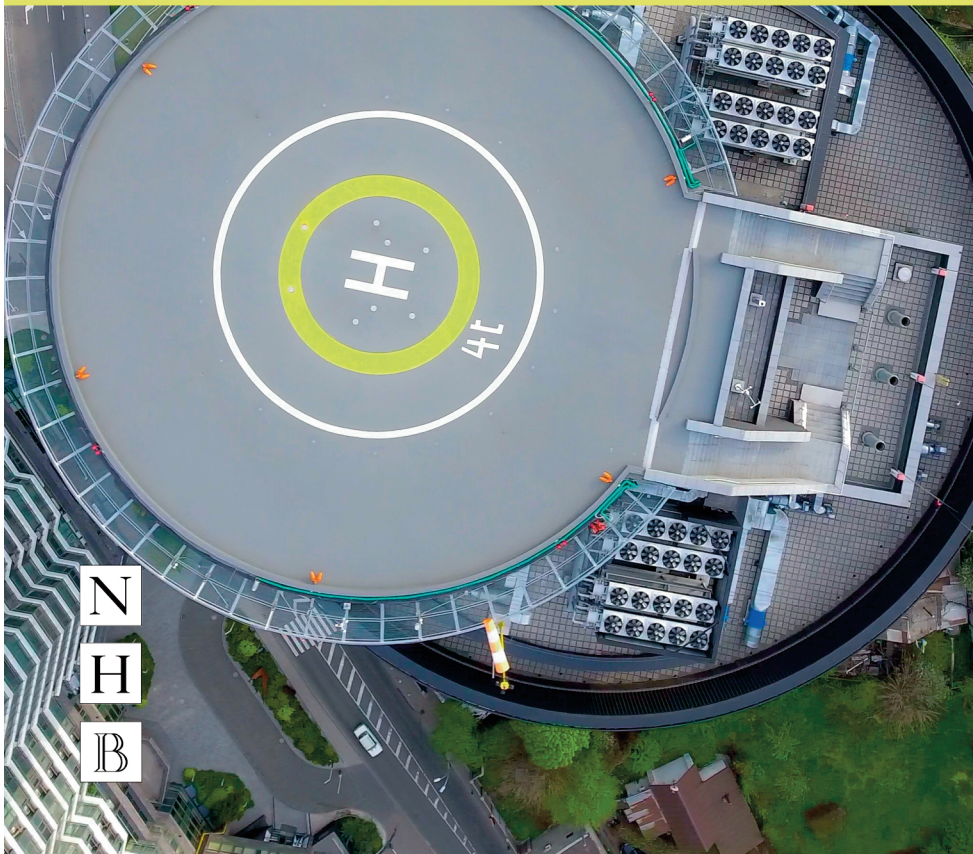


The Red Helicopter

Robin French



Characters

The characters are aged between thirteen and sixteen.

DADDY
GOLDING
SAIMA
ZADIE
WILLIAM
RIDLEY
ELIZABETH
ELLIS
KINGSLEY
KEITH
HALLER
HUMBERT
BLONDEL
BLAIR
ANDREA

Costume

All characters are dressed in rag-tag second-hand clothes that often don't match or suit them. They look unwashed, grubby and unhealthy. Hierarchy within the group is clearly delineated by clothes – the more colourful the clothes, the more favoured the person is.

Scene One

A Wednesday afternoon in 2072. The action takes place on the third floor of a skyscraper in the east of London, south of the river. The third floor is now the ground floor because of the level of the snow. The office space is clearly no longer used for office activities, though there is still a lot of office furniture there.

In general, this scene should feel like a hubbub. A hive of activity. This is a society which works. Other characters may well walk through the space in the course of the scene.

KEITH is playing a bashed-up guitar. BLONDEL and BLAIR are sat on improvised thrones made out of office swivel chairs and various shiny objects. BLONDEL is styling BLAIR's hair. Both girls are pregnant. They give the impression of ladies of leisure.

ANDREA approaches SAIMA. She gives her a drawing.

ANDREA. E... E... E...

ANDREA can't manage to push the word out. SAIMA has unfurled the drawing.

SAIMA. Elizabeth!

This is H-Buzz, Andrea. This is just like her.

You did that from memory, that's...

Blair! Looks like her doesn't it?

BLAIR. Not interested.

SAIMA (*to ANDREA*). Did you do that for tonight? It's really good.

ANDREA nods. KINGSLEY enters.

SAIMA. You seen Zadie?

KINGSLEY. She went north. She's not back?

SAIMA. We're meant to be rehearsing.

KINGSLEY takes his bag over to a pile of tinned food in the corner. KEITH moves near him.

BLONDEL. How far you go?

KINGSLEY. Parsons Green.

He throws the bag to KEITH. KEITH opens it.

KEITH. Not bad!

KINGSLEY (*from memory*). Plum Tomatoes. Twice. Whiskers. Novelty cigarette lighter. Anchovies.

KEITH. Correct.

KINGSLEY. Saw another dead body.

You ever notice – they always have the same expression. Corpses do.

Like:

He does an impression.

Quizzical.

KEITH. Oh my god! Starburst!

KEITH has found one lone Starburst sweet. KINGSLEY runs to try and get it off him.

KINGSLEY. Come on, Keith. That's my bag.

BLONDEL. You got to give that to Daddy.

KEITH. Too late.

KEITH has already crammed it into his mouth.

KINGSLEY. Gong.

ELLIS saunters in. She is wearing a bright-blue old lady's cardigan. She is obviously incredibly proud of it.

SAIMA. Ellis, you seen Zadie?

ELLIS ignores SAIMA.

BLONDEL. Where you been?

ELLIS. Around.

BLAIR. What's that?

ELLIS. Like it? I'm wearing it to Elizabeth's anniversary tonight.

You singing?

SAIMA. Daddy asked me and Zadie to do something.

BLAIR is still looking at ELLIS's cardigan.

BLAIR. Where did you get it?

ELLIS. I acquired it.

BLONDEL. If you find clothes, you have to give them to Daddy. Rules.

ELLIS. Nice, isn't it. Real wool.

What are you singing?

SAIMA. We don't know yet.

ELLIS. You'd better decide soon!

BLAIR. Something for Daddy.

SAIMA. Something for Elizabeth. That's why he asked me and Zadie to sing it.

BLONDEL. It's polyester.

ELLIS. Wool. Nice colour.

Sing something sexy. Put Golding in the mood for me.

Royal Blue.

BLONDEL. Where from?

ELLIS. Dead grief. Posh house. Kensington.

No holes or nothing. It's pristine.

BLONDEL. It doesn't fit you.

BLAIR. You don't know why that grief died. Does it smell?

ELLIS. Smells of Persil and Fairy Liquid.

BLAIR *smells it*.

BLONDEL. If Golding gave you that, you should give it to Daddy. He'll get in trouble.

ELLIS. He won't. Because Daddy gave it to Golding.

BLONDEL. What?

ELLIS. Golding's on the way up.

It's not going to be long. Daddy's going to let Golding use the laptop. Daddy's going to give Golding the password.

BLAIR. You know, Ellis, you know who you remind me of wearing that cardigan?

ELLIS. Old movie star?

BLAIR. No. Her.

She points at ANDREA. BLONDEL and BLAIR crack up, laughing at her. ELLIS storms out, in a huff.

KINGSLEY. I found Daddy this scalding hat this week. You seen him in that hat?

SAIMA. Nope.

KINGSLEY. I was near my old care home. Whipped it off this grief. So damn quick. Whoosh.

Daddy looked max happy.

I'm on the up, I am. I'm a good person to know.

SAIMA. Okay.

KINGSLEY. I'm burning too. I'm one of the most handsomest boys here. Definitely.

SAIMA. I'll bear that in mind.

KINGSLEY. Yeah. Do.

You're caught in my web, Saima, and I don't intend to let you out.

KINGSLEY *tries to do a cool, nonchalant-walk exit. But doing so, he bumps straight into GOLDING who is with HALLER and HUMBERT who are coming in. GOLDING stares at him, threatening.*

I'm really sorry, Golding. I wasn't looking, I...

GOLDING. It's all right, mate. You just touched me, that's all. You just bumped into my shoulder.

I mean – it wasn't necessary. You should have been paying more attention. I'll survive.

KINGSLEY. I'm sorry, Golding.

GOLDING nods at KINGSLEY. KINGSLEY goes. GOLDING opens his bag. During this scene, we see that ELLIS craves GOLDING's attention – but GOLDING barely acknowledges her.

GOLDING. Sardines. Gungo peas. Olive oil.

He gets out two bottles of red wine.

Sainsbury's finest.

Everybody squeals in excitement. This is brilliant.

Whole day like a lucky charm.

BLAIR. Where you get them?

HUMBERT. Old pub. Other side of Regent's Park.

BLAIR. Long way.

GOLDING. That's how it is nowadays.

Go on, tell them what we saw.

During this next section, we see GOLDING surreptitiously take a gun out of the bag his groceries were in. He puts it down the front of his trousers. He is incredibly careful not to be seen.

HUMBERT. We were in the park. You know the other side of the duck ponds, where they used to have the pedal boats. Near there, there's this patch of grass. See a grief right...

HALLER. At least eighty.

GOLDING. She's crazy. She's starving and she's singing to herself. This old song....

HUMBERT sings a snatch of a popular song from 2010.

HALLER. I don't reckon she was crazy. She was scared, man.

HUMBERT. She's wearing these high-heel shoes. These red stilettos right, in the snow.

HALLER. She's wearing lipstick. Teetering.

BLONDEL. Did you rob the lipstick?

GOLDING is now back in the fray.

GOLDING. Nah.

BLONDEL. Why not?

GOLDING. No lipstick's gonna improve that permanent scowl you got.

ELLIS laughs.

ELLIS. Sorry, Blondel. Just tickled me, that's all.

GOLDING. This grief. She's going along in the snow in these big red stilettos. She's all done up.

HUMBERT. Haller said he quite fancied her.

HALLER. I did not.

HUMBERT. Wanted to take her to the shed behind the duck ponds.

HALLER. No, I did not.

HUMBERT. Whip her off for a couple of rounds of bingo.

HALLER. Come on, she was at least eighty.

HUMBERT. It might have been the shoes.

HALLER. Humbert...

HUMBERT. If you like griefs, Haller, just be open about it. It's no problem, we won't judge you.

HALLER. I do not like griefs. I like nice girls. Young girls.

HUMBERT. Kids?

HALLER. No, not kids.

BLONDEL. Guys. What's happened?

GOLDING. Right, yeah. So this grief. She's going along.

HUMBERT. You won't believe this, right. A lion.

SAIMA. A lion?

GOLDING. A lion.

HUMBERT. Big fucking lion running through the snow, straight towards her.

HALLER. And then when it gets there, it stops and it looks at her.

HUMBERT. It looks at her like it's deciding whether it wants to eat her or not.

HALLER. She's max old.

GOLDING. She's well past her Best Before.

And this grief, in her red high heels, just stood still, watching this lion. And it's well close to her.

HALLER. So she starts shouting. 'Go away. Go away.'

HUMBERT. 'Go away! Bad Lion!'

HALLER. 'Go away.'

By now, they're laughing.

HUMBERT. And the lion is just sat there in front of her, like totally confused.

GOLDING. 'Go away! Bad Lion!'

SAIMA. Did it work?

HUMBERT. Nah.

SAIMA. What happened?

GOLDING. Well, it ate her.

HALLER. It was amazing.

HUMBERT. H-Buzz.

GOLDING. It just reaches up, right near her face. You can see its breath in the air. You can see her breath. They're mingling in the air.

Then bam, it just bites her – bites her face. Takes most of her nose off. Bam! It pins her down on the floor. It eats her head first.

HALLER. Golding let us watch the whole thing.

HUMBERT. It was proper scalding.

GOLDING. It coughs out her false teeth. It's about half an hour. It burps all the time. Then it gets to her feet. It gets to her stilettos. And it drops them. And just like that, it runs off.

HALLER. It was H-Buzz.

BLONDEL. There's a lion?

BLAIR. When I was little, my foster mum took me to London Zoo. There was a lion there.

HUMBERT. I went with my care home, yeah.

BLONDEL. I can't believe there's a lion!

How's it even alive?

HUMBERT. Griefs. It's been living off the griefs.

BLAIR. That is wicked.

GOLDING *notices* ANDREA.

GOLDING. Hey Andrea. Andrea. I got you something.

ANDREA *approaches, suspicious*.

It's in the bag.

Come on. It's a present. You're gonna like it.

ANDREA *puts her hand in the bag. She brings something out. It is a red stiletto. There's a disembodied foot still in it.*

ANDREA *drops it in disgust. She runs off. Everybody laughs.*

HALLER. You are sick, Golding!

HUMBERT. Did you see her face?

HALLER. You are so funny!

GOLDING. Yeah. I am.

ZADIE *enters. She goes over to SAIMA.*

SAIMA. Zadie? You're late!

ZADIE. I need to talk to you. Now.

SAIMA. Yeah, fine. After the rehearsal. Keith!

ZADIE. This is important. Keith!

KEITH *approaches with his guitar. ZADIE takes SAIMA upstage, away from earshot of the rest of the group.*

Sit there. Play the guitar like we're rehearsing. Cover us.

And don't eavesdrop!

KEITH *plays the guitar. During their conversation, BLONDEL, BLAIR, HALLER, KINGSLEY all mill about.*

SAIMA. What?

ZADIE. I go north.

SAIMA. Where did you cross?

ZADIE. Westminster. You can't take the ice any more. You'd fall through. I get to the old Arsenal Stadium.

There's a plane.

SAIMA. What?

ZADIE. A really old plane. In the middle of the pitch.

SAIMA. That's impossible. People took all the planes during the Exodus.

Really?

ZADIE. Yeah.

SAIMA. Can it fly?

ZADIE. It wasn't covered with snow. Someone flew it in. They must have flown it in in the last two days – there was a blizzard then. It would have been covered in snow.

SAIMA. What kind of plane?

ZADIE. Old, really old.

SAIMA. How old?

ZADIE. How would I know?

SAIMA. Hundred years?

ZADIE *shrugs.*

How could there possibly be a plane?

ZADIE. It's Elizabeth.

SAIMA. What?

ZADIE. Elizabeth's come back for us. Who else could it be?

SAIMA. Millions and millions of people used to live here. Over sixty million people.

ZADIE. I thought it would be a red helicopter.

SAIMA. You want it to be Elizabeth, that doesn't mean...

ZADIE. No one on the mainland would have a plane. It's got to be someone from outside. Come on, Saima! No one's gonna come back for griefs, are they?

Elizabeth's clearly going to come back for us. She's not going to leave us here in the cold, when she's lying on some Caribbean beach with her mum.

SAIMA. Elizabeth wouldn't be able to fly a plane.

ZADIE. I'm going to tell Daddy. He can use the laptop...

SAIMA. No.

ZADIE. Saima, I've got to tell him.

SAIMA. We could check it out first.

ZADIE. What?

SAIMA. Remember the airport. What did we do?

ZADIE. We sang.

SAIMA. What did we get?

ZADIE. We saved up enough money. We got a ticket to Mexico.

SAIMA. What did we decide?

ZADIE. We stayed here. For each other. We wouldn't leave each other.

SAIMA. We chose to stay together. We're in this together. We've got to look after ourselves.

That means me and you. No one else.

ZADIE. Saima. I'm not not going to tell Daddy.

ZADIE goes off. SAIMA looks worried.

*

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