

Contemporary Political Ethics (or, How to Cheat) by Jamie Cowan

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By Jamie Cowan

Breakfast Plays: New Tracks

Traverse Festival 2020

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[AUDIO BEGINS]

You're listening to the Traverse Theatre's Breakfast Plays: New Tracks, a series of powerful new podcast plays, fresh from some of Scotland's most exciting new creative voices.

The Breakfast Plays are a key element of the Traverse's talent development activities, and a mainstay of our celebrated Edinburgh Festival programme. They're usually performed at 9am in the morning throughout August, with the audience enjoying a breakfast roll and cup of tea whilst watching – hence the name!

Over the last four months the Traverse's artistic team have worked with five writers to develop new stories for this series of Breakfast Plays, which were each rehearsed and recorded remotely over the span of two days.

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A polling station; a table sits centrestage, with a ballot box on top. A polling booth sits to one side. A folded piece of paper lies underneath the table.

HANNAH and TERRY are seated at the table. Every so often, they shuffle aimlessly through a stack of papers in front of them. KEV plays on his phone; sounds of typing, followed by him occasionally laughing at something he's read.

A clock ticks.

Time goes by.

Hannah: Alright, Kev?

Hannah: Kev?

Hannah: Kev.

Kev: Yeah?

Hannah: Can you put your phone away?

Kev: No.

Hannah: You're not really supposed to have it out.

Kev: Why not?

Hannah: Because it's technically a recording device.

Kev: Well, technically, I'm not recording anything with it.

Hannah: Yes, but to someone coming in, they might not know that. They might think you're recording them.

Kev: It's a good thing I don't give a fuck what they think.

Hannah: Right, I – be that as it may, you can't just –

Kev: There's no law against it.

Hannah: But there is a rule.

Kev: But that's not a law, is it.

Hannah: All laws are rules.

Kev: But not all rules are laws.

Hannah: Ok, let's skip the semantics, how about –

Kev: No.

Hannah: Kev, I am asking you nicely –

Kev: And I am telling you nicely, no.

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Terry: Kev, put the phone away before I shove the fucking thing straight up your arse.

Kev: Alright. Bit strong.

Terry: Do it.

Kev: Alright! Fucking hell, if it means that much to you, I will.

Terry: It's a common courtesy.

Kev: I just said I'm doing it –

Terry: But it's still in your hand.

Kev: Because I'm still in the middle of –

Terry: Then you're not really doing it, are you? You're doing the same thing as before.

Kev: I'm sending a text. Then I can put it away.

Terry: Sending a text is not part of the process of putting your phone away.

Kev: Yes it is dummy, and if you'd let me send it –

Hannah: Stop escalating the situation Terry.

Terry: How am I escalating the situation? I am asking him to put it away –

Hannah: Give him a chance to.

Terry: Give him a chance to? If you asked a serial killer to stop murdering people and he said "oh ok, just let me finish strangling this vagrant", would you just let him finish?

Hannah: There's a bit of a gap between sending a text and ending a life.

Kev: Yeah. Exactly mate. Exactly.

Terry: Is it really necessary to undermine me right now? Do you really think that's appropriate?

Hannah: No one is undermining you.

Kev: Aye mate. No undermining here. Just facts.

Hannah: But Kev, please. Just put the phone away.

Kev: But what's the point? Nothing's happening.

Hannah: You're supposed to be here to learn something. If you pay attention, and look around you, maybe you will.

Kev looks around the room.

Kev: Do you wanna know how many windows there are?

Hannah: What?

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Kev: How many windows are in this room.

Hannah: I don't –

Kev: Eight. Do you wanna know how many radiators?

Terry: Is this really –

Kev: Four. Wanna know how many chairs?

Terry: No.

Kev: Seventy-six. Wanna know –

Terry: No we bloody do not want to know how many chairs. What is this?

Kev: I'm just showing off what I've learnt. I can tell you how many tables there is.

Terry: Oh come on –

Kev: One. That one. Great to know, eh?

Hannah: We get it, Kev.

Kev: What a building, eh? Community centres man. So much fun.

Hannah: You're not here to have fun. You're supposed to be asking questions and observing. If you engaged with that a bit, then maybe the time will just fly by.

Kev: I've been here three hours. Like, what the fuck am I supposed to be learning here, exactly?

Hannah: The fundamentals of democracy. The importance of the voting system. The act that influences the direction this country takes for the next several years.

Kev: Then why's no one turned up?

Terry: Plenty of people have turned up to vote.

Kev: No they haven't.

Hannah: Yes, they have.

Kev: Who?

Hannah: We can't just give you their names Kev.

Kev: No one has shown up. Not since that big fat guy.

Hannah: Do you really need to talk about people that way?

Kev: What? He was a guy wasn't he?

Hannah: Yes, he –

Kev: And he was pretty tall?

Hannah: Sure, but –

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Kev: And he was fat as fuck.

Hannah: Believe it or not, that's the point I had a bit of an issue with?

Kev: What? It's not my fault he's fat. Take it up with him.

Hannah: I am not taking it up with him. I am taking it up with you. Knock it off.

Kev: Fine. Point still stands though.

Terry: We get it. He was fat.

Hannah: Terry.

Terry: What?

Kev: Not that. I mean, no one has shown up.

Hannah: Plenty of people have shown up.

Kev: How many?

Hannah: I don't –

Terry: Fifty six.

Kev: That's it?

Terry: Yep.

Kev: Right. And how many people are supposed to vote today?

Terry: For this station? About a thousand or so.

Kev: Awesome. This is just a fucking hive of activity then.

Terry: So, it's not that many. But I think we can give ourselves a pat on the back for doing a stellar job so far.

Whatever. I'm giving myself a pat on the back then.

Hannah: There's still plenty of time –

Kev: There's an hour left. Not even that.

Hannah: So at least a few more people might come through –

Kev: Oh nice. We might break sixty. What a fucking achievement.

Terry: Yes, but sixty votes is still sixty votes.

Kev: Oh wow. No way. Sixty equals sixty. Look how much I'm learning.

Terry: It's important. It could make all the difference in this election.
Ok, probably not. But it's still important damn it.

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Kev: Right. So every vote matters. Except for when it doesn't. Good stuff that, I'll make sure to make a note of it.

Terry: I thought you said you didn't care about politics?

Kev: I don't.

Terry: Then why are you getting so worked up over it?

Kev: Because I could have been doing literally anything else, and instead I'm stuck here. Fucking Modern Studies.

Terry: You know, I thought you seemed quite eloquent in your letter asking to sit in with us.

Kev: That's because I didn't write it.

Terry: Ah.

Hannah: That explains it.

Kev: I'm the only one they're making do this, you know? The rest just get to write the essay. But not me, I've got to sit here and "observe". Whatever the fuck that means.

Terry: Let me guess. Academic probation?

Kev: Yeah.

Terry: Sounds about right.

Kev: How's that?

Terry: You seem the type.

Kev: The type?

Terry: Yep. The type.

Hannah: Terry.

Terry: What? I'm not saying anything. Just that he seems the type.

Kev: And what type is that?

Terry: The type to get academic probation.

Kev: Yeah?

Terry: Yeah.

Kev: Alright. And how do you spot that type then?

Hannah: Why don't we just do a Q and A or something? You can ask us what it's like to run the station, and we –

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Terry: The way you talk.

Kev: The way I talk.

Terry: You heard me. The way you talk.

Hannah: Or we could stick the radio on. We're not meant to, but –

Kev: And how do I talk, oh wise one? Oh Mr Fucking Miyagi?

Hannah: I think there's a Scrabble set next door –

Kev: Nah, hold on. I want to hear this. How do I talk then?

Terry: Do I really have to spell it out for you? Actually, given your literacy, I might have to.

Kev: Go ahead. Quit stalling and tell me.

Terry: You talk like a scaff.

Kev: Is that right?

Terry: Aye. Like a scaff.

Pause.

Kev: Right. Just wanted to make sure we were on the same page.

Terry: Well we are.

Kev: That's good.

Hannah: Ok, so, how about we talk a bit about how we set up the station? It's actually quite interesting, we –

Kev: Nah. I'm good.

Terry: Me too.

Kev: So. No one got anything to say?

Hannah: We do. But it has to stay on topic.

Kev: Oh my god. Don't you guys ever loosen up a bit?

Terry: This is us being loose.

Kev: Wow. I totally see that now. About as loose as a fucking knot over there.

Kev: So you're seriously not going to say anything unless it's about politics?

Hannah: Nope.

Terry: No.

Kev: Fine. So who'd you guys vote for?

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Hannah: Oh no, we are not discussing that.

Terry: We agreed not to.

Kev: Why not?

Terry: It isn't appropriate.

Kev: How is it not appropriate? This is like the one time and place in the world that it's appropriate.

Hannah: Nope.

Terry: Absolutely not.

Hannah: No politics.

Terry: Not here.

Kev: It's a polling station.

Hannah: Yes.

Kev: Where people vote.

Terry: It is.

Kev: For politicians.

Hannah: Right, but it just isn't good form to discuss it.

Terry: People don't really want to get into that sort of thing.

Hannah: It wrecks friendships.

Terry: Kind of sours the atmosphere.

Kev: Sure.

Terry: So best not to.

Hannah: For all our sakes.

Kev: Alright.

Hannah: So, what do you want to be when you grow up Kev?

Kev: When I grow up?

Hannah: Yeah. When you –

Kev: I'm seventeen.

Hannah: Right. Sorry, it's –

Kev: I'm not like, four.

Hannah: I didn't mean it like that, I –

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Kev: Like, what did you expect me to say? A fucking cowboy?

Hannah: No, I mean – after school, what do you want to do?

Kev: Dunno.

Hannah: Are – are you thinking of what to say?

Kev: No.

Hannah: Oh. Ok.

Kev: My answer was “dunno”. Wasn’t that enough?

Hannah: Sure. Yeah.

Kev: Then quit asking.

Kev: Besides, what did you want to do with your life? Run the most boring fucking polling station in the world?

Hannah: No, I – never mind.

Kev: Nah, go on. Tell me. It’s only fair, right?

Hannah: I wanted to be a bounty hunter.

Terry: I’m sorry, what?

Kev: What the fuck?

Hannah: You know. Like they used to have on TV. One of those people that rides around, hunting bad guys. Getting in shoot-outs and stuff. It always seemed like fun to me.

Kev: You wanted to be a bounty hunter?

Terry: You?

Hannah: Yes, me. And why not? You got to make the world a better place, you got to travel around –

Terry: You got to blow people away with guns.

Hannah: That too. I mean, it always seemed pretty cool.

Kev: Plus it’s not like you’d need qualifications or anything.

Hannah: Yeah. Just a gun. But in retrospect, it’s maybe for the best that it didn’t happen.

Kev: Why not?

Hannah: Kev, I don’t think I really need to explain why it’s a good thing that I didn’t become a gun-toting vigilante.

Kev: So what do you do instead?

Hannah: I’m a carer.

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Kev: Oh. Yeah, maybe for the best then. You wouldn't want to accidentally shoot someone doing that.

Terry: It'd be a bit hypocritical.

Hannah: How about you Kev?

Kev: Dunno, haven't really thought about it.

Hannah: That's a lie.

Kev: It's the truth.

Terry: Seriously? You've never thought about what you wanted to do with your life?

Kev: Nah, I have but – it doesn't matter.

Hannah: I told you mine. Only seems fair that you get to share now.

Kev: Yeah, but – it's dumb.

Terry: This'll be good.

Kev: Shut up. It's – I wanted to be a scientist.

Terry: Ok.

Kev: Don't laugh.

Terry: I'm not.

Kev: I can see you.

Terry: I'm really not. It's just – why?

Kev: Dunno.

Hannah: That's not an answer.

Kev: Because – I saw it in a film right? When I was younger. Some guy, working in a lab. With chemicals and stuff, right? And – I dunno. Thought it seemed fun. And people respect them, right? Scientists. So, yeah.

Hannah: That sounds – yeah. Lovely.

Terry: Nice. I think you'd make a good scientist. Making up those little DIY volcanoes.

Hannah: Terry.

Terry: What? It's a compliment. I think you'd be great at pouring vinegar into baking soda. Must be good money in that. Seems exactly the sort of job you'd be suited for.

Kev: Shut up.

Kev: What about you?

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Terry: Not much. Trying to, you know, get my foot in the door.

Kev: Of what?

Terry: Politics.

Kev: Oh fuck off.

Hannah: He ran for MP a couple of years ago.

Kev: How'd that work out for you?

Terry: What do you think?

Kev: Not very fucking well, I'd say.

Terry: It was rhetorical.

Kev: Don't have to be sore about it. So you lost. Big deal.

Terry: It is a big deal.

Kev: Alright then, scratch what I just said. Be sore about it.

Terry: I don't think I need you to tell me –

Kev: I'm not telling you, I'm just saying –

Terry: Do you think I actually give a shit what –

Hannah: Oh my god, can you both just stop. You're both giving me a fucking headache.

Terry: Well, that was a great use of time.

Kev: Yeah. Like this whole fucking day. Great fun right here.

Terry: I'd apologise for it not living up to your high expectations, if you weren't such a little shit.

Hannah: Terry!

Terry: Can you honestly tell me he isn't being a little shit?

Hannah: Of course he isn't.

Kev: Took you a long time to answer that.

Hannah: I just needed a minute to think.

Kev: Should have been instant. Should have been "of course he isn't, and fuck you too Terry you massive twat."

Hannah: Is that how you talk at school?

Kev: Why do you think I'm on academic probation?

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Terry: Knifing the first years?

Kev: Hilarious. Fuck you.

Hannah: How about a Q and A? That might be fun.

Kev: That might actually just make me start knifing you guys instead.

Terry: Is that a threat?

Kev: Depends. Do you want to get knifed?

Terry: Depends. Think you could figure out which is the sharp end?

Kev: Are you for real?

Hannah: Kev. Ask us a question?

Kev: What's your favourite film?

Hannah: About politics.

Kev: Christ. I dunno. Who's the best politician?

Hannah: Right, not that, how about –

Kev: Why not? That's political right?

Hannah: There is no "best politician".

Kev: Ah. Gotcha. Cause they're all shite.

Hannah: No, because that's like asking who's the best human being. You can't quantify that. It's way too difficult to pick one.

Kev: Alright then. I'm out of ideas.

Hannah: Seriously? And what do you think will happen when you hand in a politics essay with no politics in it?

Kev: Dunno. Get a pass?

Hannah: Really? You don't think you'll get academic probation again?

Kev: Dunno. Maybe.

Hannah: And what do you think they'll do when that happens?

Kev: Dunno.

Hannah: Try something other than saying "dunno." How about, they pick yet another dull, humdrum event such as this and make you sit in to write another essay? And they'll keep doing that over and over and over until eventually, you just give them what they want and let you move on. So why not save yourself the trouble and just, you know, get on with it now?

Kev: Don't need to be like that about it.

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Hannah: Apparently, I do. Because you just don't seem to be getting the point here.

Kev: I do, I just – it's hard, alright?

Hannah: That's not an excuse. And it'll only get harder if you don't do it.

Terry: They could just expel you too.

Kev: So I wouldn't have to do anything then?

Terry: I suppose.

Kev: Sweet. I'll take that one then.

Hannah: Terry.

Terry: What? I'm just laying out all the options –

Hannah: You were the one complaining about undermining not two minutes ago –

Terry: Yeah, but –

Hannah: It doesn't apply when it's in reverse?

Terry: I'm the polling officer though. You're the clerk. I can't undermine someone who's below me, that doesn't make sense. If anything, I overmined you.

Hannah: It's not a question of fucking semantics Terry, it's –

A phone goes off.

Terry: Seriously?

Hannah: Did we not have this conversation earlier?

Kev: What? So because you two can't calm your shit down, you're taking it out on me just because I got a text?

Terry: We told you to turn it off.

Hannah: It's completely disrespectful and unprofessional.

Terry: Exactly.

Kev: I'm not gonna even point out how fucking stupid what you just said was. No wait, actually I am. You two just fucking went off on each other like fucking monkeys and now you say I'm being disrespectful? Fuck off with that.

Terry: We are capable of having a heated debate while preserving the integrity of the polling station. Is that so difficult to understand?

Kev: Yeah. Because fucking hell, you two are mental. Like, genuinely, fucking mental.

Hannah: Let's not start in with that.

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Kev: Why, is it disrespectful and unprofessional?

Terry: No, it's – this is exactly what undermining gets you.

Hannah: Yeah. It really is.

Terry: I was directing that comment at you.

Hannah: I know.

Kev: You're not about to off on one again are you? Because I can get that kind of entertainment at home thanks.

Hannah: No one is going off on one.

Terry: I wouldn't be too sure of that.

Kev: Are you two married or something? Is that why you're like this?

Hannah and Terry: No.

Kev: Then what the fuck is the deal here?

Hannah: We're colleagues.

Terry: Yeah. Colleagues.

Kev: That's it?

Hannah: We've polled together before.

Terry: Yep. Just a pair of regular old pollsters, us.

Kev: And the other pollsters, are they as fucking weird as you?

Hannah: We are not – running a station well is a difficult and stressful job. Sometimes, things get a bit tense.

Terry: Yes. A bit strained. We don't always see eye to eye.

Hannah: On polling.

Terry: On a lot of things.

Hannah: The point is, this is perfectly normal.

Terry: Perfectly understandable.

Hannah: As you can see now, we are perfectly calm.

Terry: Perfectly controlled.

Hannah: There is absolutely no tension here.

Terry: Not a drop.

Hannah: Because we are professionals.

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Terry: We are running an election.

Hannah: We have to be.

Terry: We're helping decide the future of this country, after all.

Hannah: Now, I'm just going to go get us some coffee. Because we are all needing a bit of relaxation, yes?

Terry: Absolutely. A bit of R and R, as they say.

Hannah: Yes Terry. Good choice of words that. I totally agree.

Terry: I am glad.

Hannah exits.

Terry: Bitch.

Kev: Who, me?

Terry: No, her.

Kev: But you just said –

Terry: I know what I said. Doesn't make it any less true. I'm being professional, she isn't.

Kev: Who gives a shit? Literally, who gives a shit about professionalism or whatever. I don't. So you don't have to pretend for me.

Terry: But the people that matter care.

Kev: Thanks a bunch.

Terry: No, I mean voters.

Kev: Why do you care what voters think?

Terry: Because I ran once, and I'm going to run again.

Kev: You only ran once? Fat bastard.

Terry: Very funny. I'm being serious.

Kev: So was I.

Kev opens up his phone. Starts sending a text.

Terry: You know, I'm not blind. I can still see you.

Kev: Yeah?

Terry: Phone away. Now.

Kev: Why? So we can "talk"? Be honest, you don't actually want that.

Terry: I'm actually trying to do you a favour here.

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Kev: Is that what this is?

Terry: Yes. I'm trying to give you a few pointers. For your essay, and for yourself.

Kev: Don't need them.

Terry: Think about it. You can't just breeze through life saying and doing whatever you want. People aren't going to respect you. I mean, take me for instance; I could be a good friend, a good mentor for you, but there's no way I'm going to feel inclined to help you acting like this.

Kev: Sounds a bit dodgy mate.

Terry: No it doesn't –

Kev: Does. "A good friend?" Ever heard of stranger danger?

Terry: Forget it. This is exactly what I'm talking about. You've got no self-control, no capacity for politeness.

Kev: So? Who gives a shit?

Terry: It's your image that suffers.

Kev: Image? Fuck image. No one cares about image.

Terry: Image is pretty fucking important. You've got to be in control all the time. Sure, you can be a bit of a surly prick these days and still do well, but you can't just lose your shit in public whenever you want. Makes you look weak.

Kev: But talking shit about someone once they've left the room makes you look big?

Terry: It's a private conversation. I'm telling you this in confidence.

Hannah re-enters.

Kev: Oi, Terry thinks you're a bitch.

Terry: For fuck's sake –

Hannah: Well that's just charming, thanks a ton.

Terry: That is not what I said.

Kev: That is literally what you said, then spent five minutes trying to justify.

Terry: I didn't –

Kev: You did.

Hannah: Can we also talk about the state of the room a second? I mean for god's sake, if you'd stop calling me a bitch for five minutes, maybe it wouldn't kill you to pick this crap up off the –

Pause.

Terry: What?

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Hannah: Take a guess.

Terry: Oh for fucks sake.

Hannah: Has this been here the whole time? Seriously?

Terry: Well you didn't spot it either.

Kev: What is it?

Hannah: A ballot paper.

Kev: Wow. Amazing.

Hannah: This is a serious issue. Why was it on the floor?

Terry: I don't know. It must have been dropped at some point.

Hannah: It's not good.

Kev: Why not?

Hannah: It's spoiled.

Kev: Yeah, but can't you just like, wipe it?

Hannah: Not that kind of spoiled.

Terry: It means that it can't be counted.

Kev: Why not?

Terry: It wasn't placed in the box.

Kev: So put it in.

Hannah: We can't put it in.

Kev: Why?

Hannah: Because it isn't our vote.

Terry: It could be classed as interference.

Hannah: Which means the entire station is discounted.

Kev: Oh.

Beat.

Kev: Well it's not like that many votes would be lost, in that case.

Hannah: That isn't the point.

Terry: The point is, if the vote isn't placed into the box by the person that filled it out, then it can't be counted. It's an ethics issue.

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Kev: Well shit.

Terry: Exactly. Shit.

Beat.

Kev: Who'd they vote for?

Hannah: It doesn't matter, and it isn't any of our business.

Kev: Why not?

Hannah: It's private. We aren't supposed to know who they vote for.

Kev: But we don't even know who it belongs to.

Hannah: So?

Kev: How can you violate someone's privacy if you don't even know they are? It's like that saying, about trees and shit. You know, if a tree falls, no one knows.

Pause.

Terry: Holy shit, that isn't even close Kev.

Kev: Yeah, well, you can't blame me for wanting to know. That vote could change this entire country. Right?

Terry: Nope.

Kev: Oh. Then what was all that shit about democracy and the importance of voting?

Terry: That's just what we're supposed to say.

Kev: So what we do we do now?

Hannah: Well, we're going to have to make a note of what happened, and then –

Terry: Nope. Not happening. Do you know how stupid I'd look as presiding officer for letting an uncast vote sit underneath the desk for hours? We're not making a note of it.

Hannah: So what the fuck are we supposed to do with it?

Terry: I don't know. Just let me think for a second.

Beat.

Hannah: Alright, there's your second. Now what?

Terry: Just shut up for a minute, ok?

Hannah: Oh so it's a minute now? What next, an hour? Oh wait, we don't have an hour, because the polls will have closed and we'll be counting by then. Just put it in the adjudication tray and –

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Contemporary Political Ethics (or, How to Cheat) by Jamie Cowan

Terry: And what? This isn't a case of some dipshit scoring out all the candidates' names and writing "Paul Chuckle for President" on it. An adjudicator won't look at it and see a spoiled vote. They'll ask why it was put there.

Kev: Oh my fucking god man, who cares. So it sat under the desk a little while. Big whoop.

Terry: How exactly am I meant to be taken seriously as a political candidate if I can't even run a polling station – one of the deadest polling stations in the country I might add – without allowing a fuck-up like this happening on my watch?

Kev: D –

Terry: If you say "dunno" one more time I am going to scream.

Kev: Alright. I am uncertain.

Terry: Fucking hell.

Beat.

Terry: We rip it up.

Hannah: Absolutely not.

Terry: It's the obvious solution.

Hannah: You're already in a bit of a mess as is, so digging yourself a deeper hole doesn't really seem practical to me.

Terry: This is not digging a deeper hole. This is digging a hole right through to the other side of the earth. It's digging a tunnel really, a tunnel with a giant fucking light at the end of it.

Hannah: Hardly.

Terry: It makes sense.

Hannah: It's as bad as sticking it in the box.

Kev: Don't see how that's right, but whatever.

Hannah: It's unethical.

Terry: But if we destroy it, it's like it never existed.

Hannah: So?

Terry: If it never existed, then there wouldn't be an ethics issue. Do you understand me?

Kev: Not really.

Terry: Well I wasn't asking you, I was asking her. If that vote gets destroyed, then everything goes right back to the way it was. Kev being a pain in the fucking ass, you trying to keep the peace and me doing a great job. It'll be perfect.

Hannah: But it'll still have happened.

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Terry: No it won't. We just need to all say that it didn't happen, and it won't have happened. We're the only witnesses to it happening, so it's not like anyone can contradict us.

Hannah: But that's not the truth –

Terry: I can't believe I'm saying this, but Kev was right. About the tree thing. If a tree falls, and everyone who witnessed it agrees not to say a word about it, does it make a sound?

Hannah: Well I don't agree. So what happens if fifty percent of the people who witnessed it decide to say that it did fall? What, does it only make fifty percent of the sound?

Terry: This is serious. We have a major ethics violation on our hands.

Hannah: No we don't. We would if you had your way, but right now all we have is a very minor error that can be easily –

Terry: A minor error. Do you know how much room there is for minor errors in politics? Not fucking much. Not without having everyone tear you down on a daily basis. Not without having everyone stonewall you when you go to make a change. Not without –

Hannah: Terry love, you aren't in politics, you work in a call centre –

Terry: But I'm going to. One day, I am going to represent this constituency, and when I do –

Hannah: You had less than one percent of the –

Terry: And when I do, I am not going to have this day get dragged up and used to smear my –

Hannah: Terry, politicians shag pigs and get made prime minister for it, this really isn't that big a deal –

Terry: That isn't who I'm going to be. I am going to lead this country into a bright new future, and when I do –

Hannah: Terry, people voted for someone else for very simple reasons. And it had nothing to do with clerical errors. Ok?

Terry: I know what you're about to say, and I'm sorry, but there's no point bringing it up –

Hannah: I'm not going to say anything else, I'm just saying that –

Terry: We are not discussing this –

Hannah: I'm not trying to discuss it, I'm trying to let you know that this isn't a big deal. It's a blip. It's fine. Let's just resolve it, democratically and move on.

Beat.

Kev: You have to shag pigs to be prime minister?

Hannah: It's not actually part of the job requirement.

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Terry: I have tried so very fucking hard to get this station running smoothly. I have spent weeks preparing myself for this. And for what? For fifty-six people to come through the door. Fifty-six. Pathetic. And even then, we still fuck this up.

Hannah: Why don't we just all take a deep breath, and relax. This has a very easy solution.

Terry: And what's that?

Hannah: We take a vote. It's simple. We just vote on what the right way forward is. It'll be good; especially for you Kev. You'll get to see the practical impact of what a vote entails. Now, let's try it. Who votes to rip it up? Raise your hand.

Hannah: Ok, just Terry. Now who votes to put in the tray?

Hannah: Um, ok, just me. Kev, you can vote on this as well, you know?

Kev: I vote we put it in the box.

Hannah: Ok, but that wasn't one of the –

Kev: Yeah but it's what I want to do, yeah?

Hannah: I – ok. Who votes to put it in the box.

Hannah: Just Kev.

Hannah: Ok, so this really didn't work out the way I pictured it would.

Kev: The fuck was the point of that?

Terry: We have literally just wasted time.

Hannah: Voting is a fair and democratic –

Kev: Nah, bollocks to that. I'm writing down how shite that was. Make a real point of that in this essay.

Hannah: Just because it didn't pay off the way we thought it would doesn't mean –

Terry: Your essay?

Kev: Yeah. Might as well. Might make that it's own little section, "why voting is total bollocks because it achieves nothing."

Terry: You've still been taking notes then?

Kev: Well you were going on about it so fucking much, I thought it'd make you shut up.

Terry: What have you been taking notes about?

Kev: I've got some on why voting is the best thing ever, why it's the worst thing ever, and a bit about how polling officers are total shitheads who need to leave the house once in a while.

Terry: But you haven't been taking notes about what we've been talking about? Just now?

Kev: No.

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Terry: Kev. Be honest.

Hannah: What are you getting at?

Terry: I just want to know –

Hannah: If he wrote down that you're trying to destroy a vote rather than just mark it as spoiled?

Terry: No. Ok, yes.

Kev: Nah, I didn't.

Terry: Thank god.

Kev: I can put that down now though, if you like.

Terry: Absolutely not.

Kev: Nah, but it might be quite good right?

Terry: How exactly would that be good?

Kev: Exposing corruption and shit. Isn't that something people like?

Terry: There is no corruption here.

Hannah: There most definitely is.

Terry: No, there is not. Nothing actually happened. It was just floated. As an idea.

Hannah: Right. Kev, put down that no tampering was actually conducted, just that the polling officer is guilty of conspiracy.

Kev: What?

Hannah: Conspiracy. He's guilty of conspiracy.

Kev: What conspiracy?

Hannah: Election tampering.

Kev: Oh. Thought you meant UFO's or something. That'd be cool.

Hannah: Just put it down.

Terry: Do not write that. That is a direct instruction.

Kev: Don't work for you mate.

Terry: I know that, but –

Kev: I'm putting it down.

Terry: Fine. Go ahead. Not like anyone is going to believe you anyway.

Kev: Nah, think they will.

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Terry: Really? They'll believe the kid on academic probation just uncovered a conspiracy to tamper with an election?

Kev: Yeah.

Terry: And how do you figure that?

Kev: Because I saw it happen.

Terry: Just because you saw it happen doesn't mean it actually happened.

Kev: Are you a hippy or something? Like, what does that actually mean?

Terry: There's no evidence it actually happened.

Hannah: I saw it happen as well.

Terry: Yes, but let's be honest here Hannah, you aren't exactly a reliable source.

Hannah: Excuse me?

Terry: You've already demonstrated a streak of insubordination this evening. You're clearly unhappy with your position as clerk here. Seems like it wouldn't be too big of a stretch of you to make up baseless claims to damage my reputation. And engage in some collusion with this malcontent.

Hannah: What exactly is your point?

Terry: I don't think this is the first time you've been in trouble, is it Kev?

Kev: Wow. You must be a fucking wizard.

Terry: Not much of a stretch to say you've been in trouble with the police now, is it?

Hannah: Terry, what are you –

Terry: I'm just pointing out that it's in Kev's best interest now, not to make a huge fuss out of nothing. Because I think the police already know a bit about him. And if he starts making false claims, they won't be too lenient on someone like him.

Beat.

Hannah: Terry. Think very carefully about what you're saying.

Terry: I have thought about it. And I think everything I just said is very true. Isn't it Kev?

Kev: Got nothing to say to you.

Terry: Right. So, no denial then? No rebuttal?

Kev: Got nothing to –

Terry: Yeah yeah, nothing to say, right. Which means I've struck a bit of a nerve, haven't I?

Hannah: Back off, Terry.

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Terry: I'm not speaking to you, I'm speaking to him. I'm just trying to point out the way of the world to him. The way things are.

Hannah: That is not the way –

Terry: It is though. You either get on board or you get run over. That's what happens every day. He might not like it – hell, I might not like it, but that's how it works.

Hannah: Kev, don't listen to him, he doesn't know what he's talking about.

Terry: I do though, Kev. I've lived it. Just like I'm sure you've lived it. But here's a chance for you, right? To get on board. To be on the inside of the tent pissing out, for once. Wouldn't that be nice?

Hannah: How dare you. How fucking dare you try to manipulate him like that.

Terry: This isn't manipulation. This is just me educating him, like we were supposed to be doing. Rather than me taking out my phone and making a quick call to the police –

Hannah: And tell them what –

Terry: And tell them that –

Hannah: That you've just blackmailed –

Terry: That I've defended the sanctity of –

Hannah: Don't even use that word –

Terry: Don't get cocky now, you don't want your name getting dropped as well –

Hannah: That is so completely –

Terry: Yeah yeah, whatever. Now Kev, can we agree not to –

Kev: Fine. Whatever. Just – just back off, alright?

Kev rips a page out of his notebook and tears it up.

Kev: Happy now?

Terry: Mildly. Right. What are we going to do about the vote?

Hannah: We aren't ripping it up.

Terry: Let's not be too hasty here –

Hannah: Not happening.

Kev: Oh my god, please just let him rip it up already. Before I actually just hit one of you.

Hannah: Don't care. Not happening.

Terry: It would solve everything.

Hannah: Not. Happening.

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Terry: We could go back to normal. The way things were an hour ago.

Hannah: First of all, that is an impossibility. Like flapping your arms and flying, or watching the Eurovision and going “wow, I’m gonna listen to that on iTunes later.” We cannot go back to normal Terry. Not after this. Second of all, and I’m slightly surprised I have to say these two words yet again, not happening.

Terry: Come on.

Beat.

Hannah: Is that you’ve been left with? “Come on?” Jesus Christ you are one pathetic individual Terry.

Terry: Please. Isn’t there anything I can do? You name it, I’ll do it.

Hannah: Bribery? Is that what we’ve come to?

Terry: If that’s what it takes.

Hannah: Ok then. Bribery it is. How about this; do you see that corner over there Terry? Between the bulletin board and the water cooler with suspiciously grey looking water floating in it? What I’d like Terry, is for you to over there, and you could take with you... how about this highlighter? That’s right, take this highlighter with you, and go over to that corner there. And when you get there, what I’d really love for you to do, is to pull your trousers down, take that highlighter, and go fuck yourself you ignorant, loathsome fascist.

Beat.

Terry: So, is there anything else, or –

Hannah: Just – can you just leave the room for five minutes? Just five minutes so I can actually breathe and figure this out.

Terry: And then afterwards, will you –

Hannah: Leave. Please.

Terry exits.

Kev: Did you two used to, you know –

Hannah: Used to what? Oh for god’s sake, no. We both did a course at the college a few years back.

Kev: Is that a euphemism?

Hannah: I’m surprised you even know what that word means.

Kev: Don’t you start and all. So you’re friends?

Kev: That a no?

Hannah: It isn’t a yes. He’s... well I mean, look at all the shit that’s just happened. He’s a total arse.

Kev: Understatement.

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Hannah: Think's he's going to revolutionise the country. Which is ironic, given that his platform is basically identical to the current government's one.

Kev: Dunno. Keep going with that, you might start a revolution.

Hannah: Actually, I told a lie; it's the same as the current administration, but with different views on immigration.

Kev: He wants more?

Hannah: He wants a lot less.

Kev: That good or bad?

Hannah: It's... look, I'd say bad. Because I think it's close-minded, xenophobic, and utterly repulsive. But that's just my viewpoint. You don't have to share it.

Beat.

Kev: Kinda feel I do now.

Hannah: Really? You haven't exactly cared about my view until now.

Kev: Nah. I do care.

Hannah: You have a strange way of expressing it.

Kev: Don't want people thinking I'm a total prick. Don't mind people thinking I'm a bit of one, but I'm not all bad.

Hannah: I never said you were.

Kev: He thinks so.

Beat.

Kev: Think he'd chuck me out? If he got into power?

Hannah: Kev, he wouldn't have the power to –

Kev: He would though, wouldn't he? If he had the chance.

Hannah: He absolutely would not–

Kev: Honestly?

Beat.

Hannah: It's not going to happen. He lost by a landslide here.

Kev: Here, though. Right?

Hannah: What do you mean?

Kev: Lost by a landslide here. Lots of other places. And you said he's almost the exact same as the government, right? And lots of people voted them in.

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Hannah: That doesn't mean –

Kev: Means lots of people feel the same way about me as he does, right? Think I'm a scaff. That I'm stupid.

Hannah: His opinion doesn't mean shit. I'm being serious.

Kev: It does though. This isn't about bullying or whatever. It's about me. It's about what I do with my life. It's about people like him who get to say what I get to do; whether I get that job, whether I get that loan, whether I get that house. People like him making all the decisions. And how they feel about people like me.

Beat.

Hannah: Why don't you write about that in your essay?

Kev: What's the point? It's just an essay. They won't even care that much anyway.

Hannah: They might. It's an important thing to express. It might make you feel better.

Kev: Just expressed it to you. Don't feel better.

Hannah: Right, but that doesn't mean you can't try again. Give it some more thought. Write it out nicely and say how you really feel.

Kev: Can I call Terry a twat in it?

Hannah: I don't think that's – you know what? Go for it. You've got my blessing.

A knock at the door.

Hannah: What?

Terry enters.

Terry: Well?

Hannah: Well what?

Terry: Are you ready?

Hannah: Ready?

Terry: You know. To resolve this. Like adults.

Hannah: Like adults? That's a great way of putting it. Given that your solution is to throw all your toys out the pram.

Terry: I'm not here to trade insults. I'm here to solve a problem.

Hannah: A problem that wouldn't even be a problem if you just –

Terry: It's a problem now. You've made it clear that we can't just go back to the way things were. So we might as well address what's happening. Which is that we have a massive fly in the ointment. Only it's not a fly, is it? It's a colossal piece of shit which is stinking up this election.

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Contemporary Political Ethics (or, How to Cheat) by Jamie Cowan

Kev: Why do you want to be a politician so bad anyway?

Beat.

Terry: Why do I... where's this coming from?

Kev: You want to be a politician. You didn't say why though.

Terry: Yes I did.

Kev: No. You said you want to lead the country or whatever. Never said why.

Terry: Because I want to help people.

Kev: That right?

Hannah: Kev, don't –

Terry: Did you put him up to this?

Hannah: No, I didn't –

Kev: She didn't. I just wanted to know, is all.

Terry: I want to help people. Is that enough?

Kev: Right. What people?

Terry: My constituents. The people of this country. Everyone.

Kev: Everyone?

Terry: That's right.

Kev: So, you want to help everyone.

Terry: Yes.

Kev: Every single person.

Terry: That's the definition of everyone.

Kev: Everyone in the country?

Terry: I don't see where this is going –

Kev: What about people outside the country?

Beat.

Terry: What about them?

Kev: What do you want for them?

Terry: That isn't really my concern.

Kev: How not?

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Terry: They aren't part of the country.

Kev: What if they want to be though?

Terry: Are you talking about immigration?

Kev: Yeah.

Terry: Ah. I see what this is. We all want a little honesty from each other, all of a sudden. So how about you Hannah? Why don't you be honest with us.

Hannah: I have been honest.

Terry: I don't think so. You've acted holier than thou this entire time. You've been smug, condescending and overall a pain in my ass.

Hannah: You haven't just confused yourself with me, have you?

Terry: There's that sparkling wit that makes me want to swallow poison. Tell us Hannah, why did you become a carer?

Hannah: To help people, in a practical and necessary way.

Terry: Interesting. It's just not true though, is it? Kev, do you wanna know why Hannah became a carer?

Hannah: Terry, can you just fucking not –

Terry: Bet she didn't tell you she wanted to be a politician too huh?

Kev: She didn't.

Terry: That's how we met. A political studies course.

Kev: People actually study that.

Terry: Yes they do. And Hannah here was one of them. And when Hannah left the course, she realised that image was everything. And what would resonate better with people than a young woman who had dedicated her life to caring for others, who would then suddenly leap into politics to defend those very same people she had spent her life caring for?

Hannah: That's just not – that isn't how it's – just knock it off Terry.

Terry: Notice that she didn't once actually deny it. Because it's true. So when she tells you about how we need to put the vote aside for adjudication – technically that's what we should do. But she's only pushing so hard for it because she knows it'll hurt me. If the roles were reversed? You can bet she'd have torn it up already. In fact, she probably wouldn't have even told us she found it. Just ripped it up and moved on.

Beat.

Kev: Is all that true?

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Hannah: It's not as straightforward as that. And I don't care what he says, I would never destroy a vote. Ever.

Kev: But the rest of its true though?

Hannah: It's... the gist of it is, roughly speaking, true. But I'm not –

Kev: So you're like him then?

Hannah: No. I am not like him. We don't share a single thing in common politically.

Kev: But you want to be in charge?

Hannah: No, I don't want to be "in charge". I want to represent people.

Kev: Sounds like being in charge to me. Why didn't you say?

Hannah: I didn't think it was relevant.

Beat.

Kev: I want to see it.

Hannah: Why?

Terry: Yeah, why?

Kev: If it's so fucking important to everyone, I want to at least see what all the fuss is about.

Hannah: No. If there is at least one thing that we're going to do right tonight, it's that we aren't going to read this person's vote. We at least owe them that level of privacy. And if there's one thing we're going to uphold –

Kev: It's being corrupt as hell?

Hannah: Fine Kev, you got me. I lied to you. By omission. And I'm sorry for that. I really am. And if that makes me corrupt, then fine. You can tar me with the same brush as Terry. But that is not a reason to just tear up the rulebook and do whatever you want. Just because you hate me, and him, does not give you the right to violate the voting process for – for what? That person came in here with one simple, clear goal; to choose the party they want to represent them, and to have the privacy to do so. And no, we'll maybe never know who that mystery person was, but we owe it to them, at least, to respect their privacy, and the privacy of voter's everywhere. So yes Kev, I'm corrupt as hell. But no, I'm not going to just hand the vote over for you to sully.

Beat.

Kev: Wow. You really are a politician.

Hannah: In what sense?

Kev: In that you talk tons of shite. I didn't understand any of that. At all.

Hannah: I think you'll find that my point was very clear –

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Kev: That you're another two-faced dick and because of that we shouldn't look at that vote? Doesn't really add up, does it?

Hannah: Tell me why you want to look at it. Honestly, this time. And I'll consider it.

Kev: Fine. When they told me I was coming here, I thought it was gonna be shit. And guess what? It has been. You've both been shit. This room has been shit. The number of people who actually showed up have been shit. This has been the worst night of my life. I've been threatened, blackmailed and manipulated by two people who keep banging on about "doing the right thing". So you know what? I want to see for myself what is so fucking amazing about that piece of paper that I've had to suffer through all this shit for it. So if you don't mind, I'd like to have a look. Please.

Terry: Hannah, you don't have to listen to –

Hannah: Well I'm hardly going to listen to you, am I? And he did actually answer my question.

Hannah hands him the paper. He unfolds it and looks at it.

Terry: Oh come on. Seriously? Just like that, you hand it right over.

Hannah: Terry. I'm done with this. Just let him read it.

Kev: Huh.

Terry: What?

Kev: Nothing.

Terry: No, tell me. What is it?

Kev: Wouldn't you like to know?

Terry: Yes I would, hence why I asked. Now tell me, what is it?

Kev: Nah. Don't think I will. Not planning on being honest now, am I?

Hannah: So, you've seen it.

Kev: I have.

Hannah: What do you think?

Kev: Think you probably wouldn't have liked the result.

Hannah: Why?

Beat.

Hannah: Oh.

Kev: So. We gonna get on with this or what?

Terry: Yes. I think it's about time.

Kev: Yeah. Think it's pretty dumb that this is what we've been arguing about all evening.

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Terry: Yes, it is. I totally agree. Which is why I want to put the issue to bed, right now.

Kev: Yeah. Me too mate. Me too. I want to put it to a vote.

Terry: Because that worked so well the last time.

Kev: Yeah. But it's fair, isn't it?

Terry: It didn't achieve anything then. It won't achieve anything now.

Kev: Might vote differently this time.

Terry: Oh really?

Hannah: Can we just get on with this? Or do we want to just keep going around in circles until one of us snaps and kills the others?

Kev: Who votes to put it in the box?

Pause.

Kev: No one. Who votes to put it in the tray?

Kev: Just Hannah. Who votes to rip it up?

Kev: Me and Terry. Nice one.

Terry: Ok, that's not what I expected, but... ok. Good work Kev.

Hannah: Is this purely because I didn't tell you –

Kev: Yeah. It is.

Terry: Honesty is the best –

Hannah: Don't gloat. If it's what you two want so badly, get it over with.

Kev: You want me to do it?

Terry: Might as well. You've already got it.

Kev: It's your idea though. Your policy, right?

Terry: That's one way of looking at it.

Kev: Pretty cool, huh? You got me on side after all.

Terry: I did. I'm glad you came round.

Kev: You must be pretty grateful to me.

Terry: I am Kev. I'm very grateful. Now –

Kev: How grateful are you?

Terry: Sorry?

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Kev: You haven't actually said, "thank you."

Terry: Ok. Thank you. Now –

Kev: Nah, but like you mean it.

Terry: I did mean it.

Kev: Don't think so. You didn't put much effort in.

Terry: This isn't really relevant right now –

Kev: It's not relevant?

Terry: No, it's not.

Kev: How not? Just did you a favour.

Terry: Voting for something you believe in isn't doing someone a favour, it's voting for a change you want to see.

Kev: But you benefit from it though.

Terry: Yes, but –

Kev: So I just did you a favour. So thank me.

Terry: Thank you, now can we –

Kev: You did it again. Didn't mean it.

Terry: Oh come on. What exactly are you looking for? A fucking parade? I thanked you, you got my approval, now move on.

Kev: What are you going to do for me?

Terry: What?

Kev: I voted for you. Now what are you going to do for me? I'm your, what's that word you said a while back? Conviction?

Terry: Constituent?

Kev: Yeah. That. I'm your constituent. You represent me. So what are you going to do for me?

Terry: I don't understand what you –

Kev: What. Are. You. Going. To –

Terry: Kev. I'm not going to do anything for you. Because I'm not your MP, I'm not anything to you. You voted for my idea, that's all.

Kev: Right. But if you were my MP, you'd do the same yeah? Not do anything. Because you think I'm shit.

Beat.

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Contemporary Political Ethics (or, How to Cheat) by Jamie Cowan

Kev: You called me a scuff earlier.

Terry: Did I?

Kev: You don't remember?

Terry: Well, things have gotten pretty hectic here, so I –

Kev: So you don't remember.

Terry: I'm sorry, I don't. But if I did, then I apologise unreservedly –

Kev: You do?

Terry: Yes, I do.

Kev: You mean it?

Terry: Of course.

Kev: Because I'm your constituent.

Terry: I – sure. Because you're my constituent.

Kev: Ok.

Beat.

Kev: Alright then. Here goes.

Hannah: Kev, did you just –

Kev: Stick it in the box? Yeah. I did.

Hannah: I don't – why would you do that?

Kev: Deserved it.

Hannah: Who did?

Kev: Figure it out yourself.

Hannah: But – fucking hell, what you've just done is illegal. Totally and utterly illegal. You do understand that right?

Kev: Yep. Don't care. Was the right thing to do.

Hannah: No, putting it in the tray was the right thing to do. The legal thing to do.

Kev: Legal isn't always right, though.

Hannah: Well this is just – I mean – Terry, do you want to chime in with me here? At all?

Terry starts laughing.

Hannah: Oh fuck me, that's never good.

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Contemporary Political Ethics (or, How to Cheat) by Jamie Cowan

Kev: Why?

Hannah: He's not really the laughing type of guy. Not unless it's like, someone falling off a ladder and breaking their neck.

Kev: Oh.

Terry: You really are an idiot Kev. Do you know that? Course you do, it's the entire reason you're here, isn't it?

Kev: Whatever you say.

Terry: I mean, I've met some dumb folk in my time, most of them exactly like you, but never have I ever –

Kev: Exactly like me?

Terry: Yeah. Exactly like you. You lot. Are you going to take offense to that?

Kev: No need. Not sure what you mean by it.

Terry: And there's that stupidity shining through once again.

Hannah: He's not stupid Terry, he's giving you a chance to knock it off.

Terry: Oh is he? Well that's very polite of you Kev. More polite than I would have thought possible.

Kev: You're welcome.

Terry: I'm not thanking you though. I'm just acknowledging the miracle that is taking place before our eyes.

Kev: Careful now.

Terry: Careful? Are you threatening me? Christ, it's one step forwards, two steps back with you isn't it?

Hannah: Look, what you did was wrong Kev, ok? You do get that, right?

Kev: Don't think that's what we're talking about anymore.

Hannah: Terry's just a bit upset, and he's going to quit while he's ahead. Right?

Terry: Why quit when you're ahead? He's the jumped-up little shit who just committed a crime. And believe me, I'm going to –

Kev: Going to what mate? Report me? Could do mate, could do.

Terry: Stop calling me mate.

Kev: Problem is though, they'll give me some shit, yeah? Properly rip into me a bit, but – well I'm a minor, right? Couldn't even vote anyway. Shouldn't have even be put in the position where I had the chance to stick that vote in. But I did. Because you dropped the ball mate.

Terry: Don't call me –

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Kev: So yeah, I'll get some shit, but what do you think's going to happen? They'll toss me in prison? For doing something stupid which didn't actually hurt anyone? Something which you totally neglected to deal with, given your position? Gross negligence, right mate?

Terry: Last warning. Stop calling me that.

Kev: At the end of the day, I'll maybe get more academic probation. Might get expelled or something. Might get cautioned by the police. But I'll be alright. I'll move on. You though? You'll be fucked won't you? Who'd vote for a guy who couldn't even stop a kid from committing election fraud, or whatever it's called? That's you right there. And I hate to break it to you mate, but –

Terry backhands Kev across the face.

Terry: How many fucking times do I have to –

Hannah: Terry, what the fuck are you –

Terry: Do not blame me for this, I gave him plenty of warning –

Hannah: Kev, are you ok –

Terry: Oh sure, go running to him, see if he's fine. Of course he's fine. Not the first time it'll have happened to him, though he could do with getting it a bit more frequently.

Hannah: Shut up. Just, shut up, ok?

Terry: This is exactly the issue. You just side with them all the fucking time. Well I'm sorry, but sometimes this is just the way you need to treat them to –

Kev punches Terry in the face.

Hannah: Stop it –

Terry: Fucking hell –

Kev: What?

Terry: You've broken a tooth you little fucking –

Kev: Nah, don't complain about it. That's just the way you need to be treated, right?

Terry: You little –

Kev: Go ahead, finish your sentence. You've got plenty more to break.

Hannah: Stop it, both of you –

Kev: No offense Hannah, but I don't really give a shit –

Hannah: Well I fucking do, ok? I do give a shit. I actually care very much about what we've tried to do here tonight. And this – this is sick. What the hell is the matter with you?

Kev: I was just –

Hannah: I'm talking to him. Why the hell would you hit him?

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Contemporary Political Ethics (or, How to Cheat) by Jamie Cowan

Terry: I told him not to –

Hannah: That is not a reason. You pathetic man-child. And you, why would you hit him back?

Kev: Take a guess.

Terry: You're done here. Get out.

Kev: Gladly mate, gladly.

Terry: Are you trying to be funny?

Kev: Why? Want another shot?

Terry: I don't give a shit. Even if you won't call the police, I will.

Kev: Alright. Won't make a difference though.

Terry: You're going straight to –

Kev: Prison? Nah, probably not. Aggravated first of all. Second of all, I'm a minor. Third of all, first offence. Kinda made a lot of assumptions about me being in trouble with police back there, didn't

you? And when I tell them about the shit you've been up to, think they'll make me a state's witness or whatever.

Terry: A state's witness?

Kev: Yeah. Like in films and shit.

Hannah: We don't actually have –

Kev: Whatever. Point is, it's over. Isn't it Terry?

Beat.

Kev: Say it's over.

Beat.

Kev: Go on. Say it.

Terry: Fine. It's over.

Kev: See? Not so hard. Now get up. Want a hand?

Terry: From you? Fuck off.

Kev: Being polite mate. Come on now. Let me help you.

Kev reaches down. Terry takes his hand. As Terry starts to get to his knees, Kev punches him again with his free hand.

Kev: "You lot." Fucking prick.

Hannah: No!

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Contemporary Political Ethics (or, How to Cheat) by Jamie Cowan

Kev: He's fine.

Hannah: He is clearly not fucking fine –

Kev: Well he will be, won't he? Might not smile ever again, but that's not such a bad thing.

Hannah: Why would you –

Kev: Because that's just it, isn't it? I've spent the whole night listening to him. Letting him provoke me. Letting him say and do whatever he wants to me. And I've been peaceful. I've listened to it. I've taken it on the chin. And what does he do? He does whatever he wants to me. Hits me. And what happens when I hit back? You act like I'm just as bad for it. That I'm the same as him. Well I'm not the same as him, alright? You are. So if he's broken another tooth, or got a concussion, or whatever – I don't give a shit. It's inevitable.

Kev grabs his notebook – now ripped and battered – off the floor.

Kev: Fucking hell. Do you know much shit I'm going to get over this? "Can't even look after a notebook, can you Kev?" Unreal man, unreal.

Hannah: Is that all you can think about right now? I mean, look at the state of him.

Terry: I think I swallowed a tooth.

Hannah: Do you hear that? He thinks he swallowed a tooth.

Kev: Shame. Oh well.

Hannah: Shame? Shame? Is that all you have to say?

A phone alarm goes off.

Kev: What's that?

Hannah: What do you think? The polls just closed.

Hannah: Where do you think you're going?

Kev: Done ain't we?

Hannah: No we are not done. You can't just walk out of here –

Kev: I can though. Democracy, ain't we?

Hannah: I'm going to have to –

Kev: Yeah yeah, I know. Go ahead. Doesn't bother me.

Terry: All this over a fucking vote. I lost a tooth because some idiot couldn't even –

Kev: Oh yeah. Wanna hear something funny?

Terry: No.

Kev: That vote? The one we argued about all evening? The one that cost you a tooth? Although I'd argue that it's your fucking fascism that cost you that –

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Terry: Get to the point.

Kev: It was blank. Not even filled in.

I know right? Fucking hysterical. Gives me something to think about.

Terry: About being a fucking psychopath?

Kev: Nah mate, in terms of what I want out of the world and shit. What I can do for it.

Terry: Do for it?

Kev: You both suck, you know that? Put either of you in charge, we'll be killing each other in the streets in no time. Nah mate, you need someone with some class. Someone who knows how to fight for the real stuff, you know?

Terry: Since when did you get so fucking zen about politics?

Kev: Gotta thank you guys for it though. It's you that've done this.

Hannah: Done what?

Kev: Made me realise what I want to do with my life.

Terry: Oh god no.

Hannah: What do you want to do with your life?

Kev: I'm gonna be a politician. And I'm gonna be the exact opposite of you two.

Hannah: Oh god.

Kev: I know right? Pretty fucking good idea, I think.

Hannah: Kev, you –

Terry: You can't just –

Kev: What, be a politician? So I should leave it to you wankers who can't even run a polling station? Nah, don't think so. Think I'd be pretty good actually. Got the right attitude and such.

Hannah: The right attitude? Are you being serious or is this just one last, sad joke?

Kev: Making things better. Fighting for stuff. That's all you need right?

Terry: But you haven't got – you can't just –

Kev: Anyway, polls closed right? That's all I had to stay for, to do my essay. So if you don't mind, I'm off. Gotta get this shit written and stuff. Then think about my campaign.

Kev walks to the door.

Kev: Hey, if it makes you guys feel any better, I did learn something after all today.

Terry: But it wasn't really –

Hannah: It wasn't what we meant –

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Kev: Cheer up. You guys can always say you inspired your future prime minister.

Beat.

Kev: Might leave that bit about fighting out of the essay though. And the campaign. Probably won't play well with the voters.

Kev exits. The door slams shut.

Hannah and Terry stare at each other.

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Contemporary Political Ethics (or, How to Cheat) by Jamie Cowan

Thank you for listening to *Contemporary Political Ethics (or, How to Cheat)* by Jamie Cowan.

It was directed by Gareth Nicholls and performed by Robbie Jack, Bhav Joshi, and Anna Russell Martin, with sound design by Kim Moore and sound engineering by Richard Bell.

This year's Breakfast Plays were generously supported by the Noel Coward Foundation and the Turtleton Charitable Trust. If you'd like to support our work with new writers year-round, please go to traverse.co.uk/support-us. Every donation makes a huge difference.

And if you enjoyed this, there are four more plays in the series available. You can also check out more of our work on our website. Thanks for listening.

[END OF AUDIO]

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