

EXT. A LARGE HOUSE - DAY

A bright morning in a leafy Surrey town. We are outside an imposing Georgian house with a white portico and a bay window on the first floor.

VIC SKIPWORTH is chaining his BICYCLE behind a tree in the driveway. He is trying hard to keep it out of sight.

We see Vic from behind as he stands at the door, dressed in a scruffy shirt and light jacket, with a mop of fair hair. He tugs his hand through his hair, trying to pull it into some sort of order.

Vic reaches out to the door knocker. He drops his hand then raises it again and RAPS the knocker against the door. After a brief pause the door opens.

SUSAN PARKS stands in the open doorway. Her face betrays little emotion. She is a dignified middle-aged woman, her hair composed in an immaculate wave.

VIC

Mrs Parks? My name is Vic Skipworth. I'm with the *Post*.

SUSAN

That's very nice for you.

VIC

And I was hoping I could ask you a few questions. About your husband.

SUSAN

The man from the *Times* offered his condolences first.

VIC

Of course. You have my... I'm very sorry for your loss. Only I thought... you might have something, some way you'd like your husband to be remembered?

SUSAN

Tell me something.

VIC

Of course.

SUSAN

How do you decide who gets one of your obituaries and who doesn't?

(CONTINUED)

VIC
That would be an editorial
decision.

SUSAN
Yes and how is that decision made?

VIC
It's a matter of weighing
achievements. That and the...
subject's presence in public life.
And naturally any narrative thread.

SUSAN
So would my husband have merited an
obituary before he purchased a
winning lottery ticket?

VIC
(struggling)
Perhaps not. But it's fair to say
his subsequent... attainments set
him apart from the merely
fortunate.

SUSAN
Attainments?

VIC
The music. The albums. There was
talk of a relaunch?

CRASH. Vic's bicycle topples to the ground. Vic looks
around, embarrassed.

SUSAN
It's OK, Mr Skipworth. I'm aware of
the narrative. A tragic tale of
untold riches failing to bring
happiness. A moral for us all.

Vic shifts uncomfortably.

SUSAN
Would you care to come in?

INT. SUSAN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

A large, sparsely furnished room with signs of opulence. A
feature window shows a colourful, well-ordered garden
beyond. Beside the fireplace there are a couple of PACKING
CRATES.

(CONTINUED)

Vic is perched on the edge of a deep settee holding a cup of tea, his notepad balanced on his knee. Susan sits across from him in a vintage armchair.

SUSAN

You have to remember, this house was always our dream, before we had the money. The day Lloyd asked me to marry him he brought me here, told me our offer had been accepted. We never wanted to move anywhere else. This was our success before the good fortune.

VIC

Your husband's career in advertising?

SUSAN

You've done your research.

Susan crosses her legs and Vic admires the hard line of her calves.

SUSAN

He was the deserving winner. A self-made man. The money only gave him the chance to indulge his passions.

VIC

And was music always his passion?

SUSAN

What do you want to know, Mr Skipworth? Let me help you. What is it that will give your story the edge?

Vic sets his tea-cup aside.

VIC

I think what our readers would really like to hear is, well, was it worth it? 13 million. How did it change you?

Susan sighs.

VIC

I'm sorry if it's all too soon.

SUSAN

No, don't be sorry. It would be a cliché to say that we were happier before we had the money, and of course we loved having it, but we had something else before.

Vic picks up his notepad.

VIC

Can I quote you on that?

Susan laughs quietly.

SUSAN

If you must. But Mr Skipworth, this isn't a conversation if I don't get to ask you something.

VIC

Please. Ask me something.

SUSAN

Here's something. You seem like a kind man. How do you reconcile yourself to working for the *Daily Post*?

VIC

We're read by two million people every day, Mrs Parks. We're one of the oldest papers still in circulation.

SUSAN

Two million spiteful, reactionary people. Hateful of anything they can't understand.

VIC

There's the history.

SUSAN

And will history absolve you, Mr Skipworth?

VIC

It's a career.

Susan carefully smooths a crease in her dress.

(CONTINUED)

SUSAN

Do you remember the last headline
your paper printed about my
husband?

Vic shakes his head.

SUSAN

They called him 'Loony Lloyd'.
That's what you wrote. 'Loony
Lloyd's Comeback Flops at the First
Fence.'

VIC

It wasn't me, Mrs Parks.

SUSAN

They never forgave him for spurning
Flagship.

VIC

Flagship Records?

SUSAN

It's all part of the same MediaNet
empire, isn't it? Lloyd didn't want
to sign with a multinational.
That's why he started his own
label. But you boys never forget a
slight, do you?

VIC

No one ever said anything to me.

SUSAN

Over your head?

Vic doesn't reply. After a brief pause Susan stands up.

SUSAN

Stay there.

Susan strides across the room and exits. Vic watches her
leave.

While Susan is away Vic gets up and wanders the room. He has
a careful look inside the packing crates by the fireplace.

He sees piles of men's shirts and jumpers, carefully folded.
He looks over his shoulder, then gingerly lifts the corner
of a couple of folded shirts.

Vic looks around the room, settling on the windowsill, where
he sees a framed photo of Susan and LLOYD PARKS.

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE ON PHOTO

Susan looks several years younger. Lloyd is a handsome man, well-groomed, something like a 50s matinée idol. The couple have their arms around each other and are smiling happily.

Susan re-enters the room, catching Vic holding the photo. She stops and stares at him. He doesn't speak. Embarrassed, he puts the photo back on the windowsill.

Susan is holding a heavy leather folder, which she hands to Vic.

SUSAN

Perhaps this would lend colour to your story? Another of Lloyd's apparent quirks.

Vic opens the folder and turns the thick card pages.

CLOSE ON FOLDER

It's a STAMP ALBUM, with each page devoted to a different stamp. We see rows of three or more copies of the same stamp. They are British stamps with bright colours.

VIC

Why the multiple copies? Why are they all the same?

SUSAN

They're not the same.

CLOSE ON FOLDER

We see that, in each row, one of the stamps has a missing element. For instance, the first three stamps show red and black cars but in the fourth one the black car is missing.

SUSAN

They're misprints. The press was loaded with three inks and one of the inks ran dry.

VIC

Lloyd collected these?

SUSAN

He loved the idea that a simple omission could create something unique. He thought it proved the true value of the misfit.

(CONTINUED)

VIC

The mistakes are worth as much as
the real thing?

SUSAN

A hundred times as much. The one
you're looking at, Lloyd bought for
13 thousand.

Vic inspects the stamp more closely.

VIC

This is worth 13 grand?

SUSAN

That's nothing. Lloyd wanted to buy
a Swedish misprint from
1850-something that last sold for
two million dollars.

Impressed, Vic hands the album back to Susan.

SUSAN

He would've too if I hadn't stopped
him.

INT. SUSAN'S HALLWAY - DAY

Susan is opening the front door for Vic.

SUSAN

Will you mention the way Lloyd
went?

VIC

(hesitating)

In cases like this we generally
don't have to, Mrs Parks. People
generally know.

Vic extends his hand to Susan.

VIC

I really am very grateful.

Susan shakes Vic's hand gently. He catches her staring at
him again and holds her hand for too long.

Susan smiles and Vic drops her hand, flustered.

(CONTINUED)

VIC
One last thing. Just for the
record. Can I confirm your age?

Susan laughs.

SUSAN
You're not afraid to ask a woman
her age?

VIC
I wouldn't want to make a mistake.

SUSAN
Don't worry, Vic. I'm 38.
(beat)
All the way back to school I was a
year younger than Lloyd. Now I
guess I'll have to start catching
him up.

INT. A TAXI - NIGHT

Vic and JASON CONDER are sitting in the back of a taxi moving through London traffic. Jason is relaxed, charming and stylishly dressed, presenting quite a contrast to Vic, although they talk as good friends.

VIC
I hate having to ask their age.
Always turns it from a conversation
into a police interview.

JASON
And you with your notepad.

VIC
Right.

JASON
What did you find out about Lloyd?

VIC
Not enough. Happy couple stuff. A
man with obsessive traits.

JASON
But nothing approaching an answer?

EXT. A STREET IN SOHO - NIGHT

The taxi pulls up outside 'The Lamb and Flag' pub, and Jason and Vic get out. Vic looks apologetic as Jason pays the driver, talking all the while.

JASON
How old are you now, Vic?

VIC
Thirty-three last January.

JASON
Thirty-three and a third.

VIC
A long-playing record.

JASON
The age of Jesus when he died.

Jason swiftly walks through the doors of the pub, followed by Vic.

INT. THE LAMB AND FLAG PUB - NIGHT

Jason and Vic walk through the pub towards a staircase at the back.

VIC
How do you work that out?

JASON
Thirty-three years on Earth according to scripture. Born at Christmas, died at Easter, equals a third.

INT. PUB STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Jason ascends a narrow staircase, closely followed by Vic.

VIC
And what have I done?

JASON
You're no Jesus, Vic. But still, the obits desk is a stepping stone. Follow my lead. Get out.

(CONTINUED)

VIC

There's another job going in LA?

Jason grins broadly and grabs Vic's shoulder.

JASON

That's my fire escape, Vic. Not yours.

Jason pushes open a door to reveal:

INT. PUB FUNCTION ROOM - NIGHT

A group of people CHEER as the door opens. The party is in full swing. Some of the people come over to Jason and shake his hand or pat him on the back.

INT. SAME - LATER

A round of drinks is lined up on the bar. One cheerful man picks up the drinks two at a time and turns to pass them to others behind him.

Jason and Vic are leaning back against the bar with bottles in their hands, surveying the busy room.

VIC

Her husband dies last night and she's got his clothes packed for Oxfam already?

JASON

I've seen that. Immediate clean slate.

VIC

Doesn't strike you as... harsh?

JASON

Now Vic, you stuck on the dead man or more stuck on the widow Parks?

Vic turns away from the room, leaning on the bar.

VIC

It's the waste I can't stand. The stiffs that miss the final cut. You write them and you know they're never gonna see the light of day.

Jason turns Vic's way and CLINKS bottles with him. They are both now leaning on the bar.

(CONTINUED)

JASON

You can't let life just happen to you, Vic. Remember that. You've always got options.

VIC

It's OK for you. You never wanted to be a journalist.

JASON

Wrong. It was one of the things I wanted to be. And now I'm done.

(beat)

Whereas you only ever wanted to be Carl Bernstein.

VIC

If I knew what I wanted I would make it happen. I'd find a way. I wouldn't be afraid, believe me --

THUMP. Vic is thrown forward as a heavy hand comes down on his back. He spills his drink.

BRUCE HENDRICK barges his way between Vic and Jason. He is an overweight, red-faced man, late fifties, in a dishevelled suit. He shoves a fat CIGAR in Vic's face.

BRUCE

There's your liberal agenda for you. This is a private room, Vic lad, a private party, and if I so much as light the end of this the Met'll have me in a cell before I know whether it's Tuesday or Doomsday.

VIC

It's Thursday, Bruce.

Vic is ordering a new drink.

BRUCE

Does this look like a shoe bomb to you?

VIC

No Bruce.

BRUCE

The lottery clown offered himself for sure?

(CONTINUED)

VIC

His people have put it out as an accidental overdose. I think there's more to it.

BRUCE

Old news now. Where's the drama in a life like that? Where's the merit?

JASON

A cautionary tale, Bruce.

BRUCE

(scoffing)

No one admires a life without struggle. Some of us have to choose a path and stick to it.

(to Jason)

We can't ring Daddy every five minutes to give us a new career.

JASON

And you wonder why I want to leave?

Bruce raises a glass to Jason, cigar still in hand. Vic's new drink is poured, a heavy measure of spirits.

BRUCE

Bygones. Well played. Any friend of the Farncombes...

JASON

Hardly 'friend', Bruce.

BRUCE

Same gentlemen's club?

Jason rolls his eyes.

JASON

Something like that.

BRUCE

Should have held firm when they gave me your CV. Not the reliable shuffle-monkey.

JASON

You'd have said 'no' to Farncombe?

(CONTINUED)

BRUCE

No school tie for me. Just hard graft. Now Vic here'll have to prove to me that one shuffle-monkey can do the work of two.

Vic downs his new drink in one go.

INT. SAME - LATER

A round of shots is carried through the bar on a tray. It is nearly knocked over twice by drunken revellers. LAUGHTER, CHATTER and the occasional SHRIEK.

Vic and Jason are talking in a group with two other MEN. They all look the worse for wear, particularly Vic.

JASON

Some property tycoon in Chicago wanted her for his son's bar mitzvah. A million for a night's work. Not even a full set, just a run through the hits.

MAN 1

A good night's work.

VIC

You could retire on that.

MAN 2

You think she had to fuck him?

INT. SAME - LATER

A glass SMASHES.

The BARMAN helps a couple of swaying, singing revellers out of the door. It's throwing-out time and he's ready to shut down. Only the stragglers are left.

Bruce is talking loudly to no one in particular. He has a glass of scotch in one hand and is waving his cigar - now bent in the middle - with the other.

BRUCE

Everyone gets excited by a big death. We capture the national mood. And the dead need us. Without us they're just a list of dates. A good obituary is more than a record

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BRUCE (cont'd)
of the man, it's a record of the society that spawned him. But no, instead we've got celebrity biographies, written before the corpse has even had the decency to die. The captivated masses, and all they want to read about is boob-job non-entities and coke-snorting singers and --

JASON
Lottery winners?

Jason is standing by the bar, chuckling at Bruce's rant.

BRUCE
Lottery winners! You see the gormless goon with his mitts on the big cheque and you can see it in his eyes: 'I'm gonna spend this on a racetrack for my gerbils and a ticket to Mars.' These people aren't equipped to have money, they only know how to lose it.

Vic is slumped in a chair, watching Bruce intently with sleepy eyes. We see Bruce from Vic's POV.

BRUCE
No moral fibre. All those years you hid behind a lack of money. Now you have to admit the lack in yourself.
(to Vic)
That was your angle, Vic lad. That's what you missed, boy. The lack in Lloyd Parks. What it says about our society now our luxuries have lost their lustre. Today your millionaires are ten a penny. I wouldn't want to win a million.

Jason bursts out laughing.

JASON
You wouldn't want to win a million pounds?

BRUCE
Fine, I'll take it. But what's a million? You couldn't even buy a flat in Holland Park, and I've got mouths to feed. No, eight million.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

BRUCE (cont'd)
Nothing less. Give me that and I'll
call it a day.

Jason continues laughing hysterically while Bruce watches him disapprovingly.

Slumped in his chair, Vic's eyes close.

INT. VIC'S BEDROOM - DAY

Vic is lying face-down diagonally across his bed, wearing just a pair of boxer shorts. It is 10am.

He is motionless for a while beneath his bedraggled hair. Then his head turns, revealing a horribly hungover face.

INT. FLAT HALLWAY - DAY

The door to Vic's flat opens and Vic carefully emerges. It is a narrow hallway on a tight stairwell that hasn't been cleaned for a while.

Vic dashes up the stairs to the next level. He sees a copy of the DAILY POST halfway through the letterbox of one of the other flats.

Vic delicately removes the newspaper from the letterbox and takes it back to his flat, shutting the door behind him.

INT. VIC'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

This is the main room of the one-bedroom flat. The furniture is mismatched and the tables are covered with magazines, letters and papers, which also spill onto the floor.

There is a TV in one corner and a LAPTOP on the floor. A couple of film posters decorate the walls (stuck on with tack, not framed), either side of a large MIRROR.

Vic enters carrying the *Daily Post* and a mug of coffee. He is still only wearing his boxer shorts.

Vic sits down and flicks through the newspaper until he finds what he's looking for, the obituary of Lloyd Parks.

CLOSE ON TEXT

'Lloyd Parks, lottery winner turned
singer-songwriter turned reclusive
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

record producer, died on May 6 at the age of 39.'

And another paragraph further down:

'Susan Parks said yesterday, "It would be a cliché to say that we were happier before we had the money, and of course we loved having it, but we had something else before."'

Vic tosses the *Daily Post* aside.

INT. VIC'S BATHROOM - DAY

Vic stands motionless in the shower, the water driving hard against him.

INT. VIC'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Vic is now dressed in shorts and a T-shirt but he still looks like he's been dragged through a hedge. He is eating a bowl of cereal while writing something on the back of a BROWN ENVELOPE.

CLOSE ON ENVELOPE

Vic writes 'Monthly requirements' at the top of the envelope, and beneath this 'Rent - £1000'.

Vic looks around the dusty, disordered living room.

CLOSE ON ENVELOPE

Vic writes 'Cleaner - £100'.

Vic searches through a pile of papers on the floor and pulls out some bills.

CLOSE ON ENVELOPE

Vic writes 'Phone - £35', then 'Energy/water - £200'.

Further down the list Vic writes 'Holidays - £3000 x 4 = £12,000'.

Cut to Vic tapping numbers into a CALCULATOR, still eating his cereal.

CLOSE ON ENVELOPE

(CONTINUED)

There are some more items and figures written down.

At the bottom of his list Vic writes 'Annual requirement = £53,624'. He underlines this figure.

Vic stops to think, then turns over the envelope.

CLOSE ON ENVELOPE

Vic writes 'Remaining life span = $80 - 33 = 47 \times £53,624 = £2,520,328$ '.

VIC (V/O)

Of course I wouldn't need that much.

Vic picks up his laptop from the floor. We see the label: 'Property of MediaNet plc'.

He puts the laptop on the table and switches it on.

VIC (V/O)

You've got to account for the interest on the lump sum. Mounting up while you spend it.

Vic is tapping numbers and formulas into a SPREADSHEET. We see a column headed 'Requirement' and a column headed 'Capital'.

There is a list of numbers along the side stretching down to year 47, and in each of these rows there are figures in the other two columns.

VIC (V/O)

Take the capital, remove the annual requirement plus inflation, but add a nominal compound interest. I'm not greedy. I don't want a penny left when I'm gone, just enough to see me to the grave.

JASON (V/O)

And what if you live longer than 80?

INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Vic and Jason are eating together in a simple trattoria in Chelsea.

(CONTINUED)

VIC
State pension. I'll have done all
my living by then.

Jason laughs.

JASON
And the magic number?

INT. VIC'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Vic is staring at the laptop screen.

CLOSE ON SCREEN

We see the figure at the head of the 'Capital' column:
£1,583,703.

VIC (V/O)
One million five hundred and
eighty-three thousand, seven
hundred and three pounds.

Cut to Vic ripping a large piece of CARDBOARD off the cereal
box.

He writes the figure '£1,583,703' in huge digits on the
card.

He looks up at the mirror on the wall, then underlines the
figure on the card and affixes it (with tack) right in the
middle of the mirror.

VIC (V/O)
The way I see it, this is all the
money you might expect to make over
the course of your working life.
And all I'm saying is, why can't I
bring the effort up front and earn
my money now? Rather than kill
myself slowly and never get to
enjoy it.

CLOSE ON MIRROR

We see the figure '£1,583,703' written on the card.