

BBC Radio 4 and Open University Afternoon Play

Last Call

by Mike Walker

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Producer: Mary Ward-Lowery

Fade up

Silence

the sound of a text message being tapped out

silence

fade up:

Exterior Street. Morning.

just the usual traffic – a busy day set against the main title

mix to:

hallway of cce – lots of feet on the marble flooring

we can hear a lift pinging – Sara runs for it

Sara: (CALLS) hang on.....

We are in the lift as the doors close and we start going up – it's a fast lift and we listen to the automatic voice:

Lift: Going up - first floor – second floor – third floor – fourth floor – stopping – doors opening

Under:

1st guy in lift: See Steve Jobs at Olympia, then?

2nd guy: He's a legend. Electronic paper, I mean....

1st guy: It's got to happen. You fold the screen up...

2nd guy: Anyplace, anytime. It'd be truly personal...

1st guy: We should talk about that. Yeah?

They leave the lift – just as the door shuts Tim hurries in

Tim: Hold the door – hold the – Good morning, Sara.

The door shuts – Tim is out of breath -they go on up

Sara: What's the matter, you don't like Mondays?

- Tim:** I love Mondays. I love my job – that’s the deal, isn’t it? We all really like being here.
- Sara:** So, did *you* see Steve Jobs on Saturday?
- Tim:** Nope. Well, yeah, actually, I streamed it. I should’ve been reading the kids a story but...?
- Sara:** Was he good?
- Tim:** For a guy that old, he’s brilliant. It’s a lesson to us all in ICT – innovation doesn’t have to stop stop at thirty.
- Sara:** Isn’t that the company prayer?
- Lift:** Fifth floor – doors opening.
They get out – we go with them along the corridor
- Tim:** Right –So....
- Sara:** Yes, Tim?
- Tim:** There’s something – big uhm...
- Sara:** Yes ?
- Tim:** Yeah. On the 7th floor.
They go into their office complex – it’s reasonably noisy
- There’s a message – if you could go up. They’re waiting. The uh... in the Chairman’s... Gray ... Mr Carpenter.
- Sara:** Well I’d better... was there a time I should go up?
- Tim:** Once you got in. I mean as *soon* as you get - got your coat off. Right?
- Sara:** Right. So.... are you reading my emails, Tim?
pause – then she laughs – just a joke
- Tim:** *(laughs)* Oh right, yeah!
Pause and cut to: Executive floor. the lift pings, Sara emerges. It’s quiet, carpeted.
- Good morning Mrs Hartup. Is he ...?
- PA:** Please go in, Ms East, they’re expecting you.
- Sara:** They?

- PA:** Mr Carpenter – Mr Herrenvolk.
- Sara:** *(slight concern)* Thank you.
She walks through, taps on the office door and goes in – shuts the door behind her
- Gray:** Sara, hi, thanks for coming up. Coffee, tea?
- Sara:** Uhm, no thank you, Gray.
- Gray:** Kevin?
- Herrenvolk:** Not for me, thank you, Sir.
- Gray:** Ok, great, sit down, please, Sara –
She does so
So - Mozambique?
- Sara:** It's really beginning to move. Our guy, Ian Steele, is – should be there by Wednesday. It's going to take him a couple of days to orientate himself but...
- Gray:** He's good, this guy?
- Sara:** I think so. I've spent time with him, actually he's a friend of my brother's and he's...he's very good at what he does. ... as you know, Gray, we're starting small. Appropriate technology for people to use. It isn't a big splash but it's important for the next stage of our development in the country.
- Gray:** Absolutely. We need to be there in greater depth. Your man's an ambassador –if they like what he's doing now, they'll like what we do next month. This is vital for us, Sara. ITC is the future for Africa and we need CCE's name to be the first in the field.
- Herrenvolk:** Or the veldt.
- Gray:** Absolutely. We need to take and hold these markets.
- Sara:** It sort of sounds military.
- Gray:** *(soothing)* Just words but important words. And we need to deliver on what we say. You're going out ...?
- Sara:** Flying out Thursday morning. Sally Ryan is coming – she's from Trade and Industry...
- Gray:** We've worked together.

Sara: And some journalists – well, not just *some* – these are the important ones, they’ll give us a good write-up in the places that count.

Gray: And then you’re going on to South Africa to look at our operation there – equally important. It’ll be quite a trip for you.

Sara: I appreciate it. I appreciate your confidence.

Gray: You deserve it. You’ve earned it. But... uh before you go, we have, as they say, a bit of a problem.

Pause

Herrenvolk: Ya, a problem.

Gray: Now, your deputy downstairs...

Sara: Tim Howell.

Gray: He’s across Mozambique?

Sara: It’s my project, Gray, I don’t want...

Gray: No, no, we understand that. Your thing. Absolutely.

Sara: As long as that’s understood.

Gray: Because I need you to concentrate on... just for a few days, that’s all - Phil, this guy, he’s an engineer, Phil Reece is... he was in Uzbekistan. You know the uh...

Sara: We have something in that part of the world?

Gray: A Telecom contract. Low level but good for us. Well, it was...

Herrenvolk: He’s gone missing.

Sara: Uh, I mean is it...

Gray: Jeez, Sara, we don’t know. It’s the wild west out there. It’s the wild east, actually. I mean it’s just... tricky, really... tricky. And this poor guy. Mr W.

Pause – the phone rings – Gray grabs it – talks under:

Gray: No, we don’t yet.

Well as soon as we can.

Christ, I don’t know. Everything we can.
Yeah.

Puts phone down

Herrenvolk: The likelihood is NOT that he is laying beside the hotel swimming pool forgetting to answer his mobile. Mr Carpenter is quite correct: it's not a part of the world where enquiries are easily made. We have to tread carefully.

Sara: I can see.

Gray: As far as we know, his wife was receiving text messages, speech messages – things seemed to be going along fine. The job was progressing well – and then the messages stopped coming. Nothing. OK, communication is never going to be easy with that part of the world. Uzbekistan is chaotic most of the time...

Herrenvolk: And the rest is anarchy.

Gray: We're trying to find Mr Reece but we need to keep a sense of proportion. You know, from everybody's point of view but – but most of all, the family. Phil.. Phillip's wife. I dunno is it Phil or Phillip? Find out, will you, Sara. Issue a statement. We are just devastated for Mrs Reece. And, obviously, doing everything we can do in a difficult... well, I don't have to tell you. That's your job and... We're all frantic...

Herrenvolk: Not frantic, Ever.

Sara: Concerned.

Gray: Good... concerned about Phillip – Phil. But....

Pause – phone rings – Gray picks it up

Gray: Yuh?

No, just finesse it for now.

That's be good. We should meet.

We're onto that. Yeah...

We lose him

Herrenvolk: You see, Ms East, in these situations – let me walk you to the lift.

He takes her shoulder and they walk

Gray: *(calls)* Great, thank you, Sara. Just clear everything with me... with Kevin... this is eggshells, treading on – the guy's life is... could be...

Sara and Herrenvolk leave the office

Sara: It must be awful for his wife.

- Herrenvolk:** I think that engineers and their families, they realise ... things get mixed up. But yes.... Awful.
- Sara:** From our point of view, we need to project a confident stance, we need to be seen to be in charge, not worried – concerned, yes – worried never. ... We don't want to shout about this. People do go missing in these places. They do?
- Herrenvolk:** All the time. They turn up or... we find them. Sometimes we talk to people. Do you see?
- Sara:** There might be negotiations?
- Herrenvolk:** We can't risk muddying the water. He's out of touch but that doesn't mean he's missing.
- Sara:** Gray hasn't made any kind of public statement yet?
- Herrenvolk:** No.
- Sara:** And nothing from any other source. The wife, his department head? Nothing?
- Herrenvolk:** Human Resources will do everything they can for the wife. Don't worry. Leave the worrying to us. Above all, there must be no sense of panic, no feeling the public mind or the press that we aren't fully in control of the situation. Is that clear?
- They are at the lift – it opens
he ushers her in – we go with her – he stays outside*
- Sara:** I might need information from our people out there to field enquiries – if they come up.
- Herrenvolk:** If there's anything you can't answer, let us know, we'll deal with it. Reassurance, Sara – that's your job. Keep 'em happy.
- He barks a laugh as the lift doors shut*
- Lift:** Going down.
- We go down – her phone beeps: text message – she takes it out –*
- Sara:** 'Help me – Phil?'
- Cut to: Sara's office
the sound of keyboards
Tim comes in with a tap at the door*
- Tim:** So, yup?
- Sara:** Can you handle the Mozambique stuff for a few days.

- Tim:** Yeah, no worries. It's all clear enough.
- Pause*
- I don't want to trespass or anything.
- Sara:** No, that's fine, I've got...
- Tim:** If it's confidential?
- Sara:** No, I don't think so. Well, yes but not in the office.
- Tim:** Yeah.
- Sara:** Someone is missing. One of our engineers. Phil Reece, I don't know if you know him? He was in Uzbekistan. Software of some kind. I dunno – whatever- but he's vanished and they're worried. Obviously. So I need research on Uzbekistan. What kind of place – prospects, you know the deal -
- Tim:** Is it serious?
- Sara:** Gray seemed worried. And the security guy, Herrenvolk, I mean he was... he was there too.
- Tim:** That guy I don't like. Still, I guess he's efficient. You'd want him on your case if you... if you had a case.
- Sara:** Well. He's on this one. I just have to get out something reassuring. *Nothing to worry about* which is why we're telling you, out of the blue that there's *nothing to worry about*.
- Tim:** So what *are* you worrying about?
- Sara:** Hey, nothing.
- Tim:** You're doing that thing you do...
- Sara:** Am I that obvious?
- Tim:** Only to those that know you. No – but something...
- Sara:** I got a call – A text. Just now.
- Tim:** Right, Michael Owen was calling – he's got a spare seat for the final?
- Sara:** No, in the lift. *Help me. Phil*. It's like.... It's like he was just there in the lift. Standing right beside me. I mean this is the guy I was just talking about... he's gone missing and this text appears out of... I ... very slightly, I met him one time with Ian Steele. I put them in touch because Phil had experience of working abroad.

Pause

It was like he was there, just for moment he was... standing right next to me in the lift. Like I could hear his voice saying: Help me.

Tim: You replied?

Sara: Of course I did – but there was nothing else, no reply from him.

She shivers

Tim: Look, if... if... if the guy, this guy goes missing... maybe he was taken or kidnapped or something. That happens, right? These places? And when they came for him, he might have just had time to text everyone on his list: help me - Slammed it out, total coverage. You might do that if they were coming along the corridor to get you and you couldn't see a way out. And texts don't always come through at once, we all know that in our business.

Sara: No, you're right, we should be calm. If we release a statement, these people who took him could read it. If they have him, they could be looking at everything we say... we have to be subtle. I'll tell Gray about the text.

Pause

What his wife must be going through.

Tim: So, OK, It's the kind of job you'd get if they give you the PR and Development Directorship.

Sara: I wish it wasn't.

Tim: Its what you do, Sara. It's what we do.

Pause

Sara: So I'd better do it, then.

Fade to silence.

fade up:

tv sound of rioting –

tv reporter: ...authorities appear to be helpless at this time. The motivation of the crowds is still obscure. Islamic militants have been accused of fomenting dissention but the opposition is also accused of being involved. Some of the scenes have been highly disturbing and there are fears for Europeans working in the area....

The phone is ringing under – Sara snatches it up

The riot footage continues – fade reporter

Tim: (*distort*) Are you watching breakfast news, Sara?

Sara: Yuh, I've got the report... (*stops as she watched*) bloody hell... did you see that, did you.... the guy is on fire... Christ, that's.... I've been reading the research – it's a nightmare out there –

Fade up reporter

tv reporter: ...rumours that the burning man is a British national. The Foreign Office have issued no statement at this time.

Tim: We're looking at the nightmare, Sara.

Sara: I think we need to be in the office...

Tim: I was going to drop my kids off at school

Sara: Now, Tim, as soon as you can make it.

She slams the phone down.

cut to: ccc entrance area – many feet and lifts –

Gray: Sara, I'll ride up with you.

*They go into the lift – alone
lift goes up*

Good work, good press release. Not that anything is 'good,' in this situation but...

Sara: Did you see it? The man burning this morning? What's happening out there, Gray?

Gray: We don't know. How could we know. It's virtually closed, that place. It.. it's... it's horrible...

Sara: Was he British... God, what if it's our guy?

Gray: It isn't.

Pause

Sara: Do we know that for sure?

Pause

Gray: (*convincing himself*) Yes. Yes we do. We know that, it isn't our guy. We had word from some of our people who were working with him on the project. So yeah... anyway, not him.

Sara: So how come you get to speak to them, Gray? I mean with all respect, isn't that my job. I need that information if I'm going to ...

Gray: I understand that, Sara. But these weren't strictly our employees. More like freelance people. Private Contractors. They talk to me – they talk to Kevin but they don't talk to anyone else. These are tough guys, Sara, not geeks. But, don't worry, I'll see you're kept in formed.

Sara: So?

Gray: Sorry?

Sara: Do you have anything solid? Negotiations or... what?

Long pause

Or is it like the Contractor and you have to keep it all...

Awkward pause – the lift stops

Gray: Just.. just keep a cap on it. OK? That's our job here in Reading. Keep it calm. No panic. And, really, it wasn't our guy, the burning man. Mr Reece is out of touch.

Pause

Sara: And we are doing everything we can to find him?

Gray: Exactly. Thank you, Sara.

His mobile rings – he answers it walking away:

Gray: Yes, I saw it.

No, absolutely not.

We don't have it yet.

*(Angry)*We're doing everything we can...

He's gone

Sara: Uh, yuh.

Pause

Thank you, Gray.

She walks to her office – we go with her

Morning, Kathie. Tim...

- Tim:** Is it him? The Burning Man. God!!!
- Sara:** No.
- Tim:** I hope it isn't. How do they know it isn't him. I mean he was on fire.
- Sara:** Calm down. It isn't him. Gray assures me of that. OK. We go on with things.
- Tim:** I guess so. But just looking.... My kids saw that.
- Sara:** Tim, it's television, it's what they do. It's about images. Things that grab us. Hold us. It's not about our man. Just images. So – take a deep breath: How are we showing?
- Tim takes a literal deep breath*
- Tim:** As you hoped. A couple of inches in the inside pages. Nothing much at all.
- Sara:** Good. Oh, and could you check with Mozambique that they're ready for Ian Steele – hotels and...
- Phone rings*
- Yuh?
- Phone:** (*distort*) Ms East, I have a Richard Gordon for you. I think he's a journalist.
- Pause*
- Shall I...
- Sara:** Yes, fine. (*To Tim*) And Tim, call Sally Ryan at Trade and Industry – check that she's still OK for this – and is she taking any staff? and...
- Tim:** And the press pack.
- Richard:** (*distort throughout*) Hello? Sara, Sara East?
- Tim:** I'll check with you later.
- Sara:** Good. - Yes?
- Richard:** We used to know each other, yeah, you are that Sara? Lancaster...
- Sara:** Yes, of course, Richard, hi. You're...
- Richard:** Well, yeah. Hacking away. Lower reaches of radical journalism.

- Sara:** Right. Well.. I've looked at Crossing Borders. Obviously, since we're interested...
- Richard:** Oh, so you know where I work?
- Sara:** It's my job, Richard.
- Richard:** Right. Uh, Yeah. So CCE in Africa.
- Sara:** We'll be setting up a junket for the press and... MPs and... I don't know if your magazine is on it... well, actually I do, and you're not.
- Richard:** Not likely, given the way we feel about big companies.
- Sara:** CCE isn't big – well it is but it's also small.
- Richard laughs*
- No, really, Gray Carpenter is ... is concerned to stay reachable. Sorry, I'm sounding like a PR person.
- Richard:** You can convince me.
- Sara:** Hm?
- Richard:** Have lunch with me. London Street Bistro.
- Sara:** We *are* a bit busy here, Richard.
- Richard:** Come on – old times sake. I mean even a PR person has to have a life or at least a lunch sometime.
- Sara:** When were you thinking of? I'm away from Thursday but maybe when I...
- Richard:** Today. Three hours time. Come on, I booked a table already.
- Pause*
- We could chat about Uzbekistan.
- Pause and cut to: restaurant interior*
- Sara:** never actually been here.
- Richard:** I come down quite a lot – with all the ITC companies in Reading – I don't usually buy lunch, we don't have that sort of money but this is different. San Pellagrino?
- Sara:** Thanks.
- He pours – it fizzes*

- Richard:** So - You've become the complete professional.
- Sara:** No, I don't think so.
- Richard:** Tipped for a place on the main board?
- Sara:** You make me sound awful. How do you...
- Richard:** Like you, Sara. It's my job.
waiter puts food down
- Sara:** *(to waiter)* Thank you.
They eat
- Richard:** Uzbekistan. Hell of a place to send someone.
- Sara:** Well... obviously we're all *(beat)* concerned and really hoping...
- Richard:** It's top of the Foreign Office list of don't-go's – it's lethal, Sara, and that's on a good day. I wouldn't send my worst enemy there, hell, I wouldn't send the SAS there and you sent this guy Phil Reece? A Telecom engineer?
- Sara:** I'm sure the company would have had some guarantees in place.
- Richard:** There are no guarantees. What about the burning man?
- Sara:** It's not him.
- Richard:** You're sure?
- Sara:** *(tense)* I'm not sure about anything, Richard. How could I be, I'm here, he's there.
- Richard:** And what was he doing?
- Sara:** He was putting in place a system to speed up connection times and help with billing.
- Richard:** Ye-es. That would important in Uzbekistan. Billing. Noted as they are for paying their bills promptly. Through standing orders. Or maybe trading in the odd yak or goat.
- Sara:** Don't ask me.
- Richard:** Why not, Sara, you're the Voice of CCE, aren't you?
They both stop eating
- Sara:** I issue statements, yes.

- Richard:** Which are sometimes economical with ... just about everything?
- Sara:** No.
- Richard:** Like your man, Phillip Reece. is over there working on some kind of spooky programme?
- Sara:** We don't do... that kind of work.
- Richard:** I don't believe you.
- Sara:** Where did you hear this
- Pause*
- The coffee is put down*
- No coffee, thanks, I have to go. Thank you for lunch, Richard. It was nice to see you again.
- Richard:** I don't think his wife believes it, either.
- Sara:** Have you been talking to her?
- Pause – no answer*
- Richard.....
- Richard:** You show me yours, I'll show you mine.
- She stands up*
- Sara:** There's no conspiracy.
- Richard:** Really?
- Sara:** Yeah, really. Just one thing – Civilian contractors – what would that mean in the context of...
- Richard:** Uzbekistan? Well, not a load of navvies in yellow jackets. Probably ex-CIA or Special Forces people. Why?
- Cut to: Sara's office*
- Tim:** He didn't believe you?
- Sara:** It's not that – he didn't believe that I believed it.
- Tim:** You know the mag he works for. Its what they do: Conspiracy! They think everyone has a plan. I mean when I was in the army...
- Sara:** You were in the army?

Tim: Not for a while but uh... we had a saying, I mean everyone has a saying: No plan survives battle. We used to say: No plan survives breakfast. Things go wrong, it isn't all one big Conspiracy.

Sara: I just don't like the way he was ... it just seemed like he'd talked to Mrs Reece.

Pause

Tim: Yeah?

Sara: Yeah.

Pause

Only.... He wouldn't admit anything. What if... she's talking to him and giving out... I mean she'd be worried sick, she wouldn't be thinking straight... if it made the dailys...

Tim, I have to see her, find out what she's thinking – what she's feeling.

Tim: Maybe that's not such a good idea. I mean intruding on private grief and...

Sara: We don't know yet, Tim. She doesn't know. No one knows. Maybe she needs to talk.

Pause

Really needs to.

Fade to silence.

Carol: Come in.

*Fade up: Carol's house interior
Carol ushers Sara through into the sitting room*

This is the sitting room. It's.... the sitting room. You could sit down. I could make some tea.

Sara: Thank you.

She sits

If it's no trouble.

Carol: It's a pot of tea. Leaves, I always use leaves. Well not always.

She doesn't move

- Sara:** Are there... is there someone...
- Carol:** My sister is staying. She's doing some shopping. She thought she should – when you came – she should be here. I didn't want her here, I... I mean I did but I didn't.
- Pause*
- Sara:** I wanted to offer... I mean they are, the company, doing everything that... keeping you informed. I know it's not much but... these situations...
- Carol:** You know about them, do you, Ms East?
- Sara:** No. I mean, we all... feel...
- Carol:** Oh, really. Do you know what I feel?
- Sara:** It's impossible, it must be... so hard to... but everything that can be done, I'm sure...
- Carol:** What! Nothing! Nothing! Patrick, that's all, the only ... person who's been there, come round.... I don't know a bloody thing, not a word. I don't know where he is. I don't know where Phil is and nobody'll tell me. You just treat me like... like... like a ...
- She gets her breath*
- That man, that burning man on the...
- Sara:** No, that isn't your husband. It Isn't. We know. You should have been told... it isn't him
- Carol:** You sent him out there, that's why he was there, your bloody company wanted him there doing that stuff. I DON'T KNOW WHERE HE IS! I could wring someone's.... where is he? WHERE IS HE?
- Sara:** Hasn't anyone come to see you?
- Carol:** I told you, Patrick. Phil's supervisor. Pat MaCall. He's been.... He's done all he can, he's been here and on the phone and...the Foreign Office are doing what they can, so they say. And someone from the company personnel department came. They said don't worry. See the doctor. Don't worry about money. Did Phil send any files home - emails and the computer, did he... I don't know. I told him to go away.
- Sara:** Did any reporters call at all? I have to ask you. I know that kind of thing can be...

Carol: No. Somebody. But nobody..I didn't speak to anybody yet. Someone from some magazine. But I will. I'll... speak to everyone if... just...

Tears which she fights

Sara: I don't think that'll help right now, Carol. Really, I don't. I think the company, the people on the spot are doing everything they can... everything to..... try and get your husband back safely. Look, I'll make sure you're kept properly in touch. Day or night. And anything else. Everything else. I promise that... who was it that came so I can make sure...

Carol: I don't know, he was South African.

Sara: I don't think... (we have anyone in HR like that)

Carol: Herrenvolk. I didn't like him. Get them to send someone else. Get them to do something. Please....

Cut to: Sara's office interior

its quiet – just the sound of pages in a file being turned

we stay with this – she stops turning pages – picks up the phone and punches an internal number–

Phone: (*distort*) Yes.

Sara: HR? I've got Phillip W's file here – this is Sara East?

Phone: Yes, Ms East?

Sara: Actually I've only got some of it and I was wondering you could send along the missing bits.

Phone: Could you hold on, Ms East?

Sara: OK.

She flips some pages

Phone: Hello, you've got it all.

Sara: I don't think so. His last job, that seems to be...

Phone: That went upstairs, Ms East. I think they're handling everything from the 7th floor.

Sara: Ah, yes. Of course.

Phone: Is there anything else I can help you with?

Sara: Thank you. No.

She puts the phone down

*cut to: Projects office its open plan and busy –
Sara arrives at Patrick's work station*

Sara: Hi, Patrick McCall?

Patrick: Yes?

Sara: Yes.. uhm Phil W, this thing...

Patrick: Yeah, that's awful.

Sara: Only I was – his file – I need to prepare some statements – I hope it isn't any problem.

Patrick: I'm sorry, I don't quite understand what you want, Miss East.

Sara: If you could fill me in a little about the job Phillip was doing.

Pause

In Uzbekistan?

Pause

Patrick: *(flat)* No.

Sara: Sorry?

Patrick: No.

Sara: Come on...

Patrick: Chinese walls.

Sara: We work for the same company, Patrick. We're all worried about Phillip.

Patrick: Phil.

Sara: Yes.

Patrick: No.

Pause

It's procedure. Current contracts are confidential.

Sara: Do you believe that? Is that why he sent that text?

Patrick: What text?

Sara: It said 'Help me, Phil.' That's what it said.

Pause

Patrick: *(upset but controlling himself)* No, right. There were... some of those, some of those were sent. They shouldn't, you shouldn't have received it. That's all.

Sara: That's all? What do you mean, that's all.

Patrick: *(upset)* I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Fade to silence

fade up

phonecall – both sides

Richard: *(distort)* Yeah?

Sara: Richard, Sara.

Richard: Oh, hi. Look, sorry about the other day. I didn't mean to...

Sara: No, no, that's fine. It's just that uhm it might be interesting if we could meet again? Strictly off the record.

Richard: I'll meet you on Hayes and Harlington Station – that's on the Paddington-Reading line – at 8.30 tonight..

Sara: *(snorts with laughter)* Oh really, it's not Secret Squirrel, Richard.

Richard: You've easily got time to make it.

The phoneclicks off – but the hollow sound of connection is still there – then we hear a couple of clicks and just the first moments of the call being replayed before the sound snaps off.

cut to: station exterior

a train is stopping – only a couple of doors open and shut. The train pulls away – sara walking along the platform. The music dies away

Richard: Hey, you came.

Sara: It is overcast in Vladovostok...

Richard: What?

Sara: Aren't you supposed to answer: But in Moscow the sun is shining.

Richard: Ok, ok.

Sara: Is there a waiting room with separate tables?

Richard: It's Brief Encounter and there is –

They walk along to the waiting room and go in under:

Sara: So this is all strictly off the record, not attributable. Not that there's anything to attribute.

Richard: So why are we here?

Sara: Nothing, really. It's just that I can't find out what Phil W was doing in Uzbekistan.

Richard: Look this street goes two ways. If I tell you what I think I know, then it isn't going straight back to your people in Reading? I have to be sure about that.

Sara: It's just between us.

Richard: And I can trust you?

Pause

Sara: When I was talking to Carol Reece, she said the personnel people had been around, that they hadn't been much use, they'd just asked what she'd heard from Phil, if he'd sent anything to his home computers... then they cleared off. Only it wasn't personnel, it was Kevin Herrenvolk, the Security guy at CCE. Is that enough?

Richard: It's certainly something. OK, from what we've picked up, and this is strictly speculative, your man is- was installing the software for a countrywide system to monitor all calls, all numbers and destinations. A sort of security umbrella that would collect information for the authorities in Uzbekistan. It would probably be sent on to a second destination, a second country for processing – possibly the UK- and then be returned to the original clients.

Pause as a high speed train shrieks past

Sara: What? That's nuts, Richard. We wouldn't do that

Richard: It's the world we live in. The governmental flavour of the moment. Surveillance. The more complete the better.

Sara: It would be too much trouble. A vast amount of work for.... We wouldn't get mixed up in that...

Richard: Think about it: how has the world changed since the cold war? Then we were spying on superpowers, nations, armies, fleets. Now, any guy with a rucksack and a mobile phone anywhere in the world can be your enemy. Now they look like anybody else because they *are* anybody else. That's how governments are thinking. Ours, the Americans, the Chinese, the Russians and presumably the ex-KGB thugs or the Warlords who run Uzbekistan. Terrorism really has become democratised. And they're scared.

Sara: No, that's ... we don't do that sort of thing, this is... – that isn't my job.... Gray wouldn't do that – this is... It's England, it's Reading, for God's sake... people don't do that.

Richard: Then what are we doing here?

Pause

OK, I could easily be wrong, it's a murky world. That's why it's secret. Find out what your guy was doing.

Sara: IS doing.

Richard: If he's still alive.

Pause And a highspeed train shrieks through in the other direction

Cut to: train interior

it's chugging along

Sara is reading – we stay with the carriage for a while then:

Tim: Hey, wow, Sara. What on earth... can I sit down?

Sara: *(in shock)* Tim – yes – sure – uh...

Tim: Well, yeah. What on earth are you doing on the chugger? I thought you were a strictly high speed train girl. Uh, woman.

Sara: I could ask you the same question, Tim.

Tim: Ealing Broadway. You know, seeing the printers about the (BEAT) Mozambique press pack. It's great, a real credit to you. How about you?

Sara: Seeing someone. That's all.

Tim: Is this Microsoft poaching you away? Headhunters – Steve Jobs after you? All seems very clandestine. *(Laughs)*

Sara: Does it?

Tim: It's just that I was trying to get hold of you and you vanished. *(Laugh)* from the face of the earth.

Sara: As people do.

Tim: Look, I know it's none of my business and you're the boss but you don't want to go off on..on some kind of Crusade.

Sara: What?

Tim: It's obviously been worrying you.

Sara: It hasn't been worrying *you*?

Tim: Of course it has but... don't you think that if they are negotiating for his release then bargaining around making a fuss might be the very worst thing you could do.

Pause

Sara: Are you telling me something, Tim?

Tim: Just – no – maybe – some advice – good advice. Leave it alone.

Sara: I think I'm beginning to get just a little bit pissed off here.

Tim: Hey, really, no, please – it's easy to get... obsessive about something. When you haven't got anything else to take your mind off it. Like getting the kids to bed or clearing up the cat sick. I don't mean to be rude - I just don't want you to get...caught in - in something.

Pause

Sara: I've got a cat. I clear up cat sick. Excuse me.

Cut to: silence

fade up: quiet street

Sara ringing a doorbell – it opens

Sara: Sorry to disturb you so late, Mrs Reece.

Carol: Why? I'm not sleeping much. Would you?

Sara: No. Could I come in a moment?

Pause

Cut to: sitting room

Carol: The personnel people called again. Someone different. Thanks for that, anyway.

Pause

They said ... there are negotiations. People they're talking to. That they know where he is and they're doing everything they can to get him home.

She cries

Damn the company. Sod you all. Why did you...

Pause

He said he'd be alright because he was working for the government.

Pause

(Shouts) Well he wasn't, was he!!!

Pause

I want him back.

Sara: Did he... what he was doing, did he think he'd be alright because the government was ... sponsoring him?

Carol: I don't know. It was the job, what he did. He installed systems, that's what he did. He was good at it. That's why he took on all the difficult....

Pause

He was good at it.

Sara: Did he ever mention what it was he was doing?

Carol: Not really.

Sara: That it might have been dangerous *because* of what he was doing or... just *where* he was doing it?

Carol: I told you, we didn't talk about work. We've got a cottage in Devon, it's in pretty bad condition but we're working on it, rebuilding it and.... he's just an engineer. He does what he's asked to do.

Pause

Will they get him back?

Sara: I know they will do everything they can – everything under the sun to get your husband back.

Pause

Carol: But you can't say they will. CAN YOU!!??

Pause

Sara: Do you, by any chance, Mrs W, happen to know your husbands password for his computers at work?

Carol: Why? Why does that matter?

Sara: It probably doesn't but he might have made some notes about the trip? Something that might help, that's all. I quite understand if you don't want to or if you don't know...

- Carol:** They should have told him, the government should have warned him.
- Sara:** I afraid the Uzbeki authorities aren't in control of anything much any more.
- Carol:** Not them. That's what he said. He said it would be alright because it was the government he was working for. Don't you understand?.
- Pause and*
- Cut to: Sara's office*
she's punching a number – the phone rings –
- Richard:** *(distort)* Yes?
- Sara:** He was working for the government. That's what his wife says.
- Richard:** Sara? How late do you people work?
- Sara:** This is strictly off the record and not to be used until I give you the say-so.
- Richard:** You're sure about it?
- Sara:** No. That's what he told he: he'd be safe BECAUSE he was working for the government. She's worried sick, she may be imagining things – she may not be.
- Richard:** OK, sorry. Is there any record you have that might confirm it?
- Sara:** Nobody's talking about anything here, Richard.
- Pause*
- Richard:** I'll keep digging this end. Is there anyone you could talk to there? Maybe put some pressure on?
- Sara:** Richard, this isn't Woodward and Bernstein. I'm not on your team.
- Richard:** So what are we talking about?
- Sara:** I *work* for this company. I –I... *(she's lost)* don't know. I - I just get this sense of a clock winding down – of time going too fast for any of us...
- Richard:** Maybe you'd better find out where your loyalties are, Sara.
- Cut to: Sara's office*
she comes in – shuts the door – outside sound fades
- Tim:** *(brightly)* Morning, Sara.

- Sara:** I don't think you should be in here. I don't want you in here.
- Tim:** Hey, hi, Sara. Look, uhm... about yesterday...
- Sara:** What about yesterday?
- Tim:** It was...
- Sara:** You had to be on the station. You couldn't have known what train I'd get on. What the hell is that about?
- Pause*
- Tim:** I was just doing what I was asked. This isn't some kind of...
- Sara:** What? Conspiracy? *(She laughs)* Who asked?
- Tim:** Look, it doesn't matter. Can we just forget it.
- Sara:** No.
- Tim:** Uh...
- Sara:** You don't work in this department any more, Tim. Please clear your desk and go.
- Tim:** Yuh... uh... yuh.
- He goes – opening and shutting the door whilst Sara punches in an internal number*
- Phone:** *(distort-woman)* Projects.
- Sara:** *(bland)* Oh hi, I wonder if you ask Patrick McCall to come over to PR this afternoon - fivish – a few things we need to sort out on the Mozambique Project.
- Phone:** Will do.
- Sara:** Great, thanks.
- Phone down – she starts typing*
- Mix through to:*
- the office later*
- tap at the door*
- Patrick:** You wanted a word about the Africa job?
- Sara:** Hi, yeah, sit down. Can I get you any coffee?

Patrick: I drink too much coffee. You know how it is.

Sara: Ok, I'll get right down to it. If I don't find out exactly what Phil W was doing in Uzbekistan in the next five minutes, I will make sure you either lose your job or this whole pile of shit gets tipped, in public, onto you.

Patrick: Are you totally stupid, Ms East?

Sara: I don't think so, Mr McCall.

Patrick: *(getting angrier as he talks)* Then... then exactly which team are you playing for? Them or us. Do you want to see a video of Phil getting his head cut off or something? Is that it? You want to go round and see Carol and say: 'I sorted it out, you don't have to worry any more.' Is that it?

Isn't this whole thing about keeping the cap ON, not taking it off? It's hard enough as it is trying to do this. Have ...have you got any idea how many people we have on the ground out there trying to find...

He cuts himself off

Sara: Trying to find what?

Pause

Phil? Don't you know where he is?

Patrick: *(calm)* We are doing everything we can at this time to resolve what is, under any circumstances, a difficult and trying situation.

Sara: Don't give me my own press release!

Patrick: It's a very good press release. In the circumstances. Now, you'll have to excuse me. Good night, Ms East.

Sara: I'm not finished.

Patrick goes to the door – opens it

Patrick: Actually, I think that's exactly what you are.

He shuts the door with finality.

Sara: Screw you!

She starts to type

fade down

fade up

still typing

Sara sighs and punches a number on her mobile – she flips the pages of a file as she waits

Richard: (*distort – sleepy*) Uh, yeah, Sara, uhh... whaaa, yeah. Right.

Sara: Awake now?

Richard: Mmmm, yeah, sure. Go on.

Sara: I've been going back through the prelim material for our East Europe/Asia contracts. The financial records seem to be the only ones still available – and it looks like the job prices are way too high for what they should be.

Richard: You're sure about this?

Sara: No, obviously not. I'm not financial, I couldn't cost a contract but I've been comparing like with like and it seems to me that whatever Reece was doing, wasn't ... hello? Richard?

He's gone

she redials but her mobile is dead – she dials her desk phone–

Hello, is that Security? Jimmy? Are you there? Hello?

Pause

Hello?

She puts the phone down

sighs - stands up then her mobile rings – she grabs it

Richard, where did you...

Herrenvolk: (*distort*) Ah, hello, Sara, this is Kevin Herrenvolk. I wondered if...

She cuts him off – tries dialling again – nothing

she pulls on her jacket and hurries to the door and leaves

Herrenvolk: May I walk you to the lift, Sara.

Sara: (*she jumps*) What is this, the ghost train! No you can't, I can let myself out.

Herrenvolk: I'm afraid I must insist, Sara. Company policy when an employee has been involved in theft.

Sara : What are you talking about.

She presses the lift button

Herrenvolk: I'm afraid it's not working. You'll need the key.

The clink of his keys as he turns them – the lifts come to life –

It's not Spooks, Sara.

Sara: Ms East will do quite well. Were you listening to my calls?

The doors open and ring.

Herrenvolk: After you. Tampering with computers, taking financial information from another department.

Sara: Am I being sacked or what?

Herrenvolk: Mr Carpenter has a great regard for your work, Ms East.

Sara: Is Tim working for you?

Herrenvolk: I thought he was working for you.

Sara: Do you ever *answer* a question?

Herrenvolk: What do you want?

Sara: I want to go home, I want to get out of this place. You can't hold me here, you know. This isn't... South Africa.

Herrenvolk: Neither's South Africa any more. You can go, of course you can go. I'll escort you down to the front entrance. Or you could go up to the top floor and have your questions answered.

Pause

We're not going to truss you up and throw you off the building, Ms East. This is real life. Your choice.

Sara: Is Gray up there?

Herrenvolk: Is there anyone else who could answer your questions?

Pause

Sara: Alright.

He uses his key to shut the doors – the lift starts up – as they go

Herrenvolk: You know – my father spent time on Robin Island – not as a warder, as a prisoner. He was a member of the ANC. Strange world, Ms East, eh?

The lift arrives – they step out

Gray: Hi, Sara. Come on through.

They go into his office

Sara: Patrick - well, why isn't that a surprise.

Patrick: Hi, Sara. I'm sorry it had to... well... you wouldn't listen.

Sara: Go to hell, Patrick.

Gray: Looks like none of us got a lot of sleep tonight. We're all a bit snappy. Shall we try and cool it? Hardly worth going home now. Coffee?

Pause

You don't really have to make like Dark Phoenix, you know, Sara. Because I'm not crying doesn't mean I don't take it seriously.

Sara: Is this stuff really... are you really mixed up in this stuff...?

Gray: Everybody is nowadays. Hadn't you noticed?

Sara: I've noticed what I've been told, Gray, and it isn't very much. Thank you, Patrick.

Herrenvolk: Ms East has been very assiduous in finding out things for herself.

Gray: And I don't blame you. Maybe we should have included you in from the start.

Sara: It might have been easier.

Gray: Or not.

Sara: More honest, then?

Pause

What was Phil Reece doing?

Gray: Patrick...

Patrick: He *was* installing a surveillance system for the Uzbekis – software mostly – listening in, identifying sources and destinations. Your friend got that more or less right.

Sara: You were spying on us?

Gray: No. Though we did, rather clumsily, try to warn you... which, I grant, was stupid.

- Sara:** Then how do you know...?
- Gray:** There are people who monitor these things – of course there are.
- Sara:** Which people?
- Herrenvolk:** Your government, Ms East.
- Sara:** You said Richard got ‘that’ right. There’s more? That he doesn’t know?
- Herrenvolk:** Always more.
- Pause*
- Gray:** Sometimes agencies need somewhere secure where they can store things. Keep things they might not want in their own house. Information gained by less than reputable means. (*Takes a breath*) Extraordinary rendition.
- Sara:** Torture?
- Gray:** It makes sense to have an offshore domain, a neutral area where we can... store material... and consult it without being compromised.
- Sara:** That’s what he was doing? His wife was right. For the government.
- Gray:** Last week we were informed by the authorities on the spot that our Engineer Phillip Reece had died in a road accident.
- Sara:** But you told me –
- Gray:** I don’t think so...
- Sara:** You implied he was alive.
- Gray:** His laptop went missing. At least, we didn’t have it.
- Herrenvolk:** If it had fallen into the wrong hands, if the cyphers had been broken, it could have been embarrassing to us and to the client. It could have jeopardised the Mozambique Project
- Sara:** If that’s the case, maybe we shouldn’t have been doing what we were doing.
- Gray:** Maybe not, Sara. Maybe none of us particularly like it – maybe none of us have a choice any more. We had to be sure the laptop hadn’t been compromised. There was material on it that... that a lot of people really did not want to be seen.
- Sara:** And Phil W? What about *him* – did he know what he was doing? What it might mean? Did his wife?

- Patrick:** Technology isn't neutral, Sara. We have to accept that.
- Sara:** Come on, the man was an engineer, not a bloody spy. He wasn't trained. He thought the government would look after him.
- Gray:** There's a war going on out there, hadn't you noticed? And we have to take sides.
- Sara:** Well maybe we're on different sides. Because I don't think lying to a woman – telling her that he husband is still alive when you know...
- Herrenvolk:** We don't KNOW anything, Ms East. Except that the body of Phil Reece and his possessions including his laptop, were handed over to our representatives last night – actually this morning at 0.55 hours our time. With the sympathy of... whoever was holding him or his body while they worked on him or his laptop.
- Sara:** (*shock*) You mean he might have been alive for the last three days and only died....
- Herrenvolk:** It's a lot easier to open a human being than an encrypted lap top.
- Sara:** They can't.. they....
- She's almost sick with the realisation*
- ...tortured him? (ALMOST A SCREAM) He's just a man... an engineer... he's got a cottage in Devon, he lives in Reading. For God's sake... he...
- She tries to pull herself together*
- Patrick:** That's what we've been living with.
- Gray:** As far as we know the laptop is uncompromised.
- Sara:** Is that what matters here? The bloody computer?
- Gray:** We must have an influence in those parts of the world. East Europe. Asia. Africa. If we don't, we're finished.
- Sara:** Maybe we should be finished.
- Gray:** You don't really believe that, do you? You want to be on the main board, yes?
- Sara:** I did. But not if means...
- Gray:** And did you think you'd get there without ever having to do anything discreditable? Did you think you'd sit on it and make decisions about peoples lives and jobs without ever hurting any one?

Is that what you thought? That you could fight a war without taking any casualties?

Pause

Look, come here, down there... the company car park...

Sara crosses the room

Sara: Are you showing me the world, Gray, and telling me it's all mine if only I agreed to get down on my knees and kiss your arse?

Gray: I'm showing you people arriving for work. A few dozen so far, early birds. Later, there'll be a couple of thousand. And in the town there are the businesses that depend on us – on *them* buying their groceries...their clothes – their kids' toys.

I will be very clear about this: The Company is overextended – we've big loans. We're OK, we're growing but if we don't get the Mozambique contract and expand into Africa, we'll go down.

If this story blows up and we are made to look like some kind of evil spy company, we'll go down. Think about the publicity – some poor guy being tortured, nobody does anything, he dies. Think who our real employers are on this job? Do you think we'd EVER get another government contract?

If this comes out, CCE will go down... our employees will go down. Carol Reece's's compensation payments and pension will GO DOWN.

Sara: And the truth about her husband's life and death?

Gray: Which is going to be easier for her to live with, Sara? A traffic accident or – whatever the truth might be?

Sara: And I'm s'posed to lie – to say what ? That he was tortured and we don't care or he wasn't tortured and we don't care or we don't know if he was or wasn't but we don't care anyway?

Gray: You know exactly what we need to say. That's why you're here. You're good at your job.

Herrenvolk: So why don't you go and do it, Ms East.

Gray: You're supposed to make Mrs Reece feel a little bit better about something intolerable. You're supposed to tell people how the company feels – how we're still committed to making things better for people. How we're bringing ITC to Africa for the good of the whole continent.

Pause

You're supposed to get on that plane to Mozambizue at midday today – you're supposed to shmooze the politicians and journalists – you're supposed to do your job.

She stands up

Sara: And if I don't, if I break the real story?

Gray: If you do, Sara, there's not a damn thing we can do about it. Go ahead, the choice *is* yours.

Pause

Phil Reece really was involved in a traffic accident and taken to hospital on Sunday night. Once there he was interviewed by certain elements of Uzbeki State security who are against the current government. The interviews were *vigorous*. He died on Wednesday night at 17.30 before he was able to reveal the cyphers to the information contained on his laptop. His body and the laptop were handed over to ...

Sara: Civilian contractors?

Gray: ...yes, at the time we specified. That is the truth. I tried to protect you before, I thought it would make your job easier – I thought it would make your conscience easier. I was wrong. You should have been told. Thank you.

Herrenvolk: I'll walk you to the lift.

They start walking

Sara: I can find my own way.

The lift pings

Herrenvolk: Welcome to the big table, Ms East.

The doors open

Go and write your press release – whichever way you want it.

The doors close

cut to: Sara's office

She comes in, slumps down and sighs

she clicks her mobile – a long international number beeps out – she waits as it rings – then:

(Brightly) Ian, Hi. Sara East. We need to talk. I'm flying out midday our time. I just wanted to check that you're OK, that everything is... happening the way it should. *(Fade on)* It's important we make this

work.... There's going to be a lot of interest in this project, it could be good for both of us....

end