

‘TALK TO ME’  
a one-act play by Phyl Brighthouse  
written for the Leverhulme Drama Festival  
Gladstone Theatre, Port Sunlight, Wirral.

SET: A shabby little basement office in USLA Film Studios, Hollywood.

There’s a table acting as a desk. Nearby, a vintage arm chair, an old coffee table and an almost empty book case. A container of books in front of the bookcase. A briefcase nearby. Upstage left: rostra on which the radio announcer is depicted, playing 1920s popular music and reading news bulletins.

*TIME - the afternoon of Tuesday October 29: the aftermath of the Wall Street crash.*

CHAS, the WRITER enters the office, carrying a briefcase. He’s English. He starts packing the last of his books away into the box. He is definitely one of the bohemian set. Flowing locks, open neck coloured shirt, cravat, waistcoat – dressed down not up.

CHAS           What a week. (*picks up a copy of his latest novel and reads the book blurb*) “Homer knew fifty ways and more for heroes to die in battle ... None of them die easily. They die in agony. In blood. Lots of blood. They drop screaming to their knees, their arms missing, legs missing ... The only time they don’t scream is when their heads are missing.” (*to himself*) Not much of Peter came home after Gallipoli. ‘Missing believed killed in action’. (*takes Peter’s photo from the book where it acts as a bookmark, and talks to it*). The Trojan War wouldn’t

have been any picnic, would it, boy? Mud, cold, hunger ... All around them, ruin. Opposite - another army. Just like them, and not like them... Any minute the enemy could come marching over the gap in the middle, spitting death. Surprising anyone survived, really. *(tucks the photo away in the book and packs it away along with the last of the books)* That's the lot. Ready to ship back home. A home fit for heroes. Ten years of fighting to build it, and it all fell apart in a week.

*Chas picks up the briefcase and exits.*

*TIME SHIFT BACK TO BLACK THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24: THE DAY OF THE WALL STREET CRASH.*

FX: 1920S DANCE MUSIC

THE RADIO ANNOUNCER IS OBSERVED READING THE NEWS

ANNOUNCER This is WLM on Thursday October 24, playing some of your favourite tunes for 1929, and bringing you all the latest news headlines. This morning, leading bankers met after the unprecedented sudden drop in auto share prices in the last hour of trading yesterday. Afterwards, they released this statement: *(reads)* "In the last five years the market has only gone up, and we are confident it will do so again. Shares in automobile manufacturing continue to be sound investments."

*In the studio, the announcer quietly enjoys the music he plays. In the office, Chas re-enters. He carries his briefcase. Looks around at the shabby space.*

CHAS                This is Hollywood?

*Chas tries to lift the box of books but it's too heavy.*

CHAS                Who moved you – Hercules?

*LUIGI, an Italian FILM DIRECTOR, enters. He sees Chas with the box and assumes he's the removal man. Luigi's a very flashy dresser. His whole persona shrieks "success".*

LUIGI                Is that everything?

CHAS                Yes.

LUIGI                Great. You know the way out?

CHAS                Sorry?

LUIGI                Elevator's down the hall, next to the stairs. ... *(Gives him a dollar tip and hustles him out of the room)*. Put it into Cincinnati Driftwood. Hottest stocks in town. My shoe shine boy got it as a hot tip from a regular. It's the Fall. Everyone's going to need firewood. So long.

*Luigi pushes Chas through the door. Chas re-enters.*

CHAS                Excuse me...

LUIGI                You want more investment advice? *(takes out a business card)* Here. Get my secretary to give you the name of my broker.

CHAS            I'm Chas.

LUIGI           Nice to meet you. But I have an appointment.

*Luigi tries to push Chas out of the room again. Chas doesn't leave.*

LUIGI           For a removal man you're persistent, I'll give you that.

CHAS           **We** have an appointment. Charles. Charles Langham.

LUIGI           The novelist? **You're** the hot shot screenwriter for my new talkie?

CHAS           Call me Chas.

LUIGI           Not the removal man?

CHAS           The accent?

LUIGI           Hell, what's one more accent among so many. Everyone comes to Hollywood. Poles, Russian émigrés. Irish. Italians too - look at me. What's one more accent? (*shakes hands*) Luigi Bertolucci.

CHAS           Your removal men must have pretty natty wardrobes.

LUIGI           This is Hollywood. Hottest spot in the richest country in the world. My shoe shine boy says he's worth fifty grand on the market. Real snappy dresser. (*regards Chas critically*) What kind of an outfit d'you call that?

CHAS           Bohemian?

LUIGI            (*Enlightened*) Yeh! Sherlock Holmes. *A Scandal in Bohemia*.

Did the movie last year. We wanted Valentino for the King of

Bohemia but we had to settle for Vincent ... Price? No.

Somebody or other – Real good. That your national costume?

In Bohemia?

CHAS            I suppose so. In Chelsea anyway. (*explaining*) Chelsea,

London.

LUIGI            Right. (*takes back his tip*). You can buy your own stocks.

You're in America now.

CHAS            (*looking around*) Indeed.

LUIGI            Don't worry. We're building a new sound stage for when we

film Troy. We'll get them to paint your office too - I'm sure

they'll squeeze you in. But get a quote first.

CHAS            Of course.

LUIGI            'Cos, you know, we need to know how much to invest before

the decorators start.

CHAS            I beg your pardon?

LUIGI            (*as if to a 5 yr old*) Then, when they finish, we cash in the

shares, pay off the work crew, and bank the profit.

CHAS            (*amused*) And the decoration pays for itself?

LUIGI            You got it. We'll make an American of you yet.

- CHAS            God forbid. Ah – How long will it take? I mean, when can I start work? Monday?
- LUIGI           How about this afternoon. Time is money. Silent movies are dead. Talkies are the future. I have to have a script. Sound. Sheesh! Costs a fortune.
- CHAS           It isn't going to pay for itself?
- LUIGI           To build? Sure. But it can't stand empty. I have to pay the cast, the crew, the set designers, my uncle Silvio who runs the casting agency...
- CHAS           Ah, a family business.
- LUIGI           And family takes a lot of feeding.
- CHAS           I've got a first draft done. Basically, I just dramatised my book. *Hector's War*. You've read it?
- LUIGI           Sure. There's this city – a regular fort – and it's surrounded by an invading army riding around on the beach.
- CHAS           You make it sound like cowboys and Indians with chariots. You know the story?
- LUIGI           Sure I do. There was the most beautiful woman in the world – *(using French pronunciation)* Ellaine.
- CHAS           Helen

LUIGI            (*emphasising the aspirate*) Like I said – Hellaine.

CHAS            Married to the king of Sparta.

LUIGI            And she runs off with this other guy – named after the city.

CHAS            Paris.

LUIGI            You got it. Sure I know the story.

CHAS            Right. Maybe we should talk about the script. Make sure you like what I've done. That's why I'm here, yes?

LUIGI            Right. Book an appointment for a script meeting when my secretary gets back from lunch.

CHAS            (*aside*) Why am I getting a bad feeling about this?

LUIGI            Meantime, you can move your desk into Sandy's office while the decorators are in ... Sandy - my secretary.

CHAS            I'll get set up, then. I'll need some paper.

LUIGI            Store's right down the street. Send Sandy to run any errands you want.

CHAS            (*dryly*) Thanks. Could he help move this box out of the way first, d'you think?

LUIGI            I doubt it. SHE'S five foot five and weighs less than **it** does. A lot of us have female secretaries. They're cheaper.

*A lift is heard outside*

LUIGI                    That'll be her. (*calls*) Sandy!

*SANDY the SECRETARY enters. She's English and smartly dressed*

LUIGI                    You sorted the wages?

SANDY                  Yes, Mr Bertolucci. Your broker's cleared the transfer with the bank. The courier's bringing them at 3, as usual. Then I called Mr Warburg. Sorry if I'm late.

LUIGI                    That's OK. (*to Chas*) She's talking to her old boss about a job.

SANDY                  Mr Bertolucci, Mr Warburg doesn't think any of us will have a job soon.

LUIGI                    Baloney. He's been saying that since March. What's he saying now?

SANDY                  That in the last five months, sixty new Companies were floated.

LUIGI                    Good. Plenty more choices on the market.

SANDY                  No, you don't understand – Mr Warburg says its fuelling a bubble in the market. He's really worried that in the last hour of trading yesterday, more shares were sold than bought. He thinks a turning point's been reached.

LUIGI                    Look, Sandy, if there was going to be a problem, I'd hear from my broker.



SANDY            Yes. No. I .... (*jittery*) Mr Warburg says the bubble's bursting as we speak, and to listen out for extra editions of the paper .... He says you should sell up. He has.

LUIGI            This from a guy who was a banker in the Weimar republic. His employees took their money in wheelbarrows when they went to buy bread. And the storekeepers took the wheelbarrows and returned the money.

SANDY            So he knows what he's talking about. He lived through it.

LUIGI            He sure knows failure. Germans! If he didn't have family in America to give him work, he'd be shining shoes. So – he offer you a job?

SANDY            No.

CHAS            (*intervening*) You must be Sandy. (*shakes hands*) Charles Langham. Call me Chas. Sorry to be a nuisance – there's some things I need to buy, but I really need to set up this office ... and-

LUIGI            Why don't you two get to work. And Sandy ... when the courier gets here, there's Friday's wage packets to make up.

*Luigi exits.*

SANDY            We'd better start unpacking this box. Then make a list of what you need.

*They start to remove books from the box and stack them on the bookcase.*

*This includes the book in which the photo has been put.*

CHAS            Thanks. You're English.

SANDY          Yes. Everyone wants an English secretary. Goodness knows why. No-one in America knows how to spell. Any particular order?

CHAS            No, I'll sort them out later. Are you really looking for another job? *(jokingly)* Luigi going bankrupt or something?

*She's jittery and drops some of them. The photo falls to the floor.*

PAUSE

*Sandy picks it up. Charles snatches it from her and puts it into the desk drawer, slamming it shut sharply.*

SANDY          Sorry. This whole thing's giving me the jitters.

CHAS            *(with an apologetic smile)* No harm done. So - which worries you most – being out of a job or the forthcoming "stock market crash".

SANDY          Both. I mean – if Mr Warburg's right, I can go home. But my friends. Pat and Jean, who share my apartment. Jean's supporting an elderly mother. And Pat. Pat's getting married next month. To Bernie, one of the stage hands. He's a nice man. He'd give you the coat of his back if you were in trouble.

I've seen him do it, you know. If the market crashes ... How can they get married. They'll be ruined. And if he's wrong ... well in that case, I'm ... well, never mind.

CHAS            Out of a job?

SANDY            (*dry laugh*) Hah. ... you know Mr Warburg's family own the Warburg banking empire? Well, Mr Bertolucci has family, too.

CHAS            Ah. And you've been keeping the seat warm for one of them.

SANDY            His niece, Angelica.

CHAS            Tough luck. ... I can't quite make Luigi out.

SANDY            And you're wondering what you've let yourself in for.

CHAS            Well ....

SANDY            Mr B – he's ....

CHAS            He's let an competent secretary go, and he's replacing her with a relative who's a novice. I assume it's her first job?

SANDY            Well, she's just seventeen.

CHAS            Then he's an idiot.

SANDY            Oh, he's far from that. He started at the bottom ten years ago and worked his way up. He knows this business inside out.

CHAS            I don't think he's even read the press release for my book.  
God knows how he heard about it.

SANDY            Oh, that was me. He saw me reading it.

CHAS            Really? Enjoy it?

SANDY            Yes, actually. We did a silent movie about Troy a while back. It was a terrific hit. So when he saw the book, Mr Bertolucci thought it would be perfect. He says people will remember the story and want to hear the words.

CHAS            So ... he's read it, has he?

SANDY            Of course ... well, I gave him a summary. He seems to know the fundamentals of the story. And honestly, if he says he can make a hit talkie about the Trojan War, then take it from me – it can be done. It'll get made. Whatever else happens – it'll get made.

CHAS            If you say so.

SANDY            This is Hollywood. Things move fast. Everything. Careers, the economy ... Look at Chaplin. He was only thirty when they founded United Artists. Now it's huge. A lot of people depend on it.

CHAS            Ah. Now I see. A young town full of young men. And that's why you're here? To meet young men?

SANDY            Not many at home. I'd go to parties, and the room would be full of other women. The men who did come were all so young ... boys really. I'm not that desperate.

CHAS            So you took a gamble and came out west.

SANDY          A calculated risk.

CHAS            I can respect that.

SANDY          (*awkward pause*) You know, Mr B was surprised how old you are. He was expecting...

CHAS            Someone younger? Sometimes I feel like Methuselah.

SANDY          I mean, over the last few years, you've written seven best sellers.

CHAS            I wrote them all in a single year, actually. I needed something to do after .... It was getting them published that was damned hard work. I expect you know all about that, working for Luigi.

SANDY          Oh, yes. But it was fun while it lasted.

*He looks around.*

CHAS            The glamorous world of Hollywood.

SANDY          (*giggling*) The dresses. The cars. The cardboard sets, the twelve hour days.

CHAS            The parties?

SANDY          (*darkly*) Oh yes, the parties. They don't invite me. Unless I'm helping out. Like last week, when I introduced Angelica to all her new contacts.

CHAS            Enjoy yourself?

SANDY          They all drank like fish. Pirhanas.

CHAS            I thought the US had prohibition.

SANDY          Much they care.

CHAS            So you don't want to be a film star.

SANDY          Well ....

CHAS            You do! Good God.

SANDY          Well, if Mr Warburg's right, I'm going to have to do something.

CHAS            And if he's wrong?

PAUSE

*Sandy frantically shoves books into the bookcase*

CHAS            So why not audition?

SANDY          Easier said than done. For one thing, I'm usually the one organising them.

CHAS            Another studio?

SANDY          You have to queue for hours, and I don't get many days off.

CHAS            Look, why don't I arrange for a .... a private audition. Just you, me and Luigi.

*Sandy backs off in alarm, putting a chair between them*

SANDY            Now wait a minute. I'm not that kind of girl.

CHAS             For your information, I'm not that kind of chap.

PAUSE

CHAS             I am not a great white shark looking for its next meal.

SANDY           Lots of predatory fish out there.

CHAS             Luigi?

SANDY           (*giggles*) His wife would kill him. And if she missed, there's his brother-in-law, father-in-law, his wife's second cousin three times removed... It's one of the reasons I took the job. And if I were rich and famous, the sharks would have to hide their teeth, wouldn't they?

CHAS             So ... shall I fix it up for you?

SANDY           I don't know. I mean ... it 'd be terribly difficult to work with Mr B afterwards, wouldn't it? If he'd turned me down as useless.

CHAS             You have to stay till you get another job. Tricky .... Tell you what – why don't I say I want to try out a speech, and get you in to read it. If he says "Oh, Miss Gish, you must be in my next movie" ....

SANDY           I'll be in work.

CHAS                    And if he doesn't, no harm done.

SANDY                You'd do that for me? Why? I mean – we've only just met.

CHAS                    A calculated risk? (*sees her sceptical look*) Let's just say  
you're not the type of girl who goes to the kind of parties that  
involve rooms full of predatory women.

SANDY                You'd be surprised.

CHAS                    Ah.

SANDY                For your information, there's heaps of difference between  
working in a place where you might meet a husband and  
hunting one down.

CHAS                    So – the audition. Are you up for it?

SANDY                Why not?

CHAS                    Who's your favourite star?

SANDY                Keaton.

CHAS                    I mean female. One you can emulate.

SANDY                Oh, I see. Well, there's Mary Pickford. And Mabel Normand.  
They produce, too.

CHAS                    Aiming high?

SANDY                This is America. Up is the only way they know.



CHAS            So - let's do it.

SANDY          When?

CHAS            Now. Before you lose your nerve. Go and ask Luigi if I can see him.

SANDY          Oh, Golly.

CHAS            Think of it as another calculated risk.

SANDY          Never mind butterflies. I've got a stomach full of caterpillars.

*Sandy exits. Chas riffles through his manuscript.*

CHAS            *(selects a page)* Right. Let's see ... Cassandra. That should tell me a lot about the sort of mess Luigi is planning to make of my book.

*Sandy returns with Luigi*

LUIGI           Sandy says you want to see me.

SANDY          *(losing her nerve)* I'll be right next door.

CHAS            Hang on. *(to Luigi)* I'd like to run a bit of the script past you.  
*(to Sandy)* Could you do me a favour and just read this while we listen. To give Mr Bertolucci an idea of what I'm trying to do.

SANDY          Oh.

*Chas hands her the script page.*

CHAS            You're playing Cassandra. She can foresee the future. She's just seen the body of Hector her brother carried home. Now disaster's looming. She's now going to predict Troy's fate, and her own. Off you go.

*Sandy launches into the following speech. She overacts and gives a really bad silent movie reading. Very overacted. She's pretty awful and very comic. Luigi remains poker faced.*

SANDY           Ahh. The god came to me. Apollo. We're all doomed. Doomed to death. Doomed to slavery. Doomed to oblivion. My sisters and brothers, my mother and father ... and the Greeks too. So much blood. So much sacrilege. The gods they worship will turn on them. They are lost. All except Odysseus, who conceived the Trojan horse from the depths of a diseased mind. He shall wander the earth for ten years. My only joy is for myself. I shall entice the Greek king, Agamemnon, and his wife shall cut us down. So he shall end. *(her normal voice)* how was that?

LUIGI            Unbelievable. *(to Chas)* We need to talk. *(to Sandy)* Sandy, call my accountant and set up our monthly meeting. Book a table for lunch. *(to Chas)* Five minutes Chuck.

*Luigi exits.*

SANDY           He didn't like it, did he?

- CHAS            Your acting? To be honest, I don't think he noticed. He was too busy hating what I'd written. I was afraid of that.
- SANDY          I was pretty awful wasn't I?
- CHAS            No, no ... I mean, if we were making a silent movie, you'd be terrific.
- SANDY          Oh, well. Thanks for the opportunity. What about you? Do you think Mr B liked your script – or at least the bit he read?
- CHAS            Put it this way. I know the story I want this movie to tell. Unfortunately so does he.
- SANDY          And not the same story. But your version's pretty accurate, I think.
- CHAS            Does Luigi? ... how do you know, anyway?
- SANDY          I grew up with two brothers. Both of them mad for the *Iliad*. All those tales of valour and honour. (*sadly*) They used to talk about it for hours.
- CHAS            Used to?... You lost a brother.
- SANDY          Both of them. Passchendaele. You?
- CHAS            Just the one. My son. Peter. Gallipoli.
- SANDY          I volunteered as a nurse. Afterwards, I felt ...

CHAS            Guilty? We all share that. Every one of us. Serving. Not serving. Or just surviving.

PAUSE

CHAS            You know, the thing about the Trojan War is the violence was so ... indiscriminate. Death was always just around the corner. In the end, the enemy to overcome was yourself. Yourself and your fears.

SANDY          Yes – yes, I can understand that. And that's why you wrote '*Hector's War*'?

CHAS            Hector wasn't me. He was all of us. My first book. It sold well.

SANDY          A million copies. And the others followed.

CHAS            Mmmm. And now, here I am ten years later with a film contract tied to my next book. And a producer who hates it.

*Luigi enters and hears that last remark. Sandy looks busy.*

LUIGI            Your script - It's full of people who clutter up a good story.

*Offstage there's the cry from a newspaper boy:*

BOY             Extra, extra, It's Black Thursday. Stock market latest, read all about it. Extra, extra.

*Sandy drops the books again*

LUIGI            Sandy, go stop hopping about and go get a paper – if only to prove you're wrong.

SANDY           Yes, Mr Bertolucci.

*Sandy exits*

CHAS            I think she's preparing for the end of the world.

LUIGI            OK, your script. Let's get down to brass tacks. You had me listen to that page for a reason.

CHAS            You didn't like it.

LUIGI            Frankly, it stinks.

CHAS            Sure it wasn't just the acting?

LUIGI            She was terrible, wasn't she? But then I already knew that.

CHAS            You did?

LUIGI            Would you read a novel written by someone who'd bored you to death at a party.

CHAS            I don't go to parties if I can help it.

LUIGI            Just answer the question. Would you read anything they wrote?

CHAS            God, no. If they can't entertain me to my face how on earth can they do it on the page.

LUIGI            There you go. You can tell the non-starters right off.

CHAS            Well - within five minutes.

LUIGI            Me too. Sandy's a great organiser but the camera's never gonna love her. And she knows it. Concentrates on the job. That's why I hired her.

CHAS            So the day she wants to be a star...

LUIGI            Her head would be in the clouds and she'd have to clear her desk. Now - about this script?

CHAS            What about it?

LUIGI            It's full of gods and second string characters cluttering up the narrative line. Like that Cassandra girl.

CHAS            Cassandra? Cassandra's the film's tragic figure. A Prophetess. A bridge between the past and the future for everyone else.

LUIGI            You make her sound like the Bridge of Sighs in Venice.

CHAS            She's the voice of truth you have to listen to. If she says something it has to be true. She's one of the most important people in the story.

LUIGI            No, no, no, no. Ellaine ... Hellaine ... she's the only important female in the movie. The love interest. With Paris. Pitted

against Agamemnon and his great warrior, Achilles who storm the fort.

CHAS           And then? The cowboys and Indians analogy doesn't work, Luigi.

LUIGI           Sure it does. The Greeks leave the Trojan horse, and the Trojans take the horse inside the city. And the Greeks hidden inside climb out and open the gates.

CHAS           And then mayhem. More than you could possibly imagine.  
*(reflecting)* The river just outside the gate would become a quagmire. Boys weighed down with weapons, wading through the shallows that have turned to mud - a sea of thick, sticky mud ... slipping, sliding, drowning in mud. Calling for their mothers. While battle hardened men can do nothing except march past, as ordered. Not even weep. No tears left. And after that - God help the Trojans.

LUIGI           Well, you don't have to show all that. This ain't no horror flick. Concentrate on the Trojans who live to fight another day.

CHAS           *(startled)* Another day?

LUIGI           Think I don't know my own culture. Aeneas. You must have heard of him?

CHAS           The Roman version. Of course.

LUIGI                So never mind Cassandra. Laocoon the priest – now that's the character to concentrate on. He warns the Trojans not to take the horse into Troy. You heard the story? In the Aeneid?

CHAS                It's in the Iliad too.

LUIGI                There you are. Laocoon gets killed by a sea snake. Very dramatic. They take that as an omen, ignore his warning, and take the horse into the city. Ah, Laocoon. Ever see his statue. In the Vatican?

CHAS                One day, maybe.

LUIGI                I saw it before I left home. My mama took me. "Don't ever forget your roots" she said.

CHAS                So Aeneas-

LUIGI                Rallies the troops, fights off the invaders, breaks out of Troy, and sails to Italy to found Rome. What a sequel that'll make.

CHAS                *(beat)* Not quite the novel I wrote.

LUIGI                Look, there's something you need to know about the audience for this movie. There's a lot more Italians in America than there are Greeks.

*There's a rising clamour outside. Sandy rushes back in with a newspaper.*

SANDY              Mr Bertolucci, the paper. The film crews are panicking.



LUIGI               What the hell is that rag saying?

SANDY             That the stock market's dropping like a stone. They're scared.  
I'm scared.

LUIGI             The market hasn't failed to rise every day for five years.

CHAS              Maybe the market's paused to catch its breath.

SANDY             You aren't a bit worried?

LUIGI             I pay a broker to do the worrying for me. He has telephones,  
radio, telegraph, ticker tape machines. If things were all that  
bad how come we haven't heard about it?

SANDY             Because so many stocks are being sold the machines are  
four hours behind. And that's machines which still have tape.  
Lots of them have run out, there's so much selling going on.

LUIGI             Selling, huh? Maybe I should call my broker and have him  
buy.

SANDY             Then you'll be the only one. Mr Bertolucci – everyone's selling  
and nobody – I mean NOBODY's – buying. Something's  
happening out there. Whether the market's just having a  
temporary panic attack, or run totally mad – the  
consequences will be dire. My friends – your friends – they've  
all put their life savings into that market. Pat and Jean who  
share my apartment may have to move out. The girl who sells  
us our morning coffee, she's just got engaged. Three of the

women in wardrobe are widows. They might not be able to eat at the weekend.

LUIGI            You're describing total meltdown. Maybe the markets will drop for a while then pick up.

SANDY           If they do that ... I feel sick. I wish I knew what to do. What to say. Mr Bertolucci, I .... Never mind. I .....

LUIGI            Sandy, this is not like you. Sit tight. That's the thing to do. Wait. Wait and see. It will be fine.

SANDY           Yes. Tomorrow. I'll see how everything is tomorrow. Then I ... I'll decide what to do – what to say – tomorrow.

CHAS            (*who is reading the paper*) This isn't good. How's this film – this movie - to be financed?

LUIGI            (*alarmed* Shareholder's money ... Never mind the crew. My shareholders! We have to look in control.

CHAS            Solvent. You have to look solvent.

SANDY           The Friday wage packets!

LUIGI            Hand them out today. A day early. When they've been paid they'll calm down.

SANDY           Yes, Mr Bertolucci.

*Sandy rushes out*

LUIGI           What's got into the girl?

CHAS           This really isn't good. They're calling it Black Thursday.  
(*reads*) Yesterday afternoon saw....

THE RADIO ANNOUNCER IS REVEALED

*The Announcer has stopped playing records and is reading a bulletin*

ANNOUNCER /yesterday afternoon saw the start of a spectacular drop in the value of stocks. Today the downward spiral continues. Ten, twenty, and thirty points at a time. In the New York exchange, there are gasps from the visitors' gallery as below them, traders try and offload their stocks. At a third of their former price.

IN THE OFFICE, CHAS AND LUIGI HAVE NEWS SHEETS

CHAS           The popular reaction seems to be that 'this can't be happening'. (*reads*) Mounting panic ... the ticker tape machines can't keep up ... (*to Luigi*) This all sounds frightful.

LUIGI           Spare me your stiff upper lip. (*reads*) There – I told you it would be OK. (*reads*) Charles E Mitchell, Chairman of the National City Bank, attended a meeting with Rockefeller .... Afterwards they announced ... keep cool ... no cause for alarm .... some distress selling but none of the banks or brokers are in difficulty and margins are .... everything's OK, They've put two hundred and fifty million of their own money

into stocks. Now they wouldn't do that if there was anything to worry about, would they?

CHAS            Perhaps.

LUIGI           Let's just see what tomorrow brings. Meantime – I have a business to run and we have a script meeting.

*They exit.*

FX                    MUSIC.

A TIME SHIFT FORWARD TO TUESDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER.

THE ANNOUNCER IS SEEN READING A NEWS BULLETIN

ANNOUNCER   It's Tuesday October 29 and last week's chaos on the money market continues. In offices all over America, brokers borrowed from the banks to lend money to their clients. Now those brokers have received demands for repayment, and many haven't the cash in hand to do it. To find the money, they're selling their clients' shares for whatever they can get. The result is terrifying. Everyone's still selling, no-one's buying, and the market is plunging. When will share prices rise again? Outside the New York stock exchange, thousands gather grimly waiting for news, and praying for a miracle, while 400 mounted police officers keep the crowds in order.

*Offstage a newspaper boy shouts for the "extra" edition of the paper*

BOY                    Extra, Extra. Stars of stage and screen bankrupt. Groucho Marx loses fortune. Read all about it. Extra, Extra.

*Chas enters with Luigi, who's a broken man. They have news sheets.*

LUIGI                What a week.

CHAS                Unbelievable.

LUIGI                (*reading paper*) The huge waves of selling continues. Everyone's affected. Ordinary men and women have been saving to pay the bills in the bad times. Now the bad times have come – and their money has disappeared. Businessmen no longer have customers, and now, suddenly, they have no money to pay their employees.

CHAS                How about you?

LUIGI                I waited for a call from my broker. When he didn't call, I called him. I've been calling him every day – but so is everyone else. His line is permanently busy. So this morning I went to his office. That's when I knew. When I realised. The queue stretched down the stairs and into the street. There were so many people in the hallway I could barely get the door open. Women, some of them holding little babies, were weeping. So were the men. And on the stairs there were whole families camped out, eating breakfast. Vast piles of bread and cheese, pork pies, pastries, if it they knew it was their last decent meal and they'd better make the most of it. They'd been there all

night. Two nights some of them. And the silence. That's what struck me most. You'd think they'd be shouting, maybe screaming. They were all just ... stunned. If they are broke, so am I. My world has ended.

CHAS            Troy has fallen.

*Luigi collapses into the chair.*

CHAS            (*reads*) A dam has burst and the tide seems unstoppable....  
Oh, By Jove, when the stock market closed this afternoon, it was worth twenty two percent less than when it opened on Monday. In thirty six hours the value of American industry has dropped by almost a quarter and ... Good God. (*reads*) In the last five days twenty five billion dollars has just ....

LUIGI           Disappeared from the face of the earth. Including my money. Family money. And ... (*shaken*) what do I tell my shareholders?

CHAS           The truth. You know what they're calling Sandy's former boss. The Warburg guy. 'The Cassandra of Wall Street'. He was right, none of us believed him, and now the bottom's fallen out of the market. What'll you tell your employees?

LUIGI           As of now they're no longer my employees. Not if I can't pay their wages. And you - your money's safe in the bank?

CHAS            “Safe” is a word I learned a long time ago doesn’t exist. As a matter of fact, I’ve just bought a little property not far from London.

LUIGI           Bricks and mortar. You’re a lucky man.

CHAS           I don’t know about that. When I said “a little property” ... More of a country house and some land, really, but I doubt if it’ll raise much in the way of rents next year. I’ll be writing books for a long time to come. Speaking of which, this film – this movie. Can it get made if you don’t have any investors?

LUIGI           No.

*Chas starts to pack his books*

LUIGI           It’s OK. You go.

*Sandy enters, distressed.*

SANDY           Mr Bertolucci, I’ve had a call from your Uncle Silvio. One of the actors in his agency – Jimmy Danvers ...

LUIGI           Danvers – I had him lined up for the part of Paris.

SANDY           Yes, well ... last night - he jumped off the roof of his apartment.

LUIGI LOOKS APPALLED

CHAS           WHAT!

- SANDY            Fifteen floors. Apparently he lost everything he had in the crash. At first I thought ... I wondered if I might have warned ... But there was nothing I ... anyone ... could have done. Mr Bertolucci, Jimmy had **already** used his entire fortune to buy shares. But then he bought more shares on margin (*to Chas*) on credit. He paid ten percent down and borrowed ninety percent from his broker.
- CHAS            Then he'd pay the interest till the shares were valuable enough to make a profit and pay off the loan?
- SANDY            Yes.
- CHAS            How much?
- SANDY            All together, over the last six months – a hundred thousand.
- CHAS            Dear God.
- LUIGI            That is so sad.
- SANDY            (*to Luigi*) Mr Bertolucci, there's something I have to tell you. Something I've been wanting – needing – to tell you for-
- LUIGI            (*rushing to leave*) Later. I have to convene another board meeting. Then call on Silvio. Send a message to Jimmy's family.
- SANDY            (*tries to stop him*) Mr Bertolucci, that's the tip of the iceberg. Half your staff are in the same boat. Your employees. My



friends. There's total panic out there, and we have to tell them-

LUIGI            Later!

SANDY           Mr Bertolucci, I've been trying to pin you down for days but you've been rushing from one meeting to the next.

CHAS            Would it help if you paid the wages early, like last week?

LUIGI            Pay them? With what?

SANDY           That's what I'm trying to tell you. You didn't believe Mr Warburg when he said the market was going belly up, but I did. There's the cash in the safe to pay everyone a month's wages, as well as-

LUIGI            -WHAT! I have money?

SANDY           No, they have money. All you have to do is pay them, and assure them they've all got a job.

LUIGI            -No, no, no. I'll have to lay them off. Today. But I'm a fair man. I'll pay them up to today.

SANDY           (*shouting him down*) Mr Bertolucci will you listen. You've got plenty of money. I knew I'd done the right thing, really – well, eventually. I had a few nasty moments last week. In the end, I just didn't have the nerve to tell you until things were so bad

you'd be pleased. Hopefully. Only - then I couldn't pin you down.

CHAS           What have you done?

SANDY         Well – you know that last week Mr Warburg told me to sell up?

CHAS           If you're offering him a loan I don't think it'll be enough.

SANDY         He doesn't need one. Because on Tuesday afternoon, just before the market started to drop ...

LUIGI          You sold your shares.

SANDY         No. I mine on Monday ... I sold YOURS.

CHAS           What!

LUIGI          And he let you?

SANDY         Why not? I hadn't embezzled it. He transferred the money into your bank account, not mine. He just assumed you needed a large sum for the new sound stage, and that you'd reinvest the profits. It's what we always do, after all.

*Luigi is stunned.*

LUIGI          So I ...

SANDY         You've got twenty million dollars safely in the bank.

LUIGI            (*stunned*) Twenty million? In ready cash? IN THE BANK??  
And the family?

SANDY           I'm sorry – I didn't have access to their money.

LUIGI            What if you'd been wrong?

SANDY           I hadn't run off with it, you know. You'd just have re-invested  
it.

LUIGI            Yes, for less profit. The market was FALLING. You don't sell  
when it's falling. You buy.

CHAS            Did you?

LUIGI            I didn't have any money. Or I thought I didn't. (*to Sandy*)  
You're going to have to clear your desk – you know. Right  
now.

CHAS            Hang on-

LUIGI            She could have ruined me. My shareholders would have  
deserted me if this had not happened.

CHAS            The point is – it did .... Why?

SANDY           (*dryly*) Angelica, remember? She's broke now.

CHAS            Oh ...And you still saved his bacon?

SANDY            I didn't do it for that. I did it for Pat and Bernie. And Jean, and all my other friends. *(to Luigi)* All right. I'll go. No fuss. As soon as I've paid the wages.

CHAS            A month's money for everyone. Including Sandy.

SANDY            Thanks.

CHAS            Then start the movie to keep them in work. Immediately. With the script as it stands.

LUIGI            I must phone the family. Stop them from doing anything foolish. Angelica. She depends on me now.

*Luigi rushes out.*

CHAS            Oh, ye gods. What a delightful fellow.

SANDY            But he's right. I could have made an awful mess of his finances. I knew it at the time.

CHAS            So why? Why do it?

SANDY            Why do you write about Troy?

CHAS            Did it at school. As did Peter. He'd have read Classics at Cambridge if the war ....

SANDY            So you understand. Well, I worked for Mr Warburg. He'd stared disaster in the face, and he understood too.

PAUSE

SANDY            We're used to disaster aren't we? *(opens her locket)* My brothers. *(she opens the desk drawer and takes out the photo)* This is your son, isn't it? Peter.

*Chas takes it from her.*

CHAS            I keep it with me. But ... just looking at it brings it all back.

*Puts tucks it into the book.*

CHAS            I took this job because I was ready to move on. Talk about the books and what's in them with other people.

*He says nothing more - just starts to pack the books away. Sandy helps.*

SANDY           Mr B's right about the sequel possibilities, you know.

CHAS            Maybe I'll write the book. Then send Luigi a script.

SANDY           Well, he'll certainly have the money to make the movie.

CHAS            Thanks to you.

SANDY           I'm still out of work. Thanks for pushing for that month's wages. It'll pay my fare home.

CHAS            It'll be difficult for you to find another job, even in England. If America sneezes we'll all catch a cold.

SANDY           At least England's my home turf. Though what I'll do there...

PAUSE

CHAS            Come and work for me. Help me write that sequel.

SANDY          For you?

CHAS            Why not? It took a lot of nerve to do what you did for Luigi.

SANDY          Another calculated risk. And easy to say now I've been  
proved right. But ... what if I wasn't? I'll wake up in hysterics  
for the next month just thinking about that.

CHAS            I do mean work, you know, not .... If it'll reassure you, I'll let  
you pay your own fare. You're loyal, and brave.

SANDY          So I am. I once had a spaniel just like that, you know.

PAUSE

CHAS            And kind, and you have the courage of your convictions.  
Well?

PAUSE

SANDY          And then?

CHAS            We start the next book.

SANDY          In Bohemian Chelsea. Well, it can't be madder than this  
place.

CHAS            Yes, it can. Penniless artists, poets-

SANDY          -novelists?

- CHAS                    When I said “Goodbye to all that” and left the establishment behind, I meant it. My upstairs neighbour models in the nude. The man downstairs writes murder mysteries as an excuse to experiment with strange poisons. I won’t even tell you about the couple next door until you’ve seen them for yourself. Are you game?
- SANDY                  What about your secretary? You already have one, surely?
- CHAS                    He’s got more than enough to do with the paperwork on my new estate.
- SANDY                  Only an Englishman could call an estate “a little property”.
- CHAS                    Well, it as. As estates go. I’ve money in the bank, and I can still earn. I can afford your wages.
- SANDY                  All right. But a last word of advice, from Mr Warburg. Your money. Spread it about a bit. Because Mr Warburg says the banks are next.
- CHAS                    Good, God, if you can’t trust a bank...
- SANDY                  You know people are calling him The Cassandra of Wall Street? Well, I’ll tell you something else Mr Warburg says. Human folly and greed will always be much stronger forces than reason and restraint. And history always repeats itself.

CHAS            So you think they .... surely this couldn't ever happen again?  
Another speculative bubble, with the bankers making a mess  
of the world? (*reflects*) Never.

SANDY          Oh, dear. I'd better not tell you my full name, then.

CHAS            Which is...?

SANDY          Well ... did I ever tell you that my mother was a Jane Austen  
fan.

CHAS            So...?

SANDY          So my sister's called, Jane .... Did I mention her? And I was  
named after Jane Austen's sister.

CHAS            So Sandy is short for ...?

SANDY          Cassandra. I'll be right next door, clearing my desk.

CHAS            Don't forget your wages.

SANDY          I put the pay packets together, remember. Hey, ho, back to  
work.

CHAS            I'll just pack these away, and I'll be right along.

*Sandy exits. Chas finishes packing the books. Picks up a copy of his latest  
book.*

CHAS            (*reading the book blurb*) "Homer knew sixty ways for heroes  
to die in battle ... none of them easy. They die in agony. In



blood. Lots of blood. They drop screaming to their knees, arms missing, legs missing ... The only time they don't scream is when their heads are missing." ... Not much of Peter came home after Passendaele. 'Missing believed killed in action'. *(takes Peter's photo acting as a bookmark)*. The Trojan War wouldn't have been any picnic, would it, boy? Mud, cold, hunger ... All around them, ruin. Opposite - another army. Just like them, and not like them... Any minute the enemy could come marching over the gap in the middle, spitting death. Surprising anyone survived. *(put the photo away and packs a few more books)*. That's the lot. Ready to ship back home. A home fit for heroes. Ten years of fighting to build it, and it all fell apart in a week ... and the next ten years ....

PAUSE

CHAS            Time to start rebuilding, I think.

*Chas picks up the briefcase and exits.*

IN THE RADIO STUDIO, THE DJ IS REVEALED PLAYING A RECORD:

"BUDDY CAN YOU SPARE A DIME".

FADE TO BLACK.