is potential.

Amy is delighted.

AMY: Really? Oh how cool is that!

JOHN: Potential I said. Potential. You've got a long way to go yet. A very long way.

AMY: I see. So what do I have to do?

JOHN: Well, I think perhaps we could do something with you, er – (*he glances at her CV again*) Amy. Definitely. Hold on, I'll just go and get a form for you to sign, and, if you're willing, we can take it from there. I've just got to be sure that you've got what it takes. I just need to satisfy myself. You understand?

Amy nods

AMY: Yes.

John goes out to get the form.

JOHN: I won't be a minute.

Amy looks around, inspects his sound system then returns to the centre of the room, sighs in a resigned way and begins unbuttoning her blouse. She has

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removed it and is reaching behind for her bra clasp, when John returns with a form in his hand.

JOHN: What the fuck do you think you are doing?

Amy is confused and annoyed.

AMY: Well, where do you want me then?

JOHN: I don't 'want you'. (*Beat.*) Not like that.

AMY: I thought it was part of the deal.

JOHN: No, it is not 'part of the deal' as you put it. The plan is that I turn you from a so-so singer with potential into a singing sensation. And for that, I don't want your body, attractive though it undoubtedly is. I simply want your dedication, hard work and what I can see in you – and hear in you.

Amy picks up her blouse and puts it back on.

AMY: So, no sex?

JOHN: No, no sex.

AMY: Pity.

John sits back down on his chair by the desk.

JOHN: Yes, well I'm sorry to disappoint you so early in our relationship. There will be a stage when I'll want to have a hard look at what you're wearing. But for the moment you can keep your clothes on, all right? And you played Mary Magdalene you say?

He laughs and she does too, albeit nervously.

THE DECIDING FACTOR

AMY: Yes...

Amy goes back to the sofa and sits.

JOHN: Not in the nude I hope.

AMY: No!

JOHN: Glad to hear it ... So what do you know about me?

AMY: Well I know you're on 'Star Potential' and you upset a lot of people.

JOHN: Anything else?

AMY: You're a big fuck off record producer. With, like, loads of bands you've done.

JOHN: Yes, well, I don't produce that much nowadays. I'm more into other sides of the business now. But I like to keep my hand in ... Mm, yes you look the part, I'll give you that. I've looked through dozens of CVs you know. But, yes, I can see you. You look the part, really do... believe me, I think you're exactly the type I've been looking for.

AMY: Cool.

JOHN: Yes, let me look at you again.

John opens a desk drawer and takes a camera out.

Just stand over there for me will you?

AMY: Here?

She gets up and moves to a spot just in front of him.

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JOHN: Yeah that's fine.

He points the camera at her and she immediately adopts what she thinks of as a model pose – overblown and pouty.

JOHN: No, for God's sake – just act natural will you? I want to see you as you are. These are just reference shots, not for some crappy fashion mag.

AMY: Oh, right. More like this you mean?

She adopts a more straightforward pose.

JOHN: That's fine. *(He takes a couple of shots.)* Yes, great. Yes.

AMY: So I've got potential as you say then?

JOHN: I think so.

AMY: Oh, I'll do it Mr Tower!

JOHN: John.

AMY: I'll do it John. Really. I'll work so hard...

JOHN: You'll need to work your balls off.

AMY *(Laughing)*: I'd even do that – if I could. Oh, please. Please, just give me a chance. I won't let you down.

JOHN: You had better not.

AMY: So what happens now?

JOHN: We'll start by working on things here in the house. Style, voice, repertoire, the works. And the sooner the better.

THE DECIDING FACTOR

AMY: When would you like?

JOHN: We'll start tomorrow.

AMY: Cool.

JOHN: Here. *(He hands her the form.)* Take this and have a good read through it. I want you to be sure before you commit yourself to anything.

AMY: Oh, I am sure.

JOHN: Nevertheless, take it and read it carefully. And, at this stage, I don't want you to tell anyone what you're doing, all right?

AMY: No. Sure. Just my agent.

JOHN: No, not even your agent.

AMY: Sure. Anything you say.

JOHN: OK, let's say about 10 again shall we? Tomorrow morning?

He opens the door for her.

AMY: Sure thing.

She goes out followed by John. A second later he reappears and goes over to his desk and the phone. He picks it up and dials a number.

JOHN: Hi, John Tower here. I just want to check on studio availability in a couple or three weeks ... Can't say I'm afraid ... No, it's not for the channel, it's something else ... And I'd like Paul to engineer if he's around. He's reliable ... Great, no, no that sounds about

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right. Perhaps you could pencil me that week in, maybe? Great...
Talk to you soon. Bye.

He puts the phone down then picks it up again immediately and rings another number.

JOHN: Oh, hello, John Tower here. You sent me Amy Pullman for an audition. She's just left ... No, no she wasn't really what I was looking for, but thank you ... No, I think I've found someone now. I'll get back to you if I need to look at anyone else ... OK, fine. Thank you.

He puts the phone down again, and opens his diary. He flicks through a few pages, then picks up a pencil and makes some notes in it. The door bell rings. John goes to the door, opens it. We hear no conversation, but, when he returns, Dan is trailing behind him. John goes over to the desk and sits at the desk chair. Dan sits on the sofa.

JOHN: Well?

DAN: Wanted to know how you were.

JOHN: You can see how I am. I am fine.

DAN: We're worried John.

JOHN: Worried? What about?

DAN: You.

JOHN: And who is 'we'?

DAN: Everyone. Anna especially.

JOHN: You've seen her?

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DAN: Yes.

JOHN: How is she?

DAN: How do you think she is?

JOHN: Silly question. How long have you known... she'd moved out?

DAN: She came round the night she left.

JOHN: She said she was going to stay with Maxine.

DAN: She is. But she thought I might be able to –

JOHN: Talk some sense into me?

DAN: Yes.

JOHN: So how come it's taken nearly two weeks for you to come round?
... Oh, of course, I'm sorry, you've obviously been too busy with
the show!

DAN: You know it's not like that. Don't play games, John. It's
demeaning. I mean, don't you give a shit what happens to Anna?

JOHN: Of course I do. So she's found out she's got cancer. (*Beat.*) I
think she expected it.

DAN: Oh and that makes it better does it? It's not entirely unexpected,
so it's OK.

JOHN: Don't talk crap. I never said that.

DAN: That's what it sounded like. So... don't you think she might like
some support. Don't you even feel a sense of duty?

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JOHN: There's nothing I can do for her at the moment.

DAN: What about acting like a husband. Instead of a heartless bastard!

John stares at Dan in disgust.

DAN: Sorry. I didn't mean to say that. But you are being pretty bloody unreasonable.

JOHN: It was Anna who decided to leave.

DAN: The way she tells it, you gave her no choice.

JOHN: That's the way she tells it.

DAN: And she's wrong? You didn't tell her to get the hell out of your life?

JOHN: She told you that?

DAN: Yes.

JOHN: She has no right to broadcast our rows to all and sundry.

DAN: So I'm 'all and sundry' now am I? I thought I was a friend.

JOHN: Oh, come on, Dan. Look... I thought you'd understand. You of all people would know what I'm going through.

DAN: I can't say I do, no.

JOHN: I am just trying to get my head together.

DAN: It's a bit more than that I'd say.

JOHN: Well, maybe. Does she know when she's going in for the op yet?

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DAN: A week Friday apparently.

JOHN: Good.

DAN: See her. Talk to her. Show her you care.

JOHN: I do care. But... I'm no use to her at the moment. I'll just make things more difficult. It'll do us both good to have a little space. You must know what I mean.

DAN: I'm not sure I do. It just seems to me that you're still just pissed off at being dropped from the show. And you can't bear the thought that I'm doing it.

JOHN: That's not the... there are other things...

DAN: You're still beating yourself up about her? Zoe?

JOHN: Not beating myself up. No longer, no.

DAN: Well that's one thing.

JOHN: But there's something I have to do.

DAN: I thought maybe you'd just done it?

JOHN: Sorry?

DAN: When I got here, a girl was leaving. I was in half a mind to leave you to it and stew in your own juice. It was only because of Anna – and what remains of our friendship – that I even bothered to ring the bell.

JOHN: It's not what you think.

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- DAN: Trendy little tart, looking very pleased with herself, leaves your place at ten o'clock in the morning?
- JOHN: It was business.
- DAN: Oh yeah! So how much did you pay her?
- JOHN: I won't even dignify that with an answer. I don't have to give you my reason for her being here. And I don't intend to. Other than to say that she was here for a perfectly legitimate reason.
- DAN: If you say so.
- JOHN: Frankly Dan, I don't give a shit whether you believe me or not. I'm telling you as it is.
- DAN: You didn't do anything?
- JOHN: It was on offer, but I declined.
- DAN: You really are changing aren't you?
- JOHN: Thanks for that vote of confidence.
- DAN: I believe you.
- JOHN: I am not screwing around with kids young enough to be my daughter.
- DAN: No?
- JOHN: No.
- DAN: It seems to me you're screwing around with other people's lives though, John. As well as your own.

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Blackout

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ACT TWO. Scene 2

It is early evening. Amy is standing looking upstage, in front of John who is sitting on the sofa John claps briefly and stands up.

JOHN: Yes, well done! That is coming on really quite well.

AMY: Thanks.

He goes over to the drinks cupboard.

JOHN: I think that deserves a drink. We've had a hard day.

He opens the cupboard.

What'll you have?

AMY: Oh, dunno what you got. Could you do a Cheeky Vimto?

JOHN: A what?

AMY: You know Blue WKD and port.

JOHN: I'm afraid I don't have any WKD. And there's no way I'm mixing my best port with vodka anything, thank you. What about vodka and coke?

AMY: Yeah, that'd be cool.

JOHN: Good.

He pours a large slug of vodka into a glass and opens a can of coke, which he hands to her.

There you go.

AMY: Ta.

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She pours coke into her vodka as he goes back to the drinks cabinet and pours himself a malt.

JOHN: Well don't stand on ceremony.

AMY: Eh?

JOHN: Sit yourself down.

She does as directed and sits on the sofa, he comes and sits next to her. He clinks glasses.

JOHN: Cheers.

AMY: Cheers!

JOHN: To a long and profitable relationship!

AMY: To a long and profitable relationship.

The telephone rings. John puts down his drink and gets up to answer it.

JOHN: Excuse me.

He picks up the phone.

Hello, John Tower ... Oh, hello Jonathan ... What? Oh this and that, you know ... No, no I'm sure ... Yes, yes, Dan's doing a great job. I know ... No, I know it's not the same. Of course I understand ... Yes, of course. Oh right ... Yes, yes that'd be good. I'll think about it if it happens. Let me know will you? ... What? Yes, yes. No problem. Look Jonathan I've got to go I'm afraid, I've got someone here with me... OK, I'll wait to hear from you. Bye.

He goes back over to Amy. They both resume drinking.

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Well, that's ironic.

AMY: What is?

JOHN: That was Jonathan Slater, a Commissioning Editor.

AMY: Commissioning Editor?

JOHN: The nearest thing to God on the planet. Or they think they are. I was about to pitch to him a new show concept I was working on. But, well for various reasons, it didn't work out. It wasn't the right time, he said.

AMY: Pity.

JOHN: That's not the word I used, but yes, it was a pity. And now he's talking about reconsidering.

AMY: Well that's good isn't it?

JOHN: I suppose so. But what's ironic is It was going to be called 'The Star Makers' – about all those people that are involved in creating a real star. We'd already lined up a team – you know, publicists, stylist, producers – that would work with all the wannabes. Now it doesn't need a television programme to make it happen. And we don't need a dozen hopefuls to work with. One will do. You.

AMNY: Me? Just me?

JOHN: Just you.

AMY: Cool! My mates are going to be well impressed!

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JOHN: I told you before, you don't talk about this to anyone. Not even your best mate.

AMY: So it's just between you, me and the team?

JOHN: Team?

AMY: Yeah, like you were saying, the publicists, stylist, producers, you know.

JOHN: I think you misunderstand me. I am the team. Anybody else I need to bring in will just do their bit – no more. So nobody will get to know what we're doing until we're absolutely ready. *(Beat.)* Until I'm ready to show the world how I can turn a worthless piece of shit into a star.

There's a horrified silence.

AMY: Who're you calling a piece of shit?

(Beat.)

JOHN: Technical term.

AMY: You said I had potential, star potential.

JOHN: Everyone has potential. And I'm going to use all the techniques there are to extract every single molecule of it from you. I'm going to grow it into a huge talent. A world star.

AMY: Sounds a bit scary.

JOHN: It is. But, believe me, by the time I've finished with you, even your own mother won't recognise you.

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AMY: Well you're on a winner there. She doesn't want to recognise me most of the time!

They laugh and any tension between them is relieved.

JOHN: But you do this right and you can make her proud of you.

AMY: Yeah... right. And I'm starting OK am I? For a piece of shit that is?

JOHN: You're doing OK so far.

AMY: What about you then? How did you start? I mean how did you get into this business?

JOHN: Oh I started managing bands when I was about your age. I worked as a plugger for a record company for a few years. Then I started out on my own, record producing. That was a long time ago.

AMY: You're not that old are you?

JOHN: Old enough.

AMY: That's the sort of answer I'm supposed to give.

JOHN: Yeah well you're old enough too.

AMY: You got a wife then? I don't see nothing of her if you have.

JOHN: I've got a wife, yes. She's – away staying with a friend at the moment.

AMY: I see.

JOHN: I'm not sure you do.

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AMY: And you're not doing 'Star Potential' no more, are you?

JOHN: No ... You make it sound as if there's some connection?

AMY: Is there?

JOHN: If there was I wouldn't tell you.

AMY: Fair enough.

Both John and Amy have by now finished their drinks.

JOHN: Can I get you another?

Amy picks up the can of coke to see how much is left.

AMY: Just a Vodka. I've got some coke left.

JOHN: Sure thing.

He takes the glasses back over to the drinks cupboard.

AMY: So who's that geezer that's on the show now?

JOHN: Sorry?

AMY: The bloke that's on 'Star Potential' instead of you?

JOHN: Dan. I've known him for years. We go back a long way. It was him I was working with on the pitch I was telling you about.

AMY: Maybe he'll do it then, if they're reconsidering like you say, if you don't want to.

JOHN: Who says I don't want to?

AMY: You didn't need a television programme you said.

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JOHN: To turn you into a star, no I don't.

AMY: That's what I like to hear!

JOHN: Maybe afterwards, I might consider it. But we've got to get you ready first. And then we've got to launch you.

AMY: Whoosh!

JOHN: Yeah, whoosh!

He hands Amy her vodka and takes his malt over to his desk. He taps his lap top.

JOHN: And here's what I need to make it happen.

AMY: Your lap top?

JOHN: All my contacts. All the people I need to call on. Who is doing what and who's done what. Names, numbers, CVs, the lot. I've got reviews, gig tour dates, venue information. I can tell you who handles what band and what percentage they're on. How much they made and how much they're expecting to make this year. With this I can tell you anything you want to know about any artist you care to name. I can not only tell you who their manager is, and who their vocal coach is, I can tell you who does their hair and their botox. So if we need the best costumer designer or the trendiest promo video director, I know where to go.

AMY: Impressive.

JOHN: Yeah, but I don't just know who does what, I also know who's doing who.

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AMY: Sorry?

JOHN: In here I can tell you who who's sleeping with who at the moment. I can tell you who is taking what drug-wise. I also know who is into porn. Straight porn, gay porn, even child porn...

AMY: Really?

JOHN: Whatever there is to know, I've got it – and it's all here. *(He swallows the rest of his drink and goes back to pour himself another.)* Ready for another?

AMY: Yeah thanks. *(She stands up and starts to go towards John, then stops.)* Oh no, I'd better be going really.

JOHN: Stay.

AMY: No, better not.

John pours some more malt.

JOHN: It's not just who you know and what you know, you see. It's *what you know* about who you know that counts.

AMY: Yeah.

JOHN: So when you're ready. I can make sure that everybody who is anybody in this business gets the message. Because I have a certain – influence – with some of the biggest names in show business. So whenever I want to call in a favour I can. Believe me it's the only way to get what you want, and get it quickly. There's twenty years of my life there. Knowledge I've built up since I was your age.

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AMY: You want to make sure you don't lose it then.

JOHN: Oh, don't worry, I don't take chances. Separate hard drive. See?

He goes to his desk, opens a drawer, and takes out hard drive.

It's all backed up on this little baby.

He slams the drawer shut and turns back to the drink cupboard.

JOHN: Are you sure you won't stay for another. Just a little one.

AMY: Better not.

JOHN: Suit yourself. See you bright and early tomorrow, alright?

AMY: Sure.

John walks over to Amy, puts a hand on each shoulder and leans towards her.

JOHN: You and me, we're gonna do it. OK?

AMY: OK.

JOHN: Good. Well goodnight... Amy. *(He kisses her on the cheek.)*
Don't be late.

AMY: I won't.

She leaves him standing in the middle of the room and lets herself out. John goes over to the desk. He picks up his camera, takes the memory card out of it, plugs it into his colour printer and pushes a couple of buttons. While the printer is printing he swigs back the remains of his malt, and pours himself another. He sits down on the sofa and watches the print come out of the printer. When it's done he goes over to it, looks at it, then opens another drawer of his desk. He

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takes from it the photograph we saw him looking at in Act 1, Scene 4. He compares the two photographs side by side.

JOHN: Amazing.

He takes the two prints and some sellotape from his desk over to the drinks cupboard and opens both doors wide. On the back of one door he sticks the picture of Zoe, on the other he sticks Amy. He then goes to his desk and takes out a box file. He opens it and takes out several newspaper cuttings with headlines and pictures about Zoe. He sticks these on the inside of the drinks cupboard's doors as well.

JOHN: Oh, Zoe... Zoe...

Frantically, he now pulls the bottles of drink and glasses from the drinks cupboard and stands them on the floor. He goes over to the shoulder bag, still lying on the floor where he left it. He unclasps it and takes out an old teddy bear, a book, a small framed photograph of Zoe, a shoe, a bra and two thongs. He examines each item in turn.

JOHN: If I could only bring you back.

He arranges the teddy bear reverentially on a shelf in the cupboard and places the frame photograph alongside it with the book. On the bottom shelf he places the shoe, and finally the bra and thongs complete the display. He steps back and stands in front of the objects as the lights fade.

Blackout

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ACT 2. Scene 3

It is morning, some days later. The bottles of drink and glasses are no longer in evidence, neither is the shoulder bag. Everything looks neat and tidy. We hear the front door open and someone come in.

JOHN (OFF): Is that you? I'm upstairs. I didn't think you were coming today.
Go in the sitting room. I'll be down in a second.

The door to the sitting room opens and Anna enters. She looks around with interest and some disgust. She is standing with her back to the door, looking at the trophies on the display cabinet when John enters, picking up from where he left off...

JOHN: I didn't think we said today, what are you –

Anna turns round.

Anna!

ANNA: Expecting someone else?

JOHN: No, I – well yes.

ANNA: Why, who were you expecting? Who else did you think would let themselves in?

JOHN: I thought it might be Dan.

ANNA: Dan doesn't have a key. Why would he?

JOHN: We were going to get together, work on something...

ANNA: Don't lie to me, John. Not that. I can't stand any more lies. So who were you expecting?

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- JOHN: No-one ... Amy.
- ANNA: And who the hell is Amy?
- JOHN: No-one.
- ANNA: No-one? No-one who happens to have a key to my – to our– house? Who is she, John? Who is this Amy?
- JOHN: I told you – she's no-one in particular.
- ANNA: You bastard! You're a total bastard, you know that? So Dan was right –
- JOHN: Dan! Oh, I see! I understand. So he's been opening his great gob has he?
- ANNA: Jesus! You have some little whore round here! In my bed no doubt! And all you can do is complain because Dan had the decency to tell me what's going on!
- JOHN: He doesn't know what's going on! And neither do you You've got the wrong end of the stick that's all.
- ANNA: Oh have I? Have I indeed? What I know is that some young tart called Amy has been coming around here to see you. On your own. And this 'no-one' as you refer to her has achieved such intimacy that you trust her with the key to the house.
- JOHN: It's not like that.
- ANNA: Oh really? How many times has she been here then?
- JOHN: I don't know, I can't remember... five or six.

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ANNA: Five or six! How can you stand there and look me in the face and tell me that?

JOHN: I can't remember, that's all.

ANNA: Dan said he saw her leaving here when he came to see you last. And that was just over a week ago. Are you telling me you've had this slut round here virtually every day since I've been gone?

JOHN: No! Don't be stupid!

ANNA: Oh, I'm being stupid am I? ... What is it, John? What is it, the thought of a mastectomy put you off? It would be like going to bed with an Amazon? Is that it? Did I revolt you so much? Or was it just the thought of breast cancer? Did you think you might catch it or something? ... You're more likely to catch something from your little whore. She's probably riddled with disease.

JOHN: I wouldn't know.

ANNA: Well I hope you're taking precautions, that's all I can say. And don't expect me to let you share my bed.

JOHN: I told you, it's not like that. It's not like that at all.

ANNA: You're disgusting. You're sick and disgusting. Oh, Jesus!

She sinks on to the sofa, sobbing. John goes over to comfort her. He puts his arm around her which she shrugs off violently.

JOHN: Anna, I –

ANNA: Don't you touch me! Don't you dare touch me. I don't want you anywhere near me!

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John backs off and goes and stands by the desk.

JOHN: OK. OK, if that's what you want...

ANNA: What the hell is happening to us? How can everything turn upside down so suddenly?

JOHN: I don't know.

ANNA: You don't think it has anything to do with you? And how you've been behaving lately.

JOHN: Well yes, yes of course. But it's not what you –

ANNA: Not what? I can see with my own eyes John. I can hear with my own ears.

JOHN: If you'd only give me a chance...

ANNA: A chance! And, at the first opportunity, this happens!

JOHN: You're wrong. Believe me, you're wrong about me. You're seeing it all wrong.

ANNA: Oh am I? I see someone who when I met him was a gifted, dedicated, determined record producer, who thought maybe he could break into the business he loved. And while I struggled to sell my illustrations and my paintings, I stuck by him and helped him. And selflessly – yes selflessly – that's a word you don't know the meaning of too much, do you John. Selflessly I stood by. Until eventually he got a break and then shot to stardom so fast he didn't understand what the hell was going on. He was blinking in the the light like a rabbit coming out of its hole. And then it just grew and grew and he couldn't control it. And the

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whole damn thing took him over until he didn't know what was real and what wasn't. And he believed in it so fiercely that he totally lost touch with reality. What I see, John, is someone who became so in love with himself that he started believing his own hype ...

JOHN: I don't have to listen to this...

ANNA: Yes you do! So when – shit happens – some kid dies and this – this person you've become – despite all his big talk, all his 'I am fucking God' talk, it hit him – kicks him in the balls. And, to start with, he can't think straight. because he believes it was done to spite him. But it's gone beyond that now hasn't it John. Hasn't it, *darling?*

JOHN: What – what are you talking about now?

ANNA: This other man – this other John Tower – has now grown so fucking arrogant that he believes not only can he make and break people with what he says, he controls their fucking life!

JOHN: What?

ANNA: He actually believes that people will die for him. Jesus. You have certainly come a long way since we first met, John. Who are you? What have you become?

JOHN: It's not like that Anna. Really it isn't.

ANNA: So how is it then? Go on enlighten me.

JOHN: All right, some of what you say is true.

ANNA: Ha!

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JOHN: But you don't understand...

ANNA: Oh, I understand only too well.

JOHN: No, no you don't. All I want is to do the best in this rotten, lousy business. And if that means telling people the truth, so be it.

ANNA: Telling people the truth! Telling people the truth!.God almighty! Listen to yourself will you, John? Just listen to yourself!

JOHN: I've always worked on the basis of giving it to people straight.

ANNA: I don't want to hear any more of this!

JOHN: No, hear me out. What you call arrogance is just me being honest. I truly believed that it was better to put people out of their misery before they got hurt.

ANNA: Like Zoe? You put her out of her misery did you? Is that what you're saying?

JOHN: Don't twist my words! You know what I mean ... And yes, when Zoe killed herself, it did have an effect. It hit me hard.

ANNA: Oh yeah?

JOHN: Yes. Much more than I knew. I tried to dismiss it, but it kept growing, the thought that it was down to me. I couldn't get her out of my head.

ANNA: You fool. You bloody, bloody fool! You've brought it on yourself, you know that?

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JOHN: Yes, yes I know. But there's nothing I could do about it. And when I got sacked from the show, I had to do something to show them. For me. And for Zoe.

ANNA: I can't believe I am hearing this.

JOHN: It's true. I just needed time to get my head together. I've told you that. Why can't you believe me?

ANNA: You have to ask? Because of your conceited, arrogant selfishness, you tell me you can't bear to be with me, you have to be on your own. You don't give a thought for what I'm going through. You don't seem to give a shit that I've got cancer –

JOHN: That's not true –

ANNA: You haven't even asked me what's happening have you? Since I've been here you haven't said a fucking word!

JOHN: I – I knew you were going in, Dan told me.

ANNA: So that's all right is it. Because Dan keeps you up to date with the latest news, you don't need to bother talking to the one person in your life, who you're supposed to share things with, your thoughts, your – love?

JOHN: So, so when are you having it done?

ANNA: Friday as it happens.

JOHN: Right, I'll –

ANNA: You'll what? what will you do John? Have your little whore round here while I'm having my tit cut off!

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JOHN: Don't be so disgusting!

ANNA: Christ, what has become of you now? what is happening to us? what the hell am I expected to believe. The minute I walk out the door, you wheel in the first tart who'll drop her knickers for you.

JOHN: I've told you, I've told you, it's not like that.

ANNA: But you give her the front door key?

JOHN: Yes, it just seemed the right thing to do. She was going to come round one morning to practice, but I had to go to the bank first thing, so I let her have a key so she could get started. And I , well, she hung on to the key. It's perfectly innocent.

ANNA: *Innocent?*

JOHN: Yes.

ANNA: And what does this Amy do for you, if it's not spreading her legs?

(Pause.)

JOHN: She's... She's an experiment.

Silence.

ANNA: You are sick. You really are sick, do you know that You need some help. and I mean medical help!

JOHN: Don't be ridiculous. I'm making something of her. Amy is Zoe, don't you see that? Can't you see that Amy is my Zoe?

Anna stands and looks at John absolutely aghast for a second. Then abruptly she stands up, goes to the door and exits, slamming the door behind her without

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saying another word. John stands in silence looking at the closed door, then he goes to his desk, picks up the phone and dials.

JOHN: Amy... it's John. Look, Amy, something's come up. Perhaps we could take a rest for a couple of days. There's something I need to get sorted ... What? Oh, yes, no nothing to worry about. No everything is going ahead just as we planned. Yes, yes sweetheart, of course. No, tell you what, make it Friday. Come round then, we'll have the place to ourselves.

Blackout

THE DECIDING FACTOR

ACT 2. Scene 4

It's late afternoon. There is music playing on the music system. Files are strewn across the sofa. Two costumes are hanging on coat-hangers from the display shelves. The door opens and Lucy the reporter enters, Amy trails behind her flustered.

AMY: John's not here. He's – he's just popped down the shop.

LUCY: Yes, I know. I won't stay more than a minute.

Amy goes over to the sound system and switches the music off.

AMY: Well, what do you want?

LUCY: We've been watching the flat for a good few days.

AMY: Watching the flat? Why?

LUCY: We've seen you coming and going. Stop over do you?

AMY: No. And if you've been watching as you say, you'd know that.

LUCY: Yes, we would.

AMY: Who are you, the police?

REPORTER (*Laughing*): No. Press.

AMY: Press?

LUCY: We're planning a follow up story on John Tower.

AMY: And? So what?

LUCY: You could help.

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AMY: I don't know what you're talking about. I'm working with John. He's going to make me a star.

LUCY: That's exactly the sort of information we need.

AMY: I'm not going to give you no information.

LUCY: No? So he's promised to make you a star has he?

AMY: Yes, and he means it.

LUCY: Just like he meant it to all those other poor hopefuls you mean?

AMY: What poor hopefuls?

LUCY: Let me see... there was Judith Peters, and Bridgit Whiley and ...

AMY: Who? Who are they? What've they got to do with John?

LUCY: He led them on, just as he's led you on. All he's after is to get their knickers off.

AMY: Like shit he is! I offered it to him on a plate, very first time we met and –

LUCY: Did you now?

AMY: I'm not talking to you no more, I shouldn't be talking to you at all.

LUCY: Well, he may be taking his time with you. But if you take my advice you'll cut your losses. Not into threesomes are you?

AMY (*Panicking*): I don't know what you're talking about!

THE DECIDING FACTOR

LUCY: Of course you don't. But, you see, the thing is, well, my paper would pay very well, very well indeed, if there were things you could tell us about John Tower.

AMY: What things? There's nothing to tell.

LUCY: Isn't there? I expect you know a lot more than you're telling. And you'd be doing a lot of other poor women a favour by exposing him. Do you know what I mean?

AMY: He hasn't done nothing.

LUCY: No, but if past performance is anything to go by he will. He's just biding his time with you I expect. Grooming you for the kill, so to speak.

AMY: What are you saying. For fuck's sake, what are you saying?

LUCY: All I'm saying is that if there's anything you can tell us about John Tower, what he's up to. Anything at all. If you can find out – let us say interesting bits of information – well, there would be a lot of money in for you. And, frankly sweetheart, a lot more chance of you doing something with your life, than hanging around with John Tower. I mean whatever he's promised you, you can't really believe it can you? I mean you know what sort of man he is. You only have to have watched 'Star Potential' to know that. He'd cut you up and spit you out soon as look at you if he had a mind.

AMY: I —

Lucy takes a business card from her handbag

THE DECIDING FACTOR

LUCY: Here, this is my card. That's my personal number there. Call me any time you think you've got something I might be interested in. Will you do that for me?

Amy nods dumbly.

Good. I'd better go, I don't want to be caught talking to you, do I?

She goes to the door and opens it.

It's all right. Don't worry, I'll see myself out.

Amy watches the door close behind her and hears the front door open and close. She looks around her puzzled for a minute, then sits down and opens her magazine. A few seconds later she stands up.

AMY: Christ, I need a drink.

She goes over to the drinks cupboard and opens a door. She stands there stunned at seeing a photograph of herself stuck to the back of the door.

AMY: Jesus.

She slings back the other door to reveal the pictures and press cuttings of Zoe, together with all the other items.

AMY: What the fucking hell is this?

She takes the teddy bear off the shelf, then picks up one of the thongs with disgust. She throws them back in the cupboard, slams the doors shut and stands there momentarily disoriented. She covers her face with her hands.

AMY: Jesus. Jesus Christ!

We hear the front door open and close.

THE DECIDING FACTOR

AMY: Oh, fuck!

The door to the sitting room opens and John enters. With only the barest of glances at Amy, he puts his wallet by the lap top on his desk and slings a pile of magazines on the coffee table.

JOHN: There we go, time to acquaint you with the media. We need to be working with them, if we're going to get you noticed big time.

AMY: Yes.

Now he notices Amy.

JOHN: Are you all right?

AMY: Not really.

JOHN: What's up? You look like you've seen a ghost.

AMY: I have.

She looks over to the cupboard.

Silence.

JOHN: I see.

AMY: I needed a drink. I opened your cupboard to get a drink. That's where you keep it.

JOHN: It's where I used to keep it.

AMY: And now it's where you keep pictures of that girl? She's that stupid bitch who topped herself isn't she?

He half smiles.

THE DECIDING FACTOR

JOHN: That's what I said at the time.

AMY: And why have you got a picture of me stuck there too?

JOHN: Don't you know?

AMY: And that teddy bear and – other things, are they hers too?

JOHN: Yes.

AMY: Where the hell did you get them?

JOHN: From her parents. I went round to see them. I wanted to explain. Comfort them maybe, I don't know. They were amazing. If I'd been them I'd have called the police or – I don't know. But they didn't. They asked me to come in. Zoe's mother even made me a cup of tea. It wasn't as if they didn't know who I was. They said it was God's will and they accepted it. I was simply an instrument and I wasn't to blame ... They said they would pray for me.

AMY: I bet they did.

JOHN: And then I asked if I could look inside Zoe's bedroom, to feel her presence you know.

Amy shakes her head and shivers.

JOHN: And they said of course I could, take as long as I wanted, if it would comfort me. And, well I had my shoulder bag with me, you know the one I keep scripts and things in? And – I couldn't help myself! I saw her shoes and I pushed one in my bag, and the other stuff.

AMY: Like her underwear!

THE DECIDING FACTOR

JOHN: Yes, but it's not for any reason you think. it was just as a reminder to her memory you know? Can't you understand? I killed her. And I simply want to keep her memory alive! Is that so wrong?

AMY: You're sick, do you know that? Fucking sick!

JOHN: Perhaps you're right. Perhaps you are. I don't know.

AMY: Fucking hell, who are you?

He shrugs in response.

AMY: I hadn't realised it before, but she looks a bit like me, doesn't she? Zoe looks a bit like me.

JOHN: No, she looks a lot like you.

AMY: And that's what this is all about is it? This is why you got me here. To play in your sordid little game of make-believe. You want me to be her don't you? You want to turn me into your precious Zoe, the girl you killed?

JOHN: Yes, yes!

AMY: Well, you're not turning me into some fucking dead bitch!

JOHN: Oh come on don't be stupid! I'm offering you the world!

AMY: What are you talking about, offering me the world? You can't offer me nothing. You are nothing. Except some fucked up old perv!!

JOHN: Oh, for fuck's sake! You callous little bitch. Don't you understand? You really are thick as shit aren't you?

THE DECIDING FACTOR

He storms out of the room. Amy goes over to the sofa and collapses into it. She is shaking. Slowly she steels herself to stand and takes a couple of deep breaths. Shakily she walks to the door. She stops and looks around, reflecting on what she had hoped for. Bitterness wells in her as she sees his wallet and lap top on the desk. She walks quickly over to it, and picks them up. She then has a thought, puts the lap top back, pockets the wallet and opens the drawer where the hard drive is. She takes it out, puts it in her other pocket and runs out, slamming the front door. The sound of this brings John Tower back from his bedroom.

JOHN (OFF): Amy? Amy, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to shout at you.

He comes in.

JOHN: Amy?

He looks around, shaking his head in frustration, He goes over to his desk, looks at it and realises his wallet is missing, He involuntarily pats his jacket pocket to make sure.

JOHN: Oh, shit! My fucking wallet! Jesus! Bitch! Fucking bitch.

He grabs at the phone and dials.

JOHN: Police ... Yes, I want to report a robbery ... John Tower, 42, Holland Park Crescent, W14 ... My wallet. My wallet has been stolen from my house ... Anything else? No, nothing I can see. I don't think so. My lap top was here but she hasn't taken that. (*A thought occurs to him*) Hang on.

He opens the drawer. The hard drive is not there. He pulls the drawer right out and it crashes on the floor. He drops the receiver and pulls out the other drawers in desperation and they too crash on the floor. He is unable to believe his eyes.

THE DECIDING FACTOR

We can hear the voice on the other end of the line. He picks up the receiver and sinks to the floor.

JOHN: My hard drive's been stolen! My fucking hard drive's been stolen!
 ... Look, you don't understand how important it is. It had
 everything from my lap top on it ... No it wasn't fucking
 password protected! ... What do you mean what was on it?

He sinks lower as the enormity of what was on his hard drive hits him.

JOHN: Everything really ... My life.

CURTAIN