

# CLOSING THE BOX

A duologue

by

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## CLOSING THE BOX

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**The lights come up to reveal a large living room of a modern house . The house belongs to George and SARAH Sherrup . SARAH's profession is never described but she is obviously wealthy and has a substantial private income . George is a failed property speculator turned antique dealer . The house has tasteful furniture , classic in style , hence no particular era or look is evident . Seated with a large glass of red wine is SARAH . She looks to be worth about four thousand pounds live on the hoof and probably is ! She is somewhere in her forties but care , exercise and health farms have kept her looks .**

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GEORGE: Hello ! Sarah my sweet , you look gorgeous . Had a good day ?

SARAH : Well , I'm not sure how I'd classify it darling . Franklin has had to be put down , I crashed the Volvo into next door's silly Renault thing , The gas man never came , so there's still no hot water for the Jacuzzi , the post was late , we can't get planning permission for the summerhouse and the dinner will be late because I ran out of mozzarella !

GEORGE: (Hasn't listened to a word) Good! Good ! I had a great day ! It went absolutely as you said it would ! Your plan was terrific ! I'm very close to closing the deal . ( Aside to audience ) Moaning bloody cow !

SARAH: Oh I'm so glad for you! ( Aside to audience ) God this man's a self centred bore , it's no wonder I'm getting rid of him ! (Back to GEORGE) D'you know I was thinking today It's a real shame that deal with Sidney didn't come off !

GEORGE: Oh let's not go over all that again! I know , your plan was perfect . And I must admit bumping him off was easy , if a trifle over zealous ! No that stuff you gave me worked like a dream ! But I reckon his landlord suspected something . I never knew how to take him . I think he and Sidney were quite close .

SARAH: You mean they were gay?

GEORGE: Don't think so, no..... just ..... close . And , as you know only too well , the police were sniffing around too , so I thought it best to leave it alone ! Don't start in at me for that again ! God , welcome home dear ! Had a good day dear ? Lovely to see you ! Anyway , as I say , this new deal is a really low risk , high return banker . So I'm forgetting Sid and concentrating on that !

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SARAH : Very wise my darling ! ( *Aside* ) Spineless little shit ! (Back to GEORGE) So how much is this new deal worth ?

GEORGE: Oh, sixty to eighty grand. Depends what the mood's like at the auction .

SARAH: And how long before we see all that lovely loot in our grateful little paws, my pet ?

GEORGE: Well, we won't see all of it you know. What with the auctioneers fee and tax and all that . ( *Aside* ) And if I get my way you won't see a penny you money grabbing cat !

SARAH: How tiresome! ( *Aside* ) Pity he won't get a cent !

GEORGE: But I reckon we should see the best part of forty thou, what ..... in about three months .

SARAH : We could go away for a few weeks then . I've got some leave due.

GEORGE : What ! The office would cease to function without you !

SARAH : There are others just as capable GEORGE !

GEORGE : Yes I suppose so . ( Pause ) . SARAH, don't stand so close to the Pollock dear in that blouse , you clash terribly !

SARAH : Sorry Darling ! ( *Aside* ) Pretentious idiot ! When I first knew him he thought Pollock was a fish !

( *Freeze :* )

***GEORGE comes out of the freeze and walks towards the audience into a spot .***

GEORGE :

The trouble with Sarah is , she's so bloody demanding ! You could say avaricious . I do like that word , avaricious , it really rolls nicely , anyway , sorry I was saying , she was always

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goaded and prodded me into doing things I never wanted to do . She chucked me out once you know ! Said I was useless . Mind you I had lost a small fortune , sadly the fortune was not mine ! I was a property dealer for a big city firm . I 'borrowed' close on a million to do a little free lance work ! Trying to be clever , hide it all on the computer , all that sort of tosh . Point is the deals went very sour and I was found out . Damn lucky I wasn't prosecuted . But the company I 'borrowed' the money from thought it would be a major embarrassment to themselves to take it to court . So they kicked me out on the understanding that if I ever applied for another job in finance they would blow the thing wide open . I was pretty desperate I can tell you. Booted out of my home , no job , no friends , until I met this bloke on the streets . I really got to like him , Sid his name was , He was amazing ! He had a moral code that rivalled Fagin . He was a con man working in antiques . He had some knowledge but he wasn't the shiniest penny in the moneybox . I started to read up on antiques and go to a few auctions . After a while I began to visit Sid in his flat , listen to how he planned scams , that sort of thing . I realised he had some pieces that were much more valuable than he knew . I told Sarah . God what a mistake ! She became obsessed about how we could relieve him of the ownership of said goodies . Now you might not believe this , especially from a man who thought nothing of borrowing money from his employers without asking , but I swear I had no intention of conning Sid out of his treasures . I'd have been happy with starting up a little business of my own . Conning silly old dears and pompous retired bankers and such out of some valuable pieces is one thing , but Sid had been good to me . Let me have a place to stay , even if it was a cardboard box with some blankets outside on the street ! But he cared ! He wanted to help and damn it all I really did like the bloke ! His flat was a tiny place , crammed full of pieces he had picked up from boot sales , house clearances , he even went on the knocker for stuff . I remember the place had a most peculiar smell . A combination of spray polish , musty books and stale food .

Sarah , by now had a plan ! She always had plans did SARAH ! She was convinced I could make enough from cheating Sidney to set up my own ' Operation ' as she called it . Still , that's enough for now ! I suppose I've got to pretend to be enthusiastic !

GEORGE : ( **Back to SARAH** ) So where do we go for our little break then ?

SARAH : I've had a great idea , GEORGE , How about it ? We could go to New Zealand !

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GEORGE : Why in God's name go to New Zealand ? (**Aside**) As if I didn't know !

SARAH : Adventure GEORGE ! (**Aside**) He'll want to go to Cornwall !

GEORGE : What's wrong with Cornwall ? I like Cornwall !

SARAH : Oh God ! George you are so unimaginative ! Cornwall's very nice if you like pubs with bunches of yokels insulting you behind your back whilst snatching money from your hand like greased lightning ! Charging the earth for home made pasties that come in a van from Bristol !

GEORGE : Not all the pubs are like that and it's Exeter actually !

SARAH : What ?

GEORGE : The pasties are made by Gripes of Exeter !

SARAH : It's the same thing ! And how appropriate ! They give you the gripes when you eat one !

GEORGE : That's unfair !

SARAH : You got food poisoning the last time you ate one ! Laid you low for three days !

GEORGE : That was fish in Padstow !

SARAH : Well it was bloody Cornish fish anyhow !

GEORGE : So not Cornwall then ?

SARAH : Oh please god , no ! Cornwall is a sort of healthy grave ! Come on GEORGE ! Let's try something different !

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GEORGE : I don't think I'm cut out for bungy jumping and white water rafting !

SARAH: They have some of the best white wines in the world !

GEORGE : Well .....

SARAH : Superb scenery ! Fantastic seafood ! It's very romantic .

GEORGE : I fail to see what's romantic about a place where most men are on more intimate terms with their sheep than they are with their neighbours !

SARAH : If their neighbours come from Cornwall I can well understand that !

GEORGE : What about Australia ? Ayres Rock , the outback !

SARAH : Barbecues , flies and Fosters ?

GEORGE : You have a point ! What about Austria ?

SARAH : What ! Sitting surrounded by grey haired old biddies all singing selections from the Sound of Music ! You must be joking ! I want a country that's wild, untamed . I want to be in a place where the unexpected is around every corner . New sights , new sounds , new experiences . Where there's a hint of danger in the air !

GEORGE : Scotland ?

SARAH : GEORGE ! Look , who was it that said you should try all things once except incest and folk dancing ?

GEORGE : Okay ! Okay ! New Zealand it is ! Though what the attraction is about a place where near Neanderthal men in check shirts are bonking sheep all day and .....



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SARAH : If you're going to be course GEORGE I'm going into the kitchen to prepare dinner !

GEORGE : I just can't understand this fascination with travel ! The crow went travelling abroad and came back just as black !

### ***Lights cross fade to SARAH***

SARAH : You can see why he had to go can't you ? God ! He has all the charisma of John Major with haemorrhoids ! He was fun , once ! I remember when the Cardigan-Smythes came around one Christmas and GEORGE put cannabis in the pudding ! Carolyn got so high she swore she saw Rudolf in the garden ! She did no more than strip off her dress and run outside proclaiming

“ Rudolf , come and take me my darling ! “ Her husband stroked my knee under the table at least five times before passing out with his face in a plateful of profiteroles ! I didn't mind the stroking of the knee , but the profiteroles had taken an age to make and I thought that an awful waste ! Still , it was fun . And that was so typical of George then . Always doing mad things . But he's like a Beaujolais , best when young ! He's gone insipid with age ! I've tried to encourage him to try new experiences and live on the edge a little , because I believe too much of a good thing is simply wonderful ! but frankly one has more thrills looking through an Argos catalogue than in a whole week with GEORGE ! He cheats on me , of course . Little weekends away with some pathetic young tart on the pretext of attending an auction or something . It's his idea of a little spicy adventure ! That reminds me . Not long ago I asked him if we could spend some time in one of those adventure hotels in North Wales . You know the sort of thing , healthy food , plenty of it , hill walking , climbing , gorge walking et al !

### ***Cross fade to lights up in the living room some weeks ago***

GEORGE : A week where ?

SARAH : Nant Y Cwm ! It's in North Wales , quite near Beddgelert ! It's a fantastic place . Look at the brochure !

GEORGE : Have you seen the activities listed here ? Day one : A fantastic walk to the top of Moel Hebog , God what dreadful name ! With a chance to try

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scree-running ! What in god's name is scree running ? It sounds like something appallingly contagious that's happening to your skin ! Don't stand too close to him his scree's running !

SARAH : Don't be silly ! You'd enjoy a scree-run . You start a small avalanche of small stones , called scree , on a steep slope and then you run over the top of the shifting stones , a bit like surfing !

GEORGE : Have you gone completely mad , or are you just practising for when you do , finally , relinquish control of your senses , um ? And look here , what joy , what fun ! We go abseiling **and** grass tobogganing ! Fantastic ! Having arrived at the top , completely knackered , you have the choice of breaking your ankle on the scree run , crashing to the ground head first abseiling , or breaking your neck by hurtling headlong into a rock on a grass toboggan ! I can't wait for day two ! What is it with you ? Are you trying to cash in on my life assurance early or what ?

SARAH : ( Aside ) Oh god , yes please ! ( Back to GEORGE ) There's white water canoeing .....

GEORGE : I should drown !

SARAH : Gorge walking !

GEORGE : Likewise !

SARAH : Day three you get to build and ride a death slide over a river !

GEORGE : I rest my case !

***Lights fade to SARAH***

SARAH : We never did go ! We spent a thoroughly boring time in Norfolk staring at some marshes and drinking warm beer and not very dry Martinis !

***Lights cross fade to Living room , the present***

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***We are in the Kitchen***

GEORGE : I'm sorry ! Look , if you've set your heart on New Zealand then there we shall go !

SARAH : Thank you George. Kindly don't pick at the ingredients ! Raw peas are bad for the digestion . I don't want you impregnating the furniture with your flatulence ! I have visitors tomorrow morning !

GEORGE : And which boring old fart are we entertaining ?

SARAH : **We** are not entertaining anyone . **I** am entertaining Mrs. Jenkins . You will absent yourself , I care not where , until lunchtime !

GEORGE : Oh goody ! I'll go and have a round of golf !

SARAH : Splendid ! But please don't wear those Pringle clothes I bought for your birthday ! You know , the tartan slacks and the cashmere sweater .

GEORGE : But those are made for playing golf in SARAH !

SARAH : George , you do not **play golf** , you stagger around the course being torn to shreds in every briar and bramble bush for miles ! Those clothes are so you can look presentable in the clubhouse bar **after** you have played your silly game !

GEORGE : Ah ! I see , I'll wear a pair of jeans and my garden sweater then !

SARAH : You're being silly now ! I've bought you plenty of good serviceable sports clothes ! Choose some of those !

GEORGE : Right you are ! Roger , over and out ! Now about this trip abroad . Shall I use a card or pay by .....

SARAH : Oh for heaven sake use my account , it won't be the first time ! You know

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the number for the card ! You can book it on the web , unless you feel it's too risky ! And for heaven's sake remember to book first class flights !

### ***Lights cross fade to GEORGE***

I should explain that Sarah , my wife , is a funny thing that happened to me on the way to insanity ! She is a fairly wealthy woman in her own right . Some Aunt or other had left her a house and small business in Somerset which she sold up for a tidy sum . So you might well be moved to ask why she needed to set to with some criminal scheme to get her hands on Sid's antiques ? The fact is she was bored again ! She is not afraid to take risks , in fact she relishes them ! She saw the whole thing with Sidney as a game that she could plot on her laptop !

She nagged and nagged and went on about it for weeks ! This was to be my chance to set up in a business that gave **her** a buzz ! Something illegal ! Something that involved a danger of being caught , a gamble , a war in the guise of sport , with our whole way of life as the stakes . I gave in and agreed to the plan . God alone knows why , but I did . I set about befriending the man . Took him to see some shows in the West End . Treated him to supper back in a room I'd rented , so he didn't know I was back with SARAH . Another little treat was to take him to Bridget's Tea House for afternoon tea . Can you believe it ? Crumpets with butter , scones and jam , presented on willow pattern plates from British Home Stores , and a pot of tea for two in a genuine nineteen forties E.P.N.S. teapot ! All served by a waitress in a black dress with one of those hats that look like a folded doily . Over a period of some months Sid came to trust me as **almost** a partner . In the meantime I was busy drawing up an inventory of pieces that he had woefully undervalued . There were several rare books with exquisite illustrations of a somewhat risqué nature . He had several maps , hand drawn on velum and signed by the cartographer , which were worth at least ten times the amount he put on them ! It took all my self control not to cry aloud as he went round them now and again with his dreaded Mr Sheen !

After a period of consolidating our friendship and business arrangement , I judged the time was ripe to broach the subject of a partnership . We sat in my room one evening and I hoped to improve his willingness to accede to my suggestions , by endowing him with liberal quantities of a decent Brandy I had managed to obtain on a little excursion to H . A . Rods . He was reticent at first. Warbling on about one thing and another , how he didn't want to tie himself down with responsibilities . But , praise the almighty , at length he

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agreed ! I now had what SARAH wanted . Access to his goodies , The trouble was she wasn't in the mood for sharing , oh no ! She wanted the whole shebang ! You won't believe this but she even got some poison I had to give him to , as she most delicately put it , empty the space he was needlessly occupying ! We had words about that . Take a look !

**( *We are in the middle of a row* )**

GEORGE : That's not the point ! I'll know . And I know how I feel ! I like Sid !

SARAH : Why , what is he to you ? He's an insignificant human being !

GEORGE : That's just it you see ! I don't happen to believe that any human being is insignificant ! I'll cheat for you , I'll lie for you , but I'm damned if I'll shorten the life of another man just so you can have your buzz !