

Big Fat Pig

Woman sits on stage on a stool- she is wearing a smart suit and heels and full make up. She fidgets, pulls out a powder compact. Checks her lipstick and hair. Rehearses answers to herself. She is facing a camera on a tripod.

A producer wearing a headset walks in, fastens a microphone to her collar and gives her an earpiece to put in her ear.

Stage hand walks on holding sign that reads THE INTERVIEW

FLOOR PRODUCER: ok- could we get a few words for level.?

Woman she presses her ear--

CATHERINE: oh yes,

PRODUCER: Just say what you had for lunch and then count up to ten

CATHERINE: Oh right- yes. Er, I had a cheese and pickle sandwich- 1, 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10

Producer adjusts her microphone.

PRODUCER: Great- sounding good-- now just stare straight down the barrel, try not to let your eyes wander and you should hear the presenter - they'll be with you shortly - remember this is live so no rude words please! We've got two minutes til you're on-- are you hearing output okay?

CATHERINE: Yes, yes thank you

She sits. spotlights on her face. She is fidgeting. Stroking away loose strands of hair from her face and running her tongue over her top teeth beneath her lip catch any odd lipstick traces

PRESENTER VOICE (on loudspeaker or from off stage): And joining us now is the labour candidate for Westmorland and Lonsdale, Catherine Thorneythwaite. Catherine, if you are elected as MP, how would you manage the challenges of funding hospital services here, bearing in mind the relatively small population.

CATHERINE: *(hesitates)* Well, my duty would be first and foremost to my constituents, of course, but I would do my utmost to protect the services we have here and I would go further. I'd try to bring some services back here-- no more traipsing to Preston for cancer patients --

PRESNTER (Interrupting) -- But your party hasn't made any promises of that nature in its manifesto - can you really make promises like this?

CATHERINE: I can try-- and I can promise to fight tooth and nail for the hardworking people living here- they contribute, they pay taxes, it's time they got a better deal.

PRESENTER: Wouldn't it be better to put your energy into improving transport links- so if people do need to travel to hospital in Preston, for example, they can get there faster?

CATHERINE: Well ideally yes, the trains would be faster and more frequent and the roads could be improved, but we all know that infrastructure projects of that nature take an extremely long time and while I will champion those issues too-- I know from talking to people on the doorstep it would be far quicker and is definitely a higher priority to deal with issues surrounding the hospital.

PRESENTER: yes, well, sounds like you're offering voters something you can never deliver, but moving on, you're the first female candidate standing in the seat-- you have two very young children- how are you planning to juggle the twin responsibilities of motherhood with being a politician in Westminster?

CATHERINE: Well, I... I have a very supportive husband and excellent childcare -- and er, I have every confidence that I will be able to deliver what is expected of me both as a politician and as a mother.

PRESENTER: Catherine Thorneythwaite, thank you very much.
And next we come to Geoffrey Samuelson - who is hoping to remain as the local MP....

PRODUCER: Okay you're off- thanks very much. Let me just take this—wouldn't want you to do a Gordon Brown now would we?!

CATHERINE: (*flustered*) Is that it? I was hardly on. Gordon Brown? Goodness, no. Thank you. Yes.

PRODUCER: you know, it's so much better if you can make it into the studio – comes across much better.

CATHERINE: Oh right. Yes. It's just such a long way. And I'm so busy.

PRODUCER: Yeah, I guess, it's hard right? Kids.

CATHERINE: (*snapping*) No. actually – campaigning. I'm busy campaigning. A four hour round trip for two minutes of telly doesn't seem like a good use of time right now. Maybe your presenter could leave his comfy studio and come here for a change.

PRODUCER: Ok. Sorry. I'll suggest it. Not sure he'll listen though.

CATHERINE: Oh god, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to snap - it's not your fault, I just get so stressed doing these. I'm not used to it yet—and bloody Samuelson, he's so slick and experienced. Up against him, it's like I've already lost.

PRODUCER: For what it's worth—you've got my vote. Just don't tell the boss!

CATHERINE: Thanks. I appreciate it. See you soon, I hope.

PRODUCER: thanks for coming in. Bye.

CATHERINE: Bye. *She walks off stage.*

LIGHTS DOWN.

CHAIR AND CAMERA ARE REMOVED.

TWO ARMCHAIRS ARE BROUGHT ON.

LIGHTS SEMI-DARK, NO SPOT.

Catherine walks on and sits on one of the chairs. She rummages in her bag and pulls out her phone which she switches on and immediately begins scrolling through messages. She removes high heels and rubs her toes. She also begins massaging her hands and examining her finger nails. She rootles in her bag again and pulls out a nail file. She dials a number on her 'phone, tucks her phone under her chin and uses her free hand to file the nails on the other.

Toby!

Okay, I think. I was so nervous. And I had all the stuff there before I went on but as soon as I knew I was live I became so dull-- a boring old automaton - and bloody Geoffrey - so smooth, got to go second -- just my luck.

And, god, I nearly forgot... that infuriating, "so, you're a woman, how will you cope?" question. I wish I'd given him what for... I should've told him it was none of his damn business—they never ask the men that question. I'm sick of it. Will things ever change? A hundred years since we got the vote and still, we're not equal. And then the producer needled me about not being in the studio.. as if I actively wanted to be stuck out in their remote cupboard sounding like I'm in a toilet. Told them I need to be here, knocking on doors, talking to people... and maybe the presenter should make the trip to visit me!! Ha! I know, yes!

Have I what? Twitter? You've still got the password haven't you?

Should I look?

What!?! Oh god, oh no.

Okay, I'll call you back.

She ends the call, and taps at her phone and begins scrolling and tapping. She is moving her lips as she reads messages - -- some clearly please her, and she reacts accordingly, but some clearly shock her.

Why thank you. Or rather, thank my hairdresser. Yes, yes, we do need to do more about the housing crisis.

pauses. A man in a hoodie - with hood up walks on stage and stands, in profile, next to Catherine. His mouth is very close to her ear.

MAN: Fat bitch. Fucking scum. You are going to get raped. Fuck off and die you ugly, fat witch. I will laugh when you are dead.

CATHERINE: what!!!! Oh god. Oh no. Jesus. *she keeps scrolling down the screen and reading*

MAN: I know your address, you fucking whore. I will get you.

She starts dialling another number, visibly upset.

CATHERINE mark mark please pick up. *Pause.*

MAN: You will be raped in the arse, tonight at 8, you fat cunt.

CATHERINE: Mark, it's Catherine please call me back please as soon as you get this

She ends the call. And instantly redials.

hi Toby, hi, Well no not really. Not at all. Just read the messages. They're so horrible. Really vile. Why do they hate me so much? The don't even know me! It's so scary.

pause

thanks Toby.

Pause.

calmer. Well, I don't know. Will they really come and get me? Isn't it just threats? I know, I know - Police? Really? You think so? Panic button? Isn't that going a bit far? Okay then- let me know how you get on- yeah, done for the evening. Yes, I promise, I'll stop looking — meet you at nine tmrw in Windermere? Yes. Sure- see you then. Bye

She ends the call. Her phone rings. (it's Mark)

Oh hey darling, thanks for calling back-yes, I'm a bit calmer now. It's the social media stuff- just got a lot worse- really nasty actually. Unrepeatable -- don't really want to go over it if you don't mind. Toby's going to have a chat with party security and the police.

yes, -- death threats. Yes. And all the other stuff. Yes, that. I don't want to say it out loud.

Hey, hey, Calm down! I'm okay! They're only threats right? - nobody's actually here attacking me in person- these guys- I'm sure they're guys- they're sad loners - they don't leave their bedrooms. I know, I know. Okay- I'll be home soon ---*therapy* first, then I'll catch the train. Yes-- my car's at the station--I'll call before I start driving. Okay. Love you. Bye!

**ANOTHER WOMAN WALKS ON AND SITS IN THE ARMCHAIR.
STAGEHAND WALKS ON AND HOLDS UP ANOTHER SIGN WITH "THE
ANALYSIS" WRITTEN ON IT.**

THERAPIST: Good evening Catherine. How are you?

CATHERINE: Fine, I'm fine. It's going really well. *She's still filing her nails.* Busy, busy, you know. Election to win etcetera But fine. Great in fact. (*distracted*) god, my nails – I only cut them last night, they're like talons.

THERAPIST: Tell me more about the campaign.

CATHERINE: Well, I did a TV interview this afternoon. Which was good. *Pause.* (*She flicks hair from her face and scratches herself with a fingernail*) ouch! Gosh,—they really are sharp.

THERAPIST: In what way was the interview good?

CATHERINE: Oh you know, good exposure and so on. (*she's now wiping her face with a tissue or handkerchief from her handbag*).

THERAPIST: What happened?

CATHERINE: Well it was fine, but (pause)

THERAPIST: But?

CATHERINE: Oh just that annoying woman thing.

THERAPIST: What's that?

CATHERINE: Oh, you know. The bit they can't help themselves but ask—you've got small children, you want to be a politician, how will you cope? Mah mah mah (*she does some kind of bleating impression*)

THERAPIST: I see. And how did you respond?

CATHERINE: Not how I should have.

THERAPIST: I see. How should you have?

CATHERINE: I should have told him to bugger off! Well not in so many words—it was live telly, but you know, I should have politely and firmly told him that it was totally irrelevant, unless he planned to ask all the male candidates the same question.

THERAPIST: So what stopped you?

CATHERINE: Oh, I don't know. Fear? Anxiety? Wanting to keep the peace? Anyway, why should I have to have the brilliant quick reply, why does he ask the question? He shouldn't. I hate it. I'm not sure why I'm even doing this any more. It's bloody awful.

THERAPIST: Is that what you want? Would you like to stop? Is it just the campaign? Has something else upset you?

CATHERINE: Oh, you know. Social media. Trolls. They're getting more violent and nasty by the second. Why do they even call them that? Trolls? Trolls are for fairy tales, I haven't seen any billy goats around lately. It's so vile. I just want it to stop.

THERAPIST: So you'd like to give up the candidacy?

CATHERINE: In a heartbeat.

THERAPIST: Really?

CATHERINE: Well – I don't know. No. Not really, I just never thought things would get this difficult. This horrible. The selection process was bad enough – but at least the insults were in person then – to my face pretty much – not this pernicious online viciousness. I thought I could just shake it off, or at least ignore it, but more recently, it's been getting so heavy. The nightmares, they're so vivid, sometimes I wake up and I feel so scared, I can't even move from the bed. I'm caught, paralysed by my own fear. It's so scary.

SANDRA: Tell me more.

CATHERINE: What else is there to say?

SANDRA: About the dreams. Do you remember anything else?

CATHERINE. *Pause.* Well – there was one – it's a bit shadowy – I was a cat, I think. Not a house cat – a big one- maybe a lynx or something. I had these incredible claws and teeth and an amazing snarl and I remember running really really fast. It was kind of exhilarating. I think maybe I was chasing something - a sheep perhaps – I suppose I was going to kill it – but then I woke up. And I remember really craving meat. I had to drive to Tesco when it opened and buy steak. I cooked it really rare – it was practically raw. God it was so delicious.

THERAPIST: interesting. How did you feel when you woke up - apart from wanting the meat?

CATHERINE: I felt really fired up. I mean, I was relieved I didn't kill the sheep, even though it was just a dream. I'm not an animal, but I was so full of energy, I felt quite mad. Not myself.

THERAPIST: I see. And have you had any more dreams like that?

CATHERINE: Not that I can remember, not like that.

THERAPIST: Perhaps you could try writing them down when you do remember them. It can be helpful.

CATHERINE: Okay. I'm not sure I'll remember, but I'll try. I don't know what to do about all the messages - I'm sure they're affecting my sleep. I just seem to get less and less these days. Although, perhaps that's the campaign.

THERAPIST: Have you tried to stop reading the comments?

CATHERINE: sort of. I can't help it. It's kind of compulsive. I need to know what they're writing, then I see how horrible they are and I immediately regret reading them. Sometimes people are genuinely lovely, which is great - but it feels like the nice comments are getting rarer. I'm drowning in a wave of hostility. I want to understand why - I need to know why they get so personal, so nasty - I haven't done anything to them. I wish I could find an explanation.

THERAPIST: That may not be possible. But you might need to develop a way of coping - and I'm afraid the easiest way to do that may be to distance yourself from all of it. If you can stop reading the comments you may find it easier to cope - to sleep.

CATHERINE: *sighing*. I suppose you've got a point.

THERAPIST: It's perhaps worth thinking about. It's not my place to tell you what to do - but I do want to help you. What's important is that you don't let this overwhelm you.

CATHERINE: Yes. I'm definitely not feeling quite myself at the moment. *Scratches at the backs of her hands and stifles a yawn*. Do you mind if we call it a day - I need to get home - and I've got an early start tomorrow.

THERAPIST: If that's what you want. Do come next week.

LIGHTS DOWN. BOTH WOMEN LEAVE THE STAGE. CHAIRS OFF. CATHERINE WALKS BACK ON, RUMMAGING IN HANDBAG FOR HER PHONE. SHE PULLS IT OUT AND DIALS HER HUSBAND, MARK.

CATHERINE: Hi darling. Okay thanks. Yes. I think it makes me feel better. Especially on days like today. Yes- just walking to the car now. *she has keys in her hand*. Give up? I don't know - right now, I probably do, but, but -- they fought so hard, for us. They suffered so much. And they won. I know this is different, this isn't nearly as bad - nobody's put me in prison or stuck a tube down my throat - I keep trying to remind myself that this is nothing - stick with it, suck it up, ignore it. Press on- eyes on the prize.

listening.

Half an hour? Forty minutes maybe. Almost at the car.

Canvassing with Toby and the volunteers -- early start in Windermere.

Pause, listening

I'll try-- I want to be. Can I let you know?

listening

Laughing - sure. I guess you're going to have to get used to this - if I win.

See you soon.

She walks off stage. The hooded man appears at the other side of the stage and quickly follows her off.

Next day.

Stagehand walks on, holding up sign that reads, THE ESCALATION.??

Two 'doors' are set up on stage. Catherine and her assistant, Toby, walk on. They are out canvassing. They take a door each, walk up and knock. Doesn't need to be in Unison.

At the door Toby knocks on, a woman answers.

TOBY: Hello, I'm canvassing for the forthcoming election – can I talk to you about our candidate, Catherine Thorneythwaite?

WOMAN: I always vote for that man, whatisname – Samuelson - been doing us proud for decades, what's wrong with him?

TOBY: Well I'm not sure about you but I think we could do with improvements at the hospital – and public transport... Catherine has some great ideas about how to reinvigorate the local economy and ...

he carries on but sotto voce – and we start to hear Catherine overlapping him. At Catherine's door, a man has answered. He is played by the hooded man.

CATHERINE: Hello, I'm standing in the elections and I'd like to know if you'd consider giving me your vote.

MAN: Fuck off, fat bitch.

Both doors close. Catherine and Toby walk imaginary garden paths – cross over with each other and then take the alternative door. The above sequence is repeated. Toby's door is once again answered by a woman and Catherine's by the man.

TOBY: Good morning, have you registered to vote in the elections? May's not far away now.

WOMAN: I've just moved in actually – it's on my to-do list—have I still got time?

CATHERINE: Hello, I'm one of your local candidates in the elections in May – could I tell you a bit more about what I'm hoping to deliver for the local community?

MAN: Whore. You deserve to be raped. I know where you live. I'm going to come and get you. And your children. Fucking bitch.

This sequence can be repeated a two or three more times – the actors can improvise similar-sounding sentences. Each time, it is always the hooded man who answers the door that Catherine knocks on. At first, she barely reacts to what she is hearing and doesn't respond verbally, but as the insults build, she starts to react, initially her response is physical- she starts to shake and receives the words as if they are actual punches. The action is highly stylised.

TOBY: Good morning madam, I wonder if I could trouble you for a moment, I'm canvassing on behalf of Catherine Thorneythwaite...(still overlapped by Catherine)

CATHERINE: Good morning Sir, have you registered to vote in this May's elections?

MAN: Witch. I am going to come and rape you and film it and then I am going to kill you. Fat bitch. You whore. You are going to get what you deserve. Filthy slut.

CATHERINE: *suddenly screaming, possibly dropping to the floor.* STOP!! Just stop! What have I done to you? You call me a bitch and a witch and a fucking whore – why? Because I have the temerity to work hard, to want a better life for my community - because I believe I could be as good an MP as any man? Why do you care so much? Why do you waste your time abusing me with such a disgustingly vivid imagination? Does it make you feel good? Powerful? Do you think you can control my feelings?

Her voice sounds raw and strained – this is a visceral reaction - she is almost growling, like the big cat in her dream.

During this outburst Toby and the woman he is speaking to has frozen. They are not observing, they are oblivious.

CATHERINE: Well let me tell you this once and for all. I will not let you stop me. I will hunt you down and I will make sure you suffer. My bite is a lot worse than my bark and I have every intention of giving you some very nasty teeth marks.

The hooded man doesn't react. Catherine is delivering her speech to the audience now.

I don't understand why you don't like me – perhaps you don't like women at all – but we're not going away. We're not going to let you intimidate us like this. A hundred years ago, women didn't even have the vote – let alone the right to stand for parliament. They were force-fed, brutalised, even banned from visiting art galleries and museums lest they damage the exhibits. We were violent then and we can be violent again if it comes to it. The world wouldn't function without us and for a century now, we have been allowed to vote , to be represented and to represent ourselves, to have our voices heard. There's still a long way to go until we get true equality but we have come a bloody long way.

She is almost snarling now – the 'big cat' persona becoming more dominant.

You hide behind your screen, writing your horrid little messages – trying to hurt me with your violent viciousness – well *I* will be the one to get you. Not the other way around. You are not anonymous – you will be found and you will be punished.

Catherine stumbles off stage, possibly in tears, definitely raging. She has exhausted herself with anger. The hooded man walks swiftly behind her, in total silence.

Blackout. Toby and the woman leave the stage.