

My Love Affair With Tony Blair (draft)

By Tom Green

Scene 1

FX: Cautious applause from an audience of about 40 people.

Spotlight on Claire, alone on stage with a hand-held microphone. The applause dies away.

CLAIRE: (glancing off stage, smiling) Thank you for that Marian – quite an introduction. Look, I'm blushing. (She now turns directly to the audience) And thank you for coming. I'm sure that Tunbridge Wells on a Tuesday evening has many attractions, so I appreciate you choosing to come and hear me. Can everyone hear okay by the way? Yes? Good. Let me know if you can't at any point, and feel free to ask questions as I go – although, as Marian said, there will be a formal question and answer session at the end. And, of course, I'll be around after that to chat and, hopefully, scribble my name on a few copies of the book if anyone wants that. (She picks up the book). (To offstage) You have got some copies if anyone wants one, haven't you? Yes. (winks to the audience). Good.

Blackout.

Scene 2

Lights up on split stage.

On one side: a cafe. Claire is sitting alone at a table, fiddling with her cigarettes.

On the other side: an office. Christian is sitting behind the desk, feet up, looking through a box of cigars.

Straddling the two scenes, which take place simultaneously, is Howard. He steps between the two.

Christian: Was it a woman?

Claire: Mr Zift?

Howard: Get your feet off my desk.

Howard: You must be Claire.

(She looks over his shoulder as if expecting more people)

Howard: There's only me. Sorry I'm a little late. Can I get you something?

Claire: A latte. Thanks. Two sugars.

Howard: We could sit outside if you prefer. If you want to smoke.

Claire shakes her head.

Howard: Latte?

Claire: Thanks.

Christian: So, it was a woman.

Howard: (taking the cigars from him) Have you been sucking these?

Christian: A secret meeting with a woman...

Howard: It was not a secret meeting.

Christian: But you didn't tell anyone about it and it wasn't in your diary.

Howard: In this business, as you will probably never learn, discretion is still valued.

Christian takes a cigar and, grabbing the matches from Howard's desk, lights it.

Howard returns with a cup of coffee and a mint tea.

Howard: Hope this place is okay. I know it's not very grand but...

Claire sips her coffee and grimaces.

Claire: is there any sugar in this?

Howard: Sorry, did you ask-

Claire: Two.

Howard: Sorry. I'll...

Howard: That's actually not funny.

Christian: Who is she?

Howard: Christian, I'm being serious. Put that out.

Christian tries to pinch the cigar out with his fingers, and burns them. Howard takes the cigar from him and puts it in a glass of water.

Howard returns with a handful of sugars.

Claire: My brother-in-law recommended you.

Howard: Yes, you said that on the phone. I've been trying to think where we might have met, but-

Claire: You don't know him.

Howard: Is he a writer?

Claire: No.

Howard: But he works in publishing?

Claire: No. Cleaning.

Howard: Cleaning?

Claire: He's the finance director at a contract cleaning company. They used to do your offices before you moved.

Howard: Right.

Claire: He told me your firm was the best. And that you were the best person there.

Howard: I didn't realised my reputation extended to...

Claire: It's not quite true to say that he's not a writer. He does write. A lot. But nothing published. You might know him by his other name.

Howard: But if he's not published.

Claire: Cherie Tynack.

Howard: Er...

Claire: She's sent you several novels.

Howard: Yes, yes of course. We get quite a lot of unsolicited material so it's sometimes hard to remember names.

Claire: Anyway. He doesn't know why I wanted to contact you.

Howard: Right.

Claire: He thinks I've written a novel, too.

Howard: Most people have. And most of them send them to me, it seems.

Claire: No one knows.

Howard: No one knows what?

Claire: What I told you. Why I called you. Why I'm here. You haven't told anyone, have you?

Howard: No.

Howard sits down at his desk. Christian loiters.

Howard: Haven't you got work to do?

Christian: It can't be a novelist. There's no woman novelist big enough to make you keep mum about meeting her. There just isn't. Is there? It was work, wasn't it? But why be so secretive if it was just a date? You're a free man, Howard. No need to skulk about as if you're having an affair. We all envy you. You should be making the most of it. Philip Roth-ing it with anything in a skirt. No, it was work. You've got a work face on. So, not a novelist.

Howard: I didn't say that.

Christian: Definitely not a novelist. Must be memoirs of some kind. Or cookery. But again, why keep it secret? Either someone huge, who you've not yet sealed the deal with. Or someone embarrassing who, for some reason you couldn't resist. Am I getting warmer?

Claire: It's important that no one finds out.

Howard: You said that.

Claire: No, but I mean it. Everything has to be secret.

Howard: Okay.

Claire: I know they'll find out somehow but -

Howard: "They"?

Claire: His people. They'll get wind of it at some point but I want to keep them off the scent for as long as possible. What?

Howard: What?

Claire: You pulled a face.

Howard: Did I?

Claire: If you don't want to help me, I'll go.

Howard: I just -

Claire: I'm sure I'll be able to find someone else who's interested.

Howard: I'm interested.

Claire: I do have proof. Diaries. Photographs. Letters.

Howard: Can I see?

Claire: Of course. But I need to know that I can trust you. I'm already worried that I might have told you too much.

Howard: Does anyone else know? That I was at this meeting.

Christian: I don't think so. Anna thought you were at Paulo's – or was she in on it?

Howard shakes his head.

Christian: So it's only Sherlock-moi.

Howard: Why did you come looking for me?

Christian: Oh, yeah. Just some gossip I'd heard.

Apparently Fitzroy are withdrawing their offer.

Howard: Really?

Christian: That's the good news. The bad news is that Fitzroy are getting taken over themselves.

Howard: By who?

Christian: "Whom." ABD.

Howard laughs.

Howard: That's hilarious! Poor old Alan. Fucked on his own petard.

Christian: Do you remember I said that was bad news.

Howard: For Fitzroy, yes.

Christian: ABD want us as well. I say want. More accurately, ABD are going to take us over as well. Want and get are synonymous for them.

Howard: Where did you hear this?

Christian looks away. Howard looks sternly at him.

Christian: I know I shouldn't do it.

Howard: You've been looking at Cheryl's emails?

Christian: It's her own fault. She should have invested in a properly secure network years ago.

Howard: ABD?

Christian nods.

Howard: Fuck.

Christian: They want to merge us with Fitzroy. I mean, they're going to merge us with Fitzroy. Brand new offices by the Hammersmith flyover.

Howard: Lovely.

CAFE

Howard: Show me one thing.

A long pause. Then Claire takes a slim document folder from her bag and pulls out a printed sheet of paper.

Claire: This is an email. From him to me.

Howard reads it and his jaw slowly drops. Claire takes it back from him.

Howard: What do you know about Tony Blair?

Christian: Not much.

Howard: Personal stuff. Not the politics.

people. Foreign holidays. Why?

Christian: Family man. Four kids. Wife. Likes rich

Howard: Can I trust you?

Christian: What kind of question's that?

Howard: It's the kind of question I ask just before I tell you where I've been this morning.

Christian: It's not something medical, is it? You're not ill are you? If it's cancer I'd rather not know.

Howard: Can I trust you?

Scene 2

Claire remains in the cafe. But her manner now changes. Rather than being closed and cautious, she is relaxed and open.

Claire: I'm trying really hard not to smile. Not that it matters. Not that anyone will care or even notice, probably, but if I'm not careful I'll be grinning like an idiot and for a woman sitting on her own in a cafe that just doesn't seem right. [she grins very widely. Then straightens her face.] It's a beautiful place. I came here yesterday, too, after a day on the beach and you can see the sunset into the sea. Good food. Although I didn't actually eat. I had three mouthfuls of wine and felt like I was going to fall off my chair. I've tried to have something today. But my stomach is like a clenched fist. That's why I'm early. I thought I'd find a quiet, shady corner and just relax. Try to adjust. To make this feel as much as possible like something...normal.

[looking out into the middle distance] One of those might be his. I've been trying to work out which one. I even had this idea that I might be able to see him making his way in a little motorboat. Like James Bond. Although I don't actually know if he's coming from there or from somewhere on land.

Listen to me. I sound like some love-struck teenager. But look at this. What a place. The... flowers spilling over the terrace - bourgenvilla, is it? The kids over there in the fountain in the square. The sea. Fewer tourists than I'd expected. Some Germans at the table by the door but no English I don't think. I guess that's why he suggested it.

[Her face breaks into another broad grin]

I've got a feeling that the man over there by the bar is secret service. Very discrete, but he's not really concentrating on his newspaper and I've caught his eyes a couple of times. He looks Italian, but I suppose that would make sense. He's probably got his own people, too, but they probably insist on providing some. That's been the strangest thing, actually. Not who he is – to me, he's just like anyone else. I mean, he's the person I met, the person I know, not someone on the TV, someone famous. But the security. Always. Everywhere. There really is no escape. The only good thing is that they're completely trustworthy, apparently. They've been bred and trained for it. Happy to throw

themselves in front of him to take a bullet in the chest, but completely and utterly resistant to any temptation to gossip.

The other thing... The other strange thing, is his punctuality. Not that every man i've ever known has been habitually late but I am a bit of a stickler for a time and a place. It's a hrad habit to get out of, I think. Even when I try to be late for something I still find myself arriving on the dot. And he's the same. Never early. Never late. I teased him about it last time, said tit was like being an item on his schedule. I could almost imaging him coming out of a meeting, asking his secretary or whoever what's next and being told my name. "You've got eighty minutes. Then back for a meeting with the minister for transport." It's not fair really. Given that I'm like that myself and his job means he has to be like that but still. Maybe that's why he suggested this. We've never met in a public place before. Ever. It's always been hotels, arriving separately. This feels different. This feels like what I've been waiting for.

Scene 3

Howard's office.

Howard is working at his desk on his computer. Christian has pulled up a chair to work on the other side of the desk on his lap-top.

Christian: Here.

Howard: (keeping his eyes on his own screen) What?

Christian: I knew it.

[A silence. Howard still shows no interest.]

Christian: (reads) "While at No 10, Alastair Campbell was a self-confessed internet Luddite "Blah, blah, blah. "For the entire period I worked for Tony Blair, almost a decade, I did not use a computer."

Howard: Alistair Campbell?

Christian: He continues. "I should add that the prime minister is not much better. He may be one of the politicians most identified with change and modernity in the world today, but he too is at heart a pen and paper man, the computer on his desk almost as idle as the one I used to have on mine. "[Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2006/feb/20/comment.egovernment> – by Alistair Campbell] Told you.

Howard: You told me that Blair never used email.

Christian: Yes. Here's another one. "I'm a technophobe – Blair's shock confession"

Howard: And he says he never used email?

Christian: As good as.

Howard returns to his work.

Christian: "he's a pen and paper man, the computer on his desk almost as idel as the one I sued to have on mine."

Howard: So he didn't know how to send an email?

Christian: Presumably, no.

Howard: Presumably?

Christian: I'm sure he said it once. I mean in this Campbell piece he talks about Blair doing a photo opp at an adult education IT class and finding the whole thing a revelation.

Howard: Yeah, but everyone knows how to send an email. Even in 1999. Even a technophobe. Even a pen and paper man whose computer was mostly idle.

Christian (returning to his computer): I'm sure he said it once.

Howard: Of course, what a technophobe might have done, is assumed that email was private. Most of us did back then. Some people still do.

Christian: Cheryl's not a technophobe she's a techno-idiot.

Howard: So it would seem like a good way to contact someone secretly. When your every move is watched. When every phone call is monitored. It's easy to imagine the desire to send indiscreet little personal messages by the magic of the information superhighway.

Christian: Fuck it.

Howard: What?

Christian: I'm sure he said it.

Howard: Maybe he did. Although that still wouldn't be proof.

Christian: One printed email isn't proof either. Do you know how easy that is to fake?

Howard: Yes. I do. I'm not saying it was genuine. I've got an open mind. Just like you should have.

Christian: You believe her though, don't you?

Howard: Do you know what you get if you put "Tony Blair adulterer" into Google?

Christian: A writ?

Howard: "Adultery al dente" An article in The Independent. "To seduce an Italian wife you'll need at least two weeks, a puppy, after-Mass cakes for her aunts, a hire car and a love of Tony Blair, says Annalisa Barbieri"

Christian: We have to have more proof.

Howard: (reading) "Italians are, according to a recent report, more forgiving of adultery than ever before. No news there, you may think - except that this time it's the women who are indulging in it and the men who are turning a blind eye" Did you know that?

Christian: You just have to tell her.

Howard: I should go back to Tuscany.

Christian: This is all just wasting time. Either she has proof – in which case why hasn't she shown it to us already. Or she's a nutcase – which she clearly is.

Howard: "They will probably ask you about Tony Blair. Have an opinion but make it favourable since they more than likely think he is a solid family man and the fact that he chooses Italy to holiday in makes him a good *uovo* in their eyes."

Christian: Exactly. A solid family man. Who never sent emails.

Howard: Why are you so sure about her?

Christian: Because... I don't know. It's too random.

Howard: I'm a book agent. She wants to publish a book. She calls me. We meet. Is that 'random'?

Christian: She'd go to the papers first. Or Max Clifford.

Howard: She wouldn't even know who Max Clifford was. She's not like that.

Christian: So she's not interested in publicity?

Howard: Postively dreads it.

Christian: But wants to tell the world about her affair with Tony Blair.

Howard: Everyone wants to tell their story. It's a very powerful compulsion. And the bigger the story the stronger the pull. It becomes hard to resist. She's has a huge secret and it's eating her up from inside.

Christian: She told you that?

Howard shrugs.

Hwoard: In so many words.

Christian: I just think it would have come out by now. He has too many enemies. Someone would have known.

Howard: Too big a story to be kept from our voracious media?

Christian: Yes.

Howard: Four words: Major, Currie, Edwina, John. Not necessarily in that order.

Christian: That was different?

Howard: How? There were two famous people involved – an even juicier scandal.

Christian: It was John Major. Nobody cared.

Howard returns to his computer.

Howard: All I'm saying is that we should keep an open mind. This is the first stage. A meeting. Trust established -just about. Now we do some background research.

Christian: We ought to be researching her.

Howard: We'll get to that. But we mustn't scare her off. Look, I'm not saying that she is telling the truth. But there's a chance. And that chance is worth a very large amount of money. An amount so large that it could liberate the two of us from corproat ebondage unde the Hammersmith Flyover.

Christian: Would you have?

Howard: Would I have what?

Christian: Would you have had an affair with her. If you were the affair type. Which I know you're not. But can you picture it? Would you now?

Scene 5

Back to Claire in the bookshop...