

# ***Murder On the Pitch***



*A Whodunnit*

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## MURDER ON THE PITCH - DRAMATIS PERSONAE

**Luke Drool:** He is the manager of football club, Mobchester. Luke is an overbearing and self-important character who believes he is the greatest football manager this country has ever seen. He is concerned that his star footballer, Andrei Sholankov, will leave the club and, freed from any contractual obligations of loyalty, will blow the gaff on the drug-fuelled emporium that is Mobchester.

**Simon Davies:** Simon is the club's chief coach. He is heavily involved in the use of performance-enhancing drugs, and regularly gives these to Andrei Sholankov. Luke Drool suspects what is going on and, although he has broached the subject with Simon on a number of occasions, prefers to turn a 'blind eye.' Simon is a furtive character, not one that you would easily trust.

**Ron Rickets:** Ron has lost the title 'Player of the Year' to Andrei Sholankov. He now fears he will lose his wife to Andrei, and this drives him towards the arms of Rita Ritson, Luke's partner. Ron is a serious character whose normal reaction, given the volatile characters around him, is to search for peace and harmony. He can but try!

**James Proud:** James has been Andrei's boot boy and has now made it to the first team. However, Andrei insists on James continuing to shine his boots, and everyone else at the club is so in awe of Andrei that they collude in this practice, which is clearly a form of bullying. James has started to develop a relationship with Melanie Rickets, Ron's wife. James is, apparently, an unassuming character with a wry sense of humour, although he can, and is, prone to outbursts of anger.

**Olga Proudofska:** Olga is Andrei's spurned, and extremely volatile, wife. She is not happy to be living in England and would much prefer to be living in her beloved Russia. Olga's volatility is legendary, and this is part of the reason that her husband, Andrei, seeks solace in the arms of other women. Olga has a heavy Russian accent.

**Lisa Price:** Lisa Price is Andrei's current girlfriend, or so the newspapers would have us believe, although things might be on the wane as Andrei is now beginning to cast his eyes towards Melanie Rickets, Ron's wife. But will he leave Lisa for Melanie? Even Andrei himself does not know. Lisa, like Olga, is a character that you cannot ignore; she is 'common' and outspoken and would fit the stereotype of the 'true Essex girl.'

**Melanie Rickets:** Melanie is Ron's wife. She is easily given to anger, although cannot compare with either Olga or even Lisa. Melanie's is more of a controlled anger. But this is a characteristic that can lead to brooding on the injustices that befall her, and one of these appears to be Andrei's fickleness when it comes to her affections. Melanie sees, in James Proud, a young man who will indulge her feeling of being wronged, and the two of them begin to develop an alliance of their own.

**Rita Ritson:** Rita Ritson is Luke Drool's partner. She is an interesting and relatively complex character who stays with her husband, despite his overbearing ways. Rita is herself, fairly dominant and, when she discovers that a murder has been committed, is happy to take on the role of the 'sleuth' at the end of the play. Rita thus combines being a downtrodden partner, with being a leader, and also manages to be an 'alternative' healer and motivator who believes that 'envisioning,' as she calls it, will lead to success for all. Unusually for the women in this play, Rita does not have a romantic relationship with Andrei.

## OTHER PARTS

There are two other speaking parts, neither of whom appears on the stage. These are:

- **(Radio) Commentator One**
- **(Radio) Commentator Two**

These parts can be read from the side of the stage, thus providing two extra speaking parts, and this is probably the easiest way of doing things. Alternatively, the parts can simply be recorded and played at the appropriate moments.

**Andrei Sholankov** is the character around whom everything revolves. He is a star footballer, imported from Russia. He does not speak a great deal of English, but appears to know ‘the language of love.’ This gets him into lots of difficulties, not least with his wife Olga. Andrei does not appear as a character in the play, but provides the role of ‘victim’ without whom our murder mystery play would not exist.

## **MURDER ON THE PITCH**

### **Scene One: The informal meeting room, which is just off the changing room.**

**The set is a football team’s informal meeting room. There is one man on the stage. He is Luke Drool, the manager of the team, who is obviously giving his pre-match team pep-talk.**

**Luke addresses the audience as if they were the team.**

### **LUKE’S SPEECH TAKES PLACE BEFORE THE MATCH, WHEREAS THE COMMENTARY THAT FOLLOWS IS OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE GAME.**

**Luke:** As you all know, I have been asked many times by our friends in the media what makes a great team. *(Pause)* Well gentlemen, I believe that we are a great team, and that we are great because we have great players, led by someone with a great tactical know-how. *(Pauses again)* Yes, of course, I am referring to myself, manager, mastermind and man-motivator, Mr Luke Drool. Today, as we all know, we are facing Cobham United, and the expectation of all our fans is that WE SHALL WIN! Kick off is in precisely, *(Looking at his watch)* ten minutes, and I believe that we have a chance of taking all three points if we stick to our game plan.

### **LUKE FREEZES AND THE RADIO COMMENTARY COMES OVER THE AIRWAVES.**

#### **Radio Commentary:**

*Commentator one: I must say that I cannot believe the tactics being employed by Mobchester in this game. There seems to be no coherence in their tactics, apart from lumping the ball to Andrei Sholankov, their great Russian forward, who appears to be moving around the pitch like a whirling dervish. Unfortunately for the rest of the team, Andrei appears to be in a world of his own, either thinking too quickly for his teammates, or having absolutely no idea of what any of them will do next. I can’t, for the life of me, work out the tactics of this team.*

**Luke:** Of course, I understand that much will depend on you, Andrei, *(Looks in front of himself in a specific direction)* but I know that you are man enough for the challenge. *(Meaningfully)* Particularly after those new training and fitness regimes that we have

implemented. No pressure then, Andrei, but we are depending heavily on you! (**Points at Andrei and then emits a weak laugh**)

**Radio Commentary:**

**Commentator one:** *There is absolutely no doubt who is dominating this match, thank you, Mr. Sholankov, but we're just wondering who is inspiring you.*

**Commentator two:** *I know what you mean, Alan. The cameras have just panned over to Sholankov's wife, Olga, who despite his dazzling performance, does not seem to be a very happy lady at all.*

**Commentator one:** *Just for our listeners, we should say that there has been a break in play while the trainer tends to an injury to a Mobchester player. Yes, going back to Andrei Sholankov, if what the papers say is true, then Mrs Olga Sholankov, or should we say Proudofska, has a great deal to be unhappy about; not helped, it would seem, by the appearance on camera, even as we speak, of Andrei's alleged current girlfriend, Lisa Price.*

**Commentator two:** *Sorry to interrupt yet again, Alan, but, talk of the devil, the camera has now panned around to Lisa Price herself who, would you believe it, is looking as well, as happy as..... as..*

**Commentator one:** *as happy as...a woman in love! Sorry folks, I have just heard from the producer that we should get back to the football. Well, perhaps someone should tell that to the TV director who is still focussing on Lisa Price.*

**Luke: (**Bursting back into life**)** You know what we have planned, boys; a straight four-four-two, filling the holes at every available opportunity, tracking back. Not forgetting closing the door as it's called for, and playing in the channels when we the get the opportunity. Any questions?

**SILENCE.**

**Luke:** Fantastic! Well, we know what to do boys. Mobchester, up and at them! (**Luke raises his arms into the air in exhortation to his players**) And do not forget, in the heat of the battle, that our club motto is, 'Work like a Trojan. Be gallant in victory and proud to the end'.

**LUKE IS STILL AGAIN AS THE COMMENTATORS RETURN.**

**Radio Commentary:**

**Commentator one:** *Oh dear! And what is happening now then? With the stoppage on the pitch, it seems as though there is more action off the pitch than on it.*

**Commentator two:** *And this time it seems to involve Melanie Rickets, the wife of Ron Rickets, the Mobchester captain and former player of the year.*

**Commentator one:** *Until the arrival of Sholankov, of course, the new crowd favourite.*

**Commentator two:** *I don't know about that. It seems as though the TV cameras are obsessed with the WAGs and, just at the moment, Melanie Ricketts appears to be telling Lisa Price exactly what she thinks of her. She seems to have got out of her seat, walked along the row and is now wagging her finger in front of Lisa's face.....not to mention the faces of the crowd around the pair.*

**Commentator one:** *Not forgetting five million TV viewers! Oh my goodness, as if a wagging finger was not good enough, we've got flailing arms as well!*

**BACK TO LUKE.**

**Luke:** And do not forget, gentlemen, discipline on and off the pitch.

**BACK AGAIN TO THE COMMENTATORS.**

**Radio Commentators:**

**Commentator one:** *And now the stewards seem to be getting involved. Well, I know that what takes place off the pitch is not supposed to affect what takes place on it, but this cannot be helping the Mobchester players!*

**LUKE'S FOLLOWING SPEECH TAKES PLACE DURING THE HALF TIME INTERVAL.**

**Luke:** A fantastic first half performance boys! 2-0 up and it should be five. I have no doubt that, as long as we keep up the tactics we have used in the first half, that we should score at least another three. And, as for you Andrei, one more goal will give you a hat-trick, and I have no doubt you can get it. *(Moves gaze in another direction)* Provided Ron, he gets fantastic service from you! *(Pauses)* Mr. Ricketts, you know what you have to do, don't you? Right boys, team talk over. Time to get out there. *(Raises his voice again)* Mobchester, time to go, 'Up and at them!'

**LUKE EXITS**

**Radio Commentators:**

**Commentator One:** *Ten minutes into the second half, and things just aren't going well for Mobchester. They seem to have lost the direction that they had in the first half.*

**Commentator Two:** *Sholankov seems to have lost all sense of purpose and energy. Only ten minutes into the second half and he looks a spent force.*

**Commentator One:** *Which is ridiculous for a professional footballer over thirty minutes before the end of a game.*

**Commentator Two:** *Sometimes, Alan, you have to wonder about the training methods at this club.*

**Commentator One:** *All I can say is this, if the game continues in this vein, Mobchester are in danger of surrendering their lead. And if that happens and Mobchester lose, Luke Drool's name will be mud tomorrow morning when the sports editors get their hands on him.*

**Scene Two: Back in the informal meeting room, the day after the match.**

**Luke:** Just look at the rubbish I have to read today. (*Looks at one of the newspapers that he has in his hands*) 'Drool's a Fool'; (*Looking at another paper*) 'Drooling for Success – but finding failure.' (*Throws the papers to one side in anger*) Do any of these scribblers, 'exp-pros' as they like to term themselves, have any idea of the stresses of modern football management? (*Really ranting now*) 'In my day' this and 'We used to do' that. So, 'Drool's a Fool' is he? Well, more fool them for thinking that. We may have lost yesterday, but this club is where it is today because of the efforts, know-how and determination of one man, and one man only. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, 'Mr. Luke Drool, nobody's fool.' (*Bows towards the audience and comes upright with a wry smile on his face*) You know what? I feel better for that. Nothing like a good rant to clear the air, to put the wind back into your sails. We may have lost yesterday but.....

**RITA RITSON ENTERS FROM STAGE LEFT.**

**Rita:** Ah hello darling. Sorry to interrupt. Er...were you practising one of your motivational addresses?

**Luke:** (*Slightly put out at being interrupted*) Er, yes, of course, er, no, not exactly. (*Recovering himself*) Now look Rita, just exactly what did you want? You must know that a man such as myself...an important man, the most important man in this football club, must have time to himself, to reflect.

**Rita:** Reflect?

**Luke:** Yes, reflect...reflect on yesterday's game. On the tactics that we employed. Should I have gone for 3-5-1? Or was I right to go for 4-4-2? That sort of thing.

**Rita:** But Luke, darling. The team lost 8-3. Surely.....

**Luke:** Yes, darling. But do you really understand the significance of that?

**Rita looks puzzled.**

**Luke:** If you were a footballing person, and, let's be honest, being the partner of possibly the greatest football manager this club has ever seen (*Puffs his chest out with pride*) does not qualify you to be called a 'footballing person'. If you were a footballing person, you would know that there are *Eight Threes* and then there are, well, (*Staring to lose conviction in what he is saying*) *Eight Threes*... if you see what I mean?

**Rita:** Not exactly darling, no, I do not.

**Luke:** (*With conviction*) Precisely, my dear. (*Smugly*) Which is why I am a footballing person and you are not. You see, you've just proved my point. Not that I needed it proving, of course.

**SIMON ENTERS FROM STAGE RIGHT.**

**Simon:** Hello, Luke, how are you this morning? *(Sees Rita)* Oh sorry, Rita, I did not expect to see you here. *(There is a dramatic pause)* And how are you? You're not talking about the game yesterday are you, deconstructing our performance, in that post-modern way that you have?

**Rita:** *(Acerbically)* Certainly not, Simon. And, while we are on the subject, I think the team would have performed far better if it had not been for, how should I put it... your influence.

**Simon:** My influence?! I see, so it's going to be like that, is it? The team plays badly and the blame goes straight to the poor chief coach, the person least able to effect changes, once he gets the team out on the pitch.

**Rita:** As you well know, Simon, your influence carries on way beyond the dressing room, even beyond your coaching sessions, if you take my meaning, and the performance that we saw yesterday, well, how should I put it, was 'stimulating' in the first half, but 'lacked stimulation' in the second. If you take my...

**Luke:** *(Who has been following the debate with an interested, but concerned, expression)* I think lady and gentleman, enough is enough. I do feel that, to sum up, you could not argue with the conclusion that our 8-3 defeat was more than a tad unfortunate; that we were, without doubt, unlucky; that the footballing gods, if they did cast a glance over to the *(Delivered quickly, as a set phrase)* 'C and W DIY Specialists for you the customer' stadium, that they were not, at that time, smiling on Mobchester, but on our opponents, the much reviled, Cobham United.'

**Rita:** Of course darling, but do you not think that....you know, some of the training methods that you employ....if we can call them training methods that is.

**Simon:** *(Angrily)* And what are you insinuating exactly, Rita? I hope your reference does not refer to the excellent and state-of-the-art methods of coaching that I employ!

**Rita:** *(Equally angry)* With due respect Simon, I don't think that anyone in their right mind would call some of the methods that you use to 'get the best out of your players' state of the art.

**SIMON'S MOBILE RINGS.**

**Simon:** *(Acknowledging the other two)* Sorry you two. Could you just let me take this call. *(Simon moves to the side of the stage and cups his hand over the phone, although he can still be heard by the audience, but not by the two other characters on the stage.)*

**THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN SIMON AND THE PERSON ON THE OTHER END OF THE LINE (LISA PRICE) TAKES PLACE AT THE SAME TIME, IN REAL LIFE, AS THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN LUKE AND RITA, ALTHOUGH IT IS SEQUENCED FOR THE AUDIENCE, WHO CAN HEAR EVERYTHING.**

What's the problem? *(Pause)* What? *(Clearly worried)* That's ridiculous! So you say that despite everything, all the promises that he has made, all that this club has done for him, he is going to spill the beans.

**Rita:** *(Addressing Luke)* Anyway darling, do calm down. You know that it is not good for you. I wasn't implying that you had done anything wrong, that you were not the tactical genius we all know you to be.

**Simon:** *(Still on the phone)* To ruin not only your and my lives, but to bring the whole of this club and himself down with him? But this is absolute madness!

**Rita:** *(Continuing to speak to Luke)* Would you like some tea darling? I'll go into the back and make you some if you like.

**Luke:** *(Calming down)* Yes, that would be lovely darling. Sorry I am so prickly at the moment. It must be the defeat. I don't want to blame anyone, but Andrei Sholankov just did not produce in the second half. Sometimes I blame myself, but then I think....'

**Simon:** He must be stopped, and he must be stopped now. You know what to do darling. We must be brave, but make sure that there are no mistakes.

**Rita:** Won't be a second darling. A cup of tea and I'm sure you'll be *(Said in an accent different from the one that she normally speaks in)* 'as right as rain' as my late grandmother used to say. *(Looking around)* Now, we haven't got any cups in here have we?

**Simon:** To quote Lady Macbeth, "Screw you courage to the sticking place, and we'll not fail." *(Comes off the phone looking ashen. Something, self evidently, has gone wrong)* *(To himself)* Oh my goodness. Just what is going on? You can't trust anyone these days. *(Simon has been standing stage right; he now looks over to the other two, who have been stage left.)*

**RITA IS LEAVING STAGE LEFT IN ORDER TO MAKE A CUP OF TEA AND, AS SHE LEAVES, HER MOBILE PHONE RINGS. SHE IMMEDIATELY ANSWERS IT.**

**Rita:** *(Answering the phone to Ron, although the audience do not know who it is)* Oh, my goodness me, no. That is unbelievable! Just a minute.

**RITA SCUTTLES OFF, STAGE LEFT.**

**Luke:** *(To Simon)* Everything okay Simon? You cannot keep this up, you know.

**Simon:** *(Feigning innocence)* Keep this up Luke? What on earth do you mean? I am sure that I do my very best to ensure that all the players that leave our dressing room to go out on to the pitch to represent.....

**Luke:** Oh come on, Simon, you know exactly what I mean. We can pretend to the outside world, but we cannot pretend to each other.

**Simon:** I'm sure, Luke, that I do not know what you could possibly mean.....



**Luke:** *(Who, by this time, is starting to take control of the stage by prowling around and putting Simon under increasing pressure – he speaks very assertively and with power)* Do you think I am a complete fool? Do you think I haven't noticed that, game after game, some of our players go out and perform wonders in the first half and then fade away in the second? Do you think I haven't noticed that, half the time, some of them appear to have a glazed expression across their faces, and do you think I haven't noticed the quiet words you seem to be having with individuals when you think that no one else is looking, or you are closeted in a corner. 'Drool's a fool' the papers said this morning, and I think that that is exactly what I am, a complete and utter fool!

**Simon:** Look Luke.....

**Luke:** No Simon, I am not willing to live this lie any more. Not when the team is suffering like it is *(Forgets himself for a moment and puffs his chest out)* Despite having, what I might humbly say, is a manager with tactical nouse, know-how, and some would even say, genius!

**RITA RETURNS WITH A MUG OF TEA FOR LUKE. SHE HANDS IT TO HIM.**

**Rita:** There you are, my dear. *(Realising that she has not made one for Simon)* Oh sorry, my dear. I completely forgot about you. How silly of me. Would you like a little cup of something?

**Simon:** No, you're all right, Rita. It's very kind of you, but....

**Luke:** *(Continuing to be assertive)* Yes, my dear, what a splendid idea. *(Looking across at Simon)* I could not stand here with a cup of tea in my hand and leave you without, could I now Simon? *(Returns his gaze to Rita)* Another cup of tea would be a splendid idea. Thank you my dear.

**Rita:** *(With a degree of irony)* Your wish is my command.

**RITA LEAVES STAGE LEFT.**

**Simon:** Incredible! One of the most assertive women I have ever met, and round you Luke, she appears to be the dutiful housewife. Quite bizarre!

**Luke:** *(Who appears to have been flattered by this last comment)* Well, how should I put it Simon? Some of us have it and some of us do not. Anyway, back to the issue. Simon, how can I put this straightforwardly, without hurting your feelings? *(Continues to be blunt and insensitive)* If things do not improve in the coaching department, then you will be sacked!

**Simon:** *(With bitterness)* Really Luke, charmed, I am sure! Talk about a manager blaming his staff. I don't know if I want that cup of tea now! I've got other, more important things, on my mind!

**SIMON STORMS OFF, STAGE RIGHT, LEAVING HIS MOBILE PHONE, AND TEA, BEHIND.**

**MELANIE RICKETS ENTERS STAGE RIGHT AS SIMON LEAVES. HE BRUSHES PAST HER.**

**Simon:** Ah Melanie, I don't know what you are doing here, but I wouldn't be too optimistic of a welcoming reception if I were you! Luke's in one of his moods again. And I don't think it's going to be improved by the presence of the wife of one of the players that he appears to hold responsible for his team's demise!

**MELANIE LOOKS SLIGHTLY AGHAST AS SIMON DISAPPEARS IN A FIT OF HIGH DUDGEON.**

**Melanie:** Oh dear! Well, I suppose it takes all sorts! (*Looks beseechingly at Luke*) How are you Luke? It's not true is it? You've not blamed poor Ron for the defeat yesterday have you? Don't forget, he's always been a fans' favourite. (*Almost as an afterthought*) And don't forget, he was voted 'Player of the Year' by the fans last year, before.....

**Luke:** (*Deliberately interrupting her, back to his assertive ways*) Yes Melanie, and how are you today? Feeling good? Happy with your lot in life? Or are you more like Lot's wife, soon to please us all by turning into a pillar of salt, never to be heard of again?

**Melanie:** Goodness me Luke, Simon was right. You certainly have got out of the wrong side of the bed this morning haven't you?

**Luke:** Perhaps my dear, but at least the bed I extricated myself from was my own!

**Melanie:** (*Attempting moral indignation*) I beg your pardon, Luke. I cannot possibly imagine what you mean.... a woman of high morals such as my good self.

**Luke:** (*Mimicking her*) 'A woman of high morals such as my good self'. Perhaps that's your view Melanie, but it certainly isn't mine. Do you not think you have caused enough disharmony in our dressing room by your continued obsession with Andrei Sholankov when it appears clear to one and all that Andrei has absolutely no interest whatsoever in the wife of a footballer who, on the basis on his performance yesterday, is a has-been!

**Melanie:** Has-been? Anyway, you're a fine one to talk after the weekend we spent together last Easter that, according to you, 'was simply to organise our positions on the field'. Well, I don't know what positions you had in mind, Luke, but I can assure you that, on Monday night, I felt that I had been through a full training session without, sadly, the benefit of high performance as a result!

**Luke:** (*Changing his tune as he starts to become worried due to the presence of his wife, not so far away*) Now Melanie please, darling, lover, you have promised not to talk about that particular excursion into pastures new, not with, you know, others being around. (*Looks off Stage Left, to where his wife is.*)

**Melanie:** Well that depends does it not Luke? It depends on what you may be able to do for me, and for Ron, of course.

**Luke:** (*Somewhat nervous, and losing the conviction that he had earlier in the conversation*) You mean the captain's armband?

**Melanie:** Well, let's say, you would keep a lot of the more traditional fans happy. Those that believe that Mobchester represents the heart and soul of England.... a heart and soul that should not be sold off to the nearest foreigner with clever feet.

**Luke:** If you are trying to bribe me Melanie, I don't think that you are going the right way about it. Many things I may not be, but a man of integrity I most certainly am!

**RITA ARRIVES WITH A MUG OF TEA, STAGE LEFT, HER EYES NOT FOCUSSED ON THE PAIR ON STAGE.**

**Rita:** Here you are Simon! Oh dear, where is Simon? He seems to have disappeared!

**Luke:** Or morphed into Melanie.

**Rita:** Melanie darling, how are you?

**MELANIE AND RITA MOVE TOWARDS ONE ANOTHER AND BLOW AIR KISSES IN TIME-HONOURED-FASHION. RITA PUTS THE TEA DOWN.**

**Melanie:** Wonderful, Rita darling. How are you? Looking well as always. I don't know how you manage it (*Looking at Luke*) with all that you have to put up with.

**Luke:** (*Now in something of a huff*) Well, if all I am going to be subjected to is abuse from two women, I'm afraid, in time-honoured fashion, 'I am out of here' Goodbye ladies, and enjoy your tea!

**WITH THAT LUKE LEAVES STAGE LEFT.**

**Rita:** (*Trying, vainly, to preserve the peace*) See you later dear! And don't forget the 'Envisioning session' tomorrow. (*Turning to Melanie*) Men and their stupid pride for you! It's a wonder that we women are able to get anything done with those huge egos around.

**Melanie:** I couldn't agree more, Rita. (*Changing her tone and being somewhat mysterious*) There are exceptions, of course.

**Rita:** Exceptions? Melanie, you are a dark horse. No one I know is it?

**Melanie:** (*Continues to be mysterious*) It could be.

**Rita:** I see, so is that why I heard you talking to Luke about 'excursions into pastures new?'

**Melanie:** (*Looking shocked and somewhat taken aback*) What? You mean that you were listening to our conversation?

**Rita:** (*Quite calm*) Not listening as such, but I did hear the odd phrase. (*Inscrutably*) I'm sure that there was nothing to worry about. (*Sounding bright*) Anyway, don't forget your tea, my dear. It might go cold. (*Mysteriously, yet again*) And we both know what happens when things go cold, do we not?

**Melanie:** I am sure, Rita dear, that I have absolutely no idea what you are referring to.

**Rita:** Is that right, Melanie darling? Well, do not forget that *'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned'*. And I don't think that that is the first piece of Shakespeare that I have heard today! **(Looks meaningfully at the audience)** There are some of us, and call me old fashioned if you like, who believe that it is more important to be faithful to your chosen partner in life than would appear to be the case in the modern, 'partner here today, gone tomorrow' society that we all inhabit.

**THE TWO WOMEN STARE AT ONE ANOTHER IN A SLIGHTLY MENACING FASHION. AS THEY DO SO JAMES PROUD STORMS ON FROM STAGE RIGHT.**

**James:** Absolutely and utterly ridiculous!

**Rita:** *(Taking her eyes from the stare she is sharing with Melanie)* Ah James! Everything all right I hope?

**JAMES STRIDES OVER TO STAGE LEFT IN ORDER TO POUR HIMSELF A DRINK.**

**James:** All right? Do I look as though everything is 'all right'? No, everything is certainly not 'all right'!

**Rita:** I know that we lost yesterday James, but Luke tells me that the 8-3 score line felt, well, more like a victory.

**James:** Felt like a victory? Well, it might have done in that poor demented man's head, but certainly not in mine! How can anyone claim that an 8-3 defeat feels 'more like a victory'? **(Delivered with passion)** The man's mad, Rita, we all know that. And more fool you for staying with him all these years, when you know that he's someone who does not care a fig for anyone but himself, his ego, and the self-important and pompous image which he, quite erroneously, believes makes him the greatest football manager the world has ever seen in the public's eyes!

**Melanie:** *(Fawningly)* Well, I don't know what Rita believes, James, but I can tell you that my dear husband, Ron, would whole-heartedly agree with you! Since Andrei came to the club, Mr. Drool seems to have become obsessed with him. Everything now has to be a through-ball for Andrei or 'put it over the top' so that Sholankov can run on to it. I wouldn't mind, but that man, Sholankov I mean, seems to have spent most of his energies interfering with other people's wives and girlfriends.

**Rita:** *(Teasingly)* Couldn't be jealous could we Melanie dear?

**Melanie:** *(Pauses to reply, before continuing her rant)* What? Of course not, darling. **(Continuing)** Ron, my dear Ron, and let me remind you that he was 'Player of the Year' last year,.....

**Rita:** *(To herself)* And how could we ever forget?

**RITA MOVES OVER TO WHERE, IN THE RUSH TO LEAVE, SIMON HAS LEFT HIS MOBILE PHONE, ON THE TABLE STAGE RIGHT.**

**Melanie:** *(Continuing)*.....Even my placid Ron is fed up with what is going on and, well, between you and me, he is thinking of quitting the club!

**James:** Well, he is not the only one, Melanie. James Proud I am by name, but I never thought that it was my nature. Well, not until now! And I have always been known for my easy-going ways. Too easy going, if you ask me. I know that I am the youngest player in the team, and that I should be grateful, some say, to have a place at all. But to ask me to be nothing more than Andrei's boot boy is insulting beyond belief!

**Melanie:** What? What has he asked you to do then?

**AS MELANIE AND SIMON ARE TALKING, RITA IS EXAMINING SIMON'S PHONE, WHICH REVEALS TO HER WHO THE LAST CALL HAS BEEN FROM (LISA PRICE).**

**James:** Only make sure that Andrei's boots have been cleaned before every game, that's all.

**Melanie:** You mean to make sure that they are not caked in mud following all his sprinting around the field after other people's wives!

**James:** *(Who breaks the tension by laughing)* Wow Melanie, you really are angry with him, aren't you? No, I don't have to keep an eye on his morals, as you might put it, but I do have to make sure that everything is hunky-dory, 'spic and span', as Luke likes to put it!

**Rita:** *(Who, by this time, has examined the phone and put it down – she speaks to herself and to the audience, but is not heard by the other two)* Very interesting. So that is what is going on.....who would have thought? The waters at this club just became a whole lot murkier. And those that venture in them could just drown!

**James:** Well, there are more ways of making your mark at a football club than just your performance on the field. And with this *(James holds up a pair of keys to Melanie, but not to Rita)* I may have the opportunity to make sure that Andrei's little game is revealed to the whole world.....if it is Andrei, of course.....

**Melanie:** *(Who is either perplexed or feigning being perplexed)* James, I am not sure exactly what you can be referring to.....Anyway, where did you get that? I thought there were only two keys, and .....

**JAMES PUTS THE KEY BACK INTO HIS POCKET.**

**RITA HAS NOW LEFT THE PHONE, JUST BEFORE SIMON RETURNS TO THE STAGE, COMING ON STAGE RIGHT.**

**Simon:** *(Interrupting the conversation between James and Rita)* Hello again everyone. *(Seeing James)* Ah, hello James. *(Engineered optimism)* How are you feeling after yesterday's game? Not too down I hope. There were bright signs for the future. I think your game is really coming along. Before you know where you are, you could be the next Andrei Sholankov, the poster boy on everyone's bedroom wall.

**James:** Better than being the bedroom boy in everyone else's four poster! *(Smiles to himself in that 'Aren't I very clever?' way, before admitting defeat.)* Oh well, never mind. Look Simon, it's very kind of you to boost my ego, but I honestly don't think that that is going to happen. I am an optimist, but I'm not a fool. It is quite clear to me that I have no future at this club, not while Andrei is here, at any rate, and I'm realistic enough to understand that, *(meaningfully)* and despite any of the 'specialist training methods' that might go on, my future lies elsewhere.

**SIMON SUDDENLY NOTICES THE MOBILE PHONE THAT HE HAS LEFT BEHIND AND REACHES FOR IT.**

**Simon:** Ah, there we are. *(Picks up the phone and puts it in his pocket)* How silly of me! *(Somewhat unnecessarily to the others)* Well, we all make mistakes. I don't suppose I'm the first person to have left his mobile phone lying around. Still, it's back in safe hands now, so no need to worry! Cheerio everyone!

**SIMON EXITS STAGE RIGHT.**

**Rita:** *(To herself and the audience)* You can believe that if you want to, Simon Davies, but I wouldn't be so sure! *(Looking at her watch)* Goodness me, you two, just look at the time! I must get off and prepare!

**Melanie:** Prepare?

**Rita:** Yes, of course. Don't forget that we have our 'Envisioning session' later on today, and I wouldn't want anything to go wrong during that, would I now?

**James:** *(Recovering himself enough to be polite)* Of course not, Rita. It's important for all of us to make sure that we have all been properly 'Envisioned'.

**Melanie:** *(Joining in, without any real conviction)* Absolutely true, James. *(To Rita)* Is everyone invited, by the way?

**Rita:** *(Much happier now that she is the centre of attention, and revelling in her role as the great 'Spiritual Envisioner')* Absolutely, my dear. We won't get all the players, of course, but I would expect some of them. And wives and girlfriends are more than welcome. *(With conviction)* You know what we always say, the more our spirits combine and work together, the more we will be able to do the same! *(Looking encouragingly at the two of them)* I'm sure I'll be able to count on the two of you. *(To Melanie)* I know that we have our little differences, my dear, but I know that, when it comes to our spirits, you and I are as one!

**Melanie:** *(Without any sense of conviction at all, and with not a little sarcasm)* Of course, dearest Rita. I'll most certainly be there. And what time are we to meet, by the way?

**Rita:** Four o'clock, on the dot! We are all to be gathered here in this room. *(Looks at James)* James?

**James:** *(Again, without conviction)* What? Of yes, of course, I'll be here. You can certainly count on me.

**Rita:** Fantastic! (*Makes a move towards the outside world, Stage Right*) I'll be off then. See you later, you two. And don't forget, you don't need to bring anything with you, but your good selves! It's to be hoped that Luke is in a better mood when I get home. (*Pauses*) Having said that, is he ever?

**RITA EXITS STAGE RIGHT.**

**James:** (*To Melanie*) Is it just me, or do those two deserve each other?

**Melanie:** You know, James, I think you are right. I used to feel sorry for Rita when I first met her, but having seen the other sides of that woman, the unpleasant side, and the downright loopy side, I have no doubt that Luke and Rita were meant for each other.

**James:** On that we are agreed! Come on Melanie, should we go and get ourselves ready! (*Starts to move towards the exit Stage Right.*)

**Melanie:** Yes, kind sir. You know I believe that you are right!

**JAMES HOLDS OUT HIS ARM, IN TIME-HONOURED FASHION, AND MELANIE TAKES IT AS THEY BOTH LEAVE STAGE RIGHT.**

**THE HOUSE LIGHTS DIM.**