

Normal

by Paul Wallis

(UK)

I have been writing plays since I was at school and as a result am now a drama teacher. I have an MA in Advanced Theatre Practice and would very much like to be a professional writer. I have written poems, songs, plays, film scripts and am currently working on a novel, though as yet none of my work has been published. I have successfully avoided celebrity for many years by being at a constant stream of parents' evenings and department meetings. I have Peter Cushing's autograph, and am very proud of it.

Normal © Paul Wallis.

Requests to reproduce and/or perform the text in whole or in part
should be addressed to Paul Wallis at wallis.paul1@gmail.com

Characters

Davy

Mum

Inspector 0128

Inspector Inspector 0111

Inspector Inspector Inspector 0666

Davy is flicking cards into a hat. He takes his time about this. Nearby, his homework lies unfinished. Presently, Mum enters with a basket of washing to fold. Davy watches her with half an eye, but continues flicking cards for a while.

Davy: Mum?

Mum: Davy?

Davy: Why haven't I got a dad?

Mum: I've told you, we can't afford one.

Pause.

What's your homework about?

Davy: The Battle of Bosworth Field...acids and alkalis...Norway.

Mum: Oh. Give us a hand with these.

Davy helps Mum fold sheets. His thoughts seem to be elsewhere.

What's on your mind?

Davy: Well...the other day I was reading this book in the library. It was about the universe. There was a picture of a gravestone where two astronomers were buried. The inscription said, 'We have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night.'

Pause.

Mum: Go on.

Davy: I began thinking about the atoms in my body, their journey from the nuclear furnace of the Big Bang to their present arrangement. Millions upon millions of untold stories. In *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare writes, 'Golden lads and girls all must, as chimney sweepers, come to dust'. But that's not the end of it. We move on. If time and space are indeed endless, we shall in due course become all things.

Pause.

NORMAL

Mum: You haven't discussed this with anyone, have you?

Davy: No.

Mum: Only...it's random inspections this week. We can't really afford to...um...stand out.

Davy: Right.

Mum: So, if anyone asks what you're into...

Davy: Football, Game Boy, Britney Spears.

Mum: Good lad.

Davy: Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?

Mum: That's the ticket.

Davy: Skateboards?

Mum: At the moment – yes. Always a tricky one.

Davy: Model railways?

Mum: I think they'd suspect.

Davy: Fishing?

Mum: Definitely out.

Davy: Quasar?

Mum: OK.

Davy: Grouting?

Mum: No.

Davy: Little silver scooters?

Mum: For the time being.

Davy: Bonsai?

Mum: Davy...

Davy: Puppetry?

Mum: I think not.

Davy: Bowling?

Mum: Ten-pin?

Davy: Lawn.

Mum: No.

Pause.

Davy: What's so great about being normal?

Mum: They leave you alone.

Pause.

Davy: Your turn.

Mum: Me?

Davy: Best to be prepared.

Mum: All right.

Davy: Occupation?

Mum: Housewife.

Davy: Hmm...

Mum: What's up?

Davy: Sort of implies a husband.

Mum: Oh...

Davy: Use your part-time job.

Mum: Shop assistant.

Davy: Hobbies?

Mum: Kung Fu, Tai Chi, fixed base jumping...

Davy: Mum...

Mum: Knitting, crochet, gardening.

Davy: Thoughts on the government's track record?

Mum: Tends towards knee-jerk rather than sober deliberation.

Davy: Pardon?

Mum: Oh, I expect they're doing all they can. It's a difficult job, isn't it? Everyone's an expert.

Mum and Davy finish folding.

Davy: Are the inspectors normal?

The doorbell rings.

Who could that be?

NORMAL

Mum: Homework.

Davy: Roger that.

Mum: Davy...

Davy: Yes, mum.

Mum goes out to answer the door. Davy quickly clears up all the cards and the hat, then settles himself with the Battle of Bosworth Field. Mum returns, accompanied by Inspector 0128.

Mum: Well, here we are. This is my son, Davy.

Davy: Hello.

Mum: Davy, this is...I'm sorry, what did you say your name was?

0128: My *number* is 0128.

Davy: Can I call you Zero?

Mum glares at Davy.

0128: There's no need for you to call me anything.

0128 takes an alarmingly careful look around the place.

Lived here long?

Mum: Er...five years?

0128: Are you asking me that, or telling me?

Mum: Telling you.

Slight pause.

Davy: We've lived here five years.

0128: Sure?

Davy: Yes.

0128: Don't want to change your mind?

Davy: Absolutely not.

0128: So, let me get this quite clear. You're saying that you and your mother have lived at this address for the past five years. Correct?

Davy: That's what I'm saying.

0128: Are you in agreement?

Mum: Oh, yes.

0128: I see.

Mum: Would you...would you like a cup of tea?

0128: I'll be asking the questions, madam. Now, take a deep breath – here we go. The information you provide is protected by law and treated in strictest confidence. If it proves inaccurate, you may be liable to anything from a fine to permanent incarceration without trial. Should any queries arise, please dial the Helpline number...

Davy: What is the Helpline number?

0128: I'll give it to you if any queries arise. Is your household self-contained?

Mum: Well...it does *contain* itself.

Davy: I think this may be about shared facilities. Is that right?

0128: I'm not at liberty to say.

Davy: Can I have the Helpline number?

Mum: We don't share any facilities.

0128: Would you share facilities if required to do so?

Mum: We're quite flexible.

0128: Number of rooms – not including bathrooms or cupboards?

Davy: A cupboard's not a room.

Mum: Davy...

Davy: Well, it isn't. Do some people get those mixed up?

0128: You'd be surprised, Sonny Jim.

Mum: Four. We've got four rooms. Davy's room, my one, the kitchen and this one.

0128: Quick thinking, madam. Do the walls in all *four* rooms reach the ceiling?

Mum: Er...

Davy: Helpline number?

0128: Bath/shower/toilet?

Mum: Sorry?

0128: Do you have a bath?

Mum: Well...as often as possible.

0128: What about a shower?

Mum: Oh, I'd love a shower.

0128: Toilet?

Mum: We have one – but I don't feel the same way about it.

0128: [*advancing on Mum*] Individual interviews. Name?

Mum: Mum. Er...Mary.

0128: Sex?

Mum: Not for some time now.

0128: Are you in full-time education?

Mum: No.

0128: This question is not applicable in England.

Davy: What was it?

0128: Never you mind. [*back to Mum*] Over the past twelve months, would you say your health has been good/fairly good/not good?

Mum: I'd say it's fluctuated.

0128 cannot find a tick-box for this.

0128: Good/fairly good/not good?

Mum: Fairly good.

0128: Have you ever worked?

Mum: Oh, I'm quite functional.

0128: Professional qualifications?

Mum: That'd be nice.

0128: What is the full title of your main job?

Mum: Shop assistant.

0128: Describe what you do at work.

Mum: Well, people come into the shop with a lifetime of anxieties, which they express indirectly as enquiries about merchandise, and I have to act as a buffer between their fury and the capitalist imperatives of my employer.

0128: Shall I call for back-up?

Mum: I sell goods.

0128: That's better. [*spinning to face Davy*] Your go. Name?

Davy: You know my name – it's Davy.

0128: Sex?

Davy: Maybe – in a couple of years.

0128: Are *you* in full-time education?

Davy: Certainly feels that way.

0128: Hobbies?

Davy: Er...football, Game Boy, Britney Spears.

0128: Which team?

Davy: Team?

0128: Football team. Which one?

Davy: Well...which one do you support?

0128: No, no clues.

Davy: What was that Helpline number again?

0128: Nice try.

Davy: Football team?

0128: Yes.

Mum: Shall I put the kettle on?

0128: Remain where you are, madam. [*to Davy*] See that tree in the garden?

Davy: Yes.

0128: Go and stand in front of it.

NORMAL

*Davy looks at Mum, who shrugs. He exits to the garden.
0128 watches him go. A pause.*

No – in front of it.

A further pause.

I'm sorry to be the one to break it to you, madam, but I'm afraid your son may be a statistical anomaly.

Mum: A what?

0128: A deviant. [*to Davy*] No, in front of it. [*to Mum*] I'm going to have to try some more subtle and complex tests. He may not be staying here tonight. [*to Davy*] *Find the front!*

Mum: Look, I know he's not your average boy, but there's nothing *wrong* with him.

0128: Anyone who is not average could pose a threat. [*to Davy*] Not even close.

Mum: A threat?

0128: Yes.

Mum: Davy's never threatened anyone.

0128: [*to Davy*] No – try again. [*to Mum*] You have to nip these things in the bud.

Mum: That always sounds so painful.

0128: What's he doing?

Mum: Looks like he's climbing the tree. Yes.

0128: Stop that! Come down this minute!

Mum: Davy, be careful.

0128: He was only supposed to stand in front of it.

Mum: There was an element of trickery there.

0128: It was a lateral thinking test.

Mum: And if he'd passed?

0128: We'd know he wasn't normal. Where's he gone?

Mum: What?

0128: He got to the top – and now he's not there.

Mum: Ah.

0128: What do you mean, 'Ah'? Where is he? The boy can't have vanished.

Mum: I think you may have upset him.

Enter Davy, from the side opposite where he exited, eating a banana.

0128: What? How...?

Davy finishes the banana, then sorts out the cards and the hat.

You were just at the top of that tree – and then you were suddenly in the kitchen.

Davy: Yes.

0128: How?

Davy: Transcendental meditation.

0128 looks for a form relating to this, but can't find one. Davy places the hat, hands Mum some cards and leaves a pile for 0128.

Want to use the Helpline?

Davy begins flicking cards at the hat. Mum more or less resigns herself to the situation and joins him. 0128 tries to adjust to where things have gone.

0128: Er...

Davy: Concentrate.

0128: What...?

Davy: It's almost as if you *become* the hat.

0128: I don't have time...

NORMAL

Davy: Reach out for the cards. Guide them in. Sense the air's invisible hands forming a pathway.

0128: The what?

Mum: It's quite relaxing, once you get into it. Almost hypnotic.

0128: There's no tick-box for this.

Davy: Just try one card.

0128: How did you disappear from the tree?

Davy: Hold it...thus...and...

0128: I'm not very good at games.

Davy: This isn't a game.

0128: I need to make a phone call.

Davy: One card.

Pause. Davy and Mum hold back. 0128 finally picks up a card.

0128: Like this?

Davy: Between these two fingers.

0128: And...flick it?

Davy: Out into space.

0128: What if I miss?

Davy: It doesn't matter.

0128: Well, of course it matters! What's the point if you can't get it to land in the hat?

Davy: The point is you tried.

0128: Tried and failed.

Davy: The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

Pause.

0128: But where does it lead?

Davy: Sometimes, to go is more important than where.

Silence.

0128: Out into space?

Davy: That's all.

0128 settles into the moment and flicks the card. It either does or does not go in.

How do you feel?

0128: I feel...good. Can I...?

Davy: Of course.

0128 flicks another card and laughs. And another. And another. Davy and Mum join in.

That's the way.

0128: I haven't...taken a break...for so long.

The game continues for a short while. Presently, 0128 moves downstage, looking out. Davy and Mum stop throwing cards and listen.

I inspect you. They inspect me. Someone inspects them, who is in turn inspected. ...Is no one just doing their own thing, unobserved? I'm sure you *used* to be allowed to – wasn't there a time when people simply trusted each other to get on with it? I'm so desperately tired of the business of scrutiny. I don't think it makes me work any harder. In fact, the more they gee me up, the greater the temptation becomes to see what I can get away with. There's something about being treated as suspect that makes you want to misbehave. To earn the suspicion, adopt the projected role. It's like...well, if I'm approaching a building, with the hope of gaining entry, and there are two large men standing by the door, in black clothing slightly too small for them, inspecting everyone who wants to go in, then I begin to think of ways in which I might incur their wrath. Just to fit the profile. What do you call them...? Commissionaires. Doormen. Bouncers. Years ago, you'd only ever see them outside expensive hotels. But now...there was one in front of the deli counter at the

supermarket last night, and I...I had to forget about the ham and olives. There was no subversive aspect to my presence there, but...I just felt guilty. That's the thing. Genuine villains are immune to it, but the inoffensive majority is stunned. Does there need to be that degree of threat? Isn't it just for show? And who's the audience? You? Me? Did we ever communicate some desire for that? I don't remember. Do you?

Mum: I'll put the kettle on.

Exit Mum to the kitchen.

Davy: That question...the one that doesn't apply in England...

0128: Yes?

Davy: What is it?

0128: I've never been told.

Davy: Would it be fair to say that your heart is not really in your work?

0128: Fair? What's fair? The course your life takes, professionally, privately, seems to have little to do with who you are.

Davy: Doesn't your identity guide you?

0128: 'A man's character is his fate', that sort of thing?

Davy: Yes.

0128: I've given it some thought. But there are so many people, brilliant sparks of life, great minds, unique personalities, hidden away in dark pockets of stifling inactivity. ...I can't believe they bring that upon themselves. Other forces are at work. A man's character is his character. His fate is another matter.

Davy: You've never felt that you might influence your destiny?

0128: I can recognise those moments when I might have done so – after the event. But at the time...I think only a few of

our senses operate in the moment. I can always work out what I *should* have said...when it's too late to say it.

Davy: The path we tread is not of our making?

0128: We improvise as we travel – but the path is the path.

Davy: I don't agree.

0128: You're young. You shouldn't agree.

Davy: I'm forty-six.

0128: What? *What?*

Davy: It's a long story. The point is –

0128: Forty-six?

Davy: I could explain.

0128: [*thinking about it*] No...no, thank you.

Davy: All I would say is...you can step off the path.

Silence.

After all – isn't that what you've done here?

Enter Mum with the tea.

Mum: There we are.

Davy: Thanks, mum.

0128 takes a gulp and sits down.

Mum: What are you going to tell them – about us?

0128: I don't think I can mention having been here. Any single detail would...give the game away. What *is* the game?

Mum: There's not really a game. It's just...well, nobody's normal, but abnormality is regarded as such a threat these days that it's very disconcerting to be confronted by a complete alternative. Philosophies or abilities which cannot be *dumbed down* retain a *shocking* quality. But then, life *is* complicated – it's only *spin* that's simple.

The doorbell rings.

[to Davy] Will that be for you?

Davy: No.

0128: Oh...

Mum: What?

0128: I'm being inspected today.

Davy: Ah.

0128: We may have a situation here.

Mum: Davy – cards.

Davy hides the cards – though possibly not all of them – and the hat. Mum dashes out to fetch another cup. 0128 adopts a strict stance and readies the checklist. Mum returns with the cup, then goes to answer the door.

Davy: Ready?

0128: Ready.

Mum enters with Inspector Inspector 0111, who is here to inspect Inspector 0128's inspection of Mum and Davy.

Mum: [to 0111] Well, here we are, in...mid-inspection. Davy, Inspector 0128, this is...er?

0111: Inspector Inspector 0111. Here to inspect Inspector 0128's inspection. Just carry on as normal.

0128: As normal. Right. Where was I? Oh, yes. [to Davy] Which football team do you support?

Davy: Football team?

0128: Correct.

Davy: Which football team do I support?

0128: That is the question.

Davy: Er...

0111: [to 0128] Hesitation.

0128: Sorry?

0111: He hesitated, you need to make a note of that.

0128: Oh, I don't think he did. [*to Davy*] Did you?

Davy: Well, I *paused*...

0128: [*to 0111*] See? It was a pause, not a hesitation.

Davy: City.

0128: What?

Davy: I said United.

0128: United, there we are.

0111 begins making notes.

Now...hobbies.

Mum: [*to 0111*] I've made some tea, would you...?

0111: Not just now, thank you, madam.

0128: [*to Davy*] Could you please list any hobbies, pastimes or other leisure activities?

Davy: Any at all?

0128: Any that you *have*.

Mum: Or coffee, I can do coffee.

0111: All in good time.

Davy: Hobbies, pastimes, leisure activities. OK...well, I like to watch TV, of course. There's such a fabulous variety of programmes.

0128: There is? I mean, there is.

Davy: And then there's...Game Boy...

0128: Good, good...

Davy: Britney Spears...

0128: Nothing unusual there...

Davy: Skateboarding...

0128: As one would expect...

Davy: Quasar...

0128: Perfectly natural...

Davy: Little silver scooters...

0128: All the rage...

Davy: Alchemy, geomancy and necromancy.

Momentous pause.

0128: Bugger.

0111: Now, hold on a minute...

0128: The boy's just having a laugh.

Davy: Am I?

Mum: Gin, anyone?

0111: There's something going on here.

Davy: [*to 0111*] When you were seven, what did you want to be?

0111: That's not relevant.

Davy: Did you want to be an inspector?

0111: [*to 0128*] Call for back-up...

Davy: Or an inspector of inspectors?

0111: We've got a live one...

Davy: What was it? You can tell us.

0111: [*to 0128*] Remember the procedure!

0128: I don't think there is one for this.

Davy: What is the question that doesn't apply in England?

0111: It's classified!

Davy: And while we're at it – where are The Thirty-Nine Steps?

0111: Young man, I'm warning you...

Davy: What was it you wanted to be, more than anything else in the world, when you were seven years old?

Strange pause. Finally...

0111: A pirate. I wanted to be a pirate. I still do. I never asked for any of this. I've no idea how it happened. I can't have been paying attention. I have an office, a secretary, all these filing cabinets, thousands of forms. And I hate them. I hate them all. I don't want any of it. All that I want, all that

I've ever wanted, is to hoist the Jolly Roger, set sail – and be the Scourge of the Spanish Main!

Under Davy's hypnotic influence, all present now become pirates and enact O111's childhood dream.

Davy: Shiver me timbers – a swashbuckler.

O128: Fifteen men on a dead man's chest.

Mum: Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum.

O111: Under the skull and crossbones.

Davy produces the hat and places it on O111's head.

Davy: Pirates...

O128: Pirates...

Mum: Pirates...

O111: Pirates!

Davy: Eye patches.

O128: Cutlasses.

Mum: Daggers.

O111: And hooks.

Davy: Up in the crow's nest.

O128: Down in the bilge.

Mum: Pieces of eight.

O111: The cat o'nine tails.

Davy: Keelhauling landlubbers.

O128: Diving for pearls.

Mum: Splicing the mainbrace.

O111: Walking the plank.

Davy: Studying maps.

O128: 'X' marks the spot.

Mum: Booty.

O111: Treasure.

NORMAL

Davy: Buried treasure.

0128: Always *buried*.

Mum: Who buried it?

0111: And – *why*?

Davy: Don't look at me.

0128: We were nowhere near.

Mum: *Must* have been the *bad* men.

0111: Isn't that us?

They think about this, then dismiss it.

Davy: Sometimes, there'd come a galleon, full to the gunwales
with gold from the Incas.

0128: Who were the Inkers?

Mum: They had gold.

0111: Till we stole it!

Davy: Slicing.

0128: Stabbing.

Mum: Swinging.

0111: Singing.

Davy: What shall we do with a drunken sailor?

0128: What shall we do with a drunken sailor?

Mum: What shall we do with a drunken sailor?

0111: Early in the morning!

Davy: Put him in the longboat till he's sober.

0128: Put him in the longboat till he's sober.

Mum: Put him in the longboat till he's sober.

0111: Early in the morning!

All: Hooray and up she rises,
Hooray and up she rises,
Hooray and up she rises,
Early in the morning!

What shall we do with a drunken sailor?
What shall we do with a drunken sailor?
What shall we do with a drunken sailor?
Early in the morning!

Davy: Storm on the horizon!

0128: Batten down the hatches!

Mum: Lash the wheel!

0111: All hands on deck!

Davy: Boatswain!

0128: Take in the topsail!

Mum: Tend to the master's whistle!

0111: Play the men!

Davy: I pray now, keep below!

0128: Man overboard!

Mum: A plague upon this howling!

0111: For those in peril on the sea...

Davy: All lost! To prayers!

0128: To prayers! All lost!

Mum: We split, we split!

0111: The wills above be done, but I would fain die a dry death.

The Tempest loosens its grip. The pirates drift, clinging to the wreckage.

Davy: You're only *wet* when you *leave* the water. When you're *in* it you're *dry*.

0128: What is the difference between flotsam and jetsam?

Mum: Water, water, everywhere.

0111: Nor any drop to drink.

Davy: I'm drifting.

0128: That's all right.

Mum: Sometimes you have to.

NORMAL

O111: It feels...irresponsible.

Davy: There's no rudder.

O128: Only wreckage.

Mum: How did this happen?

O111: We turned our backs on the sea.

Davy: Is that an island?

O128: I think it's a cloud.

Mum: Let's paddle.

O111: It's quite far off.

Davy: We might end up there anyway.

O128: Just kick and push.

Mum: We should be there by sunset.

O111: Why aren't you paddling?

Davy: I'm navigating.

O128: Things are different, close up.

Mum: Bored now.

O111: Let's fish!

Davy: For what?

O128: For what there is.

Mum: How do you cast?

O111: See?

Davy: Look at the water.

O128: It's so calm now.

Mum: Like glass.

O111: Did you see that one jump?

Davy: What was that?

O128: I've got something...

Mum: Hold on.

O111: Not too tight...

Davy: Whoah!

0128: My arms hurt.

Mum: Steady...

0111: Lean back...

Davy: I've got you.

0128: Who's got him?

Mum: I have.

0111: And I've got you.

Davy: It's pulling us in...

0128: Help!

Mum: Cut the line!

0111: Must be a shark...

Davy: If a shark stops swimming, it sinks.

0128: *Is that relevant?*

Mum: I wish this one would stop.

0111: Everybody *pull!*

Davy: *It's pulling us!*

0128: *I can't hold on!*

Mum: *Look at the size of it!*

0111: *That's a monster!*

The doorbell rings. Everyone freezes. Davy looks at 0128, who looks at Mum, who looks at 0111.

Ah. Yes. I'm afraid...I'm being inspected today.

Slight pause.

Davy: Tricky.

Mum: Um...shall I get that?

0111: Just...wait a minute – *this* is going to be *tough*.

0128: Who is it?

0111: It's...Inspector Inspector Inspector 0666.

0128: Ah.

Mum: And...he's...quite strict?

O111: To say the least.

Davy: 0666?

O111: That's right.

Davy: [*to O111*] Inspecting you?

O111: Inspecting me inspecting 0128 inspecting you.

The doorbell rings again.

Mum: I think I'm going to have to answer it. Aren't I?

O111: Stall.

Mum: What?

O111: We need to prepare.

O128: How?

Mum: Stall?

O111: Just give us a minute.

Mum: A minute.

O111: That's all we need.

Mum: Right...right.

Exit Mum.

O128: Prepare?

O111: We've got to be very **mature** about this, completely *professional*.

O128: Unflappable.

O111: That's the kind of thing.

*O111 and O128 practise their **mature** walks.*

Davy: Me too?

O111: Er...

O128: I don't think we can afford to *let on*, can we?

O111: What?

0128: Well, we ought to have *done* something by *now*, this being a...a...well, a *deviant* household. We've just got to play it straight. [*looking at Davy*] All of us.

Davy: Play it straight.

0111: Yes. Yes, you're right.

Davy: OK.

Davy now practises his mature walk.

0128: So...if I ask you a question – which is bound to happen, let's make no bones about it – then you have to give an answer which arouses no suspicion whatsoever and leaves an impression of *absolute normality*.

Slight pause.

Davy: But what is normal?

0128: And none of that.

Enter Mum with Inspector Inspector Inspector 0666.

Mum: Davy, Inspector 0128, Inspector Inspector 0111, this is Inspector Inspector Inspector 0666. I'll get another cup.

Exit Mum to the kitchen. 0666 surveys the surroundings, selects the best vantage point for relentless scrutiny and then addresses the assembled several.

0666: [*to 0111*] You are to proceed with *your* inspection.
[*to 0128*] You are to proceed with *your* inspection. [*to Davy*]
You are to be *inspected*. And I [*to 0111*] shall inspect you.

Mum returns with another cup.

Mum: Thought you might like some tea.

0666: [*to 0128*] Has *she* been inspected?

Davy: She has, yes.

0666: Nobody asked *you*. [*to 0111*] Begin.

0111: [*to 0128*] Go on.

0128: Right. *[to Davy]* Hobbies...

0111: *[hastily]* We've done those.

0128: Have we? Ah.

0666 begins making notes.

So, now...oh, yes. Here we are. What was the last book you read?

Davy: The *last* one?

0128: *[a little nervous now]* Yes.

Davy: *[getting it]* Oh, I never read books, I'm always playing football. Can't let the team down.

*There is low profile relief shown by Mum, 0128 and 0111.
0128 relaxes perhaps a little too much.*

0128: Which position do you play?

Silence.

Davy: Position?

0128: It's not important, I don't have it on the list here, it was incidental. Let's move on...

0666: *[to 0111]* Ahem!

0111: *[reluctantly, to 0128]* He has to answer.

0128: What? Why?

0666: Because you asked.

0128: Oh. *[tentatively, to Davy]* Well?

Davy allows a little more tension, then...

Davy: I'm in goal.

Phew!

0128: Excellent, marvellous. Next one...

0666: *[to 0111]* Instruct 0128 to use the *Special* questions.

0111: *[sensing trouble, to 0128]* Turn to page thirteen.

0128: The *Special* questions? I've never had to use those.

Silence. 0128 turns to page thirteen.

What is your favourite colour?

Davy: Purple.

0128: Number?

Davy: Seven.

0128: Drink?

Davy: Water.

0128: Language?

Davy: Mandarin.

0128: What am I thinking?

Davy: *We could be in trouble.*

0128: Do you belong to any political party?

Davy: I make a point of not belonging.

0128: Have you ever seen an unidentified flying object?

Davy: No, I can always identify them.

0128: What is the square root of -1?

Davy: You're not ready for that.

0128: Do you believe that you have ever had an out-of-body experience?

Davy: I'm still up the tree – *this* is an *astral projection*.

0666 takes charge.

0666: [to 0128] I've heard enough. Arrest him.

Mum: What? No!

0666: And her. I'll book an interrogation cell.

0666 takes out his mobile.

0128: [to Davy and Mum] I'm sorry.

0666: *Don't* be sorry. It's your *job*. Why isn't this thing working?

Davy: A ringmaster.

0666: What?

Davy: When you were seven, you wanted to be a ringmaster.

0666: Who told you that?

Davy just smiles.

[to 0128] Is there a land line, here?

Davy: Greasepaint...

0666: Stop it!

Davy: Sawdust...

0666: No!

Davy: Gunpowder!

Under Davy's influence, the others are spellbound by a circus dream.

0666: Three rings.

Davy: Under the Big Top.

0128: With lions...

Mum: And tigers...

0111: And bears.

0666: Jugglers.

Davy: Stilt-walkers.

0128: Elephants.

Mum: Acrobats.

0111: Knife-throwers.

0666: On the road.

Davy: Cheek by jowl.

0128: One huge family.

Mum: Touring the world.

0111: With our box of tricks.

0666: Spotting a field.

Davy: Unrolling the canvas.

0128: Setting up shop.

Mum: Chestnuts roasting.

0111: Candy-floss.

0666: Ringmaster.

Davy: Lion tamer.

0128: Tightrope walker.

Mum: Clown.

0111: Human cannonball.

0666: Roll up, roll up!

Davy: Get your popcorn here!

0128: Choc-ices!

Mum: Hot dogs!

0111: All the fun of the fair!

0666: Ladies and gentlemen...

Davy: We proudly present...

0128: A finely balanced...

Mum: Comical...

0111: Spectacular...

0666: Death-defying...

Davy: Airborne...

0128: Cavalcade of unrepeatable...

Mum: Say that again.

0111: Unrepeatable excitements!

0666: Without a safety net...

Davy: On a wing and a prayer...

0128: Throwing caution to the wind...

Mum: We'll dice with death...

0111: For your entertainment...

0666: There's nothing to compare...

Davy: With the thrilling possibility...

0128: That it might all go...

Mum: Tragically wrong...

0111: In the blink of an eye...

0666: On a winter's night...

Davy: In the breathless hush...

0128: As a blanket of snow...

Mum: Covers the meadows outside...

0111: And time stands still.

0666: Look out!

Davy: What's that?

0128: The lion's loose!

Mum: He turned his back...

0111: For just a second.

0666: You're fired!

Davy: Too late!

0128: It's in the crowd!

Mum: Run for your lives!

0111: Pick up that child!

0666 takes out a gun and shoots the lion dead. At the sound of the shot, the others freeze in shock. Mum breaks out of it and peers anxiously at the bullet hole in the 'absent' fourth wall.

0666: I had to think of the crowd's safety.

Silence.

We'll bury it here.

The circus folk slowly begin digging a huge grave for the lion. There are a few doleful glances at 0666. Presently, the latter realises that the spade he is using isn't there. He stares at it for a moment.

What am I doing?

He throws away the non-existent spade. Davy is aware of the danger.

None of this is real!

0666 points the gun at Davy.

Stop digging – all of you!

The others comply.

[to 0128 and 0111] Now...you two are going to help me take him into custody.

Mum: No...

0666: [to Davy] And you – no more *funny* business.

0128 and 0111 move in on Davy. As they hold him, 0666 addresses all present, still holding the gun.

In case your thinking has become muddled, let me ask you this: what kind of world would it be if everyone were *different*? If every single person were complex, unique and *particular*, how could society possibly survive? There'd be no possibility of popular entertainment, no agreement on key social issues, no landslide election-victories. We'd have to listen to endless debates about what to do and how to do it. Nothing but talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. The armed forces might as well retire. No. Far better that people should all like the same sport, all sing the same song – and all toe the same line.

Silence.

Davy: Are you a gambling man?

0666: What?

Davy: I have a proposal.

0666: You're in no position to negotiate.

Davy: A simple contest, between the two of us. If *you* win, I surrender not only myself but my network of accomplices. If *I* win, you leave here now and never bother us again.

0666: Look, I've told you – accomplices?

Davy: Thousands of them. Far and wide. A vast diversity.

0666: I'll get that out of you in the cell.

Davy: No. This is a one-time offer. You know I mean it.

Silence.

0666: A contest?

Davy: A race.

0666: Explain.

Davy: See that tree?

0666: Yes.

Davy: First one to the top wins.

Pause.

0666: No, it's unorthodox.

Davy: Coward.

0666: What did you say?

Davy: You heard.

0666: Right, *you're on!*

0666 hands the gun to 0128, limbers up and exits to the garden.

Davy: Excuse me.

Exit Davy, after 0666.

0111: Is this wise?

Mum: I don't know.

0128: I've got a gun.

0111: Start the race with it.

0128 adjusts to this.

0128: OK.

0111: *[shouting to the competitors]* On your marks...get set...
[0128 fires the gun at the ceiling. Mum looks at the bullet hole.] And they're off!

Mum: I think you got the bath.

0128: I fired a gun.

0111: Davy's leading...

Mum: Go on, go on...

0128: Ooh, nice move by the inspector...

0111: He's drawing level...

Mum: It's neck and neck...

0128: Was that a bird's nest?

0111: They're nearing the top...

Mum: Come on, Davy!

0128: What's he doing?

0111: The inspector's in the lead!

Mum: Why's Davy holding back?

0128: Should I shoot someone?

0111: He's catching up now...

Mum: It's going to be close...

0128: This is too much...

0111: The inspector's there!

Mum: He's won!

0128: He's...*gone*.

Pause.

0111: What...? How...?

Mum: Yes.

0128: *[getting it]* Oh.

Pause.

O111: I...he...I...

Mum: There's still some tea in the pot.

*O111 goes and pours some tea, sips it slowly, thinks carefully.
Davy enters.*

O128: [to Davy] He's not...in the kitchen...is he?

*Davy solemnly shakes his head. After a moment, O111
decides to take charge.*

O111: We were never here. [to O128] Agreed?

O128: Agreed.

O128 tears up all the paperwork. O111 turns to leave.

O111: [to Davy] If I were you, I'd keep a low profile.

Exit O111. O128 holds the gun out to Mum.

O128: Can you...?

Mum: [taking the gun] Of course.

O128: [quietly] Thanks.

O128 goes to the door, then turns and speaks.

The question about...whether the walls all reach the
ceiling...that wasn't on the list. I made that one up.

Exit O128. A moment. Mum has a final word with Davy.

Mum: Time for bed, young man. Oh, and...Davy?

Davy looks at her.

Next time – football, Game Boy, Britney Spears...right?

Davy: Yes, mum.

*Exit Mum, with the gun. Davy pauses, looks out to the
audience.*

Spear Britney!

He vanishes with a bang in a cloud of smoke. Curtain.