

ACT ONE: SCENE ONE.

Music: Match of the Day theme.

Lights up. KARL enters. He wears a Chesterfield football shirt and he is carrying a carrier bag. He walks to the centre of the stage. He looks at his watch. Then he looks around, before taking a klaxon out of the bag. He places the bag on the ground. As the music fades down he blows the klaxon nine times - De, de, de/de/de (slight pause) de, de, de/de! - then chants 'Spireites!' He does this three times. He looks around. He looks at his watch again. He sighs.

KARL: Bloody hell!

He takes out a mobile phone and dials. He appears inexperienced with the mobile. (In 1997 they were less common.) He makes a mistake in his dialling.

KARL: Bugger!

He dials again. He holds the phone up to his ear. It appears not to be working. He takes it from his ear and looks at it.

KARL: Chuffing thing!

He dials again. Once more he holds it to his ear.

KARL: (*Impatiently.*) Come on! Come on!

Again nothing happens. He looks at it again.

KARL: Bloody signal!

He puts the phone in the bag. He looks at his watch again. He sighs in frustration. He roots around in the bag again. He takes out a four can pack of beer. He breaks one off and opens the can. He drinks. He looks at his watch again.

KARL: Biggest day of our lives and where are they?

He sighs and drinks again. He belches.

KARL: Bloody hell!

He drinks again. As he is drinking STEVE enters. He too wears a CFC football shirt.

STEVE: Heyyy Karl!

KARL: About bloody time.

STEVE: What's up?

KARL: What time you call this?

STEVE: (*Looking at his watch.*) It's eight minutes past ten precisely. The speaking clock would have charged you for that information.

KARL: More like ten past, Steve. And we're the only ones here.

STEVE: We've plenty of time.

KARL: Plenty of time? We said we'd be off by ten. On the road.

STEVE: It'll not take long.

KARL: What about the bloody traffic? It'll be murder. Murder!

STEVE: It'll be alright. Johnny'll sort it.

KARL: Sort it? Sort it? Where the hell is he?

STEVE: He'll be here soon. You know you can rely on him.

KARL: I don't know any such thing.

STEVE: When has he let us down before?

KARL: The match'll be over before I've finished telling you. But to give one example, there was that time he left us stuck in bloody Scunthorpe 'cos Sheila had a migraine. We had to get that grotty b and b with that barmy landlady.

STEVE: How could I forget? She spent all night camped outside our door with that parrot on her shoulder. Either she fancied me or she didn't trust you.

KARL: Don't know about that, but why did she need the bloody parrot?

STEVE: Someone to talk to. She *was* a poor lonely widow.

KARL: Yeah, she never stopped telling us. And I'll never forget that breakfast. I think I'm still eating it now.

STEVE: It *was* a bit grisly.

KARL: A bit grisly? When she told us she'd had her old man cremated I didn't know she meant in the bloody sausages.

STEVE: Yeah, I think I got his toenail.

KARL: Then there was the time Johnny's exhaust fell off that old Cortina when we were boarding the channel ferry. Talk about Amsterdam or bust.

STEVE: Well at least he's given you some memories to talk about.

KARL: And what about the six hours we spent stuck on the M6 because he couldn't tell the difference between Tuesday and Wednesday?

STEVE: He reckoned he had jet lag.

STEVE: Jet lag? They'd only been to bloody Ibiza.

STEVE: Okay, okay, Karl, I take your point. But remember Sheila's nearly due.

KARL: As if I could forget. It's all they've rabbitted on about for months.

STEVE: It *is* their first.

KARL: Anybody'd think nobody had ever been up the duff before.

STEVE: Well Sheila hasn't. It is unique to them.

KARL: Let's hope it hasn't got his ears or her chin

STEVE: What's wrong with her chin?

KARL: Nothing. Apart from the fact that she has two of them... When's it supposed to be due anyway?

STEVE: Next Thursday.

KARL: Next Thursday! Why does she have to drop a bloody sprog now?

STEVE: I don't suppose she could help it.

KARL: Of course she could. Most important day of our lives and she's ready to drop a sprog. Why couldn't she have dropped it next month? Or *last* month?

STEVE: I don't suppose when it was conceived, Karl, they thought that nearly nine months later Town would be in the FA Cup Semi Final.

KARL: Town in the FA Cup Semi Final! God it sounds so good, Steve! I still can't believe it even now.

STEVE: No, whatever happens it's going to be a day to remember that's for sure. April 13th 1997. We'll never forget this date, mate.

KARL: That's if we ever get there.

STEVE: We've got over four hours yet. It'll only take just over an hour or so.

KARL: That's if we don't get stuck in a bloody jam... I thought we were going to have a few pints first? Make a day of it? It *is* once in a lifetime.

STEVE: We don't want *too* many before the match.

KARL: We aren't going to get *any* at this rate.

STEVE: (*Referring to Karl's beer.*) What's that you've got there then?

KARL: This is only an appetiser before the main course. Do you want one?

STEVE: Bit early yet.

KARL: No it isn't. It'll soon be twenty past. We said ten. We said ten and it's nearly twenty past, Steve.

STEVE: Your watch is fast.

KARL: I don't care. It's better to be fast than slow.

STEVE: As the actress said to the bishop... Have you phoned anybody?

KARL: I tried to phone *you*.

STEVE: Well I'm here aren't I? In the flesh and twice as lovely. So there's not much point now.

KARL: I don't know anybody else's number. And there's no signal. Either that or the battery's gone.

STEVE: Can't you tell which?

KARL: I haven't had it long.

STEVE: Give it here.

KARL gets his phone out of the bag and gives it to STEVE. STEVE turns it on. He fiddles with it. He dials his own number and his own mobile rings.

STEVE: There you are, you're phoning me.

He turns it off.

KARL: Why wouldn't it work for me?

STEVE: You'd got the settings all to cock.

KARL: How do you mean?

STEVE: Never mind. Just leave it as it is now.

KARL: Like I said I haven't had it long.

STEVE: Evidently.

KARL: Don't really know why I bothered. Nobody phones me and I've only got *your* number. But everybody else seems to have got one.

STEVE: So you didn't want to be left behind?

KARL: That's right, mate... Pity I can't work the bloody thing.

STEVE: I'll phone Johnny before I burst into tears.

He gives KARL his phone back and starts to dial his own phone.

KARL: See I wouldn't mind his missus having a sprog, but we're depending on him. We're depending on him for transport. And he's not missed a home game this season. Not one.

STEVE: Well he might be missing this one. He's got his answer phone on.

KARL: Oh no! Don't say that, Steve. Please!

STEVE: Maybe Sheila's started with the baby?

KARL: If I miss this match he won't live to see the kid. If I miss this match because of him I swear I'll kill him!

STEVE: I can't be arsed to leave a message. I'll phone Tony. See where he's got to.

He dials again.

KARL: And Mark. Where's *he* got to an' all? Biggest day of our lives and where *are* they all?

STEVE speaks to Tony on the phone.

STEVE: (*Into phone.*) Tony, it's Steve. Where are you, mate?... What?... What do you mean?... But it's the biggest match in Town's history.

KARL: What's up?

STEVE: Haven't you told her?

KARL: What's up with him?

STEVE: She's *got* to let you go. Tell her.

KARL: Gimme that phone!

He takes the phone off STEVE.

KARL: Now look here, Tony! Just what do you think you're... Tony?... Tony?... (*To Steve*).

He's gone. He's bloody *gone*!

STEVE: I wonder why?

KARL: What did he say? Isn't he coming?

STEVE: Linda's in one of her moods.

KARL: What?

STEVE: She won't let him go.

KARL: Won't let him go?

STEVE: That's right.

KARL: Won't let him go?

STEVE: You just asked that.

KARL: Why not?

STEVE: He didn't say. Apart from that she was in one of her moods.

KARL: One of her moods?

STEVE: Please, Karl. It's like talking to an echo.

KARL: She's *got* to let him go.

STEVE: Apparently not.

KARL: But it's the biggest day of our lives.

STEVE: Biggest day of *your* life.

KARL: What about yours?

STEVE: Maybe so. But evidently not the biggest day of Tony's. Not if Linda's got anything to do with it.

KARL: Bloody women. Tony's not coming because of Linda. And Johnny's not here because of Sheila. Thank God we haven't got one.

KARL is still holding STEVE'S phone. It suddenly rings. KARL is surprised.

KARL: It's ringing.

STEVE: So it is. Aren't you going to answer it?

KARL: It's *your* phone, Steve.

He holds it out to STEVE.

STEVE: I'll let you answer it. Give you some practice.

KARL: But it's your phone.

STEVE: It'll only be one of the lads. Go on answer it.

KARL answers it.

KARL: (*Into phone*.) Hello?... What?... No he's here. (*To Steve, surprised*.) It's somebody called Debby.

He hands the phone to STEVE.

KARL: Who's Debby?

KARL stands listening to the conversation. He reacts at appropriate moments.

STEVE: (*Into phone.*) Hi Debby... Yeah... Yeah. I got your text... I didn't reply 'cos there was no answer to something like that!.. Course not, babe. It's great to hear from you... You know I did. Glad you felt the same... Yeah, it was a piece of luck for the both of us. We both have Julie to thank... Yeah, we're just about to set off... (*He laughs.*) Well if you put it like that I can't wait...Yeah, me too. Of course... Of course...I'll see you soon, babe... Bye... Bye.

He ends the call. KARL looks at him expectantly.

KARL: Well?

STEVE: Well what?

KARL: Who was that?

STEVE: Debby.

KARL: I know that.

STEVE: Why'd you ask then?

KARL: Well who is she?

STEVE: Her name's Debby.

KARL: I *know* that, Steve!

STEVE: Copped off with her in town last night, didn't I?

KARL: How?

STEVE: What do you mean 'how?'

KARL: Well you never do when I'm with you.

STEVE: I wonder why that is?

KARL: Who did you go out with?

STEVE: Went on me tod.

KARL: On your tod?

STEVE: I'm a big boy, Karl. I am allowed out on my own. Remember you wanted an early night because of the early start this morning?

KARL: Some early start... You didn't say you was going out.

STEVE: Last minute decision.

KARL: You could have phoned me.

STEVE: Thought you wanted an early night?

KARL: Waste of time that was.

Pause.

KARL: Well?

STEVE: What?

KARL: What happened?

STEVE: She was with Julie Hampton in the Rutland.

KARL: Julie Hampton?

STEVE: A chick I used to work with.

KARL: In the Rutland?

STEVE: No, I never worked in the Rutland. Don't know about Julie.

KARL: I meant you met this Debby in the Rutland?

STEVE: That's what I said, Karl. They do let women in... In fact it was crawling with talent.

KARL: And I wasn't there.

STEVE: Maybe they knew something?

KARL: Funny bugger... So what happened?

STEVE: Julie introduced us, and well... Bob's your uncle.

KARL: What do you mean, 'Bob's your uncle'?

STEVE: It's an expression, Karl.

KARL: But what's it mean?

STEVE: Good grief! She seemed to take a shine to me, especially when Julie told her what a great bloke I am - I reckon Julie fancied me herself at one time. As you can see we exchanged phone numbers and I'm seeing her next week.

KARL: Next week?

STEVE: She wanted to see me tonight.

KARL: (*Incredulous.*) *Tonight!* Don't she know what's going on today?

STEVE: No, not until I told her. She's not into football.

KARL: Not into football?

STEVE: That's right, Karl.

KARL: You're planning to go out with somebody who's not into football? Somebody who don't know what's going on today? How can she have lived in town these past few months and not know what's going on?

STEVE: She's been working away.

KARL: Working away?

STEVE: She's been in London for six months. That's why they were out last night; celebrating her return.

KARL: She's been working in London?

STEVE: The echo's back, Karl.

KARL: What's she been doing there?

STEVE: Modelling.

KARL: (*Surprised.*) She's a model?

STEVE: A *glamour* model.

KARL: (*Amazed.*) You're going out with a *model*?

STEVE: She's been in all the magazines. And at the fashion shows. Apparently she's the latest queen of the catwalk.

KARL: Queen of the catwalk?

STEVE: The echo's still alive and kicking.

Pause. KARL is stunned.

KARL: A model!

STEVE: (*Laughing.*) Bloody hell! I'm winding you up, mate. She was working as a temp.

KARK: A temp?

STEVE: In an office... But she's a real babe. And it seems she's ultra keen. Not only was there the phone call this morning, she sent me this text last night.

He shows KARL the text on the phone.

KARL: She wants to do that?

STEVE: If I was free today. Almost worth missing Town in the semi final for, isn't it?

KARL: Bloody hell. *Women!*

STEVE: Lovely aren't they?

KARL: They'll do anything to come between a bloke and his mates. Throw a moody. Drop sprogs. Even do that. (*He refers to the text message.*)

STEVE: But what would we do without 'em?

KARL: *I* do without 'em.

STEVE: Not through choice.

KARL: So, you're seeing her next week?

STEVE: That's right, mate.

KARL: Sat'day?

STEVE: Yeah.

KARL: What about me?

STEVE: Despite that text, I don't think she's into threesomes.

KARL: You always see *me* on Sat'days.

STEVE: Well, it'll make a nice change. Besides there's still tonight. You never know we might even have something to celebrate.

KARL: If we ever get there. (*He looks at his watch.*) Twenty five to. Where *are* they?

STEVE: (*Looking into the distance.*) Well it looks like Mark's coming now.

KARL: 'Bout bloody time, an' all... Bloody hell!

STEVE: What's up?

KARL: He's got Ruth with him.

STEVE: So he has.

KARL: What's she bloody doing?

STEVE: Looks like she's holding his hand.

KARL: Holding his hand?

STEVE: They *are* married.

KARL: But what's she *doing*?

STEVE: Maybe she's coming with us?

KARL: Oh, no. That's not on, bringing women to football. That's not on isn't that.

STEVE: Maybe she wants to see Town in the FA Cup Semi Final. After all it *is* a once in a lifetime's experience.

KARL: How many games has she been to this season?

STEVE: Ssh, they'll hear you.

KARL: Good.

MARK and RUTH enter. MARK is also wearing a CFC shirt.

MARK: Alright lads. Sorry we're late, but Johnny phoned. Sheila's gone into labour.

STEVE: Isn't he coming?

RUTH: She *has* gone into labour.

KARL: Bloody hell!

MARK: So Ruth's coming instead.

STEVE: What about Johnny's van?

MARK: Well Tony texted me to say he can't make it.

KARL: He texted you?

RUTH: Linda's not well.

KARL: I thought she was in one of her moods?

STEVE: We just phoned him.

MARK: Johnny's brother's decided to meet us there seeing as he's got this bird in Manchester. And that boss eyed bloke from Bolsover and his funny son have got a ride with somebody else, thank God. So that means we don't really need a van. We can go in our car.

KARL: (*To Ruth.*) You're coming, are you?

RUTH: Any objections?

KARL: How many matches you been to this season?

MARK: It seems a shame to waste Johnny's ticket.

KARL: I'm sure a *rea*/supporter would have used it.

MARK: Come on, Karl. Ruth *has* offered to drive.

KARL: Offered to drive?

RUTH: So you boys can have a few drinks on your big day.

KARL: That's a great idea, Ruth! Come on then, what are we waiting for?... Bloody hell, look at the time! Let's get cracking!

He moves off in the direction MARK and RUTH entered.

MARK: Karl.

KARL stops.

MARK: We're parked over here.

MARK and RUTH move in the opposite direction. STEVE follows them.

KARL: But you came this way.

MARK: (*Insistently.*) This way, Karl.

KARL: Bloody hell!

They move off. As KARL leaves the stage he gives nine blasts on his klaxon as at the beginning.

KARL: Spireites!

Lights down. Music: Match of the Day theme.

SCENE TWO.

Lights up. As the music fades KARL and STEVE enter. KARL is angry.

KARL: Bloody women drivers!

STEVE: It wasn't her fault.

KARL: I said we should never have let her drive.

STEVE: No you didn't. And it wasn't Ruth's fault anyway.

KARL: She should have seen him. Did she have her bloody eyes closed?

STEVE: The guy pulled out in front of us. It was *his* fault.

KARL: Why didn't she do an emergency stop?

STEVE: I suppose *you* would have?

KARL: *I'd* have seen him.

STEVE: Yeah!

KARL: She was probably looking through the mirror putting her bloody eyeshadow on.

STEVE: Don't be ridiculous.

Pause.

KARL: Don't know what she had to come for anyway.

STEVE: She's as entitled as we are.

KARL: And how many matches has she been to this season?

STEVE: I don't know.

KARL: Last season? *Any* bloody season?

STEVE: It doesn't matter.

KARL: Was she at Gillingham in 1987 when we lost ten nil?

STEVE: Were you?

KARL: That's not the point. I've been to more matches than she has.

STEVE: And Tony's granddad has been to more than both of us put together.

KARL: He *is* eighty three.

STEVE: Yeah. And he never told you that you can't come because you haven't been to as many matches as he has.

KARL: That's as maybe, Steve, but it's now gone twelve o' clock. Greatest day of our lives and it's gone twelve o clock.

STEVE: Time passes the same no matter what day it is, Karl.

KARL: We aren't going to get there.

STEVE: They're sorting it out.

KARL: We're going to miss the match.

STEVE: They said they'll be as quick as they can.

KARL: Don't know why we had to come away.

STEVE: You want it sorting out quickly?

KARL: Course I bloody do.

STEVE: Well, with you around it wasn't exactly speeding things up.

KARL: I only told him he wasn't fit to be in charge of a bloody dinky car.

STEVE: And you said it was Ruth's fault.

KARL: It was hers as well.

STEVE: You're impossible, Karl.

KARL: It's gone twelve o'clock, Steve. Three hours to the biggest match of our lives and we're still miles away. It's enough to drive a man to drink.

He takes another can of beer from his carrier bag. He opens it and drinks.

KARL: I don't know how *you* can take it so calmly.

STEVE: I'm as gutted as you are, Karl, but there's no point in showing it. It won't make any difference.

KARL: A once in a lifetime experience and here we are stuck in God knows where. We should be there by now soaking up the atmosphere, enjoying the crack.

STEVE: We'll get there.

KARL: (*Sarcastically.*) And town'll get to the cup semi final next year an' all.

STEVE: Why not? Who'd have thought it'd happen this year?

KARL: Don't be bloody stupid, man... Do you know that in my lifetime they've never been past the third round? The *third* round!

STEVE: Never got *to* the third round that often either as I recall.

KARL: 1981 last time. Lost to Peterborough at home in a replay. And that was when we had a bloody good side. Never even *got* to the third round since then. Sixteen years. Sixteen years since we even got to the *third* round! And now we're in the bloody semi final! An' we aren't gonna get to see it!

Pause.

STEVE: Yes, there's been some rough old times in the cup right enough.

Pause. KARL settles down.

KARL: Went to Derby when I was a kid for the second round second replay against Walsall. Rod Fern team. He was a good player he was, Rodney Fern. Remember he had hair like Bobby Charlton an' a big tache? Good player though.

STEVE: Course I remember him.

KARL: Second replay on a neutral ground. They don't bother with second replays anymore. Guess who we'd have been playing in the next round if we'd have won?

STEVE: Man Utd at Old Trafford.

KARL: But of course we lost. We were the better team over the three matches but we lost one nil. Typical!

STEVE: But now we *are* playing at Old Trafford.

KARL: Except we won't be there to see it.

STEVE: You have to be more optimistic, Karl.

KARL: Optimism and Town in the FA Cup aren't compatible, mate. Remember the year after Walsall?

STEVE: Blyth Spartans away.

KARL: Another one nil. Blyth bloody Spartans. Bloody non league team and another one nil. I was there. Even though I was a kid I still felt the humiliation losing to a non league team... Then there were those two home games against Bolton a few years ago. Two in three years. If you remember we drew the first one at Bolton despite everybody expecting us to lose, then we lost the reply 3-2. Last minute winner... A couple of years later we played them again and went even one better losing 4-3... No mate, Town's record in the cup don't bear thinking about.