

FADE IN:

INT. A COMMUNITY HALL - EVENING.

A large bare room furnished with a number of small TABLES with a CHAIR either side of each table, facing each other.

At each table, a man sits in one of the chairs with his back to the wall, facing a woman.

PETER is sitting at one small TABLE opposite a woman. On the table is a NOTEBOOK and PEN.

There is a BLAST from a WHISTLE.

MC (O.S.)

Change!

All the women stand, and move to the table to their right. ANGELA sits in the empty chair opposite Peter.

ANGELA

So.

PETER

Ah, yes. Er...

ANGELA

We have two minutes. What do you wish to talk about?

PETER

Oh, right, yes, well. I, er, have three questions which I have been asking all the women I meet. I think it is the most objective way of judging.

ANGELA

Judging what, exactly?

PETER

Well, you know... the probability of us being compatible. It's what I do for a living, you see. Statistics, probabilities-

ANGELA

How unutterably dull.

PETER

Do you think so? Oh, sorry, my name's Peter.

ANGELA

Names. The last refuge of the truly anonymous, adrift on the sea of atomisation.

PETER

Er... what? Oh, I didn't catch your name.

ANGELA

I didn't throw it. It's Angela (with a hard "g")

PETER

Angela (with a soft "g"), that's a pretty name.

ANGELA

(sternly)

Angela (hard "g"). Think Merkel, only much less frivolous. I know I have hardly any accent, but I am German. Ask me your questions.

PETER

Okay, first one, backpack or suitcase?

ANGELA

Pfff... what do they contain except the shards of our broken dreams?

PETER

Eh?

ANGELA

Was it your Oscar Wilde who said that nothing narrows the mind quite so much as travel? A fatuous and desperate attempt to find meaning among the oblivion. Peter, you said?

PETER

Peter, yes.

ANGELA

Like the man who betrayed Jesus. A very good decision.

PETER

Hmm. Second question. Do you grow your own vegetables?

ANGELA

Do I... what?

PETER

Grow your own vegetables.

ANGELA

What you lack in originality you more than make up for in banality. Vegetables!

PETER

But I'm sure you eat vegetables.

ANGELA

I eat sometimes to prolong the torture of life. But I rarely notice what I eat.

PETER

But... you know where vegetables come from, surely.

ANGELA

Of course I do. The shop by the tube station.

PETER

And before that?

ANGELA

Before that there is nothing. Just the void, the abyss. But the more I stare into the abyss and the more it stares back, the more appealing becomes the emptiness.

PETER

Angela, what are you actually doing here?

ANGELA

That is your third question?

PETER

No, no... I just can't see what you're hoping to achieve.

ANGELA

Of course you can't. Not with your mind. I am looking for someone with whom to sit in a darkened room pondering the futility of existence.

PETER

My, you certainly know how to enjoy yourself!

ANGELA

Yes, and it's so much more fun with two.

PETER

You're a Nihilist, aren't you?

ANGELA

Pfff... Nihilists... I pity them for their optimism. Almost as bad as the existentialists.

There is a brief blast on a whistle.

MC (O.S.)

Change!

ANGELA

Such a pity.

Angela stands and moves to the table to her right.

SANDRA moves to Peter's table. She carries a SHOULDER BAG.

Peter stands and extends his hand.

PETER

Hello, I'm Peter.

Sandra grasps his hand and shakes it excessively.

SANDRA

(nervously)

Peter, hello, I'm Sandra. Call me Sandy... in fact, call me anything... just so long as you call me!

(laughs)

Where do we start? I'm-

PETER

Sandra, I hope you won't mind but we only have two minutes and I have three questions I am asking all the women I meet here. That way we can see if we want to take it further. What do you think?

SANDRA

Fine with me. Go ahead... ask me anything you like... I'm easy.... well, not-

PETER

Thank you. First question, backpack or suitcase?

SANDRA

Oh, that's so exciting! Backpacking, yes, we could go youth hostelling in the Lakes... or Dartmoor... would you prefer Dartmoor? Oh! Let's go to North Wales... Betys-Y-Coed... some marvellous walks and I can take you to meet my mother.

(Sandra pulls a SMARTPHONE out of her bag.)

Look, I've got one of these phones that does everything...

PETER

Smart.

SANDRA

Why, thank you, Peter. Shall we fix our trip now? There's lovely. We can-

PETER

(laughing)

Hang on, Sandra, not a suitcase, then?

SANDRA

Oh, that's so exciting! Suitcase, yes, we could go on a city break, er... how about Paris? Very romantic... so I've heard.

PETER

(surprised)

You've never been to Paris?

SANDRA

Ah, is that your second question?

PETER

What? Oh, no... it's just that I would have thought pretty much everyone's been to Paris.

SANDRA

Not me, I never had anyone to go with. But look... Ryanair.

(studies phone)

I'm sure there's an app for that... if we take Ryanair, we'll land somewhere and we could be in Paris three or four days later. Shall we fix it now? Tidy. /We can-

PETER

(interrupts at /)

But which do you prefer? You haven't really answered my question.

SANDRA

Are we still on the first question?

PETER

That's right, backpack or suitcase?

SANDRA

Well... either... both... I don't care! What do you think? Or we could just travel light... do we really need luggage at all? Let's go to Bournemouth... tonight!

(studies phone)

Let me find the train timetable... we can buy what we need-

PETER

Hold on, Sandra, please-

SANDRA

Ah, not keen on Bournemouth. Full of geriatrics, take your point. Norwich? They used to film Sale of the Century there... Oxford! Dreaming whatsits-

There is a brief blast on a whistle.

MC (O.S.)

Change!

SANDRA  
 Oh, no... we're getting on so well...  
 what about your other questions?

MC (O.S.)  
 (more insistently)  
 Change!

PETA moves to Peter's table. She is carrying a SMALL BAG. She stands over Sandra.

PETER  
 Sorry, Sandra, that's it. We must  
 obey the rules.

Sandra stands up reluctantly.

SANDRA  
 But your other questions, I must know  
 what they are!  
 (she backs away,  
 reluctantly)  
 Call me, text me, e-mail...  
 Facetime... Instant Messenger...  
 (she continues to back  
 away)  
 Friend me... Follow me...  
 @BonkersSandy... Skype...

Sandra reaches the table to her right and we see her speaking to the man there.

Peta extends her hand towards Peter.

PETA  
 Peta, good evening.

Peter stands and shakes Peta's hand.

PETER  
 What... how did you know?

Peter and Peta sit.

PETA  
 How did I know what?

PETER  
 My name. Peter.

PETA  
 My word. I'm Peta too. P-E-T-A,  
 Peta.

Peter and Peta both laugh. Peta points to the exercise book on the table.

PETA

What do you have there, Peter?

PETER

Oh, this. Well, I have three questions written down that I am asking all the women I meet this evening. I find it to be an efficient use of the two minutes. I think the answers will tell me all I need to know about them.

PETA

Well now, this really is quite spooky!

(reaches into her bag and produces an identical notebook)

I am doing just the same thing.

Peter leans forward, showing his interest.

PETER

Fancy that! This is... promising.

PETA

Isn't it just? First question?

The next two lines are spoken simultaneously.

PETER/PETA

Backpack or suitcase?/Suitcase or backpack?

Peter and Peta laugh together.

PETER

This is quite uncanny. I don't suppose your second question involves vegetables?

PETA

No, it doesn't. (PAUSE) But my third question does! Specifically whether or not you grow your own.

Peter points to the question in his exercise book. They stare at each other for a long moment. Peta leans forward and takes Peter's hands in hers.



PETA  
And your answer?

PETER  
To which question?

PETA  
Suitcase or backpack?

PETER  
Oh, backpack, obviously. Travel  
light, keep your hands free, that's  
my motto.

Peta releases Peter's hands and leans back.

PETA  
I see.

PETER  
Have I said the wrong thing?

PETA  
Yes, you bloody well have.  
Backpacks conjure up images of  
loathsome, self indulgent, badly  
dressed hippies and mud spattered  
festivals of so-called music. I'm a  
suitcase girl.

PETER  
Not too practical when you go  
walking.

PETA  
Then don't go walking. Walking  
where, anyway?

PETER  
Hills, fells... anywhere that  
requires a pair of sturdy boots.

PETA  
(derisively)  
Sturdy boots? Do these feet look  
like they belong in... sturdy boots?

Peter moves to look at Peta's feet under the table.

PETA  
(continuing)  
Actually, I'd rather you didn't look  
at my legs, thank you very much.

Peter sits back up.

PETER

Oh! But please tell me you do grow your own vegetables?

PETA

(irate)

Good God, no. You horny handed sons of the soil make me sick. So holier than thou. I bet you shop at Holland and Barrett and farmers' markets - money back if you're not completely self-satisfied. You do realise, don't you, that if we grew all our food organically, there wouldn't be enough land on the planet to feed half its population?

PETER

Oh dear.

PETA

Oh dear, indeed.

PETER

The third question?

PETA

Stuff the third question!

(stands up and looks O.S)

Oy, you! MC! Don't bother blowing your sodding whistle, we're finished here.

Peta walks briskly away.

PETER

Oh well. Still a few more yet. I'm damned sure I'll get to that third question before the end of the evening.

There is a brief blast on a whistle. A woman wearing a burka walks towards Peter's table and he looks up, full of hope.